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Different Types of Teacher-Child Interactions Support Children's Development in Different Areas

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

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Teachers' daily interactions with children are crucial to making sure they're ready for school. Many state early childhood systems and the federal Office of Head Start consider teacher-child interactions when they measure programs' quality. But research hasn't always been clear about which aspects of interactions are most important to how children do academically and socially. A new study that used a novel approach to analyzing data in this area has identified which types of teacher-child interactions support children's learning and development in which areas.

The study, by researchers at the University of Virginia, Oregon State University, and Clemson University, appears in the journal *Child Development*. It sheds light on a topic that's been the focus of recent reforms in early childhood policy.

Researchers studied about 1,400 preschoolers and 325 early childhood teachers from across the country. They looked at the ways teachers taught as well as how the children developed academically and socially, and how they regulated their behavior.

They found that it was not just the quality of instructional interactions that mattered for children's academic progress. What the researchers termed responsive teaching, which involved teachers' sensitivity in responding to the children as well as their fostering of positive relationships and respect for the children's autonomy, contributed to multiple aspects of the children's development, including their language and literacy development but also their ability to hold information in memory and the quality of their relationships.

Taking into account responsive teaching, teachers also varied in how well they structured the classroom environment and provided clear and consistent rules and routines. Interactions that conveyed positive rules and routines were most important to children's emerging ability to regulate their own behavior. Above and beyond responsive teaching, what the study called cognitive facilitation—engaging in language-rich and challenging instruction—was also critical to the children's academic progress.

"The results provide new insight into the ways teachers' interactions with young children support their growth in a variety of areas," according to Bridget K. Hamre, associate research professor at the University of Virginia, who led the study.

"An exclusive focus on enhancing instruction in preschool classes may fail to have as meaningful an effect as a more balanced approach that also emphasizes responsive interactions," Hamre concludes.

The study was funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

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Summarized from *Child Development*, Evidence for General and Domain Specific Elements of Teacher-Child Interactions: Associations with Preschool Children's Development by Hamre, BK (University of Virginia), Hatfield, B (Oregon State University), Pianta, RC (University of Virginia), Jamil, FM (Clemson University).
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