



Society for Research in Child Development

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PRESS RELEASE

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Poor Reading Puts First Graders At Risk for Later Aggressive Behavior; Prosocial First Graders More Likely to Become Good Readers

Does your first grader help other children? Does he comfort other children when they are upset? If so, say a silent thanks –your child’s prosocial skills may predict good reading skills by the third grade. That’s the finding from a study published in the January/February 2006 issue of the journal *Child Development*. The study, from researchers from Stanford University, also finds that children with low reading skills in first and third grade are more likely to have relatively high aggressive behavior in third and fifth grades.

The researchers chose to explore this question in light of the fact that the social and academic realms in school are inextricably connected. “Children’s social behavior can promote or undermine their learning,” explains lead author Sarah Miles, a Ph.D. student at Stanford University, “and their academic performance may have implications for their social behavior.”

Although previous studies have shown that social skills and academic achievement were linked, this study is the first to look at these relationships over time, examine both aggressive and prosocial behavior and focus on low-income children who are particularly at risk for difficulties in school.

Ms. Miles and her co-author, Deborah Stipek, Ph.D., collected data at the end of each school year between 1996 and 2002. To assess literacy achievement, they gave each child a variety of reading and comprehension tests based on their grade level. To assess social skills, teachers who had study children in their classrooms completed a questionnaire assessing each child’s aggressive and prosocial behaviors.

The difference in the patterns found between aggressive behavior and literacy achievement, and prosocial behavior and literacy achievement, suggest that these two behaviors do not represent opposite ends of a continuum, noted Ms. Miles, but rather have distinct implications for children’s development.

“The findings illustrate how problems in one domain at school may lead to problems in another,” she said. Additionally, the findings on the connection between poor literacy achievement in first grade and the subsequent development of aggressive behavior support the importance of teaching reading well in the early grades of school.

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“Early intervention for children who are slow to catch on to literacy, such as one-on-one tutoring, may help stem the development of negative behavior that makes it difficult for children who have initial academic difficulties get on to a more successful pathway,” she noted. Overall, she noted, the study findings also clearly point to the importance of attending to the “whole” child.

“Children do not develop in particular domains independently of other domains,” she said. “To the contrary, social development and academic development are inextricably connected. Efforts to improve development in one domain will be more successful if attention is given to development in the other.”

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 77, Issue 1, *Contemporaneous and Longitudinal Associations between Social Behavior and Literacy Achievement in a Sample of Low-Income Elementary School Children*, by Miles S and Stipek D (Stanford University). Copyright 2006 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.