Similarities and differences in interactions of male and female ECE workers with children

Abstract
The research project W-INN (Wirkungsstudie Innsbruck), a study on the effect of male workers on development and behavior of children in ECE centers, continues research on men and gender relations in ECEC in Austria which started with the elementar project 2008-2010 (Aigner & Rohrmann 2012, Rohrmann 2009). Theoretically based on fathers’, early pedagogical and psychoanalytic research findings (Aigner 2001, Huber 2010), several research questions are focused: What similarities and/or differences can be found in interactions with children depending on childcare staff composition (mixed gender vs. female)? What are childrens’ (re-)actions in these groups/towards staff? Are there possible “compensatory effects” of male childcareers for children who don’t have much contact with fathers and/or men in general?

The main sample consists of 30 children (15 boys, 15 girls), aged 4 to 6 years, from 10 different Austrian kindergarten groups. A multi-method research design was developed, including videographic observations of daily interactions in kindergarten groups, questionnaire survey of childcare staff (about professional background and behavior assessment of children) and parents (about familiar background and behavior assessment of children), as well as projective tests (Mac Arthur Story Stem Battery) to gain access into childrens’ inner worlds. Additionally more than 170 parents from the mentioned kindergarten groups took part in a survey using the same questionnaire on behavior assessment of their children.

The project aims at confirming research questions as well as finding possible new hypotheses about men’s influence on children. Preliminary results will be presented, and implications for practice and policy will be discussed.

Bibliography

Keywords
Gender, Male workers, Attachment
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TIMELINE

2008 2009 2010 2011 2012

PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- theoretical background, issues, sample, methodology
- research approach and main foci
- first results
- tentative conclusions
BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

- pilot study
- cross-sectional approach
- multimethodal design
- multi-informants/perspectives

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- psychoanalytic – object - relation theories & academic developmental-psychology
  1. fathers (different internal expectations of the children -> fathers respond with special masculine mode -> support developmental tasks)
  2. public fathers (transference concept -> lack of father experiences -> public fathers respond and support developmental tasks)

- preschool pedagogic context
CURRENT ISSUES

- What similarities and/or differences can be found in the interactions and behavior of children in different childcare staff compositions (mixed gender vs. female)?

- What similarities and/or differences can be found in the educational style of male and female ECE workers?

- What similarities and/or differences can be found in the group dynamics of different childcare staff compositions (mixed gender vs. female)?

further issue:
availability of male ECE workers <-> certain familiar constellations

MAIN SAMPLE

- 163 children - in 10 ECE centers (5 female staff and 5 mixed gender staff)

- 206 parents and 22 ECE workers

- 15 boys and 15 girls for investigations in greater depth
  (inclusion criteria: age: 4 to 6 years, compliance, speaking & understanding german, no developmental delays)
MAIN SUBJECTS

- observable daily life in ECE centers
- family situation of the children
- children's "inner world"

1. video grab: daily interactions
   database: 10 ECE workers
   163 (30) children
   900 min videotape
   1. focus (worker):
      educat. style & interactions
   2. focus (kids):
      behaviour & interactions
   3. focus (group):
      group dynamics

2. survey: ECE workers
   database: 22 ECE workers
   155 items
   1. focus (worker):
      experiences & teamwork
   2. focus (kids):
      behaviour interactions, & relationships in the ECEC

3. survey: parents
   database: 206 parents
   183 items
   1. focus (family):
      division of parenting
   2. focus (kids):
      behaviour interactions, & relationships in the family

4. video grab: story stem
   database: 30 children
   210 stories
   900 min videotape
   focus:
   conflicts, empathic react.,
   moral themes, avoidance,
   aggression, use of the figures,
   coherence of the story

W-INN - EECERA 2012 - Porto
sample of 30 children

survey parents (questions about the behaviour of the selected children and the family background)

survey ECE workers (questions about the behaviour of the selected children and the ECE background)

video grab

daily interactions

video grab

story completion task

CASE STUDIES

children (N=30)

gender staff composition

behaviour and interactions in the ECE

relationship to the ECE workers

imagination/structure

relationship to the parents

behaviour and interactions in the family

division of parenting tasks

ECEC

INNER WORLD

FAMILY
IN PROGRESS

- case studies

- diploma project: quantitative measure of interactions between the ECE workers (male and female) and the children (male and female)

- diploma project: qualitative measure of interactions between the ECE workers (male and female) and the children (male and female)

...first findings and tentative conclusions...
FIRST RESULTS

Two foci on our current issues:

- childcare workers' behavior (observable and self-reports)

- children's contact behavior towards childcare workers' (observable and assessment by childcare workers)

Educational style:

Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett 1989); N=10 (5m/5f) Videorating-data

- Low and high scores in all (sub)scales for men and women as well

- In mean male childcare workers interact more positive, less punitive and equally detached

- Highest difference of male childcare workers regarding permissiveness (accordance with self- and external reports)
FIRST RESULTS

Group dynamics:

self-constructed rating scale; N=10 (5m/5f) Videorating-data

- Male childcare workers provoke more mobility
- Tendency of male staff to create more 'transitional space'
- No differences concerning structuring group activities (discrepancy to self-reports)

FIRST RESULTS

Child contact behavior:

Attachment related behavior tendencies (AQS; Waters1995)
N=30 (15m/15f) Videorating-data

- No differences between boys and girls concerning frequency of contact behavior
- Boys show more often contact behavior towards male childcare workers (in comparison to female staff); esp. „enjoying physical contact“, „affective sharing“
- No similar effect for girls!
First Results

Childcare worker-child relationship:

- 45% of female childcare workers report that boys “escape” out of their operating range, whereas no male childcare worker report the same.

- Girls have overall better relationships to childcare workers of both sexes (Instrument: STRS; Pianta 2001).

- Boys show more closeness behavior to male childcare worker in comparison to female staff (Instrument: STRS; Pianta 2001).

Children’s social and emotional behavior:

- Boys in groups with mixed gender staff are more extraverted and tend to be more dynamic (e.g. room-taking behavior or general mobility) Video rating-data.

- Girls tend to be more social-emotionally competent in mixed-gender-staff groups (Instrument: VBV-ER; Döpfner et al. 1993).

- Boys tend to be more oppositional-aggressive (‘externalizing behavior’) in groups with (!) mixed gender staff (Instrument: VBV-ER; Döpfner et al. 1993).
SUMMARY

- Men in ECE seem to have some different educational styles (e.g. more permissiveness)
- Men in ECE expand the group dynamic (e.g. by relaxing the structure or provoking more mobility)
- Men in ECE develop a close relationship especially to boys (e.g. physical contact, affective sharing)

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

- Existence or absence of gender similarities and/or differences also depend upon the perspective (political gender equation vs. child developmental view)
- For children a "gender-neutral" relationship world does not exist
- Research about influences of male childcare workers on children need to be extended by the "impact" of their female colleague, especially in long-term-studies!
**W-INN research project**

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