

21st

EECERA annual conference

Education from birth : research, practices
and educational policy.

Geneva, Switzerland, 14th -17th September 2011

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Gender differences in adult-child-interactions in pre-school

Presentation on the 21st EECERA annual conference, 15.9.2011, Geneva/Switzerland

Abstract

In the last decades, research has left it in no doubt that men and women interact different with boys and girls. With new paradigms and research settings attachment theory research could show that women tend to emphasize the attachment needs of children, while explorative behavior and interest in challenges are more supported by men. These differences gain more importance when it comes to questions of behavior problems and underachievement of boys in school. In public discourse, the lack of men in elementary and primary education is seen as a major reason of boys' problems. Nevertheless, most research on gender differences in early childhood has focused on family relationships. Until today there has been nearly no empirical research in ECE that could support the view that male teachers are different from their female colleagues, and that this difference makes them important for children, especially for boys.

This paper presents first results of an ongoing research project on gender differences in interactional behavior of male and female pre-school teachers. The theoretical frame of the research combines gender theory with a systemic approach to early childhood development. With a qualitative design, the research project focuses on the behavior of male and female professionals in early childhood education. The research analyses interactions of "tandems" of a male and a female teachers in two experimental settings, using videography. In the first setting one adult interacts with an individual child, whereas in the other setting both male and female teacher work with a group of children.

The design was developed from an experimental setting used in attachment theory research. Interventions of male and female teachers are rated and compared to each other. In addition, questionnaires and interviews are conducted with the teachers. Also, the children's perspective is taken into account by interviewing them about how they perceive their teachers and what differences they notice between them. The male/female tandems are compared with interactions of female/female tandems in the same experimental design.

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The research aims at developing interaction profiles of male-female teacher “tandems”. Following results from attachment theory research, it is expected that men’s interactions with children include more stimulation and challenging interactions than those of their female colleagues. On the other hand, the comparison of mixed tandems with only female tandems can show that differences between men and women are not “natural”, but are probably results of social arrangements between individuals that can be found in gender homogenous settings as well.

As the research showed, it was a quite difficult task to develop a gender sensitive rating system for the videographed situations. In the presentation, excerpts from videographs will be shown to discuss the problems of rating interactive behavior properly, avoiding the use of gender stereotypes for a description of the behavior of male and female professionals.

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The Tandem Study

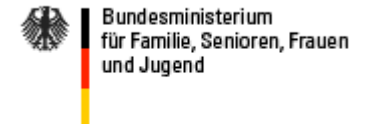


A Research Project on Men and Women in Early Childhood Education

Markus Andrä
ehs Dresden



Gefördert von:



Starting Point

Why do we need more male teaching staff in early childhood education?

From the point of view of *gender equality*:
A socially important professional field could be opened for men.

As a developmental dimension:
Children can benefit from the experience of male role models and learning activities which provide a male perspective.



Quelle: Männernetzwerk Dresden 2011

Attachment Theory and Father Research

Results in recent developmental psychology (attachment theory) and father research support this view:

„Overall, father love appears to be as heavily implicated as mother love in offspring’s psychological well-being and health, as well as in an array of psychological and behavioral problems.”

(Rohner & Veneziano, 2001 in: Allen & Daly, 2004, S. 4)

Men and women seem to interact different:

Women tend to emphasize the attachment needs while explorative behaviour is more supported by men. Attachment Theory described this typical male behaviour as paternal play sensitiveness.



Quelle: Männernetzwerk Dresden 2011

Critical Objections

The influence of traditional role models on research settings:

Results may repeat what is already prescribed: The gentle female caretaker and the challenging male breadwinner.

But how many times more might a mother confront her child with challenging situations because she spends most of the everyday live with the child? (Tamis LeMonda 2004)

A western bias on paternal behaviour:

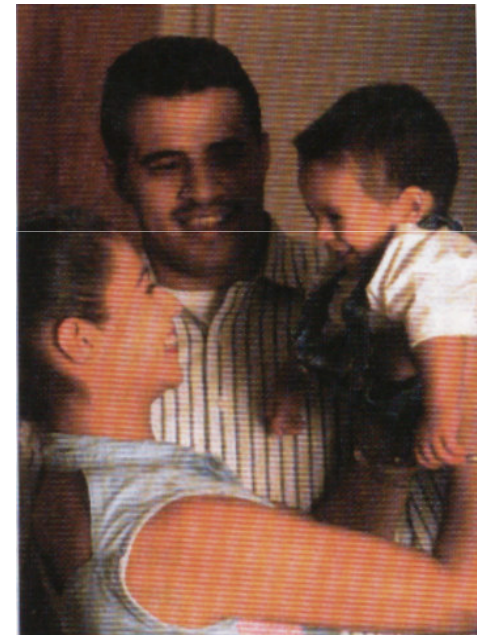
In other cultures fathers are nurturing their babies naturally (Tamis LeMonda, 2004).

Critical Objections

The parental behaviour of mothers and fathers has generally only been examined separately:

Processes of coordination between the parents and hence the systemic dimension are hereby discounted. But the father-child relationship is always grounded in a frame of partnership and family.

Rohner&Veneziano 200; Tamis Le Monda 2004; Pleck 2010)



Critical Objections

Besides these objections:

Most research on gender differences in early childhood has focused on family relationships. Professional early childhood education has not yet been investigated adequately with respect to gender-specific differences.

The Tandem Study aims to fill this research gap considering the objections and plans to examine the educational practice and cooperation between men and women through comparison and from a systemic perspective.



Quelle: Männernetzwerk Dresden 2011

The Tandem Study: Research Design

The Tandem Study records and compares the teaching practices of male and female teachers in early childhood education at the age of 3 to 6 with a *qualitative-based research design*.

The *systemic perspective* is derived from the investigation of men and women who work together as a tandem with the same group of children on a daily basis.

The Tandem Study: Research Design

Videos:

The tandems will be videoed in two semi-standard situations.

- Each tandem member alone with a child in a play situation with set creative and construction material,
- Both tandem members together with their group of children in an active game (Twister™).

Interviews:

The tandems will also be interviewed together about their division of work and their coordination in an everyday teaching context.

Personality variables will also be recorded via a standardised questionnaire.

The Tandem Study: Research Design

Sample:

- 20 mixed-gender tandems
- Comparative group of 10 tandems with female teachers

By the time more than 50% of the material is recorded. We have been at 13 institutions of professional early childhood education in rural and urban regions in 3 different German federal states.

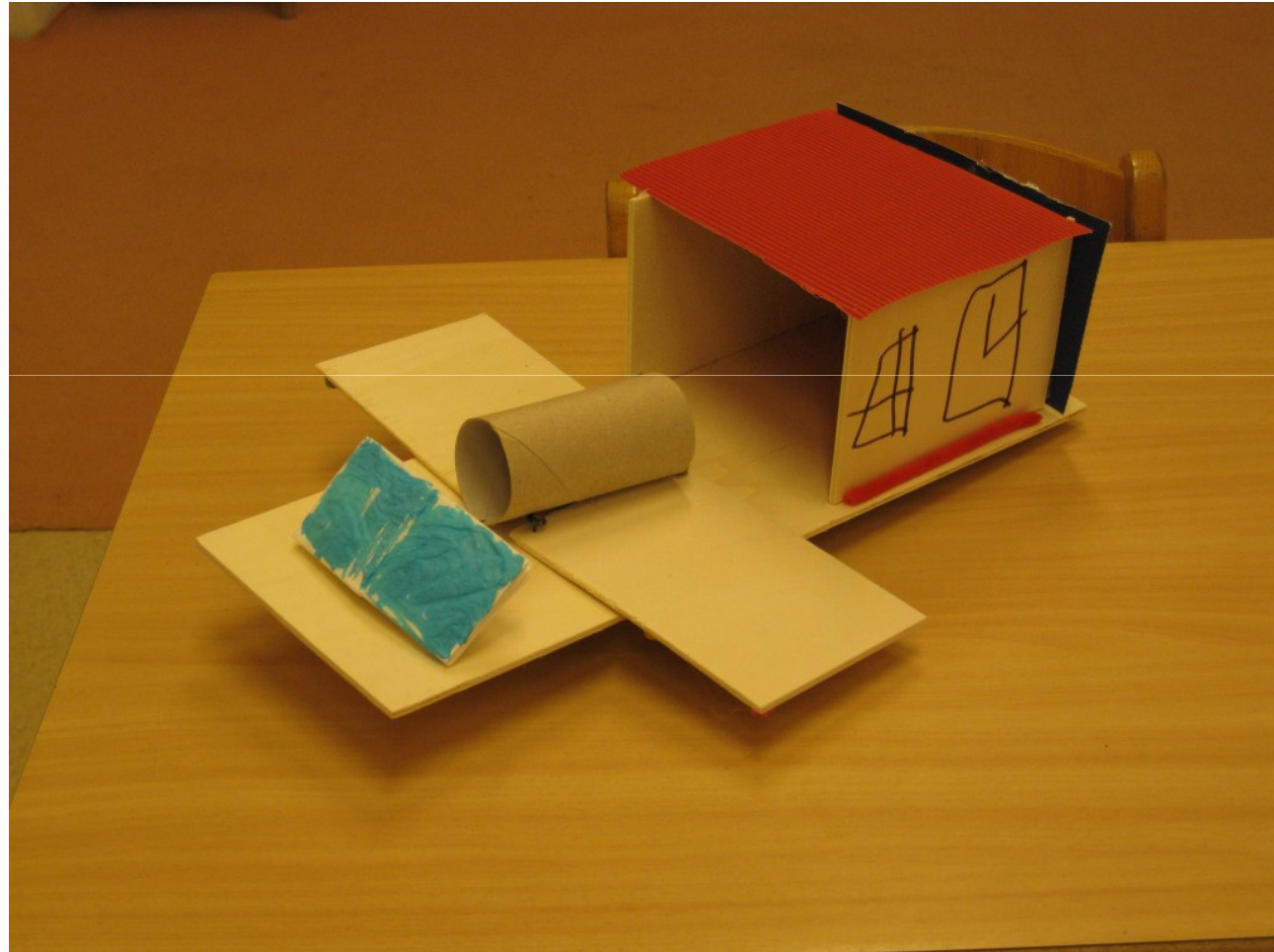
The Tandem Study: Research Design

The material for the videoed play situation:



The Tandem Study: Research Design

Objects made:
*“Aeroplane with
blue window”*



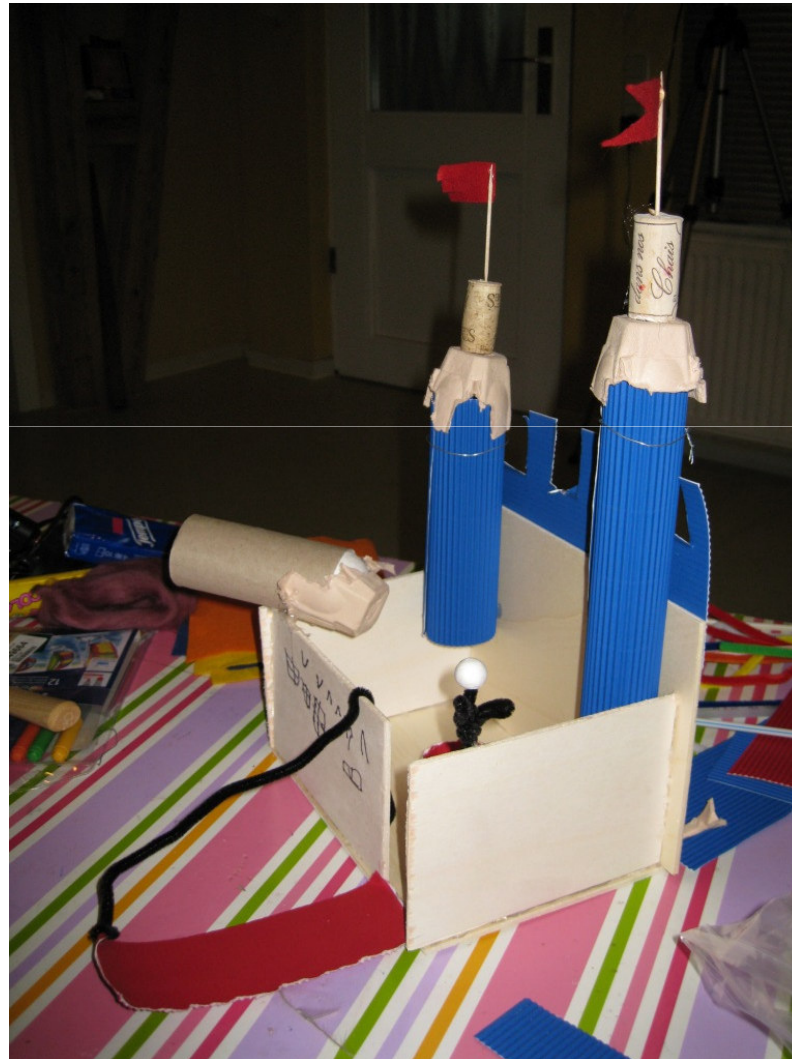
The Tandem Study: Research Design

Objects made:
"House"



The Tandem Study: Research Design

Objects made:
"Knight's castle"



The Tandem Study: Research Design

Objects made:
“Easter Chicken”



Analysis

The pedagogic interaction behaviour will be assessed by a specially developed *ratings method*. This microanalysis will be supplemented by statements taken from the interviews.

The results of the investigation will be analysed with regard to the variables *gender and personality*.

Development of a Rating System

First inspiration:

The rating system for measures of the *paternal play sensitiveness* used in researches of the German development psychologists Grossmann and Grossmann.

(Grossmann & Grossmann, 2008)

Collecting new items:

We watched the recorded material and used this impression to collect items for the rating. The results of these data sessions were discussed by the tandem-team members in an ongoing process.

Development of a Rating System

A rating system that matches the object of our study turned out to be complicated:

The items should cover any behavior that is important for our study and have to be described as exactly as possible and underlayed with examples so that any rater understands any item in the same way.

For statistical reasons we need to make clear on which level (nominal, ordinal or interval) any single scale of the system is. The levels of the scale define the proper way to calculate interrater reliability and correlation variables of the data.

Development of a Rating System

Test and discussion of the rating system with other experts:

In June 2011 we organized a symposium at our university to discuss the design of our research with scientists from Switzerland, Austria and Germany working on similar projects.

Results:

- Items that could be misunderstood were replaced.
- We added an open field to the rating system to describe the interaction as a metaphor (for example “*master and servant*” or “*father and son in the garage*”).
- We decided to use a 5-point scoring scheme instead of a 9-point one we used to know from attachment theory research. The points on the scale were verbal described as they would represent similar intervals. (Bortz&Döring 2005, S. 178)

Development of a Rating System

1. Dimension feinfühlig Herausforderung im Spiel

1.1. Erzieher/in nimmt Äußerungen des Kindes als Mitteilung wahr und interpretiert sie angemessen.

--	-	.	+	++
nicht zutreffend	wenig zutreffend	mittelmäßig zutreffend	ziemlich zutreffend	sehr zutreffend
1	2	3	4	5

1.2. Erzieher/in beantwortet Äußerungen des Kindes angemessen und prompt.

--	-	.	+	++
nicht zutreffend	wenig zutreffend	mittelmäßig zutreffend	ziemlich zutreffend	sehr zutreffend
1	2	3	4	5

1.3. Erzieher/in ermutigt das Kind zum Experimentieren und zur Auseinandersetzung mit unbekanntem Problemstellungen.

--	-	.	+	++
nicht zutreffend	wenig zutreffend	mittelmäßig zutreffend	ziemlich zutreffend	sehr zutreffend
1	2	3	4	5

1.4. Erzieher/in unterstützt das Kind bei schwierigen

--	-	.	+	++
nicht zutreffend	wenig zutreffend	mittelmäßig zutreffend	ziemlich zutreffend	sehr zutreffend
1	2	3	4	5

Hypotheses

The *shy animal* or “*Its all personal.*”

The object of our research is sometimes visible very well but it can disappear quickly, especially when you get closer.

We saw a huge *diversity*: Not just man and woman differ also man compared to man and woman to woman. Pedagogic interaction is strongly influenced by individual traits.

Most of the professionals don't want to consider themselves as s gendered beings. They prefer to say “*Its all personal.*” (Cameron 2006, S. 73)

Hypotheses

Behind this surface we might find typical male and female traits that are significant for the early childhood professionals we examined. But rating and analysis has not yet been started.

The arrangements between the tandem-team members seem not just influenced by gender but by age or experience as well.

Hypotheses

From our point of view a very important contribution of men to professional early childhood education could be the beginning of a gender modeling and discussion that is free of stereotypes.

Children will not just benefit because this broadens their learning opportunities but will enable them to a kind of “gender-creativity”.

Early childhood education will benefit with an ongoing process of professionalization.

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