

Parent-Child Interaction and Children's Engagement with and Learning of a Causal System: A Conversation Card Manipulation

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Abstract

Numerous investigations of parent-child interaction suggest that higher levels of collaboration between parents and children during free play results in children's greater engagement with the activity. A concern with these findings is that parents who are less collaborative in setting goals tend to have children who are younger than parents who are more collaborative or hands off. These children might be less naturally engaged with the activity. The present study assigned parents and 3-4-year-olds (N=82; 44 boys and 38 girls) to one of three conditions, in which parents were instructed to be directive, collaborative, or more hands-off as the dyad learned a novel causal system. Regardless of the assigned condition, children whose parents were actually more collaborative during the interaction played longer with the causal system, suggesting they were more engaged by the activity. These data suggest that the actual nature of the parent-child interaction during a free play activity relates to children's engagement, but also that parents' natural interactive with children is not easy to manipulate.