

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Evidence for General and Domain-Specific Elements of Teacher-Child Interactions: Associations With Preschool Children's Development

Hamre, B., Hatfield, B., Pianta, R., & Jamil, F. (2014). Evidence for general and domain-specific elements of teacher-child interactions: Associations with preschool children's development. *Child Development, 85*(3), 1257-1274.
doi:10.1111/cdev.12184

SUMMARY: Teachers' strategies and interactions with students may influence child development outcomes. The effects of both general (e.g., responsive teaching) and specific (e.g., positive management, routines, cognitive facilitation) child-teacher interaction factors on child development were examined in 325 early childhood Head Start classrooms. Responsive teaching was associated with positive child development across social and cognitive domains, while positive management and routines were associated with better child inhibitory control, and cognitive facilitation was associated with gains in early language and literacy skills.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Children in classrooms with teachers providing more responsive interactions (i.e., demonstrating awareness of children's emotional, behavioral, and cognitive cues and making active efforts to respond in supportive ways) demonstrated greater gains in cognitive, self-regulatory, and relational functioning.
- Teachers' positive management of behavior and routines and cognitive stimulation was associated with better child inhibitory control.
- Teachers' cognitive facilitation was associated with greater child gains in early language and literacy skills.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with local preschool programs to ensure that accessible, low-cost education and care are available for military children
- Educate community preschool staff about unique circumstances or difficulties that military children may face and the behavioral and emotional impacts possible

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information to military families regarding local preschool programs with high-quality teachers and instruction
- Provide military parents with a guide that includes important qualities of preschool programs and teachers to aid parents in choosing high-quality programs for their children

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional development for teachers about instructional interactions and responsive teaching strategies
- Support military preschool programming with low student to teacher ratios, enabling teachers to spend more individual time with children

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Teachers in 401 classrooms were participants in a larger study of Head Start examining professional development and teaching style; after distribution of program packets to students' parents, 81% of all classrooms had at least one child participate in the study.
- Child-teacher relationship data were assessed at the beginning of the school year (teacher-report), child cognitive and self-regulation data were assessed in both the fall and spring (child assessment), and child-teacher interactions were assessed from January to mid-March (researcher observation).
- The impact of responsive teaching and positive behavior and routine management on children's cognitive and social development were examined across a year of preschool.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 325 preschool teachers (96% female) with an average age of 42.40 years (SD = 10.79) and 1,407 preschool children (51% female) with an average age of 4.17 years (SD = 0.47).
- Teachers were 47% Black, 33% White, 13% Latino, 4% Asian American, and 4% another race/ethnicity; Students were 47% Black, 34% Latino, 11% White, 2% Asian American, and 5% another race/ethnicity.
- Teachers had an average of 14.50 years of experience (SD = 9.37) and 15.90 years of education (SD = 1.62), with 20% holding advanced degrees.

LIMITATIONS

- Other unmeasured variables (e.g., class size, school resources, class content areas) may have contributed to the findings.
- There is very little information offered regarding the teacher professional development intervention in the larger study, and it is unclear how this may have influenced results.
- Observation ratings of teacher-child interactions had relatively low inter-rater reliability.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how these variables may differ across different school subjects (e.g., math, history, reading)
- Compare outcomes of children in Head Start programs and other types of preschools across the variables examined (e.g., teacher responsiveness, child-teacher interactions)
- Explore methods of parent education or information (e.g., newsletters, online modules, parent learning groups) that may help parents to use similar responsiveness and management of behavior and routines at home to maintain consistency

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