



Teaching Everyday and School Related Tasks: Effective Instruction Among Mexican-American Mothers

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Working Paper No. 48

August 2000

ABSTRACT

The following study examines the teaching behaviors of Mexican-American mothers using an “everyday” and “schoolrelated” task. The study focuses on 1) What are the differences in teaching behaviors among Mexican Americans across tasks, 2) instruction changes over time, 3) changes in teaching behavior relate to children’s performance and the influence of maternal education on instruction. The sample consisted of 37 Mexican-American mother-child dyads. The children’s mean age was 50.8 months (SD= 6.1). The results indicate that Mexican-American mothers alter their instruction across time and according to the task at hand. Under everyday conditions, the mothers’ relied primarily on the use of various verbal utterances such as commands, labeling, directives and verbal corrections to guide and maneuver children’s activity. Under the school task condition, the mothers relied on the use of non-verbal behaviors, particularly visual cues and physical corrections. The mothers also instruct their children in a “complementary” fashion, altering their general strategy with respect to the demand on the child. Regardless of the task, however, mothers tended to follow an overall instructional pattern that is consistent with that proposed by a Vygotskian framework. Finally, the study found the mothers’ education level was associated with her teaching behaviors under the everyday task, but not the school task.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert P. Moreno is currently an Assistant Professor of Applied Human Development in the Department of Human and Community Development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He received his B.A. in Psychology from UCLA and his Ph.D. in Child and Adolescent Development in the School of Education from Stanford University. He also served as an Illinois Cooperative Extension Service State Specialist. His research examines family influences on children’s learning and academic achievement among Latinos and low income families. His current project examines Latina mothers’ involvement in the schooling of their children and effective instructional practices in the home.