

Public Abstract

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Title:Symbolic play in low-income African American mother-toddler dyads: Maternal behaviors and child outcomes

In this exploratory investigation, low-income African-American mothers and their toddler-aged children were observed via videotaped recordings of semi-structured play activities when children were 14 and 24 months old. Episodes of symbolic play were isolated and analyzed using five different sets of codes. Mothers' symbolic play complexity, attention-directing and autonomy-granting behaviors, involvement type, and purpose for pretend were coded at both data-collection points. These were correlated with children's language scores at both ages and children's symbolic play complexity at time 2. Mothers' behaviors that promoted advancements in children's play activities were consistent across the data-collection period. Across time, mothers' goals seemed to be to influence their children's behavior and scaffold higher levels of pretend play. A number of maternal behaviors at time 1 were significantly related (both positively and negatively) to children's outcomes at 24 months, and many of these behaviors at time 2 were related to children's concurrent language and symbolic play competence. Significant correlations are reported in the text and discussed broadly in the final chapter.