

## **Abstract #13: TODDLERS' PLAY BEHAVIORS AND INTERACTIONS WITH TEACHERS AND PEERS DURING FREE-PLAY**

Ms. Sun Geun Kim - University of Oklahoma - Tulsa

Ms. Amanda Bueno - University of Oklahoma - Tulsa

Dr. Kyong Ah Kwon - University of Oklahoma

Dr. Hyun-Joo Jeon - University of Nevada, Reno

### **Background**

The development of toddlers' prosocial behaviors can be fostered through interactions with adults and peers. Despite the importance of toddlerhood as a critical period of emerging interests in peers and prosocial skills, limited research is available on this topic. Thus, the present study examined the patterns of toddlers' play behaviors and interactions with teachers and peers in the classroom and the role of child gender and play contexts in their play and interactions.

### **Methods**

Current research is secondary data analysis. The video data were recorded by the trained researchers from Georgia State University. The videos recorded toddlers' behaviors and interactions with teachers and peers for 30 minutes during indoor free play. Eighty-four toddlers (45.2% male and 54.8% female; 76.2% Caucasian, 10.7% African American, 9.5% Asian, and 3.6% Hispanic) and their teachers from four university-affiliated child development programs in two southern cities in the US participated in the study. The videotapes were coded independently by a researcher who is trained until the inter-rater reliability of 90 percent agreement had been attained across all key variables.

### **Results**

Toddlers spent almost 45% of the time not interacting with peers and adults and were mostly engaged in unoccupied or non-peer play, spent 34% interacting with teachers, and spent 15% interacting with peers. However, when they participated in pretend play, they are more likely to engage in play by verbalizing actively ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ) and positively interact with peers ( $r = .49, p < .01$ ) and teachers ( $r = -.31, p < .01$ ). Moreover, teachers actively interacted with toddlers during creative play ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ) compare to other contexts. Overall, girls were more likely to participate in pretend play than boys ( $t = -1.86, p < .05$ ), and boys were more likely to participate in manipulative play than girls ( $t = 2.12, p < .05$ ).

### **Conclusion**

Toddlers were engaged with teachers or peers for 55% of the time. During the interaction, teachers interacted with the toddlers through reading books and singing songs the most. Although toddlers were not actively engaged with peers, they showed high verbalization and positive interaction when they were involved in pretend play. Lastly, gender is not related to the toddler's interaction with peers and teachers. However, play context showed association with toddler's interaction. Through the analysis of toddlers' play behaviors and interactions, we can analyze that teacher's purposeful elicitation, and interaction with toddlers is necessary to help the toddlers to engage in meaningful play and interaction.