The Influence of Parenting Style on the Ability of Children to Empathize with their Peers

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Abstract. The parenting style will have a subtle influence on children's peer communication. Previous studies paid more attention to "the influence of mother's parenting style on children's empathic ability". This study adopted a combination of questionnaire method and infant interview method to further explore the influence of different parenting styles on empathic ability between children and peers among 66 toddlers in Y Kindergarten in Fuzhou, Fujian Province. The results showed that authoritative parenting style was positively associated with empathy between toddlers and their peers, while authoritarian, permissive and dismissive parenting styles were negatively associated with empathy between toddlers and their peers. Authoritative parenting style, which is highly responsive and demanding, is associated with children's ability to empathize with their peers, excluding inevitable factors such as society, family upheaval and physical impairments.

1. Introduction
Families play an important role in early childhood acquisition of habits, skills and behaviors(Carlos Salavera & Pablo Usán & Alberto Quilez-Robres, 2022)[1]. Family is the first communication environment that children need to face, and the parenting style and family atmosphere have a subtle effect on the development of children's empathy ability to some extent (Zhang & Yang & Li, 2019)[2]. It has been shown that children may learn from their parents' behavioral models that antagonism and punishment are effective, and as a result, these children adopt aggressive strategies in their interactions with peers, including physical and relational aggression.(Kawabata, Y. & Alink, L. & Tseng, W. L. & Ijzendoorn, M., & Crick, N. R., 2011)[3]. In current cultural background about intensive parenting, the effect of parenting styles on children's development continues to strengthen(Zhang, 2022)[4]. The parenting styles will have a subtle influence on parent-child interaction, and in social interaction, children will try to transfer parent-child interaction experience to peer interaction, which can affect their ability to empathize with peers.

2. Literature review
Parenting style refers to the sum of ideas, emotions and behaviors shown by parents in the process of raising children, which is a relatively stable behavior pattern(Lin & Ye, 2020)[5]. American psychologist D. Baumrind had studied the influence of restrictions in different family environments on children's socialization, and assessed parenting behaviors in terms of control, maturity requirement, clarity of parent-child interaction, and parental style, which is classified as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive(Wang, 2009)[6]. According to McKerby and Martin, Baumrind's three parenting styles include two dimensions of parent-child interaction: response and demand. The cross-categorization of these two parenting dimensions leads to the four ideal types of parenting: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and dismissive(Xue & Gao, 2021)[7]. Authoritative parenting emphasizes high responses and high requirements, respects children's personality, responds to children's needs in a timely manner, and gives children some certain requirements. Authoritative parenting style is characterized by low responses and high demands. Parents usually demand children according to their own ideas and lack of communication with children. The passive parenting style is characterized by high responses and low requirements. Parents believe that their children can adjust themselves and communicate with their children harmoniously, but they have few requirements on their children. Dismissive parenting style has low responses and low requirements. Parents who use dismissive parenting style will not have strict requirements on children, and they usually lack positive communication and response with children. Many studies have shown that parents' parenting style has a subtle influence on children's social interaction. Children can acquire interpersonal attitudes and behaviors from parent-child communication directly by imitation and internalize them into their own coping patterns(Guo, 2015)[8]. And the ability to empathize is an important factor in children's peer communication. The so-called empathy refers to one
3. Research object and methods

3.1 Research object

After obtaining the informed consent of relevant kindergartens and parents, a random sampling method was adopted on April 22, 2023, taking the children and their parents in Y Kindergarten of Fuzhou City, Fujian Province as the main objects of investigation. A total of 70 questionnaires were distributed and 66 were recovered, with a recovery rate of 94.29%. After excluding invalid questionnaires, 65 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective rate of 92.86%. There were 39 boys and 27 girls included.

3.2 Research methods

3.2.1 Questionnaire method

This study adopted Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (Hereinafter referred to as PSDQ). Parenting styles were divided into two categories and three dimensions. The questionnaire adopted a 5-level scoring method (from never, occasionally, half often, very often to always, 1-5 points respectively), with a total of 37 questions. Based on authoritative and authoritarian, warmth, reasoning, and autonomy are reflected the authoritative education. The judgment of authoritarian parenting mode is carried out from three dimensions of physical coercion, verbal hostility and punitive. The homogeneity reliability and broken half reliability of the questionnaire were 0.82 and 0.81 respectively, and the KMO value was 0.81. The researchers took it back for analysis the next day.

3.2.2 Interview method

Based on the research of Mai Jingyao et al. (Mai & Gao & Duan, 2007)[10], the researchers made emoticon pictures and 16 pictures of scene stories by themselves to conduct interviews with children, all of which were 25cm×18cm in size. Emoticon pictures represent four basic emotions: happy, afraid, sad and angry. The pictures of scene stories are also based on four emotions, namely happiness, fear, sadness and anger. The contents are all in line with children's actual life and reflect children's empathy for their peers. Before the formal interview, 10 children were selected for pre-interview to ensure that children could understand the content of 20 pictures. See Table 1 for part of the story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>1. On Lucy's birthday, Tom gives Lucy a birthday present. Lucy is very happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Sam's friend, Jean, is praised for volunteering to help other children. Sam congratulates her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afraid</td>
<td>1. Vanessa finds a toy snake in Jimmy's pencil case and she screams loudly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Jim and Mark quarrel over their differences and even hit each other, while Kathy hides in a corner and dares not speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sad</td>
<td>1. Freya and Alex play hide-and-seek together. Freya falls down accidentally and breaks her leg, then she cries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Roger and Zoe are playing in the yard. Their neighbor, Joyce, watches them playing for a long time. She wants to join them. At this time, Zoe shouts at Joyce &quot;Do not stand there, we will not play with you, you are in our way.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>angry</td>
<td>1. Lily's favorite toy bear is damaged by Nina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Tina and Doris play checkers. Doris always breaks the rules.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Formal interviews were conducted one-on-one with children in a quiet and familiar room, with an average of 10 minutes for each child. At first, the interviewer asked children to identify four pictures of different expressions and required them to name the expressions and corrected the wrong answers in time. Then, the interviewer selected the pictures of scene stories randomly and told the stories to the children in a plain tone as far as possible. After telling these stories, the interviewer asked children two questions. The first is to understand emotional problems, that is, to ask children how they feel after hearing the story. The second is the empathy question, which asks the children how they feel about the protagonist of the story. When children answer these two questions, they can answer with the help of the 4 basic expression pictures just used. The researcher made records during the interview with the children. If the children's answers about their own mood and the protagonist's mood were consistent with the story situation, they would score 1 point each, and 0 points
would be recorded if they did not answer or answered incorrectly.

SPSS 25.0 software was used for data analysis, with parenting style as the independent variable and empathic ability between children and peers as the dependent variable for multiple linear regression analysis. Statistical methods included Pearson product difference correlation analysis, one-way analysis of variance, paired sample t-test and multiple linear regression analysis.

4. Research results and discussion

4.1 Research results

4.1.1 The relationship between parenting style and empathy between young children and their peers

When all other factors were held constant, the relationship between parenting style and empathic ability between children and their peers was investigated. Based on Pearson’s product difference correlation analysis, authoritative parenting style was positively correlated with empathic ability between children and their peers, while authoritarian, permissive and dismissive parenting style was negatively correlated with empathic ability between children and their peers (all P < 0.05). Relevant data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Partial correlation analysis between parenting style and empathic ability of children and peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empathic ability</th>
<th>Authoritative</th>
<th>Authoritarian</th>
<th>Permissive</th>
<th>Dismissive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand emotion</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional resonance</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *P<0.05, **P<0.01.

4.1.2 Multiple linear regression analysis of empathy between young children and their peers

In this study, the parenting style was used as the independent variable and the empathic ability between children and their peers was used as the dependent variable for multiple linear regression analysis. The results showed that the regression model was statistically significant (F=10.02, P<0.05, adjusted R²=0.57). Authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and dismissive parenting styles were all statistically significant for empathy between children and their peers.

4.2 Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the empathic ability between kindergarten toddlers and their peers in Y Kindergarten in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, is affected by their parenting style to some extent, and the research results are roughly consistent with the conclusions of scholars such as Zhang Tingting (Zhang & Yang & Li, 2019)[2]. Authoritative parenting style, excluding the inevitable factors of society, family change, children's physical disability, helps children better understand and empathize with their peer's feelings and experiences, thereby developing empathy for their peers further. As for the other three parenting styles (authoritarian, permissive and dismissive), especially the authoritarian parenting style, the highly oppression and inefficient response of parents to children are likely to reduce children's sense of self-efficacy and achievement (Xu, 2020)[11], leading to children's reluctance to communicate with their peers actively, which will affect the development of empathy between children and their peers.

5. Research conclusions and educational advice

5.1 Research conclusions

In general, different parenting styles of parents have significantly different effects on empathic ability between children and peers.

Authoritative parenting style can develop prosocial behaviors in young children and their empathy with peers, in addition to some irresistible factors, such as society, family upheaval and children's physical defects. Authoritarian parenting is not conducive to helping children form good empathy with peers.

5.2 Educational advice

According to the study, authoritative parenting with a high level of responsiveness and a high level of demand is positively associated with a child's ability to empathize well with his or her peer (except for a number of irresistible factors). Children's peer communication is not only influenced by kindergarten environment, community environment, teacher-child interaction and other aspects, but also influenced by the parenting style. Appropriate requirements and timely feedback can provide a good model for children's peer communication, which is convenient for children to transfer the original parent-child communication experience, better perceive the emotions and psychology of peers, so as to improve children's empathy for peers. In view of the above points, the author will put forward some feasible suggestions from the perspectives of parents and teachers respectively.

5.2.1 Parental aspect

For one thing, parents can act as “clairvoyance” and “clairaudience” on the way of children’s growth, and make a reasonable response in time according to children’s needs. Parents are a “guiding lamp” on the growth path of children. Children will imitate and transfer their parent-child interaction experience actively when they communicate with their teachers and peers. Therefore, not only should parents set a good example for children, but also they need to act as “clairvoyance” and “clairaudience” to observe and guide children's behaviors. Cultivating children's ability to understand others' emotions, listening
to them patiently when they need, making timely and reasonable responses, and helping children develop the habit of listening carefully can be beneficial for kids to understand others' emotions and make appropriate and effective responses.

For another, giving children some appropriate requirements and expectations based on their temperament characteristics is also very essential. According to children's activity level, rhythm, avoidance, adaptability, reaction sensitivity and other factors, child psychologists divide children's temperament into four types: easy type, difficult type, delayed type and mixed type. Each of these four temperament types has advantages and disadvantages, but there is no good or bad.

For easy children, parents may spend less time and energy. They only need to set a good example and adopt high response and high demand parenting style to help children develop good empathic ability with peers. For difficult children, they tend to shrink from new things and new environment, react strongly to new stimuli, and have irregular eating and sleeping. Therefore, parents should try their best to make difficult children in a familiar and warm environment when cultivating their empathic ability, reducing their inner fear. In this way can make their emotions in a stable state, and accept subtle education more easily than before. The reaction of delayed children is somewhat similar to that of difficult children, but their reaction is not too strong. Their activity is relatively low, both positive and negative reactions very mild. Therefore, when cultivating their empathy for peers, parents should give children more time to guide them to adapt to the new environment, such as allowing children to take their favorite toys in the strange environment. According to children's different temperament types and characteristics, parents should put forward suitable requirements when raising children, in order to help them form good empathic ability with peers better.

5.2.2 Teacher aspect

Regular activities such as tea party are held to provide parents with guidance on parenting methods.

Preschool teachers are responsible for children's enlightenment education and play an important role in children's growth. One of the responsibilities of kindergarten teachers is to keep in touch with parents, understand the educational environment of children's families, discuss educational measures in line with children's characteristics, and work together to complete educational tasks. Therefore, preschool teachers have responsibility to help parents adopt suitable parenting styles for children. Tea party and other activities can enhance the contact between teachers and parents, helping teachers understand the situation of children's behaviors at home more comprehensively. Meanwhile, these activities reduce the gap between parents and their children, and affect the cultivation of good empathic ability further.

References

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