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ABSTRACT

This study investigated associations between young children's behavior and the continuity of parent and provider behavior and attitudes. Subjects were 3- and 4-year-old children, their parents, and their family child care providers. A total of 29 children were observed in their homes with their parents and in the family child care homes with their providers. Observations of parents and providers focused on their active engagement with the children, warmth or approval, and disciplinary styles. Parents' and providers' child-rearing attitudes were measured using Strom's Parent as a Teacher Inventory. Hierarchical regressions were used to determine whether parent and provider differences remained significant predictors of child behavior after controlling for the quality of care. Results indicated that most of the child behaviors could not be predicted from parent and provider continuity. While parent and provider continuity significantly contributed to the prediction of some child behaviors, even in these cases it accounted for only a small percentage of the explained variance. Continuity of adult approval seemed to be more important than continuity in active engagement or continuity in the use of positive discipline techniques. (MM)

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Continuity Between Parents and Family Child Care Providers: Does It Matter?

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Abstract

This study investigated associations between parent-provider behavioral and attitudinal continuity and young children's behavior. Twenty-nine children, their parents and their family child care providers were observed at home and in their family child care homes. Observations of parents and providers focused on their warmth and disciplinary styles. Parents' and providers' child-rearing attitudes were measured using Strom's Parent as a Teacher Inventory. Hierarchical regressions were used to determine the contribution of parent-provider continuity beyond that made by parent and provider frequencies of behavior. Most of the child behaviors we observed could not be predicted from parent-provider continuity. Moreover, while parent-provider continuity did significantly contribute to the prediction of some child behaviors, even in these cases it accounted for only a small percentage of the explained variance. Interestingly, continuity of adult approval, or warmth, across the two settings seemed to be more important than continuity in active engagement or continuity in use of positive discipline techniques.

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Continuity Between Parents and Family Child Care Providers: Does It Matter?

Popular and professional wisdom concurs in endorsing continuity between parents' and child care providers' values and child-rearing methods. Empirical evidence supporting the importance of continuity between settings is lacking, however. The most closely related work is that of Howes, Rodning, Galluzzo, and Myers (1988) showing that toddlers' involvement with caregivers and peers is a function of their attachment to their mothers and their caregivers, with the highest levels of play occurring among toddlers with secure attachments to both.

Although research describing child outcomes is limited, there is a considerable body of research describing differences between the home and child care settings. Parents and preschool teachers have been found to differ in their assessments of individual children's behavior (Gray, Clancy, & King, 1981) and in their child-rearing expectations and values (Alston, 1982; Winetsky, 1978). Researchers have also observed more adult-child interaction and greater intensity of affect at home than in child care centers (Cochran, 1977; Ispa, Gray, & Thornburg, 1988) or in family child care homes (Long, Peters, & Garduque, 1985; Siegel-Gorelick, Everson, & Ambron, 1983).

While family child care providers and mothers are aware of their behavioral differences, they consider themselves to be essentially in agreement regarding child-rearing values (Atkinson, 1991; Long & Garduque, 1987; Nelson & Garduque, 1991). Also, despite absolute differences between parents and providers, correlational analyses have revealed positive associations in their nurturance, involvement in children's tasks, and investment in ensuring compliance (Howes & Olenick, 1986; Howes & Stewart, 1987). Parents appear to place their children in child care settings of relatively similar quality to their own home environments.

What we don't know is whether or not, and how, differences between parents' and providers' child-rearing behaviors and values affect young children. The present study was undertaken to investigate associations between 3- and 4-year old children's behavior and the behavioral and attitudinal continuity of their parents and family child care providers.

The Parent as a Teacher Inventory (Strom, 1982) was used to tap providers' and parents' understanding of child development and attitudes related to children's needs for independence and active learning. Observations of parents and providers focused on their warmth and disciplinary style.

Method

Subjects

The data for the present analyses come from information gathered on 29 3- and 4-year-old children, their mothers, fathers, and family child care providers. All children were from white, middle-income, two-parent families.

Subjects were recruited at meetings of a local association of family child care providers and through letters sent to providers whose names appeared on a Division of Family Services list of licensed child care homes. So that independence of observations would be maintained, providers were informed that we could observe only one child from each child care home. Providers were offered $20 for participating; parents were offered $25.

The children in the sample had been attending their current child care homes for an average of 16.4 months (range = 2 - 47 months). Their weekly attendance averaged 42 hours (range = 25 - 50 hours). Approximately half of the parents (16 of the mothers and 19 of the fathers) had Bachelor's or graduate degrees.

The child care providers cared for an average of 8.5 children (range = 3-15, including part-time attendance). Nine had Bachelor's degrees.

Procedure

Three one-hour observations were conducted in each child's home and two one-hour observations were conducted in each child's family child care home. One observer coded behavior during each visit. Parents and providers were asked to adhere to their usual routine and to disregard the observer's presence insofar as possible.

During each visit to the home, the observer focused on each individual for two 10-minute periods. Thus, for example, during the first visit the child was observed for 10 minutes, then the mother, then the father, then the child, mother, and father again. During each visit to the child care home, the provider and the child were each the focus of the observation for three alternating 10-minute periods. Thus each individual was the focus of observation for a total of 60 minutes (2 visits X 3 10-minute focus periods in the child care home; 3 visits X 2 10-minute focus periods in the home). The order in which individuals were observed over the visits was counterbalanced.

The observers used a time-sampling procedure involving 15-second observe, 10-second record cycles. Signals demarcating each observation and recording period were

transmitted to the observer through an earphone connected to a tape recorder.

Due to slow subject recruitment, data collection took place over the course of three years, necessitating the training of new observers each year. A total of nine students majoring in child development served as observers. Each year training took place in two child care center rooms, and continued until reliability on all categories had reached at least 80%. Below, kappa coefficients averaged across pairs of observers are shown after the description of each variable.

Measures

Parent and provider observations. On the codesheet used during the 10-minute observations focusing on the providers, mothers, or fathers, observers recorded the presence of behaviors directed toward the focal child and indicative of warmth, encouragement, and frequency and style of teaching and discipline. Included were the occurrence of (a) active engagement (positive or neutral non-disciplinary interaction with children such as playing, helping, conversing, reading aloud, teaching, kappa = .90); (b) showing approval (praising or showing affection to children, kappa = .81); (c) positive discipline (redirection, reasoning, kappa = .87); (d) neutral discipline (simple commands without reasons, kappa = .96); and (e) negative discipline (the use of physical force or verbal degrading). Negative discipline was not used in the analyses because it was observed too infrequently to establish reliability.

Mothers' and fathers' behavior frequencies were averaged to create parent scores. Reports of significant within-couple correlations in maternal and paternal child-rearing behaviors and attitudes (Belsky & Volling, 1987; Roberts, Block, & Block, 1984) supports the creation of such scores. The correlations between mother and father scores in the present sample were positively related (for active engagement, $r = .41$, $p < .05$, for showing approval, $r = .33$, $p < .10$, and for proportion of positive discipline, $r = .40$, $p < .05$).

Child observations. On the codesheet used to record children's behaviors, observers noted the occurrence of (a) unhappiness (frowning, whining, crying, kappa = .80), (b) unoccupied behavior (aimless wandering or fidgeting, lack of engagement with materials or persons, kappa = .80), (c) on-task behavior (active engagement in a neutral or positive solitary, parallel, or social activity, kappa = .83), (d) positive or neutral social interactions with adults (kappa = .86) and with peers (kappa = .88) and (e) negative social interactions (behavior that is frustrating to others and/or shows disobedience to parents or providers,

kappa = .92 for negative behaviors directed towards adults and .95 for negative behaviors directed towards peers).

Attitude questionnaires. Upon completion of the third home observation, observers gave parents a mother and a father version of the Parent as a Teacher Inventory (PAAT; Strom, 1982) and two stamped, self-addressed envelopes for their return. Parents were asked to complete the questionnaires without discussing their responses. Providers were also given the PAAT, slightly reworded so as to be suitable for them ("my child" was changed to "this child").

The PAAT consists of 50 Likert-scale items measuring child-rearing beliefs and attitudes. Thornburg, Gray and Ispa (1989) factor analyzed the instrument separately for mothers, fathers, and child care teachers and found four similar factors across the three samples. Three of these factors (Understanding of Child Development, Support of Child Independence, and Support for Active Learning) were used in the present study.

Results

Observational Data

Three measures of adult behavior were used in the analyses: (a) parent and provider frequencies of active engagement, (b) parent and provider frequencies of showing approval, and (c) the proportion of all disciplinary remarks classified as positive [positive discipline / (positive discipline + neutral discipline)]. Mothers' and fathers' scores were averaged to create parent scores, and for each adult behavior variable, the absolute value of the difference between standardized parent and standardized provider scores was calculated. Simultaneous multiple regression analyses were then done to determine whether or not children's behavior could be predicted by the combination of the three parent-provider difference scores. Sex of child was not included as an independent variable because correlational analyses showed no significant associations between it and any of the parent-provider difference scores.

Nine of the child behaviors, four at home and five in child care, could not be predicted from the degree of parent-provider difference. Specifically, the analyses indicated no relations between the models of parent-provider difference and children's on-task behavior at home or in child care, unoccupied behavior at home, positive and negative interactions with mothers, positive and negative interactions with peers in the child care setting, negative interactions with providers, or unhappiness in child care.

The five child behaviors that could be predicted by the linear combination of the three parent-provider difference variables included unoccupied behavior in the child care home, neutral/positive interactions with child care providers, showing unhappiness at home, neutral/positive interactions with fathers, and negative interactions with fathers.

The regression for unoccupied behavior in the child care setting resulted in a significant model, $F(3, 25) = 5.85$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .41$. However, the only individually significant predictor was parent-provider difference in showing approval (beta = 3.53, $p = .001$); the more parents and providers were dissimilar in showing approval, the more time the child spent unoccupied in the child care home.

Parent-provider difference also predicted children's frequencies of neutral/positive interactions with providers, $F(3, 25) = 3.83$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .31$. Two of the parent-provider difference variables had regression coefficients significantly different from zero. These indicated a negative association between children's neutral/positive interactions with providers and parent-provider differences in active engagement (beta = -7.09, $p = .01$) and a positive association between children's neutral/positive interactions with providers and parent-provider differences in showing approval (beta = 7.74, $p = .01$). Thus, parent-provider similarity in relative frequencies of active engagement and dissimilarity in relative frequencies of showing approval predicted the frequency of children's neutral/positive interactions with providers.

At home, the model significantly predicted the frequency with which children were rated as exhibiting unhappiness, $F (3, 25) = 5.19$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .38$. The individual significant predictors were again parent-provider difference in active engagement (beta = 1.24, $p < .05$) and showing approval (beta = 1.62, $p < .05$). Both relations were positive, indicating that the more dissimilar parents and providers were in relative frequencies of active engagement and showing approval, the more frequently children were rated as unhappy during observations at home.

Both measures of interaction with fathers, neutral/positive and negative, were predicted by the model, $F(3, 25) = 7.12$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = 46$, and $F (3, 25) = 3.77$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .31$, respectively. The individual variables significant in the model predicting neutral/positive interaction with fathers were parent-provider difference in active engagement (beta = 9.98, $p = .05$) and in showing approval (beta = 17.13, $p < .01$), indicating that the more the parents and providers were dissimilar on these variables, the more positive/neutral interactions children had with their fathers. In the case of negative

interactions with fathers, only the regression coefficient for parent-provider difference in showing approval was significant (beta = 1.87, $p < .01$), indicating that greater parent-provider dissimilarity on this variable was associated with children's more frequent negative interactions with their fathers.

The regressions just described suggest associations between parent-provider continuity and child behavior. However, one might ask if parent-provider continuity is confounded with quality of child care. Deal, Halverson, and Wampler (1989) found that parents who have more similar child-rearing attitudes also tend to be more "effective" than parents who disagree with one another about child-rearing.

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were therefore performed to determine if parent-provider differences would remain significant predictors of child behavior after we had controlled for the quality of care by parents and providers. Quality of care was operationally defined as parents' and providers' frequencies of active engagement and showing approval. Positive discipline proportions were not entered in these analyses because this variable showed no significant explanatory value in the simultaneous regressions. The dependent variables were limited to the five child behaviors that were significantly predicted by the models of parent-provider difference; the adult behaviors were limited to those that were individually significant in the models. In each analysis involving a behavior observed at home, the parent frequency was entered first, then the providers', and finally the parent-provider difference score. In each analysis involving a behavior observed in the child care home, the order of entry for parent and provider frequencies was reversed.

The results of the hierarchical regressions are presented in Table 1. When parent-provider difference in showing approval was entered after parent and provider frequencies, significant increases in explained variance were found for four child variables: children's unoccupied behavior in the child care setting, expressions of unhappiness at home, and neutral/positive and negative interactions with fathers. In each case, however, the increase in the explained variance was less than 20%.

The results also show that when parent-provider differences in active engagement is added to the models already containing parent and provider frequencies of active engagement, the prediction of children's expressions of unhappiness at home and the frequency of their neutral/positive interaction with their child care providers is significantly improved. Again, although significant, the increase in R^2 is small.

However, parent-provider difference in showing approval is no longer predictive of children's frequencies of neutral/positive interactions with providers when parent and provider frequencies of showing approval are statistically controlled. Similarly, parent-provider difference in active engagement no longer predicts children's neutral/positive interactions with their fathers when parent and provider frequencies of active engagement are partialled out.

Questionnaire Data

Mothers' and fathers' scores on the three PAAT factors, Understanding of Child Development, Support of Child Independence, and Support for Active Learning, were averaged to create parent scores. For each factor, parent-provider dissimilarity was calculated as the absolute value of the difference between parent and provider scores. Higher scores denoted greater differences between parents and providers. Simultaneous multiple regression analyses revealed that none of the child behaviors could be predicted from the combination of these three difference scores. In other words, child behavior could not be predicted from the degree of parent/provider attitudinal continuity.

Discussion

Our results suggest that discontinuity between parents and family child care providers may not have many implications for child behavior. No significant relations with parent-provider behavioral or attitudinal continuity were found for 9 of the 14 dependent measures.

Moreover, while the results indicated that continuity was a significant predictor for some child behaviors, there are two reasons we are reluctant to interpret the findings broadly. For one, there is no clear pattern to the results. For example, while continuity predicted unoccupied behavior in the child care home, it did not predict on-task behavior in either setting. (This was possible because unoccupied and on-task behavior were not reciprocals of one another; time spent watching TV, peers, or adults was not coded as either unoccupied or on-task.) Secondly, continuity added only small percentages of variance to models containing frequencies of adult behavior.

Nonetheless, while our results provide only limited support for the importance of continuity, the significant findings that emerged do warrant further attention. It is intriguing that continuity of adult approval across the two settings was associated with more child behaviors than any other adult variable. There is considerable research support for the importance of warmth and approval-giving from early childhood teachers and parents (Baumrind, 1971;

Fagot, 1973), and our results suggest that children may benefit from continuity on this factor across the settings where they spend the most time. It is also interesting that continuity in style of discipline seemed to have no impact on children. Given the significance attributed to induction and other forms of positive discipline (e.g. Honig, 1985), it was surprising to find no support for the importance of continuity on this variable. It seems that children can adapt to differing discipline styles, at least within the range observed in the present study.

After observing and interviewing mothers and family child care providers, Long and Garduque (1987) concluded that, while behavioral discontinuity between home and child care settings certainly exists, it is accepted by both parties and, unless extreme, probably does not negatively affect children. They suggest that discussion shift focus to complementarity between the two settings, so that we will worry less about the ill effects of discontinuity and think more about the adaptive functions fostered by home-child care differences. Similarly, Katz (1980) has written about differences inherent in the roles of mother and teacher, and suggested that these differences are as they should be; mothers' greater emotional investment in their children and teachers' greater objectivity may occasionally create misunderstandings between the two, but the child who experiences both has his or her best interests served. Our results do not show positive benefits of discontinuity, but neither do they show much cause for alarm.

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Table 1

Hierarchical Regressions of Child Behavior on Measures of Parent and Provider Frequency and Difference Scores

Step and Predictor	R^2	R^2 Change	P (F Change)
Children Unoccupied in the Child Care Home			
Showing approval			
1. Provider frequency	.006	.006	ns
2. Parent frequency	.295	.290	.01
3. Parent-provider difference	.484	.189	.01
Children's Neutral/Positive Interactions with Providers			
Active engagement			
1. Provider frequency	.292	.292	.01
2. Parent frequency	.316	.024	ns
3. Parent-provider difference	.477	.161	.01
Showing approval			
1. Provider frequency	.193	.193	.02
2. Parent frequency	.196	.003	ns
3. Parent-provider difference	.228	.032	ns
Children's Unhappy Expressions at Home			
Active engagement			
1. Parent frequency	.184	.184	.02
2. Provider frequency	.193	.009	ns
3. Parent-provider difference	.313	.120	.05

(Table 1 continued)

Showing approval			
1. Parent frequency	.230	.230	.01
2. Provider frequency	.236	.006	ns
3. Parent-provider difference	.363	.127	.05
Children's Neutral/Positive Interactions with Their Fathers			
Active engagement			
1. Parent frequency	.493	.493	.0001
2. Provider frequency	.519	.026	ns
3. Parent-provider difference	.567	.049	ns
Showing approval			
1. Parent frequency	.456	.456	.0001
2. Provider frequency	.458	.002	ns
3. Parent-provider difference	.551	.093	.05
Children's Negative Interactions with Their Fathers			
Showing approval			
1. Parent frequency	.165	.165	.03
2. Provider frequency	.165	.000	ns
3. Parent-provider difference	.328	.162	.05

Note. Only those child behaviors that were significantly predicted and those adult behaviors that were significant predictors in the simultaneous regression models of parent-provider differences were examined in the hierarchical regressions.