Materiality and teacher-children interaction: Analysis of educational activities in ECEC settings

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This research follows the Object Pragmatic Perspective (Rodriguez & Moro, 1999) that understand the early development as a process influenced by communicative/educative and cultural elements that have a semiotic nature. From this perspective, interaction with others and the material world is the key aspect that leads the children entrance in the complex network of public meanings.

The aim of this study was to analyze educational practices through the uses of materiality and other semiotic systems. This study followed a longitudinal design. We videotaped once a month for four months, the central activity of the day in the toddlers group in three ECEC settings in Madrid.

A qualitative analysis was performed centered on the selection, organization and uses of the materiality. We found that the materiality is intentionally selected and organized according to pedagogical goals: new challenges are proposed to mediate the emergency or enhance of new abilities. Teachers played different roles according to the activity proposed: sometimes they are observers and concede bigger control to the children. In other situations, when the activity is more challenging, they assume a more directive role. The teacher strategies of mediation were identified through microgenetic analysis. We identified seven different strategies to mediate the children’s uses of the materiality: invitations, positive evaluations, accompaniment, reorientations, distant exemplifications, direct exemplifications and inhibitions. These interventions are organized, from right to the left, according to the idea of an increasing degree of children agency that is promoted. In all three schools the less directed and intrusive strategies prevailed (invitations, positive evaluations and accompaniment).

We also analyzed the semiotic systems using for the teachers to mediate children actions: They talk, perform gestures, they explicitly demonstrate object uses, they use emotional expressions to amplify and comprise action tendencies (that orient, promote or inhibit children’s behaviors) and sometimes they used a direct body intervention. Teachers mediated children’s actions considering: children’s skill levels, interests, needs and initiatives. They used clusters of semiotic systems of different complexity depending on pedagogical goals.

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