

Differences in Preschool Educators' and Parents' Interactive Behavior during a Cooperative Task with Children

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Abstract : Introduction: In everyday life experiences, children are solicited to cooperate with others. Often they perform cooperative tasks with their parents (e.g., setting the table for dinner) or in school. These tasks are very significant since children may learn to turn taking in interactions, to participate as well to accept others participation, to trust, to respect, to negotiate, to self-regulate their emotions, etc. Indeed, cooperative tasks contribute to children social, motor, cognitive and linguistic development. Therefore, it is important to study what learning, social and affective experiences are provided to children during these tasks. In this study, we included parents and preschool educators. Parents and educators are both significant: educative, interactive and affective figures. Rarely parents and educators behavior have been compared in studies about cooperative tasks. Parents and educators have different but complementary styles of interaction and communication. Aims: Therefore, this study aims to compare parents and educators' (of both genders) interactive behavior (cooperativity, empathy, ability to challenge the child, reciprocity, elaboration) during a play/individualized situation involving a cooperative task. Moreover, to compare parents and educators' behavior with girls and boys. Method: A quasi-experimental study with 45 dyads educators-children and 45 dyads with parents and their children. In this study, participated children between 3 and 5 years old and with age appropriate development. Adults and children were videotaped using a variety of materials (e.g., pencils, wood, wool) and tools (e.g., scissors, hammer) to produce together something of their choice during 20-minutes. Each dyad (one adult and one child) was observed and videotaped independently. Adults and children agreed and consented to participate. Experimental conditions were suitable, pleasant and age appropriated. Results: Findings indicate that parents and teachers offer different learning experiences. Teachers were more likely to challenged children to explore new concepts and to accept children ideas. In turn, parents gave more support to children actions and were more likely to use their own example to teach children. Multiple regression analysis indicates that parent versus educator status predicts their behavior. Gender of both children and adults affected the results. Adults acted differently with girls and boys (e.g., adults worked more cooperatively with girls than boys). Male participants supported more girls participation rather than boys while female adults allowed boys to make more decisions than girls. Discussion: Taking our results and past studies, we learn that different qualitative interactions and learning experiences are offered by parents, educators according to parents and children gender. Thus, the same child needs to learn different cooperative strategies according to their interactive patterns and specific context. Yet, cooperative play and individualized activities with children generate learning opportunities and benefits children participation and involvement.

Keywords : early childhood education, parenting, gender, cooperative tasks, adult-child interaction

Conference Title : ICECET 2018 : International Conference on Early Childhood Education and Technology

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : July 19-20, 2018