RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTING STYLES 
AND CHILDREN’S MOTIVATIONAL STYLE: 
THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

A Thesis by 
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B.A., The University of Kansas, 2003

Submitted to the Department of Education and the faculty of the Graduate School of Wichita State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

May 2007
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AND CHILDREN'S MOTIVATIONAL STYLE:
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I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education with a major in Educational Psychology.

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We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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Fran Clark, Committee Member

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Abiola Dipeolu, Committee Member
DEDICATION

To my parents, for all of their support and guidance throughout my years,

I will forever be grateful;

and

to my husband, Josh, you have inspired and motivated me

to achieve my goals, without you I could not have

collected all of my data, I am forever

grateful for your assistance in this project.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With Deepest Appreciation to:

- Dr. Linda Bakken, my committee chairperson, without your guidance, insight, and support I would not have been able to reach my goal.

- My thesis committee: Dr. Marlene Schommer-Aikins, Dr. Fran Clark, and Dr. Abiola Dipeolu, I thank you for you willingness to share your expertise and providing me with encouragement.

- Valley Center preschool, much appreciation and gratitude to Betty and her staff for opening up their classrooms and providing their time and assistance.

- The parents and children who participated in this study, thank you for your time and efforts.
ABSTRACT

This study examined the phenomenon of learned helplessness, looking at the relationship between children’s motivational style and parenting style. Motivational variables included goal orientation (learning goal or performance goal) and parenting variables included three typologies: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Forty-two preschool students and their parents participated in this study assessing the influence parenting styles had on children’s motivational style. Results of the study showed no variance among the parents in terms of their parenting style, all were classified as authoritative. Thus, no data analysis was conducted and no relationship was established between parenting style and children’s motivational style.
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Chapter 1
The Problem

Rationale

Educators are faced with the challenging task of educating different types of students who learn in unique and individual ways. Some children show persistence in the face of failure whereas others give up or choose to work on less challenging tasks. Children who lack motivation to engage in a challenging task are demonstrating signs of learned helplessness. Learned helplessness refers to “the perceived inability to surmount failure” (Diener & Dweck, 1978, p. 451) and “the belief that one’s outcomes are independent of one’s actions” (Durkin, 1995, p. 339). Children who demonstrate learned helplessness tend to attribute failure to lack of ability rather than lack of effort. Thus, the child views failure as something internal, stable, and relatively unchangeable. Children who have developed learned helplessness are at serious risk for negative affect, negative expectations, decreased performance, performance decrements, and avoidance of challenging tasks (Burhans & Dweck, 1995). They inaccurately underestimate their ability and, based off past performances, believe that future tasks will be unsuccessful due to their lack of ability. They view themselves as powerless in changing their educational outcomes.

Attribution theory was developed by Weiner (1971) and is termed as a causal interpretation of an event or outcome. Weiner asserts that everyone uses attributions in order to make sense of their environment. People use attributions in every aspect of their lives in order to develop an understanding of the outcomes of their behaviors.

It is beneficial to educators to identify children who are operating under learned helplessness so that efficacious educational interventions can be implemented. Research has shown that children who have developed inappropriate attributions can be retrained to view
failure in terms of changeable outcomes. Dweck (1975) conducted a study in which attributional retraining was taught to children who were identified as having high levels of learned helplessness. Following the intervention, these children showed marked improvement in their task persistence.

Over the past several years there have been many research studies that have shown the impact parenting practices have on children’s academic performance (e.g., Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997; Rytkonen, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2005). The type of parenting style used in childrearing also has dramatic effects on children’s educational achievement, socialization, and overall well-being and development. The majority of research indicates that children reared in an authoritative environment have the most positive outcomes. These children consistently score higher on levels of psychosocial competence and school achievement. They also tend to score lower for external and internal problem behavior. Children raised in a neglectful/permissive environment, on the other hand, tend to show the lowest levels of positive adjustment. They score the lowest on measures of school achievement, social competence, and psychosocial adjustment. Children raised in an authoritarian environment typically fare better than those in a neglectful/permissive environment but are not as well adjusted as those from authoritative homes (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if a functional relationship exists between the type of parenting style used in the child’s environment and the type of motivational goal the child displays. Children who display a performance-oriented goal are more likely to develop
learned helplessness. If a relationship is established it is important for educators and parents alike to intervene and make accommodations for the benefit of the child.

Definitions

As defined above, learned helplessness refers to “the perceived inability to surmount failure” (Diener & Dweck, 1978, p. 451) and “the belief that one’s outcomes are independent of one’s actions” (Durkin, 1995, p. 339). In other words, a child believes that no matter how much effort he/she puts forth in attempting to solve a problem he/she will still fail as he/she lacks the innate ability to be successful. Children with learned helplessness develop a sense of hopelessness and often give up when faced with a difficult task. Mastery-oriented children, on the other hand, often exhibit enhanced performance on a difficult task following a failed experience (Diener & Dweck, 1978). These children are more likely to respond to failure with increased perseverance. They are more likely to attribute failure to internal (controllable) and unstable causes such as lack of effort or external and unstable causes such as poor test condition. Children with learned helplessness focus on more uncontrollable, stable causes such as ability and task difficulty (Durkin, 1995).

Dweck and Leggert (1988; 1999) developed a theory of intelligence asserting that children’s behavior is motivated by their beliefs about intelligence. Children who view intelligence as fixed and unchangeable adhere to the entity theory. They tend to focus on task performance and believe that others judge their intelligence based off task outcomes. In contrast, children who adhere to the incremental theory of intelligence believe that intelligence is changeable and improves incrementally. They believe that intelligence can be improved with effort and is acquired over time (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Bempechat, 1983; Dweck & Leggert, 1988).
Baumrind (1967) developed a parenting style typology which consists of three parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive/neglectful. Authoritative parenting style is associated with warm and responsive parents in addition to high control and demand. Authoritarian parenting style is associated with low measures of warmth and responsiveness and high levels of control. Permissive parenting style varies in degree of warmth with some being very warm and indulgent while others are cooler and lack interest in the child (Durkin, 1995).

Overview

The development of inappropriate causal attributions and learned helplessness is a phenomenon that likely has many contributing factors. The present study attempts to determine if a relationship exists between parenting style and the development of learned helplessness. Chapter two presents a review of the literature, beginning with Weiner’s (1971) theory of causal attribution. Next, Dweck’s (1975) theory of motivation and learned helplessness, which builds upon attribution theory, is concisely discussed. Third, the parenting styles typology developed by Baumrind (1967) is discussed relating the impact of parenting style on children’s educational achievement and overall well-being. Fourth, relevant studies examining the relationship of attributions and parenting styles is discussed. Next, cognitive development along Piaget’s stages is briefly addressed relating the possible development of learned helplessness among children who are functioning at earlier stages in the cognitive development process.

Chapter three presents the methodology that was used in the present study. A description of the three instruments used is also included in this chapter. Instruments used in the present study measured parenting style, motivational pattern, and cognitive development. Details regarding validity and reliability are also included in the descriptions. The procedure for
administrating each instrument is clearly explained as well as the need for parental consent due to the age of the participants.

Chapter four includes the results of the study and the analyses conducted. Results regarding motivation are presented by parenting style, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.

Chapter five discusses the results and provides possible explanations for any that were unexpected. Recommendations for further research regarding motivational patterns in young children in relation to parenting style is also included in this chapter.
Chapter Two

Review of the Research

Several studies (e.g., Frieze & Snyder, 1980; Weiner, 1985) have been conducted over attribution theory looking into what makes certain children motivated to learn while other children develop a sense of failure and inadequacy. Based upon these studies, teaching strategies and techniques (e.g., attributional retraining programs) have been developed and modified in order to assist children in developing positive causal attributions. Most educators also strongly believe that parents and caregivers have a strong impact on their children’s educational outcomes. Several research studies (e.g. Dornbusch, Ritter, Herbert, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Rytkonen, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2005) have shown that parenting styles have a significant impact on children in terms of social and educational aspects. Parents model behaviors which their children often adopt and engage in themselves. The use of causal attributions is very likely a behavior children learn in part from observing their parents.

This chapter attempts to synthesize a selection of research articles addressing the development of causal attributions and the implications parenting styles have upon it. First, a brief explanation of Weiner’s (1971) theory of attribution will be presented. Second, a concise discussion of Dweck’s (1975) theory of motivation and learned helplessness will be summarized. Next, research over parenting styles and their impact on education will be discussed. Fourth, research combining parenting styles and their role in the development of causal attributions in children will be addressed. Next, children’s level of cognitive development in relation to the development of learned helplessness is addressed. Finally, a case is made for additional research
to be conducted over the impact parenting styles have on children’s development of causal attributions.

*Literature Review*

*Attribution Theory*

Weiner (1971) is widely recognized for developing a theory of attributions specifically in the realm of achievement-related concepts (i.e., academic achievement). According to his theory, people engage in the use of causal attributions in order to make sense of their environment. He identified three common properties in his theory: locus, stability, and controllability. These three dimensions are present among all persons when engaged in causal thinking. The first dimension, locus of control, refers to attributing the cause to either an external or internal force. A child who attributes his high test score to his ability reflects an internal locus of control whereas a child who attributes his good test score to his teacher’s good instruction reflects an external locus of control.

Weiner’s second dimension, stability, refers to the relative constancy of the cause. In the original design of his theory, Weiner (1971) developed a 2 x 2 categorization scheme. Ability was viewed as internal and stable, effort was internal and unstable, task difficulty was classified as external and stable, and luck as external and unstable. Weiner later acknowledged the shortcomings of this scheme stating that these classifications are somewhat ambiguous among the general population.

Weiner’s (1985) third dimension, controllability, refers to whether the child has control over the outcome. A very difficult task that cannot be successfully mastered by a child no matter how long he or she studies is considered to be uncontrollable. The child had no involvement in the inherent qualities of the task and is simply attempting to successfully complete it. There is
little the child could do in order to succeed at the task. On the other hand, a child who attributed his success to high effort displays a controllable factor. The amount of time a student studies for a test is controlled largely by himself/herself. Thus, they have some control over the outcome of the task. In addition to his three original dimensions, Weiner (1985) proposed the possibility of two additional dimensions: intentionality and globality. In reference to intentionality Weiner stated that a student might exert high effort when studying for an exam but engage in the use of a poor strategy that ultimately leads to poor performance. Failure due to lack of effort is categorized as an internal cause. However, a student does not willingly or intentionally choose to use a poor strategy. This phenomenon has led to the term of intentionality. Weiner (1985) asserts that intent and control generally correlate highly with one another. Often students intend to engage in controllable behaviors and can in fact control their intent. However, there are situations in which intent and control can be distinguished from one another.

Globality refers to whether a situation is temporal (consistent over time) and generalizable (consistent across situations). Weiner (1985) illustrates the concept by referring to a child who attributes his poor mathematic performance to (a) low math aptitude or (b) low intelligence. Low math aptitude is a specific situation relating only to mathematic academic domain. Low intelligence, however, is a general situation which can affect performance in other academic domains such as reading.

Attribution theorists (e.g., Frieze & Snyder, 1980; Weiner, 1971) state that future behavior is largely determined by the perceived causes of past events. In regard to achievement-related concepts, success and failure are generally considered to be caused by ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. When these tasks are considered relatively stable over time (i.e., ability) then students will likely develop expectancies based off past outcomes. If students feel they did not
succeed on a mathematics test due to lack of ability then they will expect to fail on similar tasks in the future (Weiner, Nierenberg, & Goldstein, 1976).

Weiner primarily concentrated on studying college-aged students; in a 1976 study Weiner et al. tested 126 male undergraduate students’ attributions when faced with a challenging task. Students were assigned to different experimental groups and were given a series of six block designs to complete within a given time period. After completion of the block designs, experimenters then informed each participant if they completed the task within the allotted time. One of the experimental groups was told they had completed the task within the time frame on all six tasks while another group was told on all six trials that they did not complete the task in a timely manner. All other experimental groups received a mixture of timely and untimely completions. Following the tasks, experimenters looked at future expectancies for performance on similar block design tasks by each of the participants. Each participant was asked how many of 10 more of these similar types of tasks he felt he would successfully complete. In addition to testing expectancies experimenters wanted to look at specific attributions. Participants were also asked a series of questions aimed at locus of control factors (i.e., effort) as the perceived cause of the outcome or stability factors (i.e., task difficulty) as the perceived cause of the outcome.

Results of the study showed that stability rather than locus of control was related to expectancy of success or failure on future tasks. Participants who had continuously received feedback of successfully completing the tasks in a timely manner had higher expectancies of successful future performance than students who received feedback of untimely completion. Both sets of participants were more likely to attribute a stable factor such as ability or task difficulty as a determinant of the outcome.
There have been a handful of studies which examined attributional beliefs among
elementary students. One such study conducted by Frieze and Snyder (1980) studied first, third,
and fifth graders. A total of 144 participants (48 from each of the previously listed grades) were
interviewed in order to assess their views on the causes of success and failure. Four achievement
situations were examined (an academic exam, a football game, catching frogs in a pond, and an
art project). Children were told two stories from each of the four previously listed situations. One
of the stories had a positive outcome and the other story had a negative outcome. After the story
was completed the participants were then asked why that particular outcome occurred. In
reference to the academic exam situation one story was told in which a boy received a high grade
and a second story was told in which a boy received a low grade. After the completion of the
story each child was asked why the boy received a high (low) grade. The interviews were all
videotaped and participants’ responses were scored by the interviewers in accordance to the Elig-
Frieze Coding Scheme of Perceived Causality (cited in Frieze and Snyder, 1980). Responses
were categorized into three dimensions: location of the cause (internal or external), stability
(stable or unstable), and intentionality (intentional or unintentional).

Results of the study showed major differences in causal attributions among the four
situations. In regards to the academic exam situation most students attributed effort as the cause
of success or failure. These comprised of 65% of the responses followed by ability with 15% of
the responses. In the art project the majority of students attributed success to ability (34%)
followed by effort (27%). Both of these results reflect an internal locus of control but a mixture
of stability with ability as stable and effort as unstable. In regards to catching frogs external
causes (40%) and unintentional causes (65%) made up the majority of responses. In the football
situation there was a variety of responses given by participants. This led the researchers to
believe that these children did not have a clearly defined schema for causal attributions in regards to football. Researchers also noted that there was a slight significant difference among the grade levels with older students citing effort more often than ability and younger children having fewer codable responses.

Attribution theory developed by Weiner (1971) has been widely studied and many educational implications have been formulated from this research (e.g., attribution retraining programs). In addition to educational programs and practices developed from this body of research new theories regarding attributions and educational achievements have been developed based largely on attribution theory. One such theory is that of Dweck’s (1975) theory of motivation and learned helplessness.

Motivation and Learned Helplessness

Dweck (1975) has developed a unique theory on children’s development of learned helplessness and mastery orientation. Her theory builds upon Weiner’s attribution theory and demonstrates how inappropriate attributions can lead to the phenomenon known as learned helplessness. A child who exhibits learned helplessness believes that no matter how much effort he/she puts forth in attempting to solve a problem he/she will still fail as he/she lacks the innate ability to be successful. Children with learned helplessness develop a sense of hopelessness and often give up when faced with a difficult task. Mastery-oriented children, on the other hand, often exhibit enhanced performance on a difficult task following a failed experience (Diener & Dweck, 1978). These children are more likely to respond to failure with increased perseverance. They are more likely to attribute failure to internal (controllable) and unstable causes such as lack of effort or external and unstable causes such as poor test condition. Children with learned
helplessness focus on more uncontrollable, stable causes such as ability and task difficulty (Durkin, 1995).

Based on her research findings Dweck stated that children’s behavior is guided by their beliefs about intelligence. Children who view intelligence as fixed and unchangeable follow entity theory. They are primarily concerned with task performance and believe that others judge their intelligence based off their successes and/or failures on task outcomes. In contrast, children who follow incremental theory of intelligence believe that intelligence is changeable and improves over time. They believe that with effort and time intelligence can be improved (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Bempechat, 1983; Dweck & Leggert, 1988). Dweck and Leggert’s (1988) model states that children’s views on intelligence seem to be independent of their intellectual ability. Several studies have substantiated that high-ability children are no more likely then low-ability children to believe in incremental theory (Bruning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004).

Children typically select one of two motivational goals when faced with a learning situation: performance goals or learning goals. Entity theory is associated with performance goals because children complete a task for the sole purpose of demonstrating their intelligence. They believe that others’ judge their intelligence based off their performance on educational tasks. If children have low expectations for completing a task successfully due to perceived inability and/or task difficulty (uncontrollable factors) they might demonstrate learned helpless behaviors, as they do not desire to be judged as unintelligent by others. Children engaged in performance goals are more likely to become frustrated and defensive when faced with a difficult task. They attribute failure to external and uncontrollable causes. Incremental theory is associated with learning goals. These children view tasks as learning opportunities and desire to improve their skills. They believe that learning from their mistakes is as important as
successfully completing the task. Children engaged in learning goals are more persistent with challenging tasks and more likely to attribute success to internal and controllable causes. These types of goals lead to mastery-oriented behaviors, regardless of the child’s expectations for successful task completion (Bruning et al., 2004; Dweck & Bempechat, 1983).

In their 1973 study over learned helplessness Dweck and Reppucci tested reinforcement responsibility in fifth grade students. Reinforcement responsibility is the same concept as causal attributions: Do children take personal responsibility for their outcomes (such as presence or absence of ability). In this study children were asked to solve a series of tasks administered by two experimenters. One of the experimenters (the success experimenter) always presented a problem which was solvable. The second experimenter was termed the “failure experimenter” and her problems were originally unsolvable. After a few sessions the same solvable problems presented by the success experimenter were now presented by the failure experimenter. A large number of children were not successful in solving this “solvable” task when presented by the second experimenter. This was true even for children who had previously successfully solved this same task when presented by the success experimenter. One month prior to the study, children were administered the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility (IAR) Scale (cited in Dweck, 1975). This scale is used to determine whether children attribute outcomes in accordance with their behavior (internal responsibility) or in accordance to the behavior of someone else in their environment (external behavior). Children’s performance on the task problems was then compared to their IAR scores.

Results showed that children whose task performance scores showed the greatest decline were those who took less personal responsibility. They attributed success more to uncontrollable, stable factors such as ability rather than controllable, unstable factors such as effort. They did not
pay heed to the role of motivation and in doing so revealed a belief of their powerlessness to control their performances. The authors commented, “when subjected to continued noncontingent failure, the performance of some children deteriorated, while the performance of others did not, although all were motivated to succeed, and all had the ability to do so” (Dweck & Reppucci, 1973, p. 115).

Another study of learned helplessness by Diener and Dweck (1978) focused on categorizing children as either helpless or mastery-oriented and looking into the differences in strategies and achievement cognitions. To classify children, the IAR scale was conducted and children’s scores determined the group to which they were assigned. Children were then presented with a task and experimenters monitored each child’s hypothesis-testing strategy. After a few sessions, experimenters presented children with an unsolvable task and again hypothesis-testing strategies were monitored. In a separate session children were given a task to complete and were asked to verbally describe what they were thinking while performing the task. Differences between the two groups’ verbalizations and hypothesis-testing strategies were analyzed.

Results showed that over 50% of children with learned helplessness verbalized that they were unable to solve the task because they were not smart enough whereas none of the mastery-oriented children stated this. Instead, mastery-oriented students attributed their failure to lack of effort, bad luck, increased task difficulty, and fairness of the experimenter. Mastery-oriented children also engaged in solution strategies such as self-instruction and self-monitoring.

Children who have developed learned helplessness can become more mastery-oriented and learn to succeed despite failure experiences. Attributional retraining, teaching children to
attribute their failure to more controllable factors such as effort rather than uncontrollable factors such as ability, should be utilized.

In her 1975 study, Dweck identified twelve children who had high levels of learned helplessness. These children were assigned to one of two groups: success only experiences or attributional retraining. Both groups were intense, long-term training procedures. Children in the success only group were presented with a situation in which they were always successful. Previous research had shown that higher expectations of success often lead to greater persistence when faced with a difficult task (cited in Dweck, 1975). Children in the attributional retraining group were taught to take more personal responsibility for failure and to attribute failure to lack of effort. After the training procedures children were presented with problems and set up for failure experiences. Differences between the two groups were then examined.

Results showed that children in the success only group continued to show marked deterioration in their performances after a failed experience. Children in the attributional retraining group maintained or improved their performances following a failed attempt. This indicates that attributional retraining can alter children’s beliefs regarding the causes of outcomes.

According to Weiner (1979) learned helplessness conveys the thought that there is no perceived connection between effort and outcome. The student believes that the outcome of an event is independent of what he or she does. Learned helplessness creates deficits and barriers to motivation and learning, negative affect, and even depression.

A 1981 study by Dona Johnson researched learned helplessness and its effect on self-concept. The study also looked into the role reinforcement plays on children with learned helplessness. Children who had experienced chronic failure in school and were of normal
intelligence were identified as exhibiting learned helplessness. All participants were between the ages of 9-12 and were administered the Piers-Harris Children’s self-concept Scale (Piers, 1969) and the Intellectual Achievement Responsibilities Questionnaire (IAR) (Crandall et al., 1965). Children with learned helplessness were given an experimental task and their responses to personality measures were compared to those children who were average achievers. The experimental task included two maze completions which were considered simple and another maze task which was impossible to successfully complete. During the task all children were told, “this game shows if a person is good at school work” (Johnson, 1981). In addition to the verbal statement half of the participants from both groups (learned helpless and average achieving) were told they would receive a monetary prize of 10 cents for each successfully solved maze.

Researchers analyzed whether there was a significant difference between the children with learned helplessness in regards to the two reinforcement conditions (monetary and school achievement). Results showed that children with learned helplessness were much more persistent when presented with a monetary reinforcement than with a prediction of school success alone. Persistency was the same among both conditions for the average achieving group.

Next, researchers looked at the effects of internal causal attributions for success and failure and its impact on self-esteem. Children’s scores on the two tests previously listed (IAR and Piers-Harris) were analyzed. Results showed that children with learned helplessness who attributed failure to internal causes (lack of ability) had lower self-esteem.

A study by Entwisle and Hayduk (1981) found that children’s achievement beliefs are predicted more by their parents’ achievement beliefs than by their teachers’ achievement beliefs. Furthermore they discovered that parental achievement beliefs played an even more important role than how well the student is currently doing in school. Parents who attributed their child’s
failure to lack of ability tend to have children who display helpless behaviors (cited in Hokoda & Fincham, 1995). Andrews (1982) found that mothers of helpless children made more derogatory comments about the competence of their child and even encouraged them to quit. These parents in comparison to the mothers of mastery-oriented children were more likely to be unresponsive or deny their child help when the child asked for assistance. Thus, these parents demonstrated insensitivity to their child’s beliefs and self-worth (cited in Hokoda & Fincham, 1995).

Parenting Styles

Baumrind is widely recognized as developing a classification for parenting styles. In her 1967 typology she identified three different styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. In a follow-up study Maccoby and Martin (1983) recategorized Baumrind’s parenting styles separating out permissive parents from neglectful parents. Maccoby and Martin classified their parenting styles in accordance to the degree of parental responsiveness and parental demandingness exhibited in child-rearing practices. Parental responsiveness refers to the amount of warmth, acceptance, and involvement. Parental demandingness was measured by the amount of control, supervision, and maturity demands exerted by the parents (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parents categorized by low demandingness and high responsiveness displayed an indulgent/permissive parenting style. These types of parents are warm and loving toward their children but make little demands on them, instead allowing more self-regulation by the child. Parents who are low in responsiveness and low in demandingness are neglectful/uninvolved parents. They do not monitor their children and are not involved with their interests or activities. Authoritarian parents are highly demanding and low in responsiveness. They have high expectations of maturity and want to control their child’s behavior and attitudes in accordance to a set of standards. Verbal feedback and give-and-take between the child and parents are
discouraged. Parents who display a balance between high responsiveness and high demandingness engage in authoritative parenting. They consistently monitor their child’s behavior, expect appropriate behavior, and reinforce their child’s achievement. These parents are warm and supportive with verbal feedback and communication is highly encouraged (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

There has been extensive research (e.g., Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989) conducted over parental styles and their impact on children’s achievement, socialization, and overall well-being and development. The majority of research indicates that children reared in an authoritative environment have the most positive outcomes. These children consistently score higher on levels of psychosocial competence and school achievement. They also tend to score lower for external and internal problem behavior. Children raised in a neglectful environment, on the other hand, tend to show the lowest levels of positive adjustment. They score the lowest on measures of school achievement, social competence, and psychosocial adjustment (Lamborn et al., 1991).

Baumrind, in a 1967 study, examined the relationship of parenting style and the behavior of preschool children. The participants were 32 children between the ages of three and four. The children were analyzed along five dimensions: self-control, approach-avoidance tendency, self-reliance, subjective mood, and peer affiliation. Self-control was defined as the tendency to control the impulse to act in situations where self-restraint is the most appropriate action. Approach-avoidance tendency measured the degree to which the child reacted to novel, stressful, exciting, or unexpected stimuli in an explorative, curious manner. Subjective mood is in reference to the affective state expressed by the child in terms of the amount of pleasure and happiness shown. Self-reliance refers to the ability of the child to handle situations in an
independent manner without having to rely heavily on the help of peers of adults. Finally, peer affiliation refers to the child’s ability and willingness to express warmth towards his or her peers. Data were gathered by observation of the researcher and school teacher. Measures of parental influence/style were measured in terms of the amount of parental maturity demands on the child, degree of parent-child communication, and parental nurturance (warmth).

Results indicated that children of authoritative parents were more mature, independent, friendly, active, and achievement-oriented than children raised under other types of parenting styles. Children of authoritarian parents were less happy and trusting often showing signs of being withdrawn from their peers. Effects of permissive parenting showed the worst outcomes for children raised in this type of environment. These children were rated as the least competent with low levels of self-reliance and self-control. In a follow-up study Baumrind (1989) discovered that the same effects continued when the children were in middle school. The children of authoritative parents also tended to score the highest on measures of self-esteem and academic performance when tested at the middle school age.

Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1991) took an in-depth look at patterns of competence and adjustment among adolescents from authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful families. These parenting styles were based on Maccoby and Martin’s (1983) adaptation of Baumrind’s (1967) classification. Lamborn et al. (1991) sampled 10,000 students between the 9th and 12th grades. Data were collected primarily from two self-report questionnaires. One questionnaire measured demographic variables and the adolescents’ perception of parenting styles. Parenting styles were assigned according to the parents’ responsiveness and demandingness toward to the child, their acceptance and involvement with the child, and their strictness/supervision of the child. Authoritative parents were those who
scored high on both acceptance and involvement, and strictness and supervision. Neglectful parents were those who scored low on these measures while authoritarian parents scored high on supervision/strictness and low on involvement. Families who scored in the middle ranges of these measures were not assigned a parenting style and were excluded from the study. Researchers also collected data on each adolescent for psychosocial development, academic competence, internalized distress, and problem behavior. These four measures were then analyzed with parental style.

As predicted, results showed that adolescents from authoritative parents had the highest levels of competence and adjustment. They also had the highest levels of academic achievement and psychosocial development and significantly lower levels of problem behavior. These adolescents were also more confident in their abilities. Adolescents from neglectful homes had the worst outcomes across all four measures (academic competence, problem behavior, internalized distress, and psychosocial development). Children from neglectful and authoritarian homes scored very similarly with regards to self-confidence. Adolescents from indulgent and authoritarian homes tended to fall somewhere in between adolescents with authoritative parents and those with neglectful parents. Adolescents with authoritarian parents appear to be slightly better off as they reported fewer problem behaviors (misconduct, drug use, etc.), fewer internalized distresses, and more positive school orientation than adolescents from indulgent homes. These results tended to be true across all demographic groups.

*Parental Style and Adolescent’s Academic Performance*

Over the past several years many research studies have shown the impact of parenting practices on children’s academic performance (e.g., Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997; Rytkonen, Aunola, &
Nurmi, 2005). The vast majority of this research has focused on adolescents and college students. There has been little research over the effects of parenting styles on preschool and elementary school children’s academic performance. One reason for this occurrence is likely the convenience and availability of this sample age. Adolescents and college-aged students have the ability to report their academic achievement as well as answer questionnaires about parenting styles. This makes it much more convenient for researchers and reduces the time involved in gathering data. It is plausible to hypothesize that parental influence over adolescents’ academic achievement stems from earlier impacts on the child during the preschool and elementary years. It is very likely that the impact parents have on their child’s school performance in the formative years transcends to adolescence and adulthood.

In a study conducted by Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, and Ritter (1997) data were collected and examined relating parenting style, adolescent’s causal attributions, and four educational outcomes. The educational outcomes were classroom engagement, homework, academic achievement, and educational expectations. Classroom engagement refers to the extent to which the adolescent was attentive and engaged in classroom instruction. Homework was measured in terms of the amount of time spent on homework each week. Academic achievement was measured through self-reported grades and was used as an indicator of school performance. Finally, educational expectations were assessed by asking participants how far they expected to go in school given their individual situation. Parenting styles were assigned according to questionnaires completed by each participant. The parenting style index developed by Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, and Dornbusch, (1994) was used and measures of parental responsiveness and demandingness were analyzed. After each participant completed the
questionnaire a parenting style of authoritative, authoritarian, neglectful, or indulgent (permissive) was assigned.

Adolescent attributions were also measured with the use of questionnaires. Participants were asked questions such as, “Everyone gets a good (poor) grade sometimes. When you get a good (poor) grade in a class, which reason usually causes the good (poor) grade?” Participants then selected up to two answers from the following list: luck, effort, teacher bias, task difficulty, or ability. Participants answered similar types of questions for four academic subjects including math, science, social studies, and English. Attributions were labeled as dysfunctional if adolescents has a tendency to attribute academic outcomes to low ability or external causes (i.e. teacher bias).

Results of the study showed that adolescents who scored their parents as authoritarian, indulgent, or neglectful were significantly more likely to report dysfunctional types of attributions then those from authoritative homes. Furthermore, children from neglectful parents reported the highest proportion of dysfunctional attributions. High proportions of dysfunctional attributions were also linked with decreased classroom engagement, decline in the amount of time spent on homework, lower academic achievement, and lower expectations for educational advancement.

Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts (1989) conducted a study over authoritative parenting in terms of psychosocial maturity and academic success among adolescents. The purpose of this study was to determine if authoritative parenting facilitates rather than just associates with school success. One hundred and twenty families with children between the ages of 11 and 16 participated in this study. Data were collected on family relations and psychosocial maturity from the adolescent during school and home visits. School grades and standardized achievement
scores were also gathered for each participant. Each participant completed a questionnaire over psychosocial maturity.

Results indicated that authoritative parenting does likely facilitate academic achievement as adolescents who described their parents as granting them greater psychological autonomy and high levels of involvement showed greater increases in grades over the one year period of this study. Authoritative parenting also has a positive impact on psychosocial maturity which in turn has a high impact on school achievement. It was also discovered that the three components of authoritative parenting examined in this study (parental acceptance, psychological autonomy, and behavioral control) each make individual positive contributions to school achievement. Thus, developing a healthy sense of autonomy leads to increased academic achievement and authoritative parenting fosters the development of a healthy sense of autonomy.

In a study conducted by Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh (1987) the relationship of parenting style to adolescent school performance was analyzed. Participants were 7,836 high school students and most of the data were derived from a questionnaire completed by the adolescents. The questionnaire asked questions relating to background characteristics of the students, self-reported grades, perceptions of parental attitudes and behavior, and family communication patterns. Researchers then assigned a parenting style based off Baumrind’s classification (authoritative, authoritarian, or permissive) to each participant’s parents. Researchers decided to use grades as a basis of academic performance because school officials felt that these were more representative then standardized test scores or intelligence tests. School grades and parenting style were then analyzed to determine if parenting style influences academic success.
Results yielded some interesting information. Females were less likely to perceive their parents as authoritarian than males. As age of the adolescent increased the perception of authoritarian parenting also declined. The reverse was true in regards of permissive parenting style. The authoritative parenting style did not show a relation to the adolescents’ age. This led researchers to hypothesize that while permissive and authoritarian parenting may change as the child gets older, authoritative parenting may represent a more ideological commitment for the parent that does not change over time.

In relation to school performance and parenting style, results showed that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles had a negative correlation with grades. Authoritative parenting style, however, showed a positive correlation to grades. These findings substantiate previous research showing that authoritative parenting yields more beneficial results in terms of academic success. Permissive and authoritarian parenting styles are associated with lower grades while authoritative parenting style is associated with higher grades. This held true for students from a variety of different backgrounds.

**Parental Style and Children’s Academic Performance**

Rytkonen et al. (2005) conducted a study assessing parent’s causal attributions concerning their child’s school achievement. This longitudinal study addressed how parents’ attributions changed from their children’s preschool years to elementary school and to see how parenting style effected these perceptions. A total of 207 children between the ages of 5 and 6 and their parents participated in this study. Parents’ causal attributions were assessed through questionnaires. Each parent completed this questionnaire during the child’s preschool year, first grade, and second grade for a total of three times. The child’s success and failure was ranked according to importance of ability, effort, teaching, and task difficulty. Researchers also obtained
measures of the children’s academic performance. Each child completed an assessment in the areas of mathematics and reading. Parenting style was determined by having each parent complete another questionnaire in which parents rated on a five point likert scale whether each statement was like or not like their parenting practices. Three different factors were assessed: parental affection, behavioral control, and psychological control.

After collecting the data researchers conducted an analysis looking for possible correlations between parenting style, parents’ causal attributions of the children’s academic performance, and children’s academic scores in a mathematics and reading assessment. Results showed that during the preschool years parents were more likely to attribute their child’s academic success to teaching and ability. When children moved to elementary school the role of the teacher decreased and ability was more often reported as the most likely cause of school success. In terms of school failure parents were most likely to cite lack of effort as the cause. Results also showed that the higher a child scored on the reading and/or mathematics assessment the more likely parents were to state ability as the cause and less due to teaching.

Parenting styles were also found to play a contributing role in causal attributions. The higher the level of affection and behavioral control (related to authoritative parenting) reported by the parent the less likely success was attributed to teaching. Parents who reported high psychological control (i.e. Those who sought to control their child by means of guilt, anxiety, and withdrawal of love) the more success was attributed to teaching and very seldom to ability.

Hokoda and Fincham (1995) conducted a study over the origins of children’s learned helplessness and mastery achievement patterns within the family structure. One of the reasons the researchers cited for completing this study was due to the fact that little research had previously been conducted over motivational patterns and the role of parental behaviors.
Twenty-one children participated in the study (10 helpless and 11 mastery-oriented). Children completed the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Scale (IAR; Crandall et al. 1965). Children were assigned as either helpless or mastery-oriented according to their score on the IAR. After the participants were assigned a group they completed a behavioral achievement task. This was done in order to assess the effect failure had on the child’s performance. The child was given a task to complete and a baseline performance measure was established. Next, the children were given a series of unsolvable tasks followed by a couple of solvable tasks. The child’s mother was observed during the task assignment and all parent-child interactions during the task were recorded.

Results showed that mothers of mastery-oriented children were more likely to attribute their child’s success to ability than mothers of helpless children. Also, mothers of helpless children made fewer positive statements during the insolvable tasks then they did during the solvable tasks. Positive statement made by mothers of mastery-oriented children remained at the same frequency through both the solvable and unsolvable tasks. These mothers were also more likely to use teaching types of statements then mothers of helpless children. When mastery-oriented children made low-ability types of statement during the insolvable task their mothers were more likely to reassure their child of their high ability. These mothers appeared to promote mastery and task-focused behaviors when their child began to display some signs of helplessness. Mothers of helpless children, on the other hand, were most likely to encourage their child to quit when they began to make low ability statements.
Cognitive Development

In order to account for cognitive development in the present study, children’s cognitive level were assessed with a Piagetian paper and pencil task developed by Bakken (1995). Thus, cognitive level can be a controlled factor when assessing learned helplessness in young children. Piaget developed a comprehensive theory on cognitive development in children. According to his theory cognitive development is a mental process guided by maturation (genetic factors) and experiences (environmental factors) (as cited in Bakken, 1995). He asserts that children develop schemas and construct knowledge through assimilation (adapting information to fit with existing schemas) and accommodation (changing schemas to adapt to fit new information). Piaget’s theory consists of four stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations. The different stages are marked by the ability to complete certain tasks such as symbolism, egocentrism, centration, conservation, and abstract reasoning (Piaget, 1971).

There have been a few studies conducted which indicate that children have similar or high levels of perceived competence across academic domains before age 8 and then there is a steady decline (cited in Elliott & Dweck, 2005). This has led some to assert that children younger than age eight have little reason to feel incompetent about themselves and may base their perceptions on “unsystematic sampling of relevant events and information, in keeping with their relatively limited, domain-specific experience and information-processing capacities (Elliott & Dweck, 2005, p215).” However, other researchers (e.g. Cain & Dweck, 1995; Smiley & Dweck, 1994) suggest that younger children can, in fact, display behaviors associated with learned helplessness as young as age four.
Summary

In conclusion, many research studies have been conducted over the impact parenting has on children’s academic performance and epistemological beliefs about learning. Authoritative parenting has shown to have the best impact on children’s academic performance. It is associated with higher grades, more appropriate causal attributions, and master-oriented children. On the other hand, neglectful and authoritarian parenting has been linked with the most adverse effects such as lower grades, lower self-esteem, and inappropriate causal attributions.

Research has also extensively investigated the impact of causal attributions. Inappropriate causal attributions such as attributing failure to lack of ability and success to luck are associated with entity belief. Children who hold this view of intelligence often engage in performance goals which can lead to decreased persistence and frustration. However, there have been few studies which examined the impact parenting styles have on learned helplessness and motivational patterns in elementary-age children.

The vast majority of studies over causal attributions and parenting styles have focused on adolescents and college-aged students. It is plausible, as Rytkonen and colleagues (2005) suggested, that children’s views on learning are developed in preschool and elementary school and these beliefs may transcend throughout the high school and college years. In order to control for cognitive development, children were assessed for their cognitive level.

The hypothesis of this study was to investigate the relationship between parenting styles and children’s development of mastery orientation and learned helplessness. Several hypotheses were tested in this study, some of which were to substantiate previous research. There are no hypotheses regarding neglectful parenting as the parenting style index used only included authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive styles. Specifically these hypotheses included:
• Authoritative parenting style would be positively related to learning goal orientation.

• Permissive and authoritarian parenting would be negatively related to learning goal orientation.

• Authoritative parenting style would be negatively related to performance goal orientation.

• Permissive and authoritarian style would be positively related to performance goal orientation.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Participants

In order to test the hypotheses of this study participants were selected from a preschool in a suburban area. Administrators’ willingness to allow their preschool to participate was a factor in the selection process. Due to convenience and time constraints, only one preschool was selected to be a part of the sample.

Forty-two children ages four and five were asked to participate in the study. There were 26 males and 16 females most likely of European-American descent. Due to the age of the children, parental consent was obtained with the help of the classroom teacher (see appendix A).

Instruments

There were three instruments used in this study. A parenting styles index was used to measure parenting style, a Piagetian questionnaire was used to assess the child’s level of cognitive development, and a puzzle task was used to identify learned helplessness in children.

The parental style questionnaire used was developed by Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, and Hart (1995) and titled “Parenting Practices” (see appendix B). Neglectful parenting was not addressed in this instrument. This questionnaire was selected for use in the present study as it allowed for parents to complete the questionnaire rather than the children. This questionnaire consists of 62 items used to measure characteristics of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles. Twenty-seven of these items relate to authoritative parenting style with a Cronbach alpha of .91; 20 items relate to authoritarian parenting style with a Cronbach alpha of .86, and there are 15 questions related to permissive parenting style with a Cronbach alpha of .75. Factors associated with authoritative parenting style are warmth/involvement (i.e.,
gives praise when child is good), reasoning/induction (i.e., explains the consequences of the child’s behavior), democratic participation (i.e., allows the child to give input into family rules), and good natured/easy going (i.e., shows patience with the child). Factors associated with authoritarian style are verbal hostility (i.e., explodes in anger toward the child), corporal punishment (i.e., uses physical punishment as a way of disciplining the child), nonreasoning/punitive strategies (i.e., punishes by taking privileges away with little if any explanation), and directiveness (i.e., tells the child what to do). Factors associated with permissive parenting are lack of follow through (i.e., states punishment to the child and does not actually do them), ignoring misbehavior (i.e., allows the child to annoy someone else), and self-confidence (i.e., appears unsure on how to solve the child’s misbehavior). Robinson et al. (1995) used 19 questions from a parental style questionnaire developed by Block (1965) and the remaining 43 items were new items developed by Robinson and his colleagues (1995). Parents were asked to complete the questionnaire based on a five-point likert scale with one being “I never exhibit this behavior” and five being “I always exhibit this behavior.”

The next instrument used was a Piagetian-based cognitive development task developed by Bakken (1995) (see Appendix C). The purpose of using this instrument in the present study was to control for children’s level of cognitive development when assessing the presence of learned helplessness in children.

This instrument is a 21-item, multiple-choice test of Piaget tasks designed to determine a child’s level of cognitive development. The test identifies the concrete operations stage with substages of conservation of number, conservation of continuous quality, conservation of length, conservation of area, conservation of mass, conservation of weight, conservation of volume, right-left relationships, classification, and perspective-taking.
Bakken (1995) classifies children’s level of cognitive development into three substages within the concrete operations. For substage one under concrete operations children must be able to answer questions on conservation number, continuous length, and some right-left relationship questions. For substage two under concrete operations children must additionally be able to answer questions on mass, weight, and classification. Finally for substage three children must be able to answer questions from both previous substages and additionally answer more questions on volume and classification. Failure to answer concrete operations questions for substages indicates that the child is using preoperational thinking.

Reliability and validity are available for this instrument. Reliability for the concrete operations stage is $r = .70, p < .01$ and reliability for the formal operations stage is $r = .52, p < .05$. Two criterion-related validity studies showed statistically significant correlations between the Piagetian tasks using a clinical interview technique and the multiple-choice Piaget test (Bakken, 1995).

The third instrument used in this study was developed by Smiley and Dweck (1994) and used to assess children’s motivational goals (e.g., performance goals or learning goals). Dweck identified lack of persistence following failure as a key characteristic in learned helplessness among older children. Thus, she used this criterion to identify the possible development of learned helplessness in younger children. Children were given five puzzles of familiar objects (e.g., a fire truck, train, school bus, etc.) with nine pieces to complete. Three puzzles given to a child were unsolvable, as three of the pieces had been replaced with pieces from a similar puzzle. Thus, these three puzzles consisted of the failure trials. The fourth and fifth puzzles were the success trials where both puzzles were complete and solvable. The child was also allotted
enough time in order to complete them. Prior to being given each puzzle the child was shown a Xerox copy of the completed puzzle so they knew what they would look like.

In the first session subjects were asked to evaluate their overall puzzle-solving ability (“Are you good at puzzles or not so good at puzzles?”). Then they were asked to solve a pretest puzzle in order to collect baseline data on their ability and the amount of time it took to complete the task was recorded. The child was shown a copy of the completed puzzle and asked what the object in the puzzle is (e.g., a fire truck). This introduction was used for all five puzzle tasks. Next, session two began and the child was asked to complete the three unsolvable puzzles one at a time. The child was only allotted three minutes per puzzle. Next, the solvable puzzle was presented and children were permitted enough time to complete the puzzle. After working each puzzle, the experimenter pointed to the puzzle and asked the child to rate their emotions for each one, using a 5-point face scale. Children were shown five faces ranging from a large smile to a large frown. The smiles were described as very sad, a little sad, in the middle, a little happy, or very happy. Next children’s attributions and future expectations were assessed by asking the following two questions, (1) “If you had lots of time right now, do you think you could finish any of these puzzles or are you just not good enough at puzzles?” and (2) “If you tried very hard right now, your very hardest, do you think you could do any of these puzzles? Yes or no?”

Finally, in order to observe children’s tendency to seek or avoid challenges, children were shown all five puzzles from session two just as they had left them and asked which one they would like to work on again. After choosing a puzzle the experimenter responded, “Good Choice” and asked the child why he/she chose that puzzle. If an unsolvable puzzle was chosen all the correct pieces were provided and the child was permitted to solve it. After completion of this puzzle the children were then asked what puzzle they would choose from the remaining four
and again asked why that puzzle was selected. Children’s decision to work on an unsolvable or solvable puzzle and their reasons as to why were used as the primary indicators of learning goals and performance goals. Those who selected the solvable puzzle were labeled as performance goal-oriented, as were those who selected the unsolvable puzzle with the reason being it would be the easiest. Children who chose unsolvable puzzles with other kinds of reasons (such as “I want to see if I can try him again” or “I only have a few pieces left to complete”) were labeled as learning goal-oriented.

Procedures

Consent forms were sent home with the preschool children in order to gain parental permission for participation. Questionnaires for parenting style were sent home with each child who completed the puzzle task. Parents from each household were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to the preschool in the manila envelope provided. In households where there was more than one parent present, only the parent who was primarily in charge of the child-rearing was asked to complete the survey.

The Piaget multiple-choice test and puzzle task was given at the preschool setting. Since the participants in this study were unable to read the researchers read the Piagetian questions to the participants and recorded their answers. Participant’s responses were recorded on a data collection sheet (see Appendix D). Children who were absent on the scheduled days were unable to participate. Each child was given the option of not completing the tasks.

In order to ensure that each parent was matched to their correct child a number was assigned to each child. Then the puzzle task results, the Piagetian questionnaire, and the parental style questionnaire was labeled with the child’s assigned number. Only children whose parents signed the parental permission letter participated in the study.
Data Analysis

Only children who completed both the puzzle task and Piaget test in their entirety and whose parents completed the parental style questionnaire in its entirety were included in the final results of the study.
Chapter 4

Results

Hypotheses

Originally there were four hypotheses developed at the onset of the study, some of which were designed to substantiate the findings of previous research. Previous studies have found that parenting styles have a significant impact on causal attributions of adolescents. Therefore, because previous studies showed a relationship between parenting styles and the development of negative causal attributions in adolescents it was hypothesized that these same adverse affects would be found in young children. The hypotheses of the current study included:

- Authoritative parenting style would be positively related to learning goal orientation.
- Permissive and authoritarian parenting would be negatively related to learning goal orientation.
- Authoritative parenting style would be negatively related to performance goal orientation.
- Permissive and authoritarian style would be positively related to performance goal orientation.

Results

The main goal of the present study was to analyze the impact parenting styles have on children’s goal statements. However, all parents who participated in the study were classified as authoritative parents. Thus, no data analyses could be conducted, as there were no different groups to compare. A table which shows descriptive data, including means, standard deviations,
variance, and skewness over the three different types of parenting styles is presented below (see Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parenting Style</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>42 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permissive</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another aim of the present study was to assess the impact parent’s beliefs about intelligence have on children’s goal statements. Again, no data analysis could be conducted as there was little variance in the participants. Only two out of the 42 participants were classified as holding an entity belief and the remaining 40 participants were classified as holding an incremental belief in regards to intelligence. Presented below is a table showing descriptive data regarding parent’s beliefs about intelligence (see Table 2).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs about Intelligence</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incremental</td>
<td>40 (95.2)</td>
<td>.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entity</td>
<td>2 (4.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A third goal of the present study was to analyze how children’s level of cognitive development impacted their goal statements. Data analysis could not be conducted due to the homogeneous data. Only one of the 42 participants was classified as concrete operational while the remaining participants were pre-operational. Table 3, presented below, shows the mean, standard deviation, variance, and skewness of children’s level of cognitive development.
Table 3

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages for Children’s Level of Cognitive Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N (%)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piagetian Cognitive Level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-operational</td>
<td>41 (97.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete Operational</td>
<td>1 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Demographics*

A table of means and standard deviations showing children’s motivational style (learning goal or performance goal) and Piagetian level of cognitive development (pre-operational or concrete operational) is presented below. In addition age and gender are included in list of descriptives (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages for Gender, Age, and Goal Orientation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N (%)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26 (61.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16 (38.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>17 (40.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>25 (59.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal Orientation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Goal</td>
<td>24 (57.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Goal</td>
<td>9 (21.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>9 (21.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, because so little variance occurred among the parents no data analysis looking into the impact parenting style and parent’s beliefs about intelligence has on children’s goal orientation could be completed. The only data that can be provided by the present study is a list of demographic information and frequencies.
Chapter 5

Conclusions

The intent of this study was to examine the impact parents have in regards to their child’s motivational style when faced with a challenging task. Previous research (e.g. Dornbusch, et al., 1987; Glasgow, et al., 1997; Rytkonen, et al., 2005) has demonstrated the negative impact permissive and authoritarian parenting styles have on adolescent and college-aged students academic achievement. It was anticipated that these findings would be replicated among preschool children. In addition, the present study wanted to examine parent’s beliefs about intelligence on children’s motivational styles. However, due to a lack of variance among the parents no statistical analysis was completed and no relationship was established between any of the variables. Thus, no new information shedding light onto the problem of children who exhibit performance goal orientation, which can lead to the development of learned helplessness, was discovered. However, since this is still a prevailing problem for school children around the nation it would be beneficial for more research to be conducted looking into possible causal factors.

The preschool selected for the current study was located in a small suburban city. Perhaps if participants had been from a larger metropolitan city there might have been more variance among the parents, as there would have likely been more variance among the population as a whole within a larger city.

Another factor to consider when looking at the problem of children who exhibit signs of learned helplessness, such as demonstrating a performance goal orientation, is the wide range of possible causal factors. Perhaps, the impact of parenting styles and parent’s beliefs about intelligence are not the factors upon which one should focus. Maybe other influences such as
teaching styles, teacher bias, and peer influences have a greater impact on children’s development of motivational styles. Even though all the parents in the current study were classified as authoritative there were still 42.9% of children who were classified as either performance goal oriented or a combination style (displaying some sign of performance goal orientation). Thus, there may be some factors other than parenting styles that account for this behavior.

A possible factor that could account for the presence of performance goal orientation in young children may come from the impact of the teacher. Perhaps the style in which a teacher instructs or the way a child perceives the teachers approval and/or disapproval may lead to the development of performance goal orientation. Also, peer influence may affect the motivational style of certain children. If a child is very competitive in areas such as athletics it may eventually lead to competitiveness inside the classroom. The child may feel compelled to perform better than other students and win the approval of the teacher. These are possible areas of influence that should be addressed in future studies of the development of learned helplessness.

Limitations

There are several limitations of the current study: the small number of participants, the age of the participants, the time-constraints for data collection, and the homogeneity of the population. If data had been collected on more participants (including children and their parents) it might have been possible to find the necessary variance among the participants needed to run a statistical analysis. A relationship between parenting influences and children’s motivational style cannot be established without a statistical analysis. Thus, the influence of parenting practices on children’s motivational style is still largely unknown and unexamined among young children.
The age of the participants was another limitation of the study. Children who were at least five years of age were much better in their ability to solve puzzles and answer questions more thoroughly. The four year-old children took longer to complete the solvable puzzles and had more difficulty with the puzzles. Also, they were less likely to volunteer an answer when asked which puzzle they would prefer to work again. Many times the researcher had to prompt the child with more questions in order to establish a clear reason for their decision so that a motivational style could be assigned. Five-year olds and six-year olds may be more ideal participants, as they are more verbal and more likely to understand the nature of the researcher’s questions.

A third limitation of this study was the lengthy data collection process. It is not feasible to use questionnaires for data collection with very young children, as they are unable to read. In order to assess children’s motivational style, a hands-on task was implemented. It took approximately 25-30 minutes per child to collect sufficient data. If a data collection instrument was developed to collect children’s motivational style in less time than the one used in the current study, then it would be easier to gather data from a larger number of participants.

A fourth limitation of the study was the homogeneity of the population from which the participants were selected. The majority of the participants held many of the same demographics such as socio-economic status and ethnicity, as they were all of Caucasian decent with most falling into middle-class socio-economic status. This likely contributed to the lack of variance found in the study.

The Piagetian questionnaire used to assess level of cognitive development has a few weaknesses in its use with very young children. Since it was a questionnaire, the questions had to be read to the child and recorded by the researcher. Some of the questions referenced items or
things that were unfamiliar to several of the children, such as a ball of clay. This made it difficult for several of the children to have the necessary background knowledge to analyze the questions. If the questionnaire had been modified to reference things more familiar to children (such as a ball of play-doh or a glass of Kool-Aid, etc.) more of the children might have been able to interpret more of the questions correctly. A lack of cognitive maturity in the participants may account for why there is so little variance among the participants. The children may not have been able to make accurate attributional inferences.

Implications for Future Research

Currently, there are several studies that address the influences parents have on their child’s academic achievement (e.g. Dornbusch, et al., 1987; Glasgow, Dornbusch, et al., 1997; Rytkonen, et al., 2005) for adolescents and college students but not very many that address the impact on younger children. Since this is an issue which likely develops in the formative years it would be beneficial for researchers to examine the impact in younger children so that interventions may be developed and implemented for children who display signs of learned helplessness.

Parenting influences cannot solely account for the development and maintenance of learned helplessness in students. Thus, researchers should look into other causal factors such as teacher, peer, and sibling influences on learned helplessness. Likely, there are several factors that promote and maintain learned helpless behaviors in a single student. In order to develop appropriate interventions that can be implemented to diminish learned helpless behaviors in students, researchers must address a multitude of causal factors.
Summary

As students continue to show signs of learned helpless behavior all across the nation, researchers will continue to gather data and examine the many causal factors of this phenomena. A relationship has been established between parenting influences and adolescent and college students’ academic achievement. It is likely that these same negative parenting practices contribute to signs of learned helpless behaviors in younger children. Due to a lack of variance among parents in the present study no data analysis could be conducted and the influence of parenting practices on young children’s motivational styles remains unclear.
REFERENCES
LIST OF REFERENCES


November, 2006

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We would like your child to be a part of a study that is looking at how you interact with your child and their beliefs about motivation in relationship to their level of cognitive development. Four and five year-olds from two Wichita preschools have been selected to participate.

In order to find out about your child’s belief about motivation, we will ask them to solve four puzzle tasks and have them rate how they feel about the task. After completion of all four puzzle they will be asked about their future expectations in regards to solving puzzles. There are no right or wrong answers since we simply want to know what your child believes about motivation. This puzzle task will be given in the preschool classroom and will take about 15 minutes.

In order to find out your child’s level of cognitive development, we have come up with 11 multiple-choice questions. Your child will just circle which answer he or she believes to be true. These questions will be given in the preschool classroom and will take about 30 minutes. It will indicate the level of cognition your child holds.

In order to assess how you interact with your child, we have a 62-item questionnaire to be completed by you, the parent. You will just need to read each statement and rate how often you exhibit that type of behavior with your child. There are no right or wrong answers since we simply want to know how you interact with your child. This questionnaire will be sent home with your child for you to complete. It will take about 20 minutes. We have provided a self-addressed, stamped envelope for you to return the form.

All information will be confidential and neither you nor your child’s answers will be identified with your names. All the survey responses completed by parents and children will be combined in order to find those feelings and interactions that groups have in common. Knowing how children view motivation and what kinds of future expectations they have is valuable information for teachers and researchers to understand. Once again, individual responses will not be reported, only group results.

If you have any questions or would like to receive a copy of the final results or this consent form, please e-mail Rachel Ellis at rmpeck@wichita.edu. You may also contact Dr. Linda Bakken at 978-5764. If you have questions about your or your child’s rights as a participant, please contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone 978-3285. We hope you allow your child to participate in this study, but it is voluntary. Please sign this consent form in the appropriate place and return it to your child’s teacher.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rachel Ellis, researcher

Dr. Linda Bakken, researcher

Yes, I will allow my child ___________________________ to participate in the study.

Signature of parent/guardian ___________________________ date __________

No, I do not want my child ___________________________ to take the study.

Signature of parent/guardian ___________________________ date __________
Appendix B: Parenting Style Questionnaire and Parent’s Beliefs about Intelligence

Parenting Practices Questionnaire
Make a rating for each item as to how often you exhibit this behavior with your child.

I Exhibit this Behavior:
1= Never
2= Once in Awhile
3= About Half of the Time
4= Very Often
5= Always

1. I encourage my child to talk about his or her troubles.
2. I guide my child by punishment more than by reason.
3. I know the names of my child’s friends.
4. I find it difficult to discipline my child.
5. I give praise when my child is good.
6. I spank when my child is disobedient.
7. I joke and play with my child.
8. I withhold scolding and/or criticism even when my child acts contrary to my wishes.
9. I show sympathy when my child is hurt or frustrated.
10. I punish by taking privileges away from my child with little if any explanation.
11. I spoil my child.
12. I give comfort and understanding when my child is upset.
13. I yell or shout when my child misbehaves.
14. I am easy going and relaxed with my child.
15. I allow my child to annoy someone else.
16. I tell my child my expectations regarding behavior before the child engages in an activity.
17. I scold and criticize to make my child improve.
18. I show patience with my child.
19. I grabbing my child when being disobedient.
20. I state punishment to my child and do not actually do them.
21. I am responsive to my child’s feelings and needs.
22. I allow my child to give input into family rules.
23. I argue with my child.
25. I give my child reasons about why rules should be obeyed.
26. I appear to be more concerned with my own feelings than with my child’s feelings.
27. I tell my child that I appreciate what he or she tries or accomplishes.
28. I punish by putting my child off somewhere alone with little if any explanation.
29. I help my child to understand the impact of behavior by encouraging my child to talk about the consequences of his or her own actions.
30. I am afraid that disciplining my child for misbehavior will cause the child not to like me.
31. I take my child’s desires into account before asking the child to do something.
32. I explode in anger toward my child.
33. I am aware about problems or concerns about my child in school.
34. I threaten my child with punishment more often than actually giving it.
35. I express affection by hugging, kissing, and holding my child.
36. I ignore my child’s misbehavior.
37. I use physical punishment as a way of disciplining my child.
38. I carry out discipline after my child misbehaves.
39. I apologize to my child when making a mistake in parenting.
40. I tell my child what to do.
41. I give into my child when he or she causes a commotion about something.
42. I talk it over and reason with my child when my child misbehaves.
43. I slap my child when the child misbehaves.
44. I disagree with my child.
45. I allow my child to interrupt others.
46. I have warm and intimate times together with my child.
47. When two children are fighting, I discipline the children first and ask questions later.
48. I encourage my child to freely express himself or herself even when disagreeing with parents.
49. I bribe my child to bring about compliance.
50. I scold or criticize when my child’s behavior doesn’t meet my expectations.
51. I show respect for my child’s opinions by encouraging my child to express them.
52. I set strict well-established rules for my child.
53. I explain to my child how I feel about the child’s good and bad behavior.
54. I use threats as punishment with little or no justification.
55. I take into account my child’s preferences in making plans for the family.
56. When my child asks why he or she had to conform, I state: because I said so, or I am the parent and I want you to.
57. I appear unsure on how to solve my child’s misbehavior.
58. I explain the consequences of my child’s misbehavior.
59. I demand that my child does/do things.
60. I channel my child’s misbehavior into a more acceptable activity.
61. I shove my child when the child is disobedient.
62. I emphasize the reasons for rules.

Beliefs about Intelligence
Please indicate whether you agree of disagree with the following statements in regards to your child’s intelligence

- My child has a certain amount of intelligence and he or she really can’t do much to change it.
  AGREE   DISAGREE

- My child’s intelligence is something about him or her which cannot be altered very much.
  AGREE   DISAGREE

- My child can learn new things but he or she can’t really change his basic intelligence.
  AGREE   DISAGREE
Appendix C: Piagetian Level of Cognitive Development Questionnaire

FUN AND CHALLENGING PUZZLES

**Instructions:** The following are puzzles that we would like you to solve. To the best of your ability, try to find the answer to each puzzle; and then draw a circle around the letter that gives you the answer. If a certain puzzle doesn’t make any sense to you, just skip it and go on to the next puzzle.

1. Pretend that these circles are quarters.

   ![Circles diagram]

   Which row has more quarters?
   
   a. The top row
   b. The bottom row
   c. Both rows have the same number.
   d. You can’t tell which row has more.

2. Pretend that these two glasses are 2/3 full of coke.

   ![Glasses diagram]

   Now, pretend that you take the glass on the left and pour it into this glass:

   ![Filled glass diagram]

   So now you have these three glasses, one without coke, and two with coke in them:

   ![Filled glasses diagram]

   Which of the two glasses with coke has more coke in it?
   
   a. The glass on the right has more.
   b. You can’t tell which glass has more.
   c. The glass on the left has more.
   d. They both have the same amount.
3. Look at the following two lines, which are the same length: __________

Now, pretend that I move the bottom line so that the two lines look like this: __________

Which line is longer?

a. Both lines are the same length.
b. The top line is longer.
c. You can't tell which line is longer.
d. The bottom line is longer.

4. Pretend that the following two squares are two fields with a cow in each field. In the corner of each field is grass for the cows to eat.

Now pretend that you take the grass in the field on the right, cut it up, and move it so it's like this:

Now you have two fields with cows and grass that look like this:

In which field does the cow have more grass to eat?

a. You can't tell.
b. They both have the same amount.
c. The field on the right has more.
d. The field on the left has more.
5. Let's pretend that we have this box with twelve plastic beads in it. Some of the beads are black and some of the beads are white.

Are there more black beads or more plastic beads in the box?

a. There are more black beads.
b. There are more plastic beads.
c. There are the same number of black beads and plastic beads.
d. There are actually more white beads.

6. Assume that I have these two balls of clay:

Not only are they the same size, but they also weigh the same amount. Now I'm going to take the ball on the right and roll it into a sausage so that it looks like this:

So now I have two pieces of clay that look like this:

Which of these pieces of clay weighs more?

a. They both weigh the same.
b. The piece on the right weighs more.
c. The piece on the left weighs more.
d. You can't tell which piece weighs more.
7 - 10. Here we have a pencil, a shoe, and a quarter. Now I'd like to ask you some questions about these three items.

7. First, is the pencil on the right or the left of the shoe?
   a. The pencil is on the right of the shoe.
   b. The pencil is on the left of the shoe.

8. Second, is the quarter on the right or the left of the shoe?
   a. The quarter is on the right of the shoe.
   b. The quarter is on the left of the shoe.

9. Third, is the shoe on the right or the left of the pencil?
   a. The shoe is on the right of the pencil.
   b. The shoe is on the left of the pencil.

10. Fourth, is the shoe on the right or the left of the quarter?
    a. The shoe is on the right of the quarter.
    b. The shoe is on the left of the quarter.
11. Let's take those two balls of clay that are the same size and weigh the same one more time. Now let's pretend that I drop each of them in a glass of water. We can see how the water rises to the same level in each glass.

Now I'm going to take them out of the water and roll this ball on the right into a sausage once more.

If I put these two pieces of clay back into the water, which piece of clay will make the water rise more?

a. The clay on the left
b. You can't tell which one will make the water rise higher.
c. The clay on the right
d. They will both make the water rise the same amount.

12. If A is greater than B, and B is greater than C, then C is ____ A.

a. greater than
b. the same as
c. less than
d. similar to
Appendix D: Response Sheet for Thesis

Name: ______________________
Number: ____________________

- Ask the child, “Are you good at puzzles or not so good at puzzles.”
  - Exact Response: ______________________________________________________________

- Puzzle 1 (Solvable)- Baseline Data
  - Show the child the Xerox copy of the completed puzzle (ask them what it is)
  - Record the length of time taken to complete the puzzle: ______________________
    ▪ Point out the smiley faces and ask the child how they feel Smiley Face Chosen: ____
    ▪ Any other verbal response(s) given and when it occurred: _______________________
  - Push the completed puzzle aside and move to puzzle 2

- Puzzle 2 (Unsolvable)
  - Show the child the Xerox copy of the completed puzzle (ask them what it is)
  - Allow the child 2 minutes to work on the puzzle
  - Point out the smiley faces and ask the child how they feel Smiley Face Chosen: ________
    ▪ Any other verbal response(s) given and when it occurred: _______________________
  - Push the puzzle aside as the child left it and move to puzzle 3

- Puzzle 3 (Unsolvable)
  - Show the child the Xerox copy of the completed puzzle (ask them what it is)
  - Allow the child 2 minutes to work on the puzzle
  - Point out the smiley faces and ask the child how they feel Smiley Face Chosen: ________
    ▪ Any other verbal response(s) given and when it occurred: _______________________
  - Push the puzzle aside as the child left it and move to puzzle 4

- Puzzle 4 (Unsolvable)
  - Show the child the Xerox copy of the completed puzzle (ask them what it is)
  - Allow the child 2 minutes to work on the puzzle
  - Point out the smiley faces and ask the child how they feel Smiley Face Chosen: ________
    ▪ Any other verbal response(s) given and when it occurred: _______________________
  - Push the puzzle aside as the child left it and move to puzzle 5

- Puzzle 5 (Solvable)
  - Show the child the Xerox copy of the completed puzzle (ask them what it is)
  - Point out the smiley faces and ask the child how they feel Smiley Face Chosen: ________
    ▪ Any other verbal response(s) given and when it occurred: _______________________

- Ask the child, “If you had lots of time right now, do you think you could finish any of these puzzles? And “If you tried your hardest, you very hardest, do you think you could do any of these puzzles? Yes or No?”
  - Exact Response: _________________________

- Show the child all five puzzles again and ask them which one they would like to work on again. After the puzzle is selected respond, “Good Choice” and ask the child why he or she chose that puzzle (if stated they don’t know or responds with a vague answer then you should prompt the child). IF UNSOLVABLE PUZZLE
IS CHOSE PROVIDE THE CHILD WITH ALL NECESSARY PIECES AND ALLOW THEM TO SOLVE THE PUZZLE.

- Show the child the remaining four puzzles and ask them which one they would like to work on again. After the puzzle is selected respond, “Good Choice” and ask the child why he or she chose that puzzle (if stated they don’t know or responds with a vague answer then you should prompt the child). IF UNSOLVABLE PUZZLE IS CHOSE PROVIDE THE CHILD WITH ALL NECESSARY PIECES AND ALLOW THEM TO SOLVE THE PUZZLE.

Exact Response:__________________________________________________________