

Caregivers' Interaction Style & Young Children's Communication & Symbolic Profile

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Introduction

Because parents exert considerable influence on their children's development, it is important to evaluate parent-child interaction (Mahoney & Wheeden, 1997; Warren & Yoder, 1996).

Beyond examining the performance of children, evaluations should examine the quantity and quality of adults' participation in the interaction (Comfort & Farran, 1994; MacDonald & Carroll, 1994; Mahoney & Robinson, 1992).

Observations of parent-child interactions can serve to identify the characteristics parents possess that make them effective teachers in the children's natural environment (Mahoney & Wheeden, 1997). Parents and interventionists can use this information by adopting styles that will help them become more effective language facilitators.

Currently, there are few measures specifically designed to examine parent behaviors as they occur in relationship to children's social and communicative skills (MacDonald & Carroll, 1994).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the interactive and communicative styles that may influence or be influenced by young children's social and communicative skills.

Method

Participants

Children who were generally considered healthy and typically developing and their families were recruited through one pediatrician and three local childcare facilities.

Twenty families participated in the study.

Demographics

Child's Age (months)		Gender	
Mean (SD)	20.6 (1.1)	Female	11
Range	18.6-22.8	Male	9
Birth Order		Race	
First born	7	Caucasian	18
Later born	13	African American	2
Mothers' Educ. Level		Fathers' Educ. Level	
Mean (SD)	15.5 (2.0)	Mean (SD)	14.7 (2.7)
Range	12-19	Range	11-20

Procedure

Using the procedures of the Communication and Symbolic Behavior Scales – Developmental Profile – Research Edition (CSBS-DP; Wetherby & Prizant, 1998), behavior samples (BSs) were collected and scored for these 20 children at 20 months of age.

Immediately following the BSs, the parents were asked to play with their children, as they normally would for approximately 5-10 minutes while the clinician left the room. A standard set of novel toys was provided. A graduate student, who was instructed not to interact with the families, videotaped the parent-child interactions.

Six minutes of the parents' and children's communication were transcribed and coded from video using SALT (Miller & Chapman, 1998) conventions.

Due to the frequent unintelligibility of the children's utterances, their communication was coded in regard to its timeliness to the parents' communication and the number and types of turns taken.

The parents' communication was coded on 3 levels (Calhoun, Rose, & Pendergast, 1991; Clark & Seifer, 1985; Hart & Risley, 1992, 1995; Wetherby & Prizant, 1983; Wilcox, 1992).

Timeliness refers to the speed in which the next utterance occurs.

Relatedness refers the current utterance's relationship to the topic of the previous utterance.

Discourse function categorizes the utterances in terms of the types of responses they prompt.

Reliability

Point-by-point analysis was used to determine intercoder reliability. Reliability was calculated by dividing the total number of agreements by the total number of agreements plus disagreements.

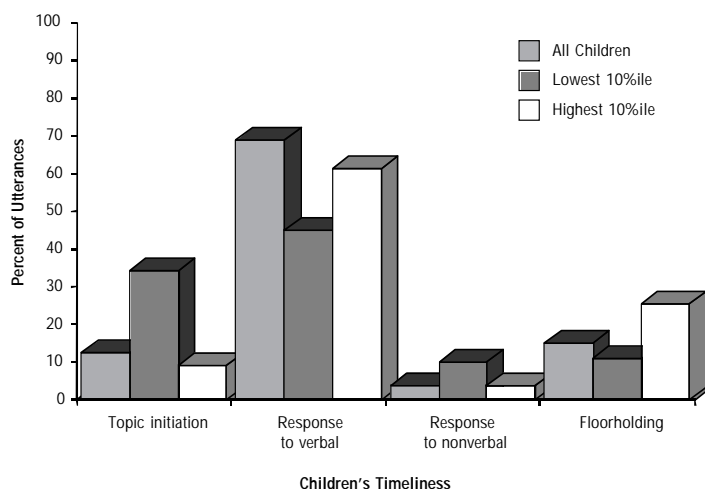
	Mean (SD)	Range
Overall	78.50(7.12)	69-86
Timeliness	75.17(8.57)	62-85
Relatedness	77.17(10.38)	65-93
Discourse function	88.00(5.29)	80-93

Results

The children were in the intentional communication to early first words stages of communication development. During the interactions, the majority of children did not produce at least 50 utterances and so their sample could not be analyzed according to mean length of utterance and type token ratio.

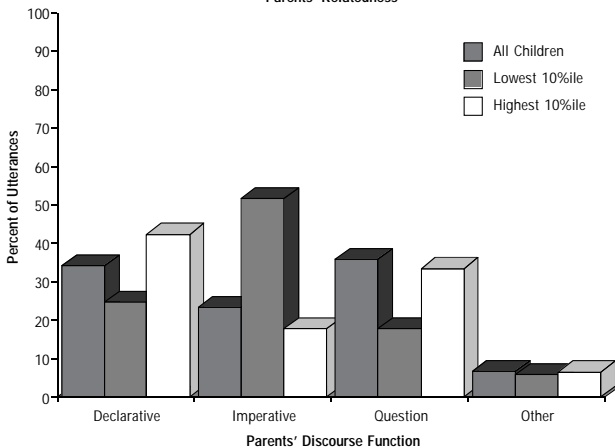
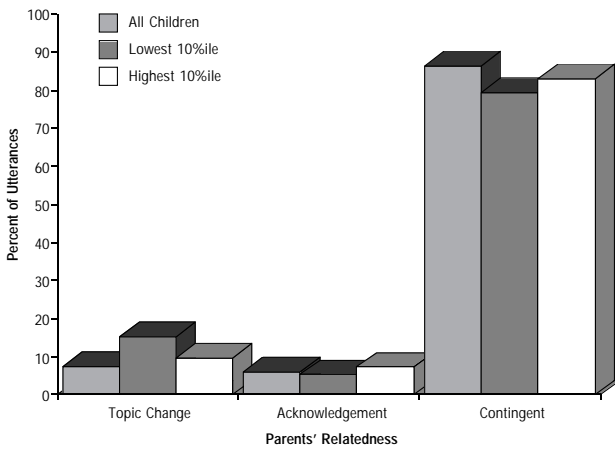
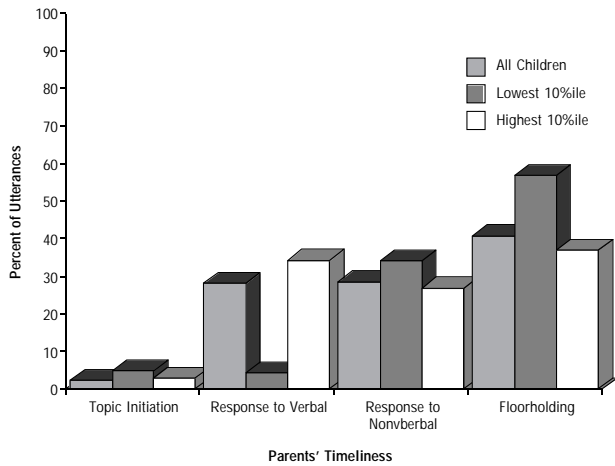
Children's Communication

	Total # of turns	# of verbal turns	# of intelligible turns	# of unintelligible turns	# of nonverbal turns	Behavior sample %iles
Mean	29.85	28.55	15.15	13.40	1.30	82.50
Median	28.50	27.00	11.50	11.00	1.00	72.00
Range	5-53	4-53	0-40	4-33	0-5	5-99
SD	2.06	13.48	11.81	7.44	1.45	27.42
Mean of lowest 10%ile	9.50	8.00	0.50	7.50	1.50	10.50
Mean of highest 10%ile	34.50	33.50	23.00	10.50	1.00	99.00



Parent's Communication

	Total number of utterances	Mean length of utterance	Type token ratio	Number of utterances per turn	Number of words per turn
Mean	76.36	3.93	0.37	4.42	15.01
Median	74.00	3.85	0.38	2.81	10.22
Range	34-125	2.75-5.58	0.23-0.50	1.44-18.75	5.41-49.50
SD	26.46	0.67	0.07	4.13	11.74
Mean of lowest 10%ile	98.50	3.06	0.30	15.48	44.40
Mean of highest 10%ile	54.00	4.17	0.46	2.95	11.22



Discussion

The parents had a high percentage of utterances that were responses to their children's communication and were related to their children's topics. This may be a factor of the setting, which had a specific set of toys and a defined play space. Further research is needed to examine parent-child interactions in settings that are less defined such as a larger play space or at home.

There were large differences on most interaction measures between the parents of the children in the lowest 10%ile and highest 10%ile on language scores. The parents of the children in the lowest 10%ile tended to use more floorholding behaviors resulting in unbalanced turntaking in these interactions. In addition, these parents used more imperatives, frequently demanding action from their children. On the other hand, the parents and children in the highest 10%ile exhibited more balanced turntaking. The parents in this group used declaratives and questions more often and were generally commenting on and confirming their children's topics.

Future Directions

In these brief parent-child interaction samples, many of the children produced only a few verbal utterances. The children's language sample would not be sufficient for making decisions about young children's social and communicative skills. Clinicians need to be aware that the parent-child interaction may provide a wealth of information about the parents' communicative and interaction style, but may contribute little information to the clinicians' understanding of the children's skills. Therefore, child-focused evaluation tools, in addition to the parent-child interaction, need to be used to examine the children's communicative and interaction skills.

This research involves only one aspect of parent-child interaction (i.e., parents and children in play). Research should continue to investigate parent-child interactions across several contexts including daily routines such as mealtime and bathing. Researchers should evaluate what changes children make in their social and communicative behaviors when parents begin to apply strategies that increase their responsivity and contingency to their children's communication (Comfort & Farran, 1994; MacDonald & Carroll, 1994).

Selected references

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