Longitudinal Relations Among Positivity, Perceived Positive School Climate, and Prosocial Behavior in Colombian Adolescents

Bernadette P. Luengo Kanacri  
*P. Universidad Católica de Chile*

Nancy Eisenberg  
*Arizona State University*

Eriona Thartori and Concetta Pastorelli  
*Sapienza Università di Roma*

Liliana M. Uribe Tirado  
*Universidad San Buenaventura, Medellín*

Maria Gerbino and Gian V. Caprara  
*Sapienza Università di Roma*

Bidirectional relations among adolescents’ positivity, perceived positive school climate, and prosocial behavior were examined in Colombian youth. Also, the role of a positive school climate in mediating the relation of positivity to prosocial behaviors was tested. Adolescents (N = 151; Mage of child in Wave 1 = 12.68, SD = 1.06; 58.9% male) and their parents (N = 127) provided data in two waves (9 months apart). A model of bidirectional relations between positivity and perceived positive school climate emerged. In addition, adolescents with higher levels of perceived positive school climate at age 12 showed higher levels of prosocial behaviors in the following year. Positive school climate related positivity to adolescents’ prosocial behavior over time.

A growing body of research indicates that the tendency to enact prosocial behavior—voluntary and intentional behavior that benefits another (e.g., sharing, helping, and caring; see Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006)—predicts better adjustment and less psychological maladjustment in childhood and adolescence (e.g., Kokko, Tremblay, Lacourse, Nagin, & Vitaro, 2006). Furthermore, the tendency to engage in prosocial behavior has been found to be positively associated with diverse positive developmental outcomes such as academic achievement (e.g., Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Caprara, Luengo Kanacri, Zuffianò, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2015; Yates & Youniss, 1996), self-esteem (e.g., Zuffianò et al., 2014), and civic engagement (e.g., Luengo Kanacri et al., 2014). Consequently, mechanisms and processes that support the development of prosocial behavior appear to be relevant for understanding positive development more generally.

Positive youth development (PYD) theorists, who are interested in fostering positive development in a broad sense, have argued for the importance of developing, within the context of schools, caring attitudes toward others and prosocial behavior (Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, & Theokas, 2005). In recent decades, educators and scholars have also increasingly recognized the importance of a school’s climate for promoting positive development (see Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013). Although much of the theory and research on school climate...