

Prosocial Behavior Education in Children

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Abstract:

Introduction: It is paradoxical that more attention is currently paid to negative features in children's and adolescents' behavior (aggressive behavior, bullying) than to the positive ones (helping, social support).

Purpose: This literature review describes how children's sensitivity to helping other people develops and how children acquire competences in helping.

Methods: The literature search was conducted in databases using keywords "child", "prosocial development" and "prosocial behavior". Publications (papers or monographs) published in English or Czech between 1989 and 2016 were retrieved.

Conclusions: The study identified the following sources of prosocial behavior: use of fairy-tale motifs in the case of babies (e. g. the motif of good deeds) and targeted family education with the use of direct and indirect procedures. Targeted education of children in preschool was accomplished by experienced teachers. Education in providing help and social support to schoolmates (including the so-called partnership and peer teaching) at elementary school was identified as a special case.

Key words: child, education, prosocial behavior, social support, helping; comforting.

1 Introduction

Helping other people, providing social support to those who are coping with stress situations are competences that children should be taught at school. Helping other people is the skill a person needs throughout the life. Based on these skills, families, work groups and communities work. As Wentzel (2015) notes, prosocial behavior was related positively to perspective taking and theory of mind abilities, empathy, and emotion regulation skills.

How the terms of prosocial behavior and altruism are defined? There are many definitions, so, we will choose only two of them. "Prosocial behavior refers to voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals. Prosocial behaviors are defined in term of their intended consequences for others; they are performed voluntary rather than under duress" (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 3). "Prosocial behavior is such behavior the target of which is to improve the situation of

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another person, whereas the helper is not obliged to provide the help and the receiver of the help is not an institution but an individual” (Zášková & Mlčák, 2009, p. 49).

Developmental and evolutionary psychologists have identified various domains of prosocial behavior, such as informing, helping, sharing, comforting, cooperating, volunteering, that are protecting someone from harm or bullying (Spivak & Durlak, 2015). According to specialists (e. g. Penner et al., 2005) we can think about prosocial behavior and study it in details at three different levels: micro-level, mezzo-level and macro-level. How do they differ? The micro-level takes interest in the genesis of prosocial behavior in individuals and also in differences among people, at the time when their prosocial tendencies are just being formed. The mezzo-level goes further and it deals with the behavior of the couple: the helper – the receiver of the help; it also deals with the situation in which social behavior takes place. Let us add that this is the level, which is studied in psychology and pedagogy most frequently. The macro-level concentrates on that prosocial behavior, which runs in social context, inside a group, class, school, or institution.

Besides the term “prosocial behavior”, professional literature uses the term altruism. “Altruism refers to one specific type of prosocial behavior – voluntary actions intended benefit another that are intrinsically motivated ... as concern and sympathy for others, or by values and self-rewards rather than personal gain” (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 3).

Where is the origin of prosocial behavior and helping others? In other words: when and how does the children’s sense for social support develop and take form? In which situations and from whom children learn to receive and provide social support? In the search for answers to these questions, we are interested not in “completed”, advanced support, but in support that is just arising, only forming itself. The problem is that the formation and functioning of “positive phenomena” is searched much less than the formation and functioning of negative ones. Reasons for that, in the case of children and adolescents, were clearly expressed by Burleson and Kunkel (1996): to understand the positive behavior of children and adolescents, to support it and develop it seemed in the past less important than to understand children’s aggression and to reduce its incidence.

2 Social support providing preparation of a child

We have ranged in the level of psychological categories so far. If we consider how the child used to be prepared for helping other people during past centuries, we cannot avoid - apart from targeted education in family – also telling fairy-tale. It presents natural indirect form of education which accompanies the child from a very young age.

What are the specifics of fairy-tales and in which way does helping others occur in their motifs? In his analysis, the Czech writer Karel Čapek expressed, in a slight overstatement, the main features of fairy-tales, when he wrote:

“They are neither magic nor supernatural, only a little bit unbelievable; they are too lovely, too successful, too happy for us so that we would be able to immediately and fully to accept them as real ... Literary theory of fairy-tales often deals with the question, where fairy-tales come from: if from India or Arabia, from prehistoric cosmogonies or literary sources. I would like to comment upon this that a whole range of fairy-tale motifs does not need to come actually from India but from the source a bit closer, actually from the general human experience” (Čapek, 1984, p. 115).

From many used fairy-tale motifs, K. Čapek set aside 11 general themes which occur in many world fairy-tales: fulfilled wish, gift, chance, discovery, magic wand, help, obstacles, success, excess, alien world, good deed. We will pay attention to the last-mentioned motif. Čapek writes about good deed in fairy-tales:

“Good deed. Give alms to a humped old woman, roll a stone aside the route, help the ant or baby bird in danger; every good deed will repay you by a big and mysterious reward, just at the moment you will most need it. But even we want to win the favor of fate by our good deeds; something inside us says, that it may be entered to our credit at some occasion, that we may bring about a kind of a positive change in the Universe or in our own life. It is not calculation, but a very quiet voice of trust; it is one of real fairy-tale feelings we experience in this sober world” (Čapek, 1984, p. 121).

Karel Čapek seems to have depicted several aspects of the education of children to helping other people; reciprocity of help; change to the good, which happens to the child himself; change to the good, which happens to a being in need; positive feelings of a helper, feeling which accompanies frankly intended and correctly provided help. Frequent occurrence of a good deed in fairy-tales (or condemnation of its absence) also indicates that human community has, since a long time ago, regarded helping to those who need it (and who deserve it) as a right thing and has inculcated it naturally into further generations.

3 Child education in family

How parents put emphasis on prosocial values, and how they show in particular prosocial behavior as examples for a child has been widely researched, however, with ambiguous results.

A strong influence of parental value hierarchy on prosocial behavior of children was found in the case of both parents, sometimes only in the case of father, sometimes it was not found in any parent. The age of children also probably comes into play – small children are usually more influenced by parents, in the case of adolescents, parental influence weakens and the influence of peers is getting stronger. Copying prosocial behavior of parents is frequent at children’s pre-school age, later causal relationships are more complicated. Numerous young people who participate in prosocial voluntary activities, however, state that they gained the basis of altruistic behavior and willingness to help other people in their families. Also, the uniqueness of a community, in which a particular family lives, membership in specific cultural, ethnic or religious group, come into play.

Köster, Schuhmacher and Kärtner propose “two prototypical pathways for the development of prosocial behavior, a relational and an autonomous pathway. Culture may be understood as shared meanings (cultural interpretations) and shared activities (cultural practices), which meet the ecological demands and the social structure of the environment” (Köster, Schuhmacher, & Kärtner, 2015, p. 73).

The relational pathway towards interpersonal responsibility can be met in small village communities where close neighbor relationships prevail. These cases are typical for the less developed areas. Parents provide living for a large family and children must take care of younger siblings and old and ill members of the family. As soon as they get older, they are led to hard work. They are inculcated with values like: to fulfil promises, to finish unfinished work, to share with others, to try hard to achieve good relationships with other community members. Parents socialize their children by inculcating them

with such rules as: it is necessary to be obedient, to fulfil instructions and commands of older people, to help the poor and needy, to do housework for the family so that the family and community can thrive. Parents, especially mothers, give tasks to their children clearly and briefly, they do not tolerate any discussion about the given tasks. They also do not allow any postponement of tasks or any dealing with anything else. In such background, the child is moving up the social scale step by step and starts to be accepted in the community social network. The child is getting more responsible, starts to understand the purpose in work and is motivated to prosocial behavior.

The second possibility is the autonomous pathway towards personal choice. Communities living in developed countries, in urban environments are a typical example of this eco-social context. Such family is usually not large, parents have their jobs and the child is not considered to be a welcome working force (as was the previous case), but he/she is considered an individual who should develop into a personality. Socialization is in progress through the children's duty to become independent, duty to update their assumptions, gain their professional skills, can make independent and correct decisions, stand up to the competition with others. Parents rather choose requests and explaining to set their tasks. They admit discussion, they try to solve the opposition and resistance of their child by amicable settlement. They lead their children to help within their family, afterwards even out of it step by step. They cultivate the feeling, that it is necessary to help people, that it is something like an obligation. The child starts to realize that there are situations, where a person must spontaneously, without an external invitation, it means in their own decision, help another person (Köster, Schuhmacher, & Kärtner, 2015).

After this general explanation, we can now proceed to the specific level. Educational procedures which parents apply to develop prosocial behavior in their children, form a specific group. We are presenting two types of them: direct and indirect procedures.

Among direct, explicit educational procedures belong: clear formulation of general requirements for the child's behavior and a clearly expressed parental expectation of morally acceptable behavior of the child. The child or adolescent must know what exactly is expected from him, what are the "game rules". Further, we also give more details for a child to get to know what will happen if they do not meet the requirements.

Giving concrete instructions regarding what the child is to do is a frequent educational procedure. Researches show that if children are given the instruction to help somebody, to share something by their parent, they will most likely do it. There are authors who suppose that a milder instruction, which includes the chance of option (it would be good to do it; you should help him but you don't have to) rather than a directive one, brings about stronger prosocial behavior in the child. The command effect, actually lasts, in the case of children, only for a shorter time (studies indicate a range of 11 days to 4 weeks), and then it is fading. More directive formulations are more suitable in younger children because their ability to understand the emotional world of other people, and their skill to orient themselves in changing social situations, are still limited. On the contrary, in the case of adolescents, rather milder formulations combined with individual parental example are more efficient. In the case, when the child or adolescent interprets some social situation in the way that they are personally responsible for its results, and that it is necessary to help somebody, then they try to help; especially when that can use that type of help they have learned by training. They are sure they will manage it.

The next type of direct educational influence is instructing children about what they should do or, on the contrary, should not do. Adults explain specifically how to act, in which situation such conduct is suitable and why it is necessary to act in such a way. On one hand, the child learns how the specific prosocial behavior is causally interrelated, and on the other hand, the child learns about the consequences brought by such behavior. Researchers are, besides other things, interested in the parental ways of explaining and using arguments. They stated that parents appeal to children's sense of justice, and they point out the impact of child's behavior on other people, they refer to the social standards or to authorities. Some parents moralize, some factually analyze contexts with their children. These are usually just mothers who form the basis of prosocial behavior in their children. At the age of 2–3 years, mothers explain them what is usually done and what is not, whereas the explanation is not about neutral speech, but on the contrary, it is emotionally very rich and thus effective.

For both educational procedures, it stands that they develop prosocial behavior in children more effectively if they are not forced by parents, only "from the position of power", but as a part of democratic education. Developing the independence and responsibility of children, their inner moral standards' acceptance is also kept in mind.

The second distinctive category is formed by the indirect educational procedures. They include the explanation of intentions or strategic contemplation explanation. A parent is in the position of an example, of a model of behavior, talks with a child about their own consideration in a specific situation. What goes through their mind before they decide to give help to another person. Although it is a less effective procedure than the demonstration of the real action to a child, it is valuable as well because it gives a child or an adolescent the opportunity to look into those thinking that are important for prosocial behavior.

Persuading a child is another procedure. The parent performs as an expert in specific norms and tries to influence the knowledge of a child as well as their attitudes. The parent appeals to the child's feelings but leaves the final decision to the child. The child's or adolescent's attention is concentrated by the parent on the positive effects of prosocial behavior towards other people as well as towards a child him/herself (help reciprocity, positive response of other children and things like that).

The next option is joining helping activities by children. The child is invited by a parent or an older sibling to cooperate in the activities, the aim of which is to make a complicated situation easier for other people by helping them, by giving them some advice or by taking a concrete action. In an unforced way, within ordinary living situations, the child experiences what it means to help others, gains direct experience with supportive behavior and with positive response to their action.

For the time being we have put aside the problem that parents – however they are trying to educate their child – are in fact amateurs in the role of educators. In all the cases where some educational problems arise even at the pre-school age of a child, parents should ask professionals for help, who should afterwards work purposefully with these parents. From the professional point of view, we speak about behavioral parent training and it is considered an effective intervention method for pre-school and school-aged youth with behavior problems.

The program called IYPT – Incredible Years Parent Training (Webster & Stratton, 2001) is typical example of it. There exists a meta-analysis, which studied effectiveness of this type of program and it included 39 studies (Menting et al., 2013). Among others, it

evaluated the context (treatment, selective prevention or indicated prevention), intervention characteristics (training components, the number of IYPT sessions offered, the total number of sessions offered to parents, and the number of sessions attended), child characteristics (age, gender, initial severity of child behavior, the extent to which the behaviour was considered a problem, and clinical symptom levels), family characteristics (single parenthood, ethnic minority, education, and being at-risk). Analyses of studies revealed that the IYPT is effective in diminishing disruptive behavior and increasing prosocial behavior, according to parents, teachers, and observers. Positive effect-size was found for disruptive behavior ($d = 0.27$) and prosocial behavior ($d = 0.23$).

4 Education of a child at school

Children do not live only in their own families. Gradually they integrate into other communities besides the family. A child usually first enters a kindergarten. Before dealing with the prosocial behavior education of a child in kindergarten in more details, it is necessary to recall its contribution. Prosocial education "... not only for compassionate society but also for classrooms. In view of the accumulated evidence suggesting that young children's prosocial behaviour makes important contributions to their long-term school adjustment, academic success, and social and psychological wellbeing, prosocial development is highly relevant for early education and intervention." (Spivak & Durlak, 2015).

In the kindergarten, the child stays for long time in the group of peers and without parental presence for the first time. Peers are of various personal peculiarities, from different social and cultural backgrounds and the child must learn to get on with them. For the child and for the professional team as well, a new specific social situation arises.

Not surprisingly, kindergarten teachers must have a special training and they should go through further education. Let us show that on the example of a publication for kindergarten teachers and for parents. It is a handbook on pre-school children's prosocial behavior education (Beaty, 1999). The author promotes the attitude, which tries to develop primarily positive behavior, not only to prevent manifestations of negative behavior. It shows, how to cultivate right types of prosocial behavior in children: self-confidence, empathy, friendship, generosity, willingness to comply with wishes, self-control, cooperation, respect for others. The handbook includes a questionnaire looking into prosocial behavior of a child as well as a questionnaire inquiring teacher's prosocial educational procedures. Both questionnaires diagnose how successful developing of prosocial behavior in children is, and where the possible shortcomings are.

The importance of the detection and development of prosocial skills in children, already in kindergartens, is shown in the longitudinal research by Jones, Greenberg and Crowley (2015). The total sample size was 753 children (non-high-risk, normative group, $n = 386$ and high-risk group, $n = 367$). Associations between measured outcomes in kindergarten and outcomes 13 to 19 years later (1991–2000), were evaluated. Statistically significant associations were found between measured prosocial communication skills in kindergarten and key young adult outcomes across multiple domains of education (participants graduated from high school on time, completed a college degree), employment (obtained stable employment in young adulthood, employed full time in young adulthood), criminal activity (early prosocial skills were significantly inversely

predictive of any involvement with police before adulthood), and mental health (results were mixed).

A child advances from kindergarten to elementary school and becomes a pupil. Elementary school education should teach a pupil to be able to share experiences with other children, to participate in collective work, communicate properly, cooperate, and help. This is usually prevented by traditional classroom teaching, where pupils learn “next to each other” and they are not to cooperate (see usual appeal “it’s every man for himself”). For prosocial behavior development, cooperative teaching and learning are much more suitable (Kasíková, 1997). To be more precise, it is such a form of cooperation, which is, by the author, called cooperation in the form of assistance, when one pupil helps the other. The relationship between the helper and receiver of the help is usually initiated and directed by the teacher; the social roles of pupils are divided: one pupil (usually of the same age but more competent or older and more competent) teaches and the second pupil tries to learn under their leadership – this is peer teaching.

M. Webb (1987) states that this type of teaching newly defines the role of a teacher. The teacher is not the only one who teaches pupils anymore. The pupil in the role of the teacher has specific pros: they are closer to his peers in terms of age, they can understand their problems connected with learning better, they can more easily put themselves in their way of thinking.

Pupils are not shy to seek help, they are not afraid to confess their ignorance. They identify with them as with their models more easily because it is, from the children’s point of view, easier to approach the level their peer has gained than the level of their teacher. Their schoolmates can provide feedback more often than the teacher and are able to provide it in a more understandable and acceptable way for them.

Peer teaching is not profitable only for the pupil being taught. The pupils who teach their schoolmates are gaining as well. In his role of the tutor, they develop their knowledge and skills (they do not want to get embarrassed), their self-confidence, self-respect and self-trust are growing. They experience the feeling of responsibility for the quality of their help and for results of his charges. He himself deepens his view of schoolwork by explaining it, by reacting to various mistakes and naive questions.

Peer teaching improves the school results of pupils, usually of those who are weaker, and also of pupils who do not master the language of the majority very well, pupils from the disadvantaged social background and pupils of different cultural and ethnic origins. It also improves the pupils’ attitudes towards learning, the subject and the school generally. It also has a positive impact on pupils which have some problems in establishing and maintaining relations with schoolmates or lack the ability to cooperate. Peer teaching, thus, works on the principle of mutual reward among children or adolescents and this way it contributes to the development of the skill to be a social support to another person.

Except peer teaching, another form exists – reciprocal helping among pupils. This is a relatively complicated phenomenon which is not much empirically investigated at our schools. In the school life reality, the spontaneous, more permanent and positive cooperation among pupils is not so common.

However, “illegal” cooperation is more common – prompting or copying during oral or written examination (Mareš, 2005; Vrbová, 2013). It is not only the fault of pupils themselves, but also of some teachers’ inappropriate demands, schools putting emphasis only on performance-related indicators and not on understanding the schoolwork, using

of school report grades as the main criteria for being admitted to higher levels of schools. At the same time, there are still only a relatively few pedagogical situations, when pupils can or even must officially cooperate.

So, it is no wonder that we meet with some complaints. Statements of pupils of the 8th grade of elementary schools are examples of that. A boy: If a person needs some help, they don't much want to help ... A girl: They are not interested in the fact that I need to get an advice. In case they need, then I am good for them. At school, most people are interested only in their own grades ...

We have described how teaching at schools is realized (or could be realized) to help to develop prosocial behavior within various school subjects. Except this, since September 1, 2010, the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport inserted into The Frame Educational Program for elementary and secondary education a new additional educational subject – Ethical education. As concerns its subject matter, ethical education includes ten different topics – two of them explicitly concern our problem: topic no. 9 – Prosocial behavior in personal relationships. Help, sharing, cooperation, friendship; and topic no. 10 – Prosocial behavior in public life. Solidarity and social problems. Schools thus have the opportunity to introduce prosocial behavior to pupils with a concrete goal and also to develop the relevant skills for that.

In other countries, intervention programs designed to prevent aggression among pupils through developing their prosocial behavior have already been verified. The Canadian preventive and intervention program called Roots of Empathy (ROE) is one of them. This is a program for children from kindergartens to the 8th grade which lasts for 9 months. Four different curricula are available: kindergarten, 1st to 3rd grade, 4th to 6th grade, and 7th and 8th grade. The main goals of ROE are to 1) develop children's social and emotional understanding; 2) promote children's prosocial behaviors and decrease their aggressive behaviors, and 3) increase children's knowledge about infant development and effective parenting practices (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012). Empiric research included a quasi-experimental control-group pre-test–post-test, multi-informant design with 585 4th- to 7th-grade children from 28 classrooms. And what are conclusions of this research? Children in intervention classrooms showed significant improvement across several of the domains assessed: self-reports of causes for infant crying, peer nominations of prosocial behaviors, and teacher reports of proactive and relational aggression. Self-reported empathy and perspective taking showed no significant changes (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012, p. 1).

5 Czech school investigation

One of the few Czech studies was inspired by the research of the German author G. Lind (1997). The aim was to identify the frequency of reciprocal helping among elementary school pupils and to study, by a hypothetical situation, the relationship between pupils' willingness to help a schoolmate and the degree of sense of responsibility for the fail rate of a schoolmate being in danger of failing. The pilot research (Mareš, Ježek, & Ludvíček, 2003) indicated that in the sample of 185 pupils of 6th and 8th grade elementary school pupils, helping among pupils at school is not a common matter. However, pupils attach quite high importance to reciprocal helping. They feel some moral duty to help their schoolmates in trouble and they obviously were (to a certain extend) willing to help. However, the question if a pupil would be willing to help their schoolmate is not unambiguous. It includes at least three aspects which

complicate the situation: 1. Motivation to help the schoolmate who is in trouble; 2. The pupil's subjectively perceived self-efficacy in the given school subject, 3. The pupil's subjectively perceived self-efficacy to help other people. Their motivation to help a schoolmate and the lack of self-efficacy were just disputed in the case of many boys: I would quite like to help him, but I guess I would be of little use for him.; I am not much better than he is.

In the case of Czech pupils (as well as the German ones), distortion, which, long ago, Allport called pluralistic ignorance, appeared: majority of pupils in the class said that they would have helped their schoolmate. At the same time, each of them individually thinks that they will be only one of a few willing to help a schoolmate in trouble, whereas most of others are probably not willing.

What did the solution of this hypothetical situation show? Provided the schoolmate in trouble does not receive help in the class and failed, nearly half of the pupils would rather considerably feel own co-responsibility for that failure. Differences in pupils' opinions obviously depend on gender as well – girls considered reciprocal help at school more important than boys.

They also felt a greater duty to help and they were more willing to help. If the schoolmate failed, they would experience higher rate of co-responsibility for his failure than boys. In this research, differences in opinions may also depend on age – younger pupils were much more willing to help than the older pupils.

6 Conclusions

In the Czech Republic, the topic of prosocial behavior of pupils and its development has officially got into elementary school curriculum. In the view of many teachers, these are only the “soft skills”, which can be practiced and verified only with difficulties. Contrary to more developed countries, in our country, neither intervention programs nor empirical studies of prosocial behavior of children and adolescents appear in a considerable number. However, this is the task which should not be postponed for a long time.

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