

**PARENTAL INFLUENCE: ITS EFFECT ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF THE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AGED CHILD**

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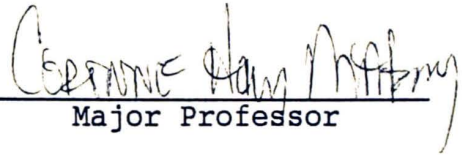
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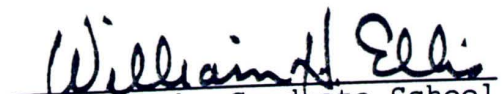
I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Anita S. Crowley entitled "Parental Influence, Its Effect on the Psychosocial Development and Academic Achievement of the Elementary School Aged Child." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science with a major in Guidance and Counseling.


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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The parent-child relationship is truly a unique relationship among human ties. It is through this relationship that children learn to relate to and socialize with family, peers, and society. Parents consciously and unconsciously shape their child's behavior both psychologically and physically, concomitantly causing their children to behave in certain ways. It is through different degrees of reinforcement, punishment, and modeling, that parents can have an adverse or favorable effect on how children relate to them and others (Baumrind, 1967).

Psychological studies of socialization in the family have been concerned with how parental control shapes and supports children's emotional learning and at the same time fosters the internalization of social skills (Baumrind, 1967; Baumrind, 1989; Perry & Perry, 1983). According to Baumrind (1972), parental control refers to those parental acts intended by the parent to shape the child's goal-oriented activity; to modify the child's expression of dependent, aggressive, and playful behavior; and to promote the internalization of parental standards. Internalization, according to Macoby and Martin (1983) is a lasting change which is not forced by influential sources and is

independent of any immediate instrumental value or attitude.

Several points of view have emerged to conceptualize the internalization effects of parental control on the behavior of children (Macoby & Martin, 1983). Social learning theory and attribution theory are among these views. Social learning theorists contend behavior which conforms with the social norm is a process of self-regulation. This self-regulation comes about by salient external incentives provided by parents in order to control and make the child behave according to their wishes. Punishment, social disapproval, reward, and praise are considered important techniques of socialization. The use of reward and punishment serves to establish the credibility of the reinforcing agent. Therefore, external incentives, when promoted, can cause internalization which in turn motivates the child to comply (Baumrind, 1983; Perry & Perry, 1983).

In contrast, attribution theorists stress the negative role of salient external incentives, viewing them as a way of undermining the internalization of self control (Lepper, Sagotsky, Dafoe, & Greene, 1982; Lewis, 1981). They favor more subtle ways of inducing compliance in children, such as modeling and reasoning, and feel internalization of an attribute is most likely to occur when the conformity stems from intrinsic motivation and not from the fear or expectation of external control from others. In essence, they

contend when one perceives oneself performing a behavior in the absence of external control one is likely to internalize the behavior as one's own (Baumrind, 1983; Perry & Perry, 1983).

Attribution theorists feel compliance to parents' wishes can be achieved with minimal pressure, unlike social learning theorists who feel the adult agent needs to make influential attempts at controlling the child. In social learning theory, children may or may not conform depending on the practicality of the situation or expectation of punishment (Macoby & Martin, 1983).

Baumrind (1967, 1972, 1989) defines a socially competent child as a child who, for the most part, is self-reliant and assertive, self-controlled, explorative, and content with oneself. There is wide acceptance that firm parental control coupled with parental warmth promotes socialization skills, such as responsibility, self control, independence, and high self esteem in children. Baumrind's (1967, 1972, 1983, 1989) work has had a major effect on theory related to parental control. She has identified several models of parental behavior and child training which influence behavior in children. Among these are the authoritative, authoritarian, and the permissive model of child training.

Authoritative parents attempt to rationally shape their child's behavior through discipline, firm control,

reasoning, and warmth. In turn, the aggressive, dependent behavior is modified and internalization of parental values is promoted.

The authoritarian parent values obedience as a virtue and believes in restricting the child's autonomy. Verbal give and take is not allowed and the parent's word is right. Discipline is achieved through humiliation, punishment, and negative reinforcement.

Lastly, permissive parents allow their children to display all their impulses and actions. Permissive parents are non-controlling, non-demanding, aloof, and relatively warm.

In examining the effects of parental control on children, it is necessary to first explore whether parents believe their behavior actually has an effect on their child's behavior. By examining this variable one can see if there is a relationship between what parents believe and how they treat their offspring. It is presumed beliefs are important because they can effect parental behavior which, in turn, effects the child's development.

In reviewing the literature, Miller (1988) found that how parents treat children is determined in part by what parents believe about children, both for children in general and particularly their own. He found parents vary considerably in the beliefs they hold and most parents favor an environmental explanation for their child's

behavior over a hereditary one. In general, he found that under the heading of environmental factors parents believed they were an important source for influencing their children, but the perceived impact parents felt varied when factors such as age and developmental skill were introduced.

In a study using 243 black and white mothers of infants between the ages of 15 and 33 months, Stevens (1984) found mothers who knew the most about child development manifested higher levels of parenting skills. He found mothers who were more aware of the potency of their behavior and of the physical environment for development behaved in ways which were more supportive of mental development.

Himelstein, Graham, and Weiner (1991) targeted mothers of 69 gifted, 59 regular, and 66 special education children to see whether these mothers attributed their own child-rearing practices, as opposed to genetic and other environmental factors, in influencing the personalities and behaviors of their children. The results showed mothers attributed greater importance to their own child-rearing practices when they have only one child versus multiple children and when the child was gifted versus regular and special education. Attributions to parental child-rearing practices were significantly lower when the child was in special education and performing poorly or a low success regular classroom child. Here, mothers attributed the

environment as having a significant effect on their child's outcome.

Do mothers treat or discipline their children differently depending on how they behave? Dix, Ruble, and Zambarano (1989) found they did. In a study using 117 mothers of kindergarten and second grade children it was found mothers who attributed high competence and responsibility to their children preferred more negative, forceful reactions to their children's misconduct than mothers who felt their children were less competent and responsible. It was also found that when the child's age increased mothers expected more and used more power-assertive discipline.

Parental control can shape and direct the behavior of children in different ways. To what extent then and in what way is the child's emotional character influenced by the nature of interaction with parents, and does this influence continue in such a way that it has an effect on academic achievement? This paper considers the direct effects of parental influence on the social and motivational aspects of behavior and whether the psychosocial behavior of a child effects academic achievement.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

One would assume that parents who talk with their child, read to their child, participate in homework, and take an interest in their child's well-being and happiness would have some influence on the way their child achieves in school. The major question that arises is the degree to which this parental influence plays upon the child's emotional development which in turn can effect academic achievement.

It has been suggested that aspects of children's cognitive abilities are related to family functioning. Wentzel, Feldman, and Weinberger (1991) focused on two nonintellectual factors, son's self-restraint and emotional adjustment to help explain the relationship between parenting and academic achievement. In a study of 85 sixth grade boys, sons' reports of parental child-rearing practices were used to assess the quality of parenting techniques. To assess parents' harsh and inconsistent discipline the Weinberger Parenting Inventory (WPI; Weinberger, Feldman, & Ford, 1989) was used on both parents. Emotional adjustment was assessed using the Weinberger Adjustment Inventory, (WAI; Weinberger, 1989) self-restraint was measured using teacher and peer ratings, and academic achievement was

assessed using end of the year overall grade point average (GPA) and total composite scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1983) a standardized achievement test.

Results indicated that GPA was significantly and negatively related to mothers' and fathers' harsh and inconsistent discipline and to the global distress the child felt. This study is significant in that it enables one to see that parenting styles can indirectly effect aspects of a child's life, such as GPA, by effecting the way a child feels about himself. It enables one to see that parenting styles can effect emotional adjustment and self-restraint which can at least explain part of the link between parenting styles and academic achievement.

In a study using 291 upper elementary and junior high school students Yee and Flanagan, (1985) also examined the relation between family environment and academic success. They examined the impact family environment has on a child's perceived self-consciousness and whether this perceived self-consciousness is related to the child's attitude towards ability in math, sports, and social settings. Self-esteem, self-concept, and avoidance of situations were also assessed.

The measure used in assessing family environment was a modified version of Epstein and McPartland's Family Decision-Making Scale (Epstein & McPartland, 1977). This scale

measured three modes of family styles: authoritarian, participatory, and child autonomy. Students self-consciousness, attitudes, and beliefs toward academic subjects, sports, and avoidance of situations were assessed using self-report questionnaires designed by the authors.

Little or no relationship between perceived family environments and student's self-consciousness was found in all three activity domains. There was no significant relationship between these two variables.

The idea of relating family environments and self-consciousness is plausible. Yee and Flanagan (1985) did find evidence that students with low self-esteem consistently reported higher self-consciousness in each domain and avoided situations where they would be noticed. With improved operationalized measures in assessing the student's self-esteem, self-consciousness, and self-concept future results may prove to be significantly correlated.

Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts (1989) support the reasoning that a parenting style can play a part in the academic success of a youngster. Using 120 first born children between the age of 11 and 16, Steinberg and colleagues (1989) concentrated not on the different types of parenting styles but rather on the over-time relation between three aspects of authoritative parenting: acceptance, psychological autonomy, and behavior control, and whether these aspects facilitated school success.

Levels of acceptance and psychological autonomy were derived from data taken from the Child Report of Parent Behavior Inventory (Schwartz, Barton-Henry, & Pruzinsky, 1985). Behavior control data was derived from a student checklist concerning 17 areas of family decision making on issues relevant to children in the age range studied.

Comparing the results of perceived parenting practices with school grades, achievement test scores, and psychological maturity over a one year period from 1985 to 1986, it was found that the relation between all three aspects of authoritative parenting led to increases in school grades and achievement test scores which were mediated through the effect of authoritative parenting on psychosocial maturity.

This aspect is significant in that it suggests authoritative parenting styles may enhance school success not necessarily directly but more so indirectly through the contribution it has towards a youngsters psychosocial development. Putting it more concretely, students who described their parents as treating them warmly, democratically, and firmly had a more positive feeling about themselves which in turn facilitated good grades.

Sears (1970) also found evidence linking parental warmth to success in schools. Using 160 children and their mothers, the impact of parental-warmth and love-oriented discipline on the self-concept of children were investigated. Within this study, the effect of self-concept

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towards school competence to include: IQ, reading achievement, and math achievement were also investigated.

Results show that parental warmth and acceptance shown toward a child at age five are significant determinants of a child's high self-esteem at age twelve. This in turn, is significantly related to academic achievement, especially in reading and math.

Although these results are noteworthy, they must be looked at with caution. Sears (1970) based his study of parental influence on children's self-concept yet, he only used mother-based interviews allowing for only her perception of the father's attitudes, discipline habits, and warmth. Also, IQ and achievement test scores for the reading and math were obtained three years earlier, therefore, not allowing for any change that might have taken place in the competence of the child from the third to sixth grade.

One must also observe the sample and judge whether the 160 children taken from two suburbs in Boston, in the year 1958, were a true representation of society in general. One can assume it was not. In any case the study did show clear interpretation of the data and clearly correlated high self-concept with high reading and math achievement.

Believing that children's cognitive responses rely on both the effects of instructional activities and discipline, Hess and McDevitt (1984) examined the relationship

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between direct control techniques that maximize parental dominance and children's school-relevant cognitive skills.

Specifically they proposed two possibilities: a) direct control techniques in both teaching and disciplinary situations will be correlated negatively with later school-related performance; and b) children of mothers who use high proportion of direct control techniques in both teaching and disciplinary situations will perform more poorly on tests of scholastic achievement than will children of mothers who use both direct and indirect tactics.

Using longitudinal data from 47 white, first-born children, discipline and teaching techniques used between mother and child at age four were evaluated and then later correlated with cognitive ability and school readiness at age five to six years and scholastic aptitude at age twelve (Hess & McDevitt, 1984).

Analysis of the results implied that children of mothers who used direct control techniques in both disciplinary and teaching situations performed particularly poorly on school-related tasks as compared to children whose mothers used a combination of both direct and indirect control tactics. Yet, children whose mothers used relatively few direct control techniques had no advantage over the children whose mothers used both direct and indirect tactics.

mirror that of Baumrind's (1983) typology: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parent. In that it is not firm control (direct control) that can have negative consequences on children but rather the rigid use of it especially when used with consistency over time.

CHAPTER 3

Discussion and Recommendations

The research relating parenting practices with a child's psychosocial development and the effect it has on academics is limited, specifically for the elementary school aged child. It is enlightening to note however, the research that has been done on this age level positively correlates parental warmth with high self-worth which in turn promotes good grades (Sears, 1970; Steinberg et al., 1989). Research also shows that absence of parental warmth substituted instead by harsh and inconsistent discipline can effect GPA (Wentzel et al., 1991), self-esteem (Yee & Flanagan, 1985) and school related tasks such as reading and math (Hess & McDevitt, 1984).

Surprisingly, research in the area of elementary school aged children is devoid of many aspects which examine the diversity of today's population. Not only do the majority of the studies cited limit their samples to white, middle class children (Baumrind, 1967; Hess & McDevitt, 1984; and Sears, 1970), there is nothing available on the elementary school aged child that examines whether parenting styles differentially effect ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups.

Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh (1987) using a large and diverse high school population in the San Francisco, area found that parenting styles effect children and academic performance differently when variables such as: race, ethnicity, gender, and family structure were introduced. So significant in some areas that one cannot predict any single parenting style would benefit all groups of people.

No longer can one truly rely on previous research such as Baumrind's (1967, 1983) to base such predictions as to what parenting styles will promote certain behavior in children. These studies, although noteworthy, represent a population of yesterday. Unless research allows for and provides a sample which reflects the state of our nation today: step-families, single parents, interracial marriages, diverse ethnic groups, and all levels of socioeconomic functioning, future research will fail to increase our understanding of parenting styles and their consequences.

Another aspect to examine is what motivates a parent to behave authoritatively towards a child. Is it the child's maturity, or lack of it, which causes the parent to behave authoritatively, or are parenting styles learned and passed down from generation to generation allowing for a constructive or destructive cycle to form. One would like to believe that parental behavior is more of a correlate to a child's behavior than a contributing factor.

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By examining the psychological processes which mediate parenting practices, research can work to find ways to explain the hidden reasons why parents behave toward their children in the manner that they do.

Summary

In summary, it is important for parents to be made aware of how their actions effect their children psychologically. Parents, who believe, "What I do matters little," or "I'm not doing anything wrong," although protecting their self-esteem, will be less inclined to provide positive experiences for their child. Parents, who fail to evaluate their behavior and the possible ramifications of the same, don't allow their children to grow up knowing that it is alright to make a mistake or that behavior can change.

Specifically, our society needs to reevaluate the priorities being developed for our youth. The mentality of teaching our children to strive to be the best in society can have both negative as well as positive consequences especially when a child's vulnerable self-esteem is at stake.

Parents are the most significant role models for any child. Society needs to make a 360 degree turn steering the emphasis back onto the most important aspect in any child's life, "the family." Only then can society hope to

see a better future filled with greater harmony and understanding of our youth.

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