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THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL VALUES ON THE PROSOCIAL
BEHAVIORS OF PRESCHOOLERS IN A PRIVATE
VS. DISTRICT-FUNDED PRESCHOOL

by
Janet Baratta

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree in School Psychology
of Rowan University
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Approved by

Professor

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ABSTRACT

Janet Baratta

The Effects of Parental Values on the Prosocial Behavior of Preschoolers in a Private vs. District-funded Preschool

1998

Dr. John Klanderman
School Psychology

Earlier studies have shown that parental modeling and communication of values are significant factors in promoting prosocial behavior in young children. The current study was conducted to determine whether a relationship existed between preschoolers' prosocial behaviors and the importance their parents attributed to such behaviors. The prosocial behaviors of twenty preschoolers from a private preschool were compared to the behaviors of twenty preschoolers from a public, district-funded preschool. The preschool teachers from both schools rated the prosocial behaviors of the children based on how often they observed each child engaging in various behaviors. The parents rated how valuable they believed these behaviors were to their child's social development. When the teacher ratings were correlated with the parental ratings for both schools, no significant difference was found between the parent and teacher ratings for the two preschool groups. However, as a group, the private school preschoolers displayed more overall prosocial behaviors than did the children from the district funded preschool.

ABSTRACT

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This study examined the relationship between preschoolers' prosocial behaviors and the importance their parents attribute to such behaviors. The behaviors of preschoolers from a private preschool were compared to those of preschoolers from a district-funded public preschool. When the teacher and parent ratings were correlated, no significant difference was found. The private preschoolers displayed more prosocial behaviors than did the district funded preschoolers.

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Chapter 1. The Problem

Introduction

Emotional intelligence and social skills training have received considerable attention in recent years (Goleman, 1995). Hailed as a better predictor of future life success than IQ, emotional intelligence has become the buzzword of the 90s and the focus of current educational research. Behaviors, such as sharing, helping, empathy, cooperating, initiating relationships, and giving compliments are studied and viewed as more critical for success than academic achievement. Children who are competent in these social behaviors interact more effectively with others (Gresham 1984). Similarly, deficits in these social skills often lead to poor academic performance and later social adjustment problems.

Teaching children how to develop the social skills needed to form successful relationships is therefore viewed as one of the most important goals of early childhood education. Educators and psychologists have a greater window of opportunity to identify and remediate potential social skill deficits because children are entering the formal educational system earlier than ever before.

The Social Skills System used in this study can provide parents, educators, and psychologists with valuable information about a preschooler's social skills. Parents rated

the skills they deem valuable for their children's social development. Teachers observed the children in their classrooms and assessed whether a child demonstrated the same rated prosocial behaviors. By comparing the teacher assessments with the parental ratings on the two forms, parents can determine whether they have effectively communicated their social values and taught their children appropriate social skills.

Social learning theorists have known for some time that children "live what they learn" (Bandura, 1977). Parents and teachers can model socially accepted behaviors to help preschool children acquire the social skills needed to achieve future successes. In addition, identifying individual social deficits in preschoolers can help educators intervene before problem behaviors become a part of a child's social interactive style.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between preschoolers' social behaviors and the value or importance their parents attribute to each behavior. The prosocial behaviors of preschoolers from a private, expensive preschool were compared to those of preschoolers from a free, district-funded public preschool. Teachers from both schools observed and rated the behaviors of each preschool child in their class. Parents from both groups assigned an importance rating to each of the behaviors. The teacher rating was then correlated with the parental importance rating to determine which preschool group demonstrated more of the prosocial behaviors their parents valued.

Hypothesis

The alternate hypothesis stated that preschoolers from a private preschool would display more of the social behaviors that their parents deemed important than preschoolers from a state-funded, public preschool. A positive correlation between the private preschoolers' behaviors and the values their parents assign to each behavior would exist. As a group, the preschoolers from the private preschool would also display more social behaviors than would the preschoolers from a public preschool.

Theory

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) maintains that children learn social behaviors by observing and imitating models (observational learning). According to social learning theory, children's identification with their parents is the most important element in how they learn a language, deal with aggression, develop a moral sense, and learn the behaviors that society holds appropriate for their gender.

In addition, preschoolers who were securely attached as infants are more likely than insecurely attached children to respond prosocially to other children. These children have more friends and teachers consider them more socially competent. Children who received empathic, nurturing, responsive care as infants develop those qualities themselves (Kestenbaum, Farber, & Sroufe, 1989).

Children actively advance their own social learning by choosing the models they want to imitate. The choice is influenced by the characteristics of the model and child, and the environment. A child may choose one parent over the other or other adults, such as a

teacher or sports figure instead of a parent. Children tend to imitate people of high status and people who reflect their own personalities.

Social learning theorists also believe that the child acts upon his/her environment and to some extent, they create their own environment. For example, a child who spends hours at a time watching television rather than playing with other children, takes his/her models from people on the screen. The specific behaviors that children imitate also depend on the behaviors that are present and valued in their environment and culture.

Finally, parents and teachers of a prosocial child can set an example. These role models encourage children to empathize with others, teach them that actions have consequences, and urge them to reflect on the impact of what they do and say. Because children do not spontaneously respond prosocially to others, theorists suggest that adults can use scaffolding techniques to teach young children about socially accepted behaviors (Vygotsky, 1932). They can set the stage for prosocial responsiveness, provide the appropriate context for the child's response, and divide the tasks of social interaction into manageable tasks (Denham, Manson, and Couchoud, 1995).

Theorists have explored the role of cognition in determining whether children internalize what they have learned through modeled behavior. This shift in emphasis from behavior to cognition asks what are children thinking and feeling when they are engaged in social interactions. What cognitive and emotional factors regulate and inhibit prosocial actions? According to the theory of cognitive development, preschool children lack the maturity to make sound moral judgments about their prosocial behavior (Piaget, 1932). Piaget would state that preschoolers, who are in the preoperational stage of cognitive

development, are too egocentric to be able to take another person's perspective. These children judge actions in terms of actual physical consequences, not the motivation behind them. Therefore, the goal of a prosocial curriculum is to not only model social behaviors but also to communicate the moral and social issues surrounding these behaviors in age-appropriate ways.

Definitions

The **social behaviors** examined in the present study include:

- Cooperation - behaviors that include helping others, sharing materials, and complying with rules and directions.
- Assertion - behaviors that initiating , asking others for information, introducing oneself, and responding to the actions of others.
- Responsibility - behavior that demonstrate ability to communicate with adults and regard for property or work.
- Self-Control - behaviors that emerge in conflict situations, such as responding appropriately to teasing, and in non-conflict situations that require taking turns and compromising.

Prosocial behavior was first coined by Wispe (1972) as an antonym to the word, "antisocial." If aggression and violence are viewed as antisocial behaviors, helping, cooperating, and empathy are considered prosocial acts. Hay (1994) further defined prosocial behavior as any action that benefits others or, at a minimum, promotes harmonious relationships with others, even if there is no great sacrifice on the actor's part and even if there some benefit to the actor, such as receiving attention from others, or

higher self-esteem. In the present study, prosocial behavior is a subset of all the social behaviors examined.

Emotional intelligence - self-awareness, impulse control, persistence, zeal, self-motivation, empathy, and social deftness.

Assumptions

In this study, the subjects were randomly selected from two preschoolers. The educational backgrounds of the preschool teachers were unknown and assumed to be equal. The parents of the preschool children from the private preschool were assumed to have a higher social economic status and more advanced educational backgrounds than the parents from the public, district-funded preschool program. Note: To be eligible for the free, public program, families must have incomes of \$17,000 or less. The school is also located in a low-income municipality while the private preschool enrolls children from a predominately middle to upper-class community.

The researcher predicted that the preschoolers from a private preschool would display more of the social behaviors that their parents deem important than would the preschoolers from a district-funded, public preschool because these parents were assumed to have better social, modeling, and communication skills.

Limitations

The validity of the current study was limited by the types of questions contained on the Social Skills Rating forms. Some of the questions on the parent form involved behaviors that the researcher did not consider to be age-appropriate for the group under consideration. Other questions did not appear to measure strictly “prosocial” behavior.

For example, one question asked whether the child asks a sales clerk for information or assistance. Similarly, the teacher form included ambiguous items. A zero (0) rating indicated that the child never engaged in the particular behavior; however, some questions involved situations that may not occur for a particular child, e.g., responds appropriately to teasing by peers.

The reliability of the results of the study were also subject to the honesty of the responses provided by the parents. In addition, the teachers may not have had enough experience with the children to objectively rate their behavior.

In addition, the instructional setting and emphasis of the preschools may have been too divergent to provide an equitable comparison. The public district-funded preschool was a more structured learning environment while the private preschool appeared to emphasize socialization skills. The children in the latter group may have had more opportunities to engage in prosocial behaviors.

Overview

The present study tested the hypothesis that preschoolers from a private preschool would display more of the social behaviors that their parents deem important to social skills development than would preschoolers from a district-funded, public preschool.

In Chapter 2, research concerning social behaviors and the factors that facilitate and inhibit those behaviors is reviewed. The research review included, but was not limited to, cognitive and emotional development, parental and peer influences, SES and

instructional setting variables, modeling, and social skills competence and training as they relate to prosocial behaviors in preschool children.

The design of the study, which is outlined in Chapter 3, included a discussion of the sample, the measures used, the testable hypothesis, design methodology, and summary. The analysis of the data collected is contained in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Overview

Although considerable information was available on the genesis of prosocial behavior in adolescents and older persons, such a review was outside the scope of this study. Therefore, this literature review was limited to the development of prosocial behavior in preschool children (ages 4 - 4 ½), followed by a discussion of the variables that influence that development . The cognitive, motivational, and situational factors that determine individual differences in prosocial behavior among preschoolers were also defined.

Prosocial Development

Sharing, helping, initiating relationships, requesting help from others, giving compliments, and saying “please” and “thank you” are examples of the socially accepted skills studied (Elliot, Barnard, & Gresham, 1989). Researchers agree that social skills are learned behaviors that allow children to interact with others in ways that elicit positive responses and assist in avoiding negative responses (Gresham & Elliot, 1984).

Studies on how children develop prosocial behaviors indicate that these behaviors increase with age (Yarrow & Waxler 1976). Initial research on the developmental trends in prosocial behaviors concentrated on the behaviors themselves. A classic observational study of preschooler's free play initially assumed that children progress from solitary play at 2 - 2 ½ years to parallel play at 2 ½ to 3 years to cooperative play at 4 ½ years (Parten 1932). When social participation among preschoolers was reexamined, the researcher found that parallel play was more characteristic of the youngest child while the older preschooler (3 and 4 year olds) alternated between solitary and interactive play (Smith, 1978).

Recent investigations have shifted the focus from the behavioral aspects of social skill development to the cognitive and emotional underpinnings of prosocial acts. Researchers have predicted that as children mature, they developed higher levels of cognitive functioning and moral reasoning, and as a result, demonstrated increased prosocial acts (Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989). Prosocial behaviors are related to moral judgments; however, prosocial behaviors and moral acts are not synonymous terms (Smetana, Bridgeman, Turiel, 1983).

Enhanced prosocial responsiveness may have more to do with the fact that older children also have more socialization experiences. In one study, preschooler's spontaneous responses to their crying peers were naturally observed, recorded, and analyzed (Farver & Branstetter, 1994). The researchers predicted that the frequency of prosocial peer response would increase with age. However, individual differences in gender, temperament, social competence, child-care experience, and friendship status were

found to be more influential than developmental age in shaping the children's prosocial behavior with peers.

Contrary to the theory that maturity enhances social skills development, Hay (1994) has proposed that prosocial activities actually decline during the preschool years. He hypothesized that prosocial behaviors are almost universal in infancy, but become more individualized and regulated among preschoolers, who exhibit prosocial behaviors more selectively. He attributed a greater understanding of social and moral conventions to preschoolers than did Piaget. Hay believed that preschoolers' increased knowledge about social conventions and standards and the emergence of moral emotions allow them to choose when and to whom they will respond prosocially. These new skills may actually inhibit earlier impulses to be prosocial. According to Hay, prosocial behavior becomes less of a general social impulse and more of a calculated decision.

Influences on Prosocial Development and Maintenance

Understanding how children develop prosocial behavior requires a systematic review of the variables that influence the occurrence and frequency of prosocial acts and the internal variables that account for individual differences. Three factors are considered essential for eliciting prosocial behavior - situational, cognitive, and motivational (Brown & Solomon, 1983).

According to this model of prosocial development, a child must have the cognitive maturity to perceive the need for an act and to understand what that act should be, as well as the motivation to perform the act. More important, the situation or environment must allow or promote the performance of the prosocial act. Individual differences in social

competence may also be examined in light of environment, gender, parental management style and values, family dynamics, and social economic status.

Environment. A number of studies have examined the effects of the situation and setting on the frequency of prosocial behaviors among preschool children. The prosocial and aggressive behaviors of preschoolers at play in a church-based preschool and a secular preschool were compared to determine whether the moral philosophy inherent in a church-based center would affect the frequency of both behaviors (Honig, A., & Douthit, D., Jeongwuk, L., Dingler, C., 1992). The researchers hypothesized that the children in the church-based center would show more prosocial and less aggressive behaviors than would the children in the secular preschools. They observed 20 boys and 20 girls, ages 3.5 - 4.5 years old, for 20 minutes during free play periods. They rated various types of prosocial and aggressive behaviors. The prosocial behaviors were defined as helping (assisting another child to achieve a task); cooperating (working together to achieve a common goal); sharing (physical lending or giving of a desired object); and empathy (expressing sympathy for the discomfort of another – with or without an explicit physical attempt to alleviate the other child’s discomfort). Aggressive behaviors were categorized as physical (striking, obvious intrusion of personal space, biting, kicking, or throwing objects directly at another; verbal/gestural (sarcasm, scolding, and name-calling); exclusion/rejection (verbal, vocal, or emotional tactics used to alienate another physically, emotionally, or socially); property theft or destruction.

Attendance in the church-based setting did not influence the frequency of prosocial or aggressive behavior patterns with peers. However, there were significant sex

differences in the prosocial and aggressive responses among the boys and girls. The girls in the church-based center exhibited four times as many prosocial acts than did the boys in the secular center and twice as many prosocial acts as compared to the boys in the church-based center.

Similar studies were conducted to determine whether the contextual features of the learning environment would influence the children's social competence (Hartup, 1983). The research suggested that the competence and number of adults in the classroom, the number of children enrolled in the class, and the size of the play group were important determinants. Smaller preschool classes (fewer than 10 children) facilitated more social interactions and prosocial behaviors than did larger ones (Asher, Singleton, Tinsely, & Hymel, 1979). Teacher-to-student ratio was also found to be a confounding factor in the frequency of social interaction among preschool children (Guralnick, 1980). The research concluded that high ratios seem to inhibit child to child social interaction and that one-third of the children's prosocial actions were directed toward the adults in the classroom. In a similar study of preschool teachers in a mainstreamed classroom, the researcher concluded that teachers give more help and affection to handicap than non-handicap children (Ipsa, 1981). He speculated that teachers may be intervening too quickly without giving the non-handicap peer time to provide the helping behavior. While it is desirable for teachers to be role models for prosocial behaviors, their interventions in these situations may actually be limiting peer opportunities for displaying prosocial behavior (Blackmon & Dembo, 1984).

A limitation of the above studies is that they examined prosocial behaviors in a single context, e.g., play. In order to fully understand the implications of social competence as well as social skill deficits, researchers should examine preschool children's prosocial behavior in more than one setting. In one such study, a researcher examined task-related and social behaviors of teacher-identified preschool children at risk for behavior problems in two school settings: structured instructional context and unstructured free play context (Del'Homme, Sinclair, & Kasari, 1994). The researchers found that group differences for on-task, aggressive, and prosocial behaviors depended on the context in which they were displayed.

Another study compared the contextual classroom features of segregated public school classrooms and community-based integrated classrooms for preschoolers with disabilities (Sontag, 1997). The researchers examined the relationship between classroom characteristics and child sociability. They found no differences in child sociability or the contexts between the two environments. However, they did find a relationship between teacher verbal prompting and child sociability; children were much more likely to talk to their peers and offer help when a verbal prompt was given and they were praised for their prosocial actions.

With regard to teacher characteristics as important features of the classroom environment, most investigators of teacher behaviors have conducted their studies by using the single-subject, applied behavior analysis methodology in highly controlled settings. Chandler, Lubeck, and Fowler (1992) reviewed the conclusions of studies which investigated the effect of setting conditions on the social skills of preschool children with

disabilities. The literature is inconclusive; however, teacher prompting, positive reinforcement, and instructions have been identified as the most common teacher strategies used to facilitate social skill generalization and maintenance.

Gender. Hay (1994) has suggested that prosocial behavior becomes gender differentiated over the course of childhood. The preschool period is also a time when gender roles are stabilizing and pressures to socialize children in gender-appropriate ways becomes more intense. Sex role socialization studies show higher rates of compliance for girls (Hay, 1994), more aggressive behavior from boys (Honig, 1983) and peer groups becoming increasingly segregated by gender (Macoby, 1990). One study examined the relationship between sex-typed toy and gender and social behavior (Cameron, Eisenberg, Tyron, 1985). The social behaviors (socializing, requesting assistance, prosocial behaviors, and aggressive/defensive behaviors) and toy choices of preschoolers were observed. Only two behaviors (socializing and spontaneous prosocial behavior) were found to be related to toy choice. Among boys, the choice of toy was associated with requesting help from the teacher. When the toy was defined as masculine, androgynous, and feminine, only sociability toward peers was related to toy choice.

Researchers have suggested that helping behavior represents a different class of prosocial behavior than sharing or comforting and involves less personal involvement or self-sacrifice (Eisenberg & Hand, 1979). Another example includes rough and tumble play studies. Rough and tumble play is defined as a prosocial behavior whose expression and purpose varies as a function of gender (DiPietro, 1981). Other researchers have limited

their definition and subsequent investigation to overt displays of empathy (Zahn-Waxler, 1991).

When sex differences in the activities of preschoolers were assessed during free play, researchers found that boys spent more time in rough and tumble play while girls were engaged in organized games with rules, such as “playing house” (Braza, Braza, Carreras & Munoz, 1997). These peer groups became segregated by gender and each group established its own culture.

A similar study on the effects of age and sex on preschooler’s helpfulness found a developmental progression from lesser to greater helpfulness for preschool girls, but not for boys (King & Barnett, 1980). The older female preschoolers responded more quickly to the needs of a distressed playmate and received higher observer ratings on sharing, involvement, and overall helpfulness than did the males or younger females.

The extent of the gender differences in prosocial behavior, however, needs further clarification. Gender differences vary depending on the particular category of prosocial behavior studied and the measurement strategy used (Eisenburg & Mussen, 1989).

Parental Actions and Values. Parental values, parenting styles, and the way in which parents communicate those values may account for a considerable portion of individual differences in prosocial activities (Hay, 1994). Research on the socialization of prosocial behavior, therefore, must examine parental values and feelings and the extent to which they wish to promote prosocial development.

One study showed that adult caregivers do not advocate sharing unless the costs for the prosocial child are relatively low (Petersen & Reaven, 1984), causing some

theorists to propose that selective prosocial responding may in fact be a necessary adaptive function (Caplan, 1993).

Another study examined the feelings of parents as they administered rewards and modeled prosocial behavior (Miller, Eisenberg, Fabes, Shell & Gular, 1989). The mothers in the study were asked what action they would take if their child hurt a peer and to explain their own emotional reactions. The mothers who stated that they would have very strong feelings about the incident and use negative control practices tended to have children who showed less sympathy. On the other hand, mothers who felt strongly about the incident, but said they would use reasoning techniques with their children had children with higher sympathetic responses.

The research supports the theory that authoritative parenting, which is firm but reasonable, is conducive to promoting prosocial behavior (Baumrind, 1978). Children of authoritative parents are typically well adjusted, cooperative, and socially competent (Dekovic & Janssens, 1992). There is some evidence that the use of induction techniques also facilitates the development of prosocial behavior (Dlugokinski & Firestone, 1974; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). Children of inductive parents, or those rated low in their use of power assertive discipline (physical punishment, belittling, etc.), exhibited fewer disruptive playground behaviors than other children (Hart, DeWolf, Wozniak, & Burts, 1992). In addition, daughters of inductive mothers showed more prosocial behaviors and were preferred over other children by peers.

Similar studies have demonstrated that differences in parental management style (Ladd & Golter, 1988) and parental perception of peer competence may account for

variations in children's social competence with peers (Proffit & Ladd, 1994). Mothers of preschool children were asked how they perceived their children's peer relationships and whether they had any concerns about their children's social competence. Mothers differentiated between prosocial behavior and peer sociability when they assessed their children's social progress with peers. Mothers gave girls higher progress ratings than the boys. They also viewed their children's prosocial skills as less developed than their sociability toward peers. Mothers who reported lower estimates of children's sociability were more concerned about social competence and less involved in managing their children's informal peer relations (e.g., arranging play dates). Conversely, mothers who facilitated informal peer activities and promoted children's social autonomy (e.g., encouraging children to initiate their own play dates) tended to view their children as more sociable with peers.

In a later study, mothers were asked to complete a questionnaire about their beliefs in the importance and modifiability of children's peer relationship skills, perceptions of their children's social competence with peers, and the strategies they would use in response to interaction problems (Mize, Pettit, & Brown, 1995). The mothers were observed supervising the play of their children and a peer. The study found that maternal perceptions were negatively associated with the extent of mothers' involvement in children's play and the quality of the supervision was predicted by the mother's knowledge of socialization strategies and the interaction of her beliefs and knowledge. Knowledge was associated with the quality of the supervision only when mothers believed that social skills were important and modifiable.

According to a naturalistic observation of parent-child interactions, preschool children are most likely to exhibit prosocial behaviors, especially nurturing and helping behaviors, in the presence of both parents, less with their mothers, and least when only with their fathers (Bridgeman, 1983). The study also found that the child's sharing was significantly correlated with the mother's tendency to share.

Additional studies are needed to identify the social behaviors and skills that parents consider to be important. These studies will help teachers and psychologists deliver the psychoeducational services needed to teach social skills and remediate deficits (Elliot, Barnard & Gresham, 1989).

Family Dynamics. The role of the family in the development and progress of preschoolers' prosocial behavior has not been adequately addressed. Isolated behaviors have been examined with conflicting results. There is an inherent logistics problem in trying to observe naturally occurring behavior in a laboratory setting.

One study assessed the effects of family variables on helping and comforting behaviors of 146 preschoolers (Rehberg & Richman, 1989). The study found that males whose fathers were absent had the highest scores for comforting behavior. Comforting was related to the mother's dependency on their children for emotional support while helping was associated with the number of chores children performed.

A laboratory study examined the relationship between preschool children's peer competency and the exchange of reciprocal negative affect displays during physical play with parents (Carson & Parke, 1996). Parents and children were observed during a physical play paradigm called "the hand game". Teacher ratings of peer competency were

also obtained. Participants' facial expressions were recorded and interactions were coded and categorized by affect. Fathers who typically responded to their children's negative affect displays with negative affect of their own had children who shared less, were more aggressive, and avoided others.

A study was conducted to determine the effects of sibling relationships on preschoolers' behavior at home and at school with peers. The study found that at home, preschoolers with older siblings received more aggressive and prosocial behavior than did preschoolers without older siblings. Preschoolers with younger siblings were more dominant in their interactions than preschoolers without younger siblings. The behavior of the preschoolers at home and at school were not significantly correlated.

Cognition, Emotions, and Motivation. A child's ability to understand and perceive another person's emotional states will dictate his/her prosocial responses, including helping, sharing, comforting behaviors (Smith, Leinbach, Stewart & Blackwell, 1983). Theorists have proposed that empathy or responsiveness is the motivational factor underlying various forms of altruistic behavior (Iannotti, 1978; Mussen & Eisenberg, 1989). Some researchers view empathy as a cognitive response (Borke, 1971) while others require that in order for a child to take someone else's perspective or express empathy, his/her own feelings must match those of the other person (Feshbach, 1975). Iannotti (1985) found a lack of a consistent relationship between perspective taking and prosocial behavior. Children's interpretation and understanding of other emotions and its relation to spontaneous prosocial behavior deserves further investigation. It has been suggested that different patterns of prosocial behavior may reflect differences in the child's

processing of situational and motivational cues. Cognitive and affective processes may have different functions in different prosocial behaviors.

Assessment procedures which are limited in scope fail to address these issues and could lead to overgeneralization of context-specific findings. Multiple assessment tools, which reflect various contextual and motivational systems, and are sensitive to differences in types of prosocial behavior therefore are required to adequately examine and assess prosocial behavior.

Social Economic Status. Head Start was one of the best known programs designed to give low-income preschoolers the skills necessary to succeed academically. Unfortunately, the research results of its effectiveness were not encouraging. While participating students generally performed better academically in lower grades, these gains disappeared as the students moved to the upper grades. The program, however, had more important implications for social skills training. Research showed that the non-academic gains were more enduring (Lee, Brooks-Gunn, Schnur, & Liaw, 1990). Another study of children from the Tompkin County Head Start program showed that children developed social competence despite their poverty (Raver, 1996). A study assessed peer competence, socialization variables, social cognitive knowledge, and social competence of 46 low-income preschoolers (Garner, Jones, & Miner, 1994). The researchers concluded that situation knowledge and emotion socialization practices are important for low-income children's social competence.

A future study of the interaction between poor children and their parents is planned to determine the family and individual factors that promote social competence (Winter,

1996). The researcher predicts that despite the stresses of financial hardship, many poor children are doing well. The study attempts to discover what happens in low-income families to account for such success. The planned three-year longitudinal study will examine the ways parents of 120 children entering a Head Start program express their emotions as well as how they help their children handle emotions. Teachers and peers will be polled to determine which emotional self-regulating strategies promote social competence in the classroom. Previous research has shown that redirecting visual attention is one of the most effective strategies for self-regulating emotions. Unlike past studies that designed interventions for poor families based on how middle class families operate, future studies should continue to examine the strategies that work within poor families and base interventions on those models.

Assessing Prosocial Behavior

Children's prosocial and social functioning and competence are typically assessed through teacher or peer ratings of behavior because they are direct observers of preschoolers' social interactions and emotion regulation, and are often recipients of specific prosocial acts (Denham & Burger, 1991; Rena & Berndt, 1992). The Behar Preschool Behavior Checklist has been used in studies linking negative affect and negative peer status (Rubin & Clark, 1982). Preschoolers' social competence and behavior problems have been evaluated using the Baumrind Preschool Behavior Q-Sort (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Denham & Burger, 1991).

Social competence and social skill deficits are identified by sociometric techniques, direct observation, behavioral interviews, and teacher, parent, and self-ratings. While

these methods are considered valuable when used together (Gresham, 1990), their isolated use is often problematic because of possible rater biases and inconsistent behaviors displayed and observed. Because children behave differently depending on the situational variables previously discussed, researchers should evaluate behaviors in a number of settings and under varying behavioral demands. Ratings from parents, peers, and teachers should be correlated to ensure predictive and concurrent validity. One such study compared mother and peer assessments of preschoolers' behavior to teachers' responses on a preschool behavior questionnaire (Tremblay, 1992). The prosocial components were moderately correlated with the mothers' assessments.

In a more comprehensive study, the researcher attempted to show the interrelationship of different categories of prosocial behavior and different assessment procedures (Iannotti, 1985). The prosocial behaviors of 52 preschool children were examined using three different approaches: naturalistic observation of prosocial events, structured measures of perspective-taking, empathy, sharing, helping, cooperation, and comforting, and teacher ratings of prosocial behaviors under different eliciting situations.

The Social Skills Rating System used in the current study is another example of an assessment tool that uses multiple sources of information to assess social behaviors that occur in multiple settings (Gresham & Elliot, 1989). The rating system identifies behaviors that are important to parents and teachers of young children, considers the influence of child and family background variables on social behavior, and uses parents and teachers to assess preschoolers' social behaviors.

The rating system has been shown to be effective in distinguishing social skills of mildly disabled and non-disabled school-aged children (Gresham & Elliot, 1990).

However, studies using this system for identifying social skill deficits at the preschool level have been sparse.

One such study used the Social Skills Rating System - Teacher version - to examine the differences among social skills and problem behaviors of disabled and non-disabled preschoolers (Lyon, Albertus, Birkinbine, Naibi, 1996). The current study used both the Teacher and Parent versions of the Social Skills Rating system to evaluate the social skills of preschoolers in a private preschool and a publicly-funded preschool. The study attempted to show a correlation between the values parents assign to social skills and the social behaviors preschoolers display as rated by their teachers.

Ideally, accurately identifying deficits early in the preschool years will enable educators and psychologists to develop effective training and intervention programs.

Promoting Prosocial Behavior

Once parents and educators understand the determinants of prosocial behavior and have the adequate assessment tools to identify deficits, they can find successful strategies for teaching and promoting prosocial behavior and for remediating deficits.

Verbal prompting. Verbal prompting has been investigated as one successful strategy for promoting social competency (Chandler, 1992). A recent study evaluated whether a mother's social coaching and responsive style would promote social competence in her preschooler (Mize & Pettit, 1997). Coaching was found to lower boys' aggressive behavior when the mother-child relationship was less responsive.

Positive reinforcement. Behaviorally-based studies were conducted to determine whether reinforcement techniques could stimulate sharing and helping behaviors (Grusec, 1971). The impact of positive reinforcement, including tangible rewards and praise, on children's social responsiveness has been studied with interesting results (Gelfand, Hartmann, Cromer, Smith & Page, 1975). The researchers found that when children were rewarded for sharing, their generosity was short-lived. The implication was that extrinsic rewards lead to the devaluing of the behavior that was initially intrinsically rewarding. Further, the impact of rewards for prosocial behavior in experimental situations seems to be mediated by the extent to which mothers believe in and use the reward system at home (Fabes, Fultz, Eisenberg, May-Plumlee & Christopher, 1989).

Modeling. Evidence from the laboratory and observational studies suggest that modeling is a major influence in the acquisition and expression of prosocial behavior (Eisenburg & Mussen, 1989). Early childhood experiences in child-care programs may also enhance children's prosocial responsiveness to peers. Children who had more experience with peers in child-care settings would have increased opportunities to observe prosocial models and would respond prosocially more often than children who had little or no child-care experience (Farver & Branstetter, 1994).

Frequent and repeated exposure to nurturing, considerate and kind role models is hypothesized to elicit imitative prosocial responses in preschoolers. Researchers predicted that teachers' behaviors would positively influence how children respond to peers in a preschool setting (Farver & Branstetter, 1994). They examined preschoolers' naturally occurring response to their crying peers in a child-care setting. They advanced the

proposition that children would imitate their teachers' most common responses when they encountered a distressed peer. However, the results of the study revealed that the children's individual characteristics and socio-emotional functioning with peers had a greater influence on the children's willingness to respond prosocially to their peers than did the teacher's modeling. Similarly, another study asked preschool children how they would respond to a distressed peer. While the children knew how to respond sympathetically, they rarely do anything in the class than stop what they are doing to watch (Caplan & Hay, 1989). They also noted that they expected the teacher to respond because she had always done so in the past. The children did not have an opportunity to respond nor if they did respond were they encouraged or rewarded for their prosocial behavior.

Social Skills Intervention and Training Programs. Recent attempts to teach social skills in structured programs have met with mixed results. One study found that adults can enhance helping, sharing, cooperating and comforting behaviors of preschool children by furnishing them with exhortations to behave prosocially and opportunities to rehearse or practice the behaviors (Lambert, 1990). In one preschool, children were paired with natural grandparents, regular elderly volunteers, and competent elderly visitors. They also visited less able elders in nursing homes. The program resulted in moderate increases in prosocial behaviors.

Earlier programs to help socially inept older students learn social skills were implemented with encouraging results (Anderson, Nelson, Fox & Gruber, 1988; Elliot, Sheridan & Gresham, 1989). These programs focused on such behaviors as initiating a

conversation or asking for a toy, and taught students these social skills. Modeling, in which the teacher demonstrates the skill, together with coaching and positive reinforcement, were found effective for improving the social skills of withdrawn or acting out children.

A social skills training program for preschoolers with developmental delays was found to be successful in teaching prosocial behaviors but efforts to reduce inappropriate behaviors was not as effective (LeBlanc & Matson, 1995). Thirty-two preschoolers were evaluated in an unstructured play session and matched for levels of appropriate social behavior, and assigned to a treatment group. The treatment group received positive reinforcement, modeling, rehearsal, feedback, and time out.

Investigations into the impact of interventions on cooperative behavior have been limited. Although interventions have increased children's prosocial behavior in experimental settings, few studies have examined the effectiveness of interventions in naturalistic settings. One study examined the impact of prosocial home- and school -based intervention on preschool children's cooperative behavior (Doescher & Sugarawa, 1992). Adult modeling and encouragement were used in a six-week intervention program to facilitate children's cooperative behavior. Only short-term increases in cooperative behavior were realized in both the home- and school-based intervention groups.

It has been suggested that teachers need to develop a more prosocial classroom environment for preschoolers (Doescher & Sugawara, 1989). By providing preschoolers with description of thoughts and feelings of others different from their own can help children express their own thoughts and feelings. Teachers can also use modeling, sharing

opportunities, and encouragement to elicit prosocial behavior. A prosocial environment can also be created by changing the room setup and availability of supplies. A curriculum can be chosen that emphasizes shared activities, such as cooperative cooking or art projects.

Chapter 3. Design of the Study

Subjects

The current study examined the prosocial behaviors of two preschool groups - one from a private preschool and one from a district-funded preschool. The hypothesis stated that preschoolers from a private preschool would exhibit more of the prosocial behaviors that their parents rated as important to their children's social development than would the preschoolers from the district-funded preschool.

The private preschool, which is located in a middle-class suburb of Southern New Jersey, is licensed by the Department of Human Services, Division of Youth and Family Services of the State of New Jersey. According to the preschool handbook, the primary goal of the program is socialization, teaching children how to interact on a one-to-one basis and how to be part of a large group. The program emphasizes prosocial skills training, such as sharing, taking turns, discipline, and respect.

The district-funded preschool is located in a rural Southern New Jersey community. In order to be eligible for enrollment in the district-funded preschool, a child must come from a family whose annual income is \$17,000 or less. The district-funded

program was originally supported by the State of New Jersey and was called Good Start, which was similar to the Head Start program of the early 1970s.

Twenty preschoolers from a private preschool and 20 preschoolers from a district-funded preschool in Southern New Jersey participated in this study. None of the preschoolers were classified as handicapped. Table 3.1 shows the ethnic and age breakdowns for each group.

	Private Preschool		District Preschool	
	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>
Black			6	5
Caucasian	11	9	3	2
Hispanic			2	2
Mean Ages	4.3 years		4.5 years	

Teachers from both schools have New Jersey teaching certificates in early childhood/elementary education, and have had 4 months experience with the children before rating them. The public preschool has one full-time aid.

Instruments

Two forms of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) were used to assess the prosocial behaviors of preschoolers: the Social Skills Rating System -Parent (SSRS-P) and the Social Skills Rating System - Teacher (SSRS-T) forms (Elliot & Gresham, 1990). The SSRS-P has 49 questions, of which 39 concern prosocial behaviors and 10 deal with problem behaviors. The SSR-T has 30 prosocial questions and 10 problem behavior

questions. The same 10 behavior problems questions are found on both forms.

Seventeen of the prosocial behavior questions overlap with the prosocial questions on the SSRS-T. The current study used only the prosocial items.

The teachers rated the prosocial behaviors of the children based on how often they observed the child engaging in various behaviors (0 = Never; 1 = Sometimes; 2 = Very Often). The parents rated how important the behaviors were to their child's social development (0 = Not Important; 1 = Important; 2 = Critical). In the current study, the importance ratings parents assign to each behavior were correlated with teacher's ratings of how often the child displayed the same behavior in the classroom.

The prosocial items on both forms yielded scores for Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-Control behaviors. The highest total that a child could receive for each behavioral category was 20. The SSRS-P form had an additional score for Responsibility, which was not used in the current study. A total Social Skills score was calculated by adding the individual scores for Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-Control. The highest total score a child could receive was 60.

Gresham and Elliot reported that internal consistency scores (coefficient alpha) for the SSRS- T for preschoolers was .90 for the subscales and .94 for the total Social Skill score. The SSRS-P form had an internal consistency of .76 to .83 for the subscales and .90 for the total score. Internal consistency coefficients for the preschool form were based on a national tryout study sample from university-based and free-standing preschools in Florida, Louisiana, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. Reliability in the current study depended on how objectively parents and teachers answered the questions.

Design

During the fall of 1997, two preschool administrators were contacted and asked to participate in the current study. The preschool teacher from the district-funded program received verbal instructions on how to complete the forms and verbal permission from the principal of the school to distribute the forms to her preschool class. Once permission was granted from the private preschool, the SSRS-T and SSRS-P forms, with accompanying letters explaining the purpose of the study, were distributed to the teachers and parents at both schools. The teachers were responsible for sending the forms home to the parents and collecting the completed forms. At the district-funded program, the teacher provided the children with an incentive to return the completed SSRS-P forms. When the child returned the form, he/she selected a prize from the treasure box. The researcher later replenished the prizes in the treasure box. If a child did not return the form, the teacher completed a copy of the form with the parent at the parent/teacher conference.

Variables and Hypothesis

The independent variables in the current study included the type of preschool attended (i.e., private or district-funded). The dependent variable was the prosocial behaviors (grouped into Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-Control categories) observed and rated by the teachers and the importance rating assigned to the prosocial skills by the parents.

The scores for each prosocial behavior group were calculated for each child as well as a total score for all behavioral groups. The importance rating on the parental

forms was matched to the teacher's assessment of how often each child displayed each behavior. The alternate hypothesis stated that the preschool children from the private preschool would display more of the prosocial behaviors that their parents deem important than would the preschoolers from the district-funded preschool. The second hypothesis stipulated that, as a group, the preschoolers from the private preschool would display more total prosocial behaviors than the other preschool group.

Analysis

To test these hypotheses, the researcher used a bivariate correlational study to compare the frequency ratings of teachers with the importance ratings assigned by the parents. The results were used to determine whether any correlation existed between the type of preschool and the frequency of prosocial behaviors. An independent t-test was used to determine whether the alternate hypothesis (as a group, the preschoolers from the private preschool would display more prosocial behaviors than would the preschoolers from the district-funded preschool) was true.

Chapter 4. Analysis of Data

Results

The current study was conducted to determine whether that there would be a measurable difference in the frequency of prosocial behaviors displayed by preschoolers from a district funded preschool and preschoolers from a private preschool. The first hypothesis stated that a positive correlation would exist between the prosocial behaviors the private school children displayed and the prosocial skills their parents rated as important for their child's social development.

The hypothesis was based on the theory that parental modeling and communication of values are significant factors in promoting prosocial behavior in preschool children (Bandura, 1977). Studies have shown that prosocial intervention programs impact preschooler children's cooperative behavior (Honig & Pollack, 1990). The researcher also made the assumption that one group (parents of private preschoolers) would be more effective in their modeling and communication skills and, as a result, their children would demonstrate more of the prosocial behaviors their parents deemed important.

When the teacher ratings were correlated with the parental ratings for both schools, however, no significant difference was found between the two preschool groups ($p = .276$). Based on these statistical findings, the alternate hypothesis is rejected.

The current study did find significant differences in the total prosocial behaviors displayed between the two groups, confirming the second hypothesis, which stated that, as a group, the private preschoolers would display more prosocial behaviors than would the children from the district funded preschool. An independent t-test was used to determine whether the private preschoolers' prosocial skills ratings from the teacher would be higher than the total teacher ratings for the district funded group.

The teacher ratings of the private school preschooler's prosocial behaviors were significantly higher than those of the district funded preschoolers ($t_{.39} = 3.08, p \leq .05$). The private preschoolers showed significantly more cooperating ($t_{.39} = 3.17, p \leq .05$) and self-control behaviors ($t_{.39} = 4.36, p \leq .05$) than did the preschoolers from the district-funded preschooler. Table 4.1 shows the mean values for the teacher ratings of each prosocial behavior category by school.

	PRIVATE PRESCHOOL	DISTRICT FUNDED
COOPERATION	15.9	12.45
ASSERTION	12.3	12.0
SELF-CONTROL	15.65	10.9
TOTALS	44.2	35.3
	n = 20	n = 20

Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusion

Summary

Earlier studies have shown that parental modeling and communication of beliefs and values are significant factors in promoting prosocial behavior (Mills & Rubin, 1990; Mize, Pettit, & Brown, 1995). The current study was conducted to determine to what extent, if any, would preschool children, who are most susceptible to parental influence, display the prosocial behaviors their parents considered critical to their child's social skills development. It was assumed that the parents of the preschoolers from the private preschool would have better communication and modeling skills than would parents of the districted-funded preschool, and as a result, their children would display more of the valued prosocial behaviors. The findings of this study did not support this hypothesis. No correlation was found between the frequency of prosocial behaviors and the parental importance ratings within either preschool group. However, there was a significant difference in the frequency of the overall prosocial behaviors displayed by the two preschool groups. The children from the private preschool displayed more prosocial behaviors than the preschoolers from the district-funded preschool as indicated by their higher total prosocial skills score. The disparity, however, may be attributed to the fact

that the former group may have had more opportunities to respond prosocially because the private preschool had a less structured curriculum.

Discussion

The current study 's reliance on the self-report questionnaires presented several reliability issues. Determining whether a parent or teacher responded objectively was a major concern. In some cases, the parents from the district funded preschool completed their forms in the presence of the teacher. These parents may have felt compelled to provide more socially accepted responses to the questions. In addition , some of questions on the parent form involved behaviors that the researcher did not consider to be age-appropriate for the group under consideration. Other questions did not appear to measure strictly “prosocial” behavior. For example, one question asked whether the child asks a sales clerk for information or assistance. Similarly, the teacher form included ambiguous items. A zero (0) rating indicated that the child never engaged in the particular behavior; however, some questions involved situations that may not occur for a particular child, e.g., responds appropriately to teasing by peers.

Implications for Future Research

Future studies of prosocial development should provide observations, assessments, and comparisons of the prosocial responsiveness of parents and children in similar social situations. To increase the reliability and validity of these studies, researchers should include a larger sample and observe and record the prosocial behavior of participants in multiple settings. More useful data may be collected by observing parents modeling

prosocial behaviors for their preschool children and then recording whether the children respond in similar ways in similar situations.

Multiple assessment tools, which reflect various contextual and motivational systems, and are sensitive to differences in types of prosocial behavior are also required to adequately examine and assess prosocial behavior. In addition, any self-report inventory used should also contain more age appropriate questions. These future studies may provide more insight into the relationship between parental values and modeling and children's prosocial development.

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