About Parenting Styles and School Performance

What is the relationship between home support and school performance? This is a question that often has been discussed in terms of parenting style and practices seen as having a developmentally negative impact and/or being in conflict with the demands and standards of their youngster's schooling. Concerns have been raised about parents viewed as overprotective, overcontrolling, overpressuring, or overly permissive.

How Parenting Styles Are Defined

In the 1960s, Diana Baumrind categorized three parenting styles – authoritarian, indulgent, and authoritative. Over the years, neglectful (uninvolved, disengaged) has been added as a fourth. Other have been proposed.

Definitions vary. The following are from **Geher** (2020):

An authoritarian parent seeks to maintain a high level of control over their children. They may set and adhere to a strict set of rules and are more likely to support and take part in corporal punishment such as spanking. Children of highly authoritarian parents may struggle socially and may be likely to become authoritarian parents themselves.

Neglectful parents (also known as uninvolved or disengaged) take on a limited parenting role. They may not spend as much time as other parents in conversation, play, or other activities, and may not bother to set many house rules. Some children of neglectful parents may resist rules outside of the home and struggle with self-control.

Indulgent (or permissive) parents may be attentive and warm, but may not set many rules for their children. They may prioritize being their child's friend over being their parent. Research suggests that the children of permissive parents may show higher levels of creativity but may also feel entitled, and be more interested in taking rather than giving in their own relationships.

Authoritative parents follow what is widely understood as the preferred approach. Such parents are more pragmatic and flexible. They set clear boundaries but also encourage children's independence within those limits. Discipline in such families may be more supportive than punitive, and as children get older, their independence increases. Children of authoritative parents may have more highly developed self-control and self-reliance.

For a related measure, see the *Parental Analytical Style Scale* **(PASS)**.

While an authoritative style often is seen as the best approach, some researchers have suggested that the ideal is a balance between authoritarian and permissive parenting. **Ginsberg** (2019) notes: "Balanced parents respect their teens' views and are clear that adults have an irreplaceable role to shape young people." The term being used for such a balanced approach is "lighthouse parenting." The aim is to maintain the balance between providing love, nurturing, support, guidance, and protection, while also allowing a youngster to learn from making mistakes and learn other things independently.

Parenting Style: Too Limited a Concept

As has become increasingly evident, the focus on parenting styles is too limited a perspective of parenting. As **Sanvictores and Mendez** (2022) note:

> Parenting varies widely across families, with cultural backgrounds having a significant role in shaping family dynamics and child-rearing practices. Over the past several years, the demographic makeup of the United States has shifted, driven by immigration, socioeconomic changes, and the rise of single-parent households, all of which influence parenting styles. These changes bring diverse cultural, ethnic, and spiritual ideologies into play.

In contrast to characterizing parenting in terms of global, consistent, and stable styles, **Smetana** (2017) emphasizes that "studies examining variations along different parenting dimensions now predominate, due to concerns about whether styles accurately capture contextual variations and have the same meaning in different groups. ... Concerns with greater sensitivity to cultural and contextual variations have led to greater specificity in defining parenting in terms of different parenting dimensions and greater consideration of the role of parenting beliefs in moderating links between parenting and adjustment. New research includes 'domain-specific' models that describe parents as flexibly deploying different practices depending on their goals, children's needs, and the types of behaviors towards which parenting is directed."

In our Center's work, we have stressed that instead of just focusing on parents, it is time to recognize that primary child caretakers differ; many students are being raised primarily by grandparents, aunts, older siblings, "nannies," and in foster homes. And in all cases, others in the home can have a significant impact on students' school performance. So, in our work, we stress the concept of *home* and explore the impact of home involvement and engagement on the youngster's schooling.

Other home involvement complications stem from factors such as caretaker economic status, work schedules, immigrant status, ethnic and racial considerations, single-parent families, the number of youngsters in the home, homes where English is not spoken, extended families, military families, families where a parent is in prison, foster homes, and homeless families and youngsters. In addition, some caretakers have disabilities, and some are dysfunctional.

Caretakers-child-school transactions are reciprocal. Attitudes about each other vary. Such attitudes often reflect personal past experiences as well as current encounters and how well a youngster is doing at school. (A home, of course, may have one or more children at a school.) When a student is not doing well, they and their caretakers often have negative feelings about the school and may manifest frustration and anger. In turn, the school staff may find it difficult to nurture a positive connection with the caretakers and students. The result can be a downward spiral in a student's well-being and school performance.

In general, as with students, parents and other caretakers vary in their personal motivation and ability to participate. And as with many students who are not doing well at school, (re)establishing productive working relationships with some caretakers involves addressing individual psychosocial and educational barriers and doing so in a personalized way.

A Sample of Research Findings

Researchers focused on parenting style have stressed the following:

>Authoritarian parenting style is associated with lower self-esteem, conformity, obedience, less satisfaction with life, and depressive tendencies (**Kostanasios,** 2024; **Shiffrin** et al., 2014). From the perspective of self-determination theory, these effects are seen as stemming from a negative impact on the youngster's feelings of autonomy and competence (**Deci & Ryan**, 1985). In turn, these feelings have been attributed to parents' overreliance on rewards and punishments to control behavior and from the youngster's views of inadequate and fixed intelligence (**Morris & Hays-Grudo**, 2024). All this can contribute to negative self-fulfilling prophecies related to performing on school tasks and tests.

>Permissive parenting style can produce students who are ill-prepared to meet the demands of schooling (e.g., lacking motivation and self-discipline to do what is expected). They also may not have developed prosocial ways to handle frustrations and interpersonal conflicts (**Rubin, Stewart, & Chen**, 1995; **Sandstrom,** 2007; **Vaillancourt** et al., 2007).

>Authoritative parenting has robustly been reported by researchers as the better approach for facilitating positive child development, academic performance, and mental health (e.g., see **Ginsberg**, 2024; **Morris & Hays-Grudo**, 2024).

However, when parenting style is studied among ethnic minorities, other findings emerge. For example, a study by **Kim & Rohner** (2018) found only 26% of Korean-American families fit neatly into the categories. Similarly, a study of eight Arab societies found that parenting styles in this culture were better categorized as controlling, flexible, or inconsistent (**Checa & Abundis-Gutierrez**, 2018). Moreover, cultural factors may mitigate negative effects of "non-ideal" parenting styles. For example, authoritarian parenting did not negatively affect a sample of African-American and Asian-American children as compared to other children. And another study reported that, compared with other ethnicities, Asian high schoolers tended to rate their parents higher on authoritarian characteristics, and that those whose parents were seen as using an authoritarian-authoritative approach had very positive educational outcomes (**Chao,** 1994). Researchers suggest that such findings may be due to authoritarian parenting being more accepted in those cultures, and therefore, children are less likely to feel stifled. For example, in collectivist Asian cultures respect for authority and obedience to elders is a high priority. Given cultural norms that encourage authoritarian parenting, the view is that some degree of authoritarian parenting is less likely to harm students, and a purely authoritative approach might not be as beneficial for them.

Finally, it is emphasized that socioeconomic class is one of the single strongest variables that correlates with student success. A higher social class tends to provide more educational resources and time available to spend on studying, which correlates to better performance. Additionally, students from lower socioeconomic classes may stress about their family's finances, which can lead to poorer mental health and class performance. However, even when socioeconomic status (and natural aptitude) are taken into account, students from authoritative households are better off than students from other households. As **Epstein** (2002) has stressed:

> *Research findings accumulated over ... decades ... show that ... parental encouragement, activities, and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievement, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account.*

Conclusion

Parenting style as a concept has stimulated a good deal of research and has generated useful discussions about good and bad parenting. At the same time, as discussed here, the focus on parenting style is too limited as a way to understand the impact of the home on school performance.

Our research stresses many factors in a home that affect development and learning and explores the impact of such factors on a youngster's schooling. It also highlights ways the school can outreach and support the home to the benefit of all concerned.

Clearly, caretakers of the young always must strive to maximize the well-being of their charges. And schools must strive to connect in productive ways with the full range of caretakers. Working collaboratively, while never easy, is an essential facet of enhancing equity of opportunity for every student to succeed at school and beyond.

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