TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS IN A PRESCHOOL IN SERBIA

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The quality of interactions between children and teachers has been a focus of interest of many researchers and early childhood educators. There is a general consensus that the overall outcome of the preschool education is dependent on the quality of teacher-child relationships (Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). Some researchers suggest that these connections affect children’s self-concept and their perceptions of peers (Colwell & Lindsey, 2003). Since the teacher-child interaction is one of the key processes in early childhood education, a clear understanding of the existing trends in teacher-child contacts is critical for future improvements in early childhood education (Jingbo & Elicker, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of early teacher-child interactions in preschools in Belgrade, Serbia. Most of the preschools in Serbia are public, funded by the local governments, and usually centrally managed in accordance with national guidelines. For this reason, it was expected that the insight in one of the Belgrade’s preschools would offer a general representative model for the teacher-child interactions in Serbia. The observational data were gathered in the preschool center “Sparrow” in New Belgrade. A total of 96 observations were recorded in three different age groups – three-year-old, four-year-old, and five-year-old children. The group size was anywhere from 16 to 39 students, with mostly one and occasionally two teachers per group. In addition, there are two different work shifts for teachers in Serbia, which creates a morning teacher and an afternoon teacher for each group; this allowed observations of a total of 9 teachers.

The inductive content analysis of data was used to derive categories of both teacher and child behaviors in their mutual interactions. The relative frequency of the interaction categories will be reported and discussed in the light of the cultural beliefs and values of Serbia. Preliminary results show that teachers initiated interactions only slightly more than children did—55% of interactions were teacher initiated and 45% were child initiated. In teacher-initiated contacts, discipline was the most common theme in teacher-child communications; in child-initiated ones, tattling was the most common subject matter.
