

BALANCING DREAMS AND REALITY: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS AND CHILDREN'S INTERESTS

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Every child is born with a unique set of talents and passions. These talents and passions may be shaped by their genes, environment, or their experiences. As children grow up, they are exposed to their parents' dreams and expectations. These dreams and expectations can be explicit, such as when a parent tells their child that they want them to be a doctor or a lawyer. Or, they can be implicit, such as when a parent values academic achievement and success over other things.

When children's dreams and passions align with their parents' dreams and expectations, it can be a smooth journey. However, when there is a conflict between the two, it can be a difficult and stressful experience for both the child and the parents. The disconnection between parental dreams and children's interests was not merely a matter of preference; it was affecting their motivation, their performance, and even their emotional well-being. They may find themselves pursuing a path that did not resonate with their hearts.

Gegenfurtner et al. (2020) discussed the negative effects of aspiration-expectation inconsistency on student outcomes. Aspiration-expectation inconsistency occurs when there is a mismatch between a student's own expectations for their academic achievement and their parents' aspirations for them. The authors found that students who experienced aspiration-expectation inconsistency were more likely to experience stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem. They were also less likely to achieve their academic goals.

This finding is important because it highlights the importance of parental expectations being aligned with students' own expectations. When there is a mismatch between these two, it can lead to negative consequences for students' academic and emotional well-being.

Parents can help to avoid aspiration-expectation inconsistency by having open and honest conversations with their children about their academic goals. By understanding what their children want to achieve, parents can better support them in reaching their goals. Additionally, parents should avoid pressuring their children to achieve unrealistic goals. Instead, they should focus on helping their children develop a strong sense of self-efficacy and motivation.

Another study by Schoon and Burger (2022) explored the incongruence between parental and adolescent educational aspirations and its impact on academic attainment. The study found that under-ambitious parents and overambitious parents both had negative effects on academic outcomes, suggesting the importance of aligning parental and children's aspirations.

This finding again highlights the importance of parents and children having open and honest conversations about their educational aspirations. By understanding each other's goals and expectations, parents and children can work together to create a plan that is both realistic and motivating. This can help to ensure that children are on track to achieve their educational goals, regardless of what their parents may want for them.

The paper also discusses the importance of parents being supportive of their children's interests, even if they do not align with the parents' own aspirations. When parents are supportive of their children's interests, it helps children to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy and motivation. This can lead to children being more likely to achieve their educational goals, even if they are not the same goals as their parents.

Parental pressure can have both positive and negative effects on academic achievement (Khan et al., 2017). When parental pressure is supportive and encouraging, it can lead to positive outcomes for children, such as high self-esteem, social competence, and academic. However, when parental pressure is excessive or controlling, it can lead to negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

Parental autonomy support is a parenting style that emphasizes the importance of children's independence and self-direction (Pomerantz et al., 2013). Parents who provide autonomy support allow their children to make their own choices, set their own goals, and learn from their own mistakes. They also provide children with emotional support and encouragement, and they respect children's privacy and personal space.

Parental control is a parenting style that emphasizes the importance of obedience and conformity. Parents who provide parental control set clear rules and expectations for their children, and they closely monitor their children's behaviour. They may also use rewards and punishments to encourage or discourage certain behaviours.

Children who are raised with autonomy support tend to have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and greater academic achievement (Pomerantz et al., 2013). They are also less likely to experience anxiety, depression, and other emotional problems. On the other hand, children who are raised with parental control tend to have lower self-esteem, poorer social skills, and lower academic achievement. They are also more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and other emotional problems.

Addressing the problem of students being nudged into careers or paths they do not have a passion for is a complex task that requires more than just clear communication; it demands understanding, empathy, and collaboration. Parents must be willing to offer support even when these aspirations diverge from their own expectations.

Furthermore, recognising each student as an individual, with unique talents and passions, is essential in nurturing their emotional well-being and paving the way for long-term fulfilment. This individualized approach requires flexibility to adapt to changes, an understanding of cultural and generation.

In acknowledging the importance of aligning educational paths with individual passions, we must also recognize a crucial and often overlooked fact: that a student's passion and interest can be the most powerful driver of success and fulfilment. While parental guidance and expectations certainly have a place in shaping a child's future, they should never overshadow or suppress what truly motivates and inspires the child.

Imagine the potential that can be unleashed when a student's innate love for a subject or field is allowed to flourish. Instead of pursuing a path defined by someone else, they become the authors of their own destiny. The enthusiasm and dedication that come from pursuing a passion can lead not only to academic success but also to a fulfilling career and life influences, and a strong focus on building resilience and independence in each child.

The complex interplay between parental aspirations and children's individual passions is more than an academic concern; it is a fundamental aspect of human development. While these aspirations can propel children toward higher educational outcomes, they also bring potential risks such as stress and anxiety. By carefully balancing encouragement, support, and individual interests, a harmonious relationship can be cultivated. This balance fosters healthier emotional growth and leads to authentic life paths that resonate with the child's true self. The responsibility lies with all of us—parents, educators, and society—to create an environment where these sometimes-conflicting forces can coexist, guiding our children towards a fulfilling future filled with both personal success and contentment.

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