

„Follow my lead“: What follows after one child's initiative in preschooler triads in a cooperative task?

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Introduction

Peer interactions play an important role in children's everyday life in institutional daycare. Sustaining social interactions requires skills as attending to the interaction partner(s), mastering turn-taking and prosocial behavior (Fabes, Martin & Hanish, 2011). If cooperation is needed to master a task, these skills become even more important.

Peer triads represent a complex setting of interactional possibilities of all three children (Ishikawa & Hay, 2006). Initiatives constitute starting points to analyze how social interaction is negotiated in a cooperative task. By suggesting how to proceed one child offers opportunities for social practices. The other children's reactions to the initiative are indicative for the involvement and social structure.

We therefore ask:

- (1) To what extent and how are initiatives responded to by the other group members?
- (2) Are there differences between boy and girl groups?
- (3) What behavioral interaction sequence follows each initiative?

Methods

Preschooler triads (N=20) of either girls or boys at the age of 62 months ($SD = 6.2$ months; range = 48–71 months) were videotaped during the task of cooperatively replicating a tangram figure.

1. Identification of initiatives
2. Coding of behavioral responses
3. Analyses of sequences

All verbal and nonverbal initiatives were identified. Behavioral responses of the other children within a 5 second interval following the initiative were coded as either support or rejection. The absence of any response by the other children was coded as no reaction. Behavioral sequences resulted when the initiating child acted again.

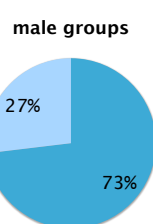
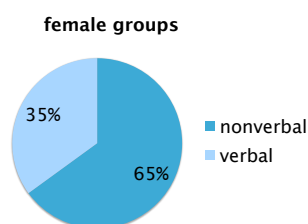
**Results**

Figure 1
Proportion of verbal and nonverbal initiatives in female and male groups

Involvement (Figure 3):

As a measure for children's degree of interaction three levels of involvement were differentiated. There was no difference between boy and girl groups, but involvement levels differed significantly after verbal and nonverbal initiatives [$\chi^2(2)=13.067, p = .001$].

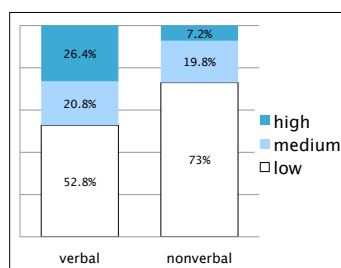


Figure 3
Percentage of high, medium and low involvement of the children

Table 1 Crosstabulation of peer and initiating child reaction

		reaction of initiating child			Σ
		no reaction	repeating/ continuing	new initiative	
peer reaction	no reaction	89	22	9	120
	support	23	10	1	34
	rejection	13	12	0	25
	Σ	125	44	10	179

Approximately one half of all initiatives were neither followed by a peer reaction nor any reaction of the initiating child.

Peer support seldom lead to new initiatives. More often the initiating child showed no reaction, thus awaiting peer involvement.

If there was not any reaction of peers, the initiating child more often repeated or continued the first initiative rather than suggesting a new one.

The initiating child did not suggest any new initiative after rejection of the first initiative. The child either did not show any further reaction or repeated / continued his or her first initiative.

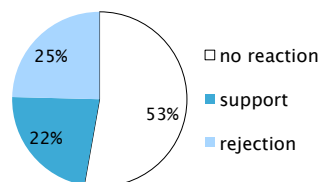
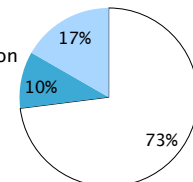
verbal initiatives

Figure 2
Proportion of reaction codes after verbal and nonverbal initiatives

nonverbal initiatives**Behavioral sequences (Figure 4):**

The analysis focusses on the number of sequential steps that followed the initiative and how many peers contributed to the interaction. Significantly different behavioral sequences followed after verbal and nonverbal initiatives [$\chi^2(3)=25.655, p = .000$], but there was no difference between boy and girl groups [$\chi^2(3)=2.476, n.s.$].

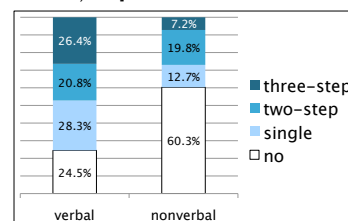


Figure 4
Percentage of different behavioral sequence types

Discussion

Verbal and nonverbal initiatives to solve a cooperation task were analyzed in preschooler triads. Children generally showed little interaction after one child's initiative and 'no reaction' dominated as response pattern in both boys and girls groups. However, the modus of the initiative was crucial: Peers reacted more often to verbal initiatives and more interaction between children resulted. Nonverbal initiatives seemed to be less identifiable as interaction prompts for children at this age. It is not known whether this characterizes a certain developmental stage in related socio-cognitive skills or whether these results reflect children's preference for verbal over nonverbal communication in an interactive problem-solving task with peers.

References:

- Fabes, R. A., Martin, C. L. & Hanish, L. D. (2011). Children's Behaviors and Interactions with Peers. In K. H. Rubin, W. M. Bukowski & B. Laursen (Eds.). *Handbook of Peer Interactions, Relationships, and Groups* (pp. 45–62). New York/London: Guilford.
- Ishikawa, F. & Hay, D. F. (2006). Triadic interaction among newly acquainted 2-year-olds. *Social Development*, 15(1), 145–168.