

The Bidirectional Relationship between Authoritative Parenting,
Prosocial Behavior, and Academic Achievement

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Introduction

Research shows that parenting style and parental activity level highly influence a child's development. (Villena-Roldan, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to explore the causal effects of the authoritative parenting style with a child's prosocial behavior and academic achievement from K-12. Authoritative parenting has great effects on a child's prosocial behavior and academic achievement because of the high level of parental involvement, clear communication style, high level of attention, and sincere affection. It has been suggested this parent-child relationship is the most beneficial because children mirror their parents, and these children will act for others more when they see that behavior coming from their parents. This paper aims find the bidirectional relationship between authoritative parenting, prosocial behavior and academic achievement to utilize all three factors to maximize one another to set child and parent up for a better relationship and future.

Background

Parenting styles have been analyzed greatly over time, especially in conjunction with child development and child success. The four different parenting styles are Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive and Neglectful. Baumrind's Typology of Parenting Styles ranks these parenting styles based on the parents' level of responsiveness and demandingness. Authoritative Parenting is a highly-demanding, highly-responsive style. Parents who raise their children authoritatively provide guidance to them and often explain the reasoning behind their rules. These parents use "verbal give-and-take," teaching their children to know how to communicate effectively. They communicate effectively through empathy because "empathy is not just understanding other people's feelings, but more importantly conveying those feelings accurately" (Sarwar, 2016). Authoritative parents raise their children with explicit

love. This affection causes the children to be “happy people” (Syahril, 2020). Authoritative parenting is seen to be the most effective parenting style because it has been the most associated with positive adult outcomes (Sarwar, 2016). The opposite of authoritative parenting is, neglectful parenting, with low demandingness and low responsiveness. These parents expect very little of their children and spend little time catering to them. Neglectful parents are not involved in their child’s life and often do not give them any rules (Sarwar, 2016). Permissive parenting is highly responsive with low demands; this is the parent that is very involved in their child’s life but does not set any rules, boundaries, or limits upon them (Sarwar, 2016). The last parenting style is Authoritarian. This is the high-demanding, low-responsive parent. This has been seen as the most hurtful type of parenting style because they are controlling, strict, and do not offer their children support. Authoritarian is also linked the most with delinquency in children (Sarwar, 2016). These four types of parenting styles all fall somewhere on the scale of demandingness and responsiveness, and Authoritative, the highest on both scales is the most affective choice since it supports the child but also sets clear expectations. This type of parenting style correlates the most with a child’s success overall in their life.

Prosocial behavior is seen in actions including sharing, donating, friendship, listening, helping, and sacrificing. These are voluntary behaviors that benefit someone beyond oneself. Parents expect their children to have these behaviors because it is seen to be necessary to live a successful life (Syahril, 2020). A child’s prosocial behaviors also causes them to have more positive personal and social characteristics, through communication and self-regulation and self-awareness. Parenting techniques and especially parenting disciplinary actions have been seen to directly correlate with a child’s level of prosocial behaviors. (Eisenberg, N.

2010) Those who exhibit more prosocial behaviors are better at listening and understanding messages from others because they listen to empathize with the people around them.

Academic achievement can be defined many ways. This paper focuses on the aspects of a child's academic engagement, future-forward thinking, and effort. A child's engagement in school is defined by their relationships with teachers and peers, interest in the subjects learned and participation. Future-forward thinking is when the child understands the greater effect of their education on their lives in the future. Lastly, the child's effort in school is defined as whether the child is working to their fullest potential and pushing themselves to try their best. Academic achievement shows the child's overall thoughts on their education and application to their future.

Authoritative Parenting and Prosocial Behavior

Prosocial Behavior is highly influenced by Authoritative parenting. In general parenting plays a big role in their child's decisions and behavior. How a parent works through problems with their child, expresses disciplinary actions, and speaks to their child all influence how the child will treat those around them. In a 15-year longitudinal study on childhood to adulthood career development, the results showed when the participants were asked to report their top 5 influences on them in high school, the majority listed their mother and father as influences one and two (Helwig, 2008). This influence does not stop at high school and this study also showed that parental influence is "an important career factor for young people" (Helwig, 2008). The analysis of this study helps explain how influential parents are on their child and their career development even from a young age and how it lasts through their young adulthood.

Knowing how influential parents are on their child, it is important to look at how the parenting style affects that outcome. Children with high levels of attention, discipline and sincere affection from parents positively correlate with high levels of prosocial behaviors compared to children with parents who are “less responsive” (Syahril, 2020). These high levels of attention and discipline is the basis of authoritative parenting. It is important to note that the high level of discipline is accompanied by explanation and open communication behind the discipline. Authoritative parents are not “because I said so” types of parents, but rather will sit down with their child and explain the reasoning behind a rule or decision. This is an important skill for children to see because they see open communication benefits both parties. They will in turn be more willing to communicate their needs and listen to others to satisfy other’s needs. These are vital skills that directly fall into prosocial behaviors. Children often copy their parents’ prosocial behaviors specifically because “through the identification of other people’s behavior will appear the desire of teenagers to help others” (Decety, 2016). When a parent is prosocial in front of their child, the child will be inclined to be more prosocial themselves.

Since a parent’s communication is vital to a child’s prosocial behavior, it is important to analyze the emotions behind communication. Many studies showed the direct effect of a parent’s empathy on their child. Empathy leads to positive communication from parent to child because the parent is communicating clearly and conscious of their child’s feelings. This in turn affects the child’s prosocial behaviors because they see their parent taking the time to listen to their feelings, they will do the same for others. A child’s level of “empathy is a predictor of prosocial behavior” (Syahril, 2020), specifically because if one understands someone’s emotions, one is more likely to behave in a way that will benefit them. In

teenagers, if they are given the knowledge of someone's "feelings, needs, and suffering... [the] teenagers will be moved to help people who experience suffering or difficulties" (Syahril, 2020). People will act on instinct unless they have a reason to think deeper; looking for and listening to other people's feelings is a reason one would think before they act and act for others. It is important to note that since authoritative parenting emphasizes empathy, it in turn affects a child's prosocial behaviors because acting at the benefit of others is highly driven by emotion.

Another important point is when these skills are introduced. In general, the earlier a behavior is introduced, the more likely one would possess such behaviors because they spend more time doing it over others. One study found that the earlier prosocial behaviors are introduced and emphasized, the easier it will be for a child to possess such prosocial behaviors later on (Eisenberg N, 1999). For example, emphasizing sharing in preschool will help influence the child to act for others more and more often until it is how they act in their day-to-day lives. There are no signs to prove that the initial exposure is enough to make a child more prosocial than their peers, but rather the continuous emphasis throughout the childrearing time (Eisenberg, N, 1999). Nascent forms of prosocial behavior can be seen earlier in a child's life, especially when emphasized by parental actions.

Authoritative Parenting and its correlation to prosocial behavior is not a one-way relationship, but rather bidirectional. If a child exhibits prosocial behaviors towards their parents and household family members, the parent will see this and parent positively as a result. If a parent sees their child is acting for others, listening, and putting effort to communicate, the parent will in turn give the child what they need and do the same. These behaviors will cause a parent to be more authoritative in their parenting even though this

cause stemmed from the child's actions first. This bidirectional relationship occurs as early on as when the child is an infant because "Infant participation in everyday cooperative exchanges may allow adults to scaffold, support, and encourage nascent forms of prosocial responding, conditioned on the infant's current emotional maturity, social understanding, and interactive skills" (Brownell, 2016) Whether the child exhibits such prosocial behaviors at home, at school, or in public is key. For example, a child exhibiting these behaviors strictly outside of the home to strangers is less likely to influence their parent than if they specifically treat their parent(s) with prosocial behaviors (Padilla, 2012). A child can influence their parents' parenting style choice depending on how they interact with their parents.

Prosocial Behavior and Academic Achievement

Prosocial behavior is also directly correlated to academic achievement. This correlation is that engagement in school is "highly dependent on the interaction between a student's environment and personal characteristics, involves the acquisition of adaptive habits, semantic knowledge, and a pro-school identity" (Moreira, 2021). This study identified five distinct character profiles: apathetic, diffuse, moody, organized, and creative and three temperament profiles: reliable, antisocial, and sensitive. The two positive attributes organized and creative, had the highest level of healthiness, happiness, and adaptiveness in school (Moreira, 2021). This study found the trends between all five character profiles was not linear; however, those who had higher levels of happiness had higher levels of engagement in school. The "organized-reliable" defined as "self-control, but not creative" had higher engagement in school because their prosocial tendencies have helped them develop more self-control. The "creative-reliable" defined as "highly creative and prosocial" had higher engagement in school because their prosocial tendencies encourage them to have more positive interactions

with those around them. It is important to reemphasize that those who exhibit prosocial behaviors in turn are better at personal and social skills, such as self-regulation of emotions and communication. Both the “organized-reliable” and “creative-reliable” are more prosocial and have higher academic achievement compared to those “emotional-unreliable” defined as “those who are emotionally reactive with little regulation or creativity” since engagement is directly affected by their “intentional self-control and self-awareness” (Moreira, 2021). These skills developed by prosocial people help a student engage in school and possess such positive qualities in education such as organization and creativity.

Academics from a young age is intertwined with working with peers. Studies have shown that group work has a positive effect on a student’s academic and social outcome (Baines, 2007). From K-12, students will engage in a multitude of group projects. Overtime, groupwork has increased. It was often found that students sat in groups but did not always work in groups. This shift to group work forces students to act more prosocially (Baines, 2007). Students that are more prosocial will have more positive interactions while working with a group. Students who are “‘slow to warm-up’ tended to be less engaged in school than individuals with a tendency to be friendly, determined, and orderly” (Moreira, 2021). A student’s academic achievement can feed off their peers. If a prosocial student’s group is engaged and puts effort into their work, the student will see this and be more engaged themselves because they will want to put in their equal contribution.

A student’s interactions in school are not limited to only peers, but teachers as well. A student’s interaction with their teacher greatly affects their academic achievement, specifically engagement and effort. “Teachers have a strong belief in the value of addressing pupils’ individual needs (Baines, 2007). Teachers want to benefit students as much as

possible, and their interaction greatly affects such. A student who is prosocial has a high level of communication and listening skills. These students will be able to interpret teacher's directions better and understand the importance of what their teacher is trying to educate their students on. Teachers can encourage active listening, effort and engagement to help get information across to students better and in turn make them act more prosocially.

The relationship between prosocial behavior and academic achievement is another bidirectional relationship. School success is heavily based on prosocial behaviors, especially with the rise in groupwork and interactions with peers and teachers. A student that is more engaged in school than their peers will have better communication and listening skills, two skills that fall under prosocial behavior. Similarly, a student that puts more effort into school will want to get the most out of their school-based interactions. These students will learn to be more prosocial with their peers and teachers because they emphasize academic achievement in themselves.

Authoritative Parenting and Academic Achievement

Authoritative parenting and academic achievement are also correlated. Children who receive high support in their education have a greater a reason to engage in school (Hill, 2019). Authoritative parents give their children high levels of support in their everyday lives. Having support and specific goal-setting tendencies help a child have higher academic achievement. There is a typical decline in student engagement over time, but this is lessened significantly when a student receives better support (Moreira, 2021). Since authoritative parenting helps build the framework for goal setting, by supporting a child's achievements and communicating the reasoning behind rules, such as attending school, a child's academic achievement can be linked to this parenting style.

Children also tend to have higher academic achievement if they are given a reason as to why education is so important. Future forward thinking defined as “planful and having a sense of purpose, a life focus that provides deep meaning to life and contributes to the good of society” (Hill, 2019). Authoritative parenting emphasizes support of their children and their goals. Circling back to authoritative parent’s clear communication and explanation has great affect in future-forward thinking. Authoritative parents are the type of parent to sit down with their child and explain the importance of education in their daily life, future, and everything in between. Having a parent that takes the time to explicitly explain why this is important will cause the child to be more engaged than a parent that says school is important with no explanation. These parents emphasize future-forward thinking because it puts their children in the best spot for their future. An authoritative parenting giving both high support and high expectations in their schools gives the student back bone of support in their studies and set future forward goals.

A parent’s level of involvement in school and school work also affects a child’s academic achievement (Piquart, 2015). A child will see their parent engaged with their school, which emphasizes the importance of education. If a parent is more involved with the school, the child will want to do well because their parent is intertwined with the school beyond a report card. This will cause a child to be more engaged and put more effort into their school work. Similarly, if a parent makes it a point to bring school involvement into the home for example by “shared reading; books at home; helping with homework; visiting museums; monitoring grades,” a child will be more engaged in school because the relevance is clearer in their everyday life. (Froiland, 2020). Parental involvement is often emphasized within school by principals and teachers in parent-teach conferences; however, less emphasis

is placed on bringing the involvement to the home (Froiland, 2020). This study showed that parental involvement alone is not enough because involvement in parent teacher conferences had little effect on school achievement (Froiland, 2020). Parental involvement in school beyond the base level involvement, such as Parent Teacher Association, Class Parent Volunteers, and other similar organizations has a higher impact on their child's school achievement. Parental involvement both at the school and at home will emphasize the importance of academics to their child.

This relationship is bidirectional between authoritative parenting and academic achievement. If a child has interest in goal-setting a parent will be more likely to help their child set goals and think about what is best for their future. Similarly, a child who does better in school and is more engaged will cause the parent to be more likely to want to be involved at school because they are proud of their child's accomplishments. Children have a great affect on their parents and a child that gives their parent a clear path to be involved by doing well and enjoying school and being involved themselves will cause their parent to be more involved.

Conclusions

Overall, the relationship between authoritative parenting, prosocial behavior, and academic achievement is high. Authoritative parenting has such great effects on their child's prosocial behavior and academic achievement because of their high level of involvement, clear communication style, attention, and sincere affection. This type of parenting style helps parent and child work together as a team, yet with clear discipline. Prosocial behavior has immensely positive effects on a child's academic achievement and relationship with their parent. Children who are highly prosocial get more out of their school experience than

children with less prosocial behaviors because they are more engaged, interact with others more, and enjoy learning. Academic achievement helps a child have positive relationship with their parent, more prosocial behaviors, and better path for their future.

Each of the four parenting styles uniquely affects the relationship between parent and child. The often-overlooked end of this relationship is how the child affects their parents. A child who listens, shares, and communicates will cause their parent to be more authoritative because they are acting in a way that compliments that parenting style. On the other hand, a child who struggles with basic prosocial skills and academic achievement will likely cause their parents to be more strict, resembling an authoritarian parenting style. This bidirectional relationship is important to highlight because both parent and child can affect the relationship between both parties.

Students who have high levels of prosocial behaviors have higher academic achievement not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. Their experience in school is much greater because they are eager to learn, want to listen to teachers, and work well with their peers. Those who are prosocial will quantitatively have higher academic achievement, but their experience in school is immensely high as well.

Parental involvement both in and out of school have major impacts on their child's academic achievement. Parental involvement directly correlates to their child's school engagement because it shows their child that education is not just necessary but a priority. A child will see their parent takes time to be present at the school, and the child will mirror that mindset. Similarly, authoritative parenting focusing on goal-setting gives a reason as to why school such be this priority. Parental involvement in education both at home, by reading,

working on homework or studying with their child and volunteer at school will show the child that school is something they need to prioritize.

Recommendations

The correlation between authoritative parenting, prosocial behavior and academic achievement is clear, but how can this information be utilized? In these recommendations it is highlighted that authoritative parenting should be the style used; it is important to note it is not always an easy choice, or choice at all. The parenting style used has previous influences, such as the parents' relationship with their own parents, relationship with each other and their natural wants in raising children. Although not always a clear choice, parents can make a more conscious effort to think about how they are parenting their child to help maximize the child's prosocial behavior and academic achievement. From this conclusion a few recommendations can be made. First, authoritative parenting is the groundwork for making their child more prosocial leading to better academic achievement. Giving clear discipline and support motivates a child to do their best and to act for others. Having open communication helps teach a child to listen and communicate effectively. Giving explicit affection shows a child how to give and receive emotions that they can carry throughout their life. In addition to parenting authoritatively, a parent can really put emphasis on prosocial behaviors early on. For example, if a child learns to share at a young age, they will know that their actions affect others and potentially act more prosocial earlier. These prosocial behaviors can come naturally to a child, especially if taught early on. Similarly, an authoritative parent can and should emphasize the reasoning behind everything they do not just with discipline. For example, if a parent explains why setting goals and working hard in school is useful for their future, a child will be more receptive to learning and engagement in

academics. Parents have the power to greatly affect their child's prosocial behavior and academic achievement and children also have the power to affect how their parents raise them. Authoritative parenting with an emphasis on prosocial behavior and the importance of education and involvement will push their children to be the best version of themselves and in turn the child will push the parent to do the same.

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