Lirdef

actes n° 1 | 2022
Proceedings of the Collaborative Initiatives for Early Childhood Conference

Understanding and supporting collaborative interactions with parents in Early Childhood Education

On training as research method

Laurent FILLIETTAZ *Professeur des universités*
University of Geneva
Marianne ZOGMAL *Post-doctorante*
University of Geneva
Stéphanie GARCIA *Professeure assistante*
University of Geneva

Édition électronique :
URL :
https://lirdef.numerev.com/articles/actes-1/2245-understanding-and-supporting-collaborative-interactions-with-parents-in-early-childhood-education
DOI : numerev_1793
Date de publication : 30/09/2022

Cette publication est sous licence **CC BY-NC-ND** (Attribution - No commercial - No derivatives).

Pour **citer cette publication** : FILLIETTAZ, L., ZOGMAL, M., GARCIA, S. (2022) Understanding and supporting collaborative interactions with parents in Early Childhood Education. *Lirdef*, (actes n°1). https://doi.org/10.34745/numerev_1793

In this contribution, we report on an ongoing research program conducted in Geneva (Switzerland), dedicated to relationships between parents and professionals in the field of Early Childhood Education. In this research program, we aim at understanding the sorts of interactional competences mobilised by educators when encountering parents in daily work situations. The program includes a video-ethnographic survey based on direct observation of naturally occurring encounters, as well as a training program, dedicated to in-service educators in which their interactional competences can be elaborated and developed. The chapter reports on the research design of this project, presents the empirical material collected and provides an overview of the main research findings available to date.

Mots-clés :
Éducation, Interactional competences, Early Childhood, Parents, Switzerland

---

1. Encounters with parents as situated interactions

This paper reflects on social relationships between parents and professionals in Early Childhood Education (ECE), as they unfold on a daily basis, when parents drop off children in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon. The conditions in which these relations are negotiated have attracted increasing attention in a context of growing expectations and institutional demands of rich symmetrical partnerships between families and education providers. Indeed, from a policy perspective, building partnership is now recognised as an integral part of the work of ECE, established in an increasing number of rules, norms and expectations for workers in the field (OECD, 2006). The concept of partnership refers to collaborative relationships, including shared decision-making, between the roles of parents and educators. Parents are, therefore, positioned symmetrically and involved in a process of “co-education”— a role that has been conferred on them by educational institutions and framed under the responsibility of others —.

As evidenced in the literature, establishing a partnership with parents is not easy and can be associated with numerous challenges. The conditions within which such

relationships evolve are often complex and characterised by multiple practical contingencies. Encounters between parents and educators occur daily, particularly at morning drop-offs, when parents bring their children to the education Centre, and at pick-ups in the afternoon. These encounters are often very brief, although they may involve multiple participants and activities that are not necessarily compatible with the *co-education* project. These encounters may also materialise in formal meetings, but these tend to be rare and usually only occur yearly. Relations with parents are not always necessarily smooth and collaborative. As mentioned in the literature, they may also include power relations and conflictual educational norms or a sense of legitimacy (Bouve, 1999; Cheatham and Ostrosky, 2009). When families come from cultural backgrounds different from the dominant local one, epistemic asymmetries and cultural misunderstandings may occur (Nunez, Moscono and Ogay, 2016; Scalambrin and Ogay, 2014).

From the perspective of professionals, encounters with parents can be seen as demanding situations, requiring specific and complex interactional competences. According to Young and Miller (2004, p. 520), interactional competences can be defined as the set of knowledge and skills that participants in interactions deploy to collectively configure the resources they need to engage in specific social practices. These competences include the ways in which participants collectively accomplish actions in society, how they configure and delineate units of actions, and how they manage turn-taking rules, direct their attention, introduce new topics, take on and negotiate social roles, or use specific categories for referring to participants. Interactional competences should not be thought of as an exhaustive repertoire of skills associated with individuals who are isolated from each other. On the contrary, they should be conceptualised as situated resources distributed among the participants involved in an interaction and made visible through the circumstances in which they are being enacted (Pekarek et al., 2017).

In fact, very little is known about how relations between educators and parents are enacted in practice or how a partnership might be created in observable social encounters and interactions. Our program’s objective was to address these issues by investigating two main avenues of research. The first objective was to identify and recognise the sorts of interactional competences mobilised by early childhood educators when they encounter parents. The research questions developed here were the following: What are the typical interactional patterns and characteristics of parent–educator encounters in early childhood education? What kinds of challenges do educators face when interacting with parents? What interactional competences are required and mobilised to respond to these challenges? The second objective of the research programme was to assist early childhood educators in the development of their interactional competences for encountering parents. The research questions developed here can be formulated as follows: How can interactional competences be supported and developed through continuing education and training programmes? How can video-based interaction analysis contribute to such training?

2. Investigating interactional competences as empirical accomplishments

To answer these questions, we used video-based interaction analysis in an empirical research design comprising two consecutive phases. The first phase consisted of a video-ethnographic inquiry focusing on the encounters between parents, early childhood educators and children in ECE centres in Geneva, in French-speaking Switzerland. These interactions were videorecorded in standard work situations over two consecutive weeks. Our observations focused on three typical interactions: *a)* morning drop-offs, when parents bring their children to the educational centre, *b)* afternoon pick-ups, when parents collect their children, and *c)* formal yearly meetings with parents, when educators provide feedback on children's development and progress.

The second phase of the research used an intervention-training design with video-based interaction analysis to assist qualified childhood education professionals reflect on their interactional skills and competences. Data from the video-ethnographic phase served as training material for small groups of volunteer educators, with the aim of expanding their interactional competences in relation to parent and family interactions. Educators were introduced to interaction analysis and the methodological principles associated with its *analytical mentality*. They were also trained to select and transcribe video data from their work and to perform a collective analysis of these data with the group. Finally, they prepared and delivered feedback about their training to a larger group of colleagues working in the same institutions.

This empirical research took place in two childcare facilities in the canton of Geneva between Spring 2018 and Spring 2020. Data consisted of video recordings of typical multimodal interactions that took place during the two consecutive phases of the project.

	Video-ethnography phase			Training phase			
	Drop-offs	*Pick-ups*	*Meetings*	*Input*	*Selection*	*Co-analysis*	*Feed-back*
Institution A	38:59	37:03	5:58	3:15	3:54	7:54	5:56
Institution B	41:20	61:09	2:42	3:59	3:33	5:52	5:30
Total (hours)	**80:19**	**98:12**	**8:40**	**7:14**	**7:27**	**13:46**	**11:26**

Table 1: Audiovideo data available, in hours and minutes

As Table 1 indicates, a total of 187 hours of video were recorded for the video-ethnographic phase of the project, of which 80 hours focused on drop-offs, 98 hours looked at pick-ups and 8 hours showed yearly meetings. The project's entire training phase was also video-recorded, with almost 40 hours of data from the different steps of training design, including 7 hours of content-based training on interaction analysis, 7 hours of video sequence selection by participants, 13 hours of collective video-data analysis by the groups and 11 hours about the preparation of dissemination activities within larger institutions. Video recordings were organised in a database, transcribed and coded using Transana Multi-User qualitative analysis software.

For the second phase of the project, consisting in training sessions involving professionals, participants were given access to video recorded data in which they were featured as active participants. During the training period, participants could select relevant excerpts of these recordings, connected to practical problems they experience about daily encounters with parents at work.

3. Key findings of the research program

The coded and transcribed data were then analysed collectively through data sessions within the research team from an interactional and multimodal perspective. These analyses led to the production of the findings presented below. Readers can refer to the publications for a more detailed presentation.

3.1. Identifying interactional competences in drop-

off and pick-up encounters

A first set of results concerned the analysis of social encounters that could be observed during drop-off and pick-up situations involving children and their parents. On this particular topic, various features of the interactional competences mobilised by educators were highlighted. A first characteristic of drop-off and pick-up situations involving children and families is that social interactions that take place during such circumstances appear as complex, fragmented, discontinuous and distributed over a very large number of participants. In these circumstances, professionals must constantly reconfigure their participation, orienting themselves in a plurality of actions carried out in parallel or alternately (Garcia, Wolter & Filliettaz, 2022; Wolter, 2020).

A second characteristic of drop-offs and pick-ups concerns their temporally constrained and highly ritualised nature. In order to 'save time', parents and educators develop specific routines and adjust to scripted scenarios that are tailored to the characteristics and needs of the child. These routines allow them to ensure smooth and serene transitions for children (Zogmal & Filliettaz, 2021). However, these routines and their implementation may vary from one child to another and according to the participants involved in interaction. They also require from the participants an ability to adjust to the contributions of the other co-participants.

A third characteristic of drop-off and pick-up interactions refers to the collaborative processes at work in their accomplishment. Our analyses show that parents take an active role and exert agentic power to influence the conditions in which these drop-off and pick-up rituals are carried out (Filliettaz, Zogmal, Garcia, Bimonte, Billett & Flückiger, forthcoming). A fine-grained analysis of the data shows that parents contribute in multiple ways to the facilitation of children’s drop-offs and pick-ups and their resistance. First, they exert agency through their contributions to the management of time and to the sequential progression of interactions. As shown in the audio-video recordings, parents often initiate units of actions that significantly progress the way encounters unfold. They decide when it is time to pass the child from arm to arm, and also introduce new topics in conversation or stray from topics introduced by other participants. Another way for parents to exert influence in the unfolding encounters is through framing and context management. Parents are actively shaping the contexts in which they leave their children in the mornings or reunite with them in the afternoon. These frames, enacted in collaboration with educators, can be either public with intersubjectivity understood by all participants, or they may be accomplished in a discreet or hidden manner, addressed exclusively to a subset of participants. A third way for parents to endorse active roles in drop-off or pick-up encounters is to use face work and interpersonal exchange as the interaction unfolds. As shown in the data, more or less symmetrical or asymmetrical relations may be built during such encounters. Parents and educators may agree on ways to categorise children’s actions or attitudes, or negotiate these with more or less agreement. Depending on the circumstances of such negotiations, a climate of collaboration or distrust may emerge.

Children are not absent from these transition routines. On the contrary, they are both an object of discourse and active participants in their own right. Analyses carried out about drop-off and pick-up encounters show that educators spend a large part of their activity addressing children concerned and supporting them in active forms of participation (Garcia & Zogmal, forthcoming). Children are also being evaluated during “feed-back” routines observable during pick-up interactions. Their experiences during the day are being reported to parents and evaluated by educators (Zogmal, forthcoming b).

3.2. Identifying interactional competences in yearly meetings with parents

A second set of results concerned the analysis of the social encounters that take place during yearly meetings held between professionals and parents, in the absence of the child. These formal meetings unfold in a sequentially ordered way. They also include a large number of assessment statements, not only of the child's behaviour and development, but also oriented towards the parents' educational actions or the work of the professionals within the institution. In such contexts, statements such as "it's normal" can carry different meanings, depending on the circumstances in which they are produced (Bimonte & Zogmal, forthcoming). The interactional competences of educators observable during formal meetings with parents also concern the production of "advice". Such recommendations are sometimes requested by the parents, and sometimes spontaneously proposed by professionals. They are generally not only address *to* parents but co-constructed *with* them. They may concern different aspects of the child's development and constitute opportunities for both parents and professionals to assume various and often asymmetrical epistemic positions (Filliettaz & Zuppiger, forthcoming). Finally, yearly meetings with parents often include narratives, produced in a 'theatrical' or emphatic manner, which allow participants to reenact children's actions and make their voices accessible to participants. Thus, although children are usually absent from the frontstage of parents-educators meetings, they are reported as active and living participants within the talk shared by adults (Zogmal, forthcoming a).

3.3. Developing interactional competences in video-based interaction analysis sessions

A third set of results concerned the analysis of data recorded during the training sessions involving the researchers and groups of volunteer educators from the two institutions. The analysis of this material has highlighted various aspects of interactional competences as they are likely to be developed during video-based interaction analysis sessions in continuing education programs (Filliettaz, Garcia & Zogmal, forthcoming a).

A first feature of these competences is that they build on multiple sorts of knowledge, as they are revealed when interaction unfolds during collective data analysis sessions (Filliettaz & Zogmal, 2021; Garcia & Filliettaz, 2020; Garcia, 2020, 2021a, 2021b; Zogmal & Durand, 2020). This knowledge is co-constructed by researchers and

professionals during training sessions. It is transformed in the course of the co-analysis sessions and are subject to frequent shift of perspective as the analytical work progresses. This knowledge relates not only to the relational work with the parents, but more generally to the observable interactional processes as well as to the method of analysis being experienced and learnt. Finally, this knowledge gives rise to personal opinions and educational norms within the professional community concerned.

A second feature of the interactional competences as developed in the training sessions concerns how professionals in early childhood education account for time constraints in their work when engaging with audio-video recorded material during training sessions (Filliettaz, Garcia & Zogmal, forthcoming b). A systematic analysis of collective data sessions involving professionals shows that educators have the ability to recognise time constraints as a structuring ingredient of their encounters with parents. Different sorts of categories are used during collective analysis sessions for referring to time and temporality. A first set of categories refers to the sequential organisation of encounters with parents. Educators commenting on video recordings of encounters with parents orient to rhythmic patterns of drop-off and pick-up encounters, as well as the sequential progression of actions composing such interactions. They also often make visible the complex range of actions that are conducted simultaneously or alternatively. A second set of categories is related to mechanisms of “typicality”. Beyond the situated nature of the encounters they analyse, educators make visible the sorts of typical or generic expectation and resources they use when engaging in drop off and pick-up encounters. These may apply to parents and children, but also to particular staff members or institutional practices. Finally, results also show that professionals have the ability to perform specific reasoning or cognitive resources when facing time constraints in their encounters with parents. For instance, they display anticipation skills as well as a capacity to adapt permanently to the evolving contingencies of interactions as they unfold.

Playing “drama” constitutes a third aspect of the interactional competence as it is observable in video-based training sessions. When commenting on their forms of engagement in interactions with parents, educators noted the "theatrical" nature of their discourse and the use of their "voice" to exaggerate specific characteristics of the encountered situations (Filliettaz & Zogmal, forthcoming). Similarly, the topic of the "image" of the self and the institution also emerged as a major concern for educators when commenting on the filmed interactions. Interacting with parents is a matter of "presentation of self" and of delivering a positive image of the institution as parents are present and observe educators at work (Garcia, forthcoming).

4. Conclusion: partnership relations with parents as situated

accomplishments

The research conducted so far shows that collaborative relations between parents and educators in ECE do not derive from declared institutional intentions, but are the results of local and highly contextual actions which are observable in face-to-face interactions between participants. As shown in our data, encounters between parents and professionals are shaped by recurrent social practices that generate routines, habits and cultural expectations. However, to navigate the numerous contingencies of each local situation, both parents and educators have to adapt to each single occurrence of drop-off and pick-up. To do so, they have to display and enact elaborated forms of interactional competences, which help them to progress their course of action, renegotiate a joint understanding of the context in which their interactions take place, share knowledge about such contexts, and utilise a complex range of semiotic resources available in the environment. It is through these interactional competences that partnership relations constructed daily.

To make such interactional competences visible and to allow professionals to develop their capabilities when encountering parents at work, it is important to foster collaborative forms of research, in which educators are not only considered as objects under scrutiny, but also as active co-participants to the production of research findings. Developing training programs closely interconnected to research methods can serve as fruitful resources to bridge the gap between research and practice. From our own practical experience in this project, it seems that the concepts and methods that define the principles of video-based interaction analysis can be applied fruitfully to the field of continuing education in early childhood. Not only is it a method through which researchers can investigate how interactions unfold in work situations and settings, but it can also be used by professionals as a way to reflect on their own work practices. From what we have observed in our data, professionals seem to have the capacity not only to enact and mobilise interactional competences but also to recognise and identify these competences when describing and commenting on what they did in video recordings of their work. From there, the opportunities for reflection provided by video-based interaction analysis can be seen as a promising avenue for seeing training not only as a secondary and consecutive outcome of research, but as an integral object of investigation.

References

Bimonte, A. & Zogmal, M. (forthcoming). « C’est normal » : la polysémie des énoncés évaluatifs dans les entretiens entre les éducatrices de la petite enfance et les parents. Pour *Langage & Société*.

Bouve, C. (1999). Confrontation des pratiques éducatives entre familles et crèches collectives. *Recherches et prévisions*, *57*(1), 45-58.

Cheatham, G.A., & Ostrosky, M.M. (2009). Listening for details of talk: Early childhood parent-teacher conference communication facilitators. *Young exceptional children*, *13*(1), 36-49. https://doi.org/10.1177/1096250609347283

Filliettaz, L., Garcia, S. & Zogmal, M. (forthcoming a). Video-based interaction analysis: a research and training method to understand workplace learning and professional development. In M. Goller, E. Kyndt, S. Paloniemi & Crina Damsa (Ed.), *Researching workplace learning and professional development: Addressing methodological challenges using advanced methodologies*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Filliettaz, L., Garcia, S. & Zogmal, M. (forthoming b). « Mais tu vois, ça dure mille ans ! » : l'expérience des rythmes du travail dans les interactions d'arrivées et de départs en crèche. Pour *Formation & Profession*.

Filliettaz, L., & Zogmal, M. (2021). « Vraiment c'était un moment très riche » : Apprendre à analyser des interactions langagières en contexte de travail et de formation. *Travaux Neuchâtelois de Linguistique*, *74*(1), 15-30.

Filliettaz, L., & Zogmal, M. (forthcoming). Travailler sous le regard d'autrui : une compétence interactionnelle ? *Revue des Sciences de l'éducation.*

Filliettaz,L., Zogmal, M., Garcia, S., Bimonte, A., Flückiger, B., & Billett, S. (to appear). Parental agency in daily encounters with professionals: an interactional perspective on the notion of partnership in early childhood education. For *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction.*

Filliettaz, L. & Zuppiger, J. (forthcoming). L'accomplissement interactionnel des « conseils » dans les entretiens de parents en contexte préscolaire. Pour *Education & Socialisation.*

Garcia, S. (2020). Penser les continuités entre recherche et formation professionnelle dans les métiers socio-éducatifs : le cas des compétences interactionnelles des éducatrices de l'enfance dans les relations avec les parents. *Recherche & Formation, 94*(2), 33-51.

Garcia, S. (2021a). L'interprétation du travail en interaction : Transformations pour la recherche et la formation. *TransFormations - Recherche en Éducation et Formation des Adultes, 2*(22), 76-91.

Garcia, S. (2021b). Interagir au travail et en situation de formation : le cas des relations avec les parents dans le champ de l'éducation de l'enfance. *Savoirs, 56*(2), 55-75.

Garcia, S. (forthcoming). La compétence interactionnelle à « préserver l'image » lors des rencontres avec les parents dans les institutions de la petite enfance. In F. Pirard, P. Garnier & M. Zogmal (Eds.), *L'éducation des jeunes enfants : analyse croisée des orientations politiques et des pratiques de terrain*. Collection Petite enfance et éducation. Berne : Editions Peter Lang.

Garcia, S., & Filliettaz, L. (2020). Compétences interactionnelles et relations des éducateurs de l'enfance avec les parents : la formation comme ressource pour la recherche. *Phronesis, 9*(2), 123-138.

Garcia, S., Wolter, L. & Filliettaz, L. (2022). Travailler « sur le pas de la porte » : le cas des interactions avec les parents dans le champ de l'éducation de l'enfance. *Revue d'anthropologie des connaissances, 16*(1), 1-27.

Garcia, S. & Zogmal, M. (forthcoming). Acquisition du langage et rituels de rencontres: les phénomènes d'adressage lors des interactions entre enfants, parents et éducatrices dans les institutions de la petite enfance. Pour *Language, Interaction and Acquisition.*

Nunez Moscoso, J., & Ogay, T. (2016). L'entretien enseignant-famille à l'école maternelle: quelles dynamiques organisationnelles, quels savoirs mobilisés ? *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, *42*(1), 147-181. https://doi.org/10.7202/1036897ar

OECD (2006). *Starting Strong II. Early Childhood Education and Care*. Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development.

Pekarek Doehler, S., Bangerter, A., De Weck, G., Filliettaz, L., Gonzalez Martinez & Petitjean, C. (eds.). (2017). *Interactional Competences in Institutional Settings: from School to the Workplace*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Scalambrin, L., & Ogay, T. (2014). « Votre enfant dans ma classe ». Quel partenariat parents-enseignante à l'issue du premier entretien ? *Education et sociétés, 34*(2), 23-38. https://doi.org/10.3917/es.034.0023

Wolter, L. (2020). L'analyse interactionnelle comme levier de compréhension du caractère complexe et invisible du travail : le cas de l'éducation de la petite enfance. Mémoire de Master en Formation des adultes. Université de Genève. https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:150134

Young, R.F., & Miller, E.R. (2004). Learning as changing participation: Discourse roles in ESL writing conferences. *The Modern Language Journal*, *88*(4), 519-535. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0026-7902.2004.t01-16-.x

Zogmal, M. (forthcoming a). L'emphase lors des entretiens de parents dans l'éducation de l'enfance. Pour *La Revue internationale de l'éducation familiale.*

Zogmal, M. (forthcoming b). « Elle a bien joué » : L'évaluation des conduites des enfants lors des « retours » dans les structures d'accueil de la petite enfance. Pour *Évaluer – Journal international de recherche en éducation et formation*.

Zogmal, M., & Durand, I. (2020). De l'observation des enfants à l'analyse interactionnelle: contributions de la recherche à la formation continue des éducateurs et éducatrices de l'enfance. *Phronesis*, *9*(2), 108-122.

Zogmal, M. & Filliettaz, L. (2021). Identifier des routines interactionnelles dans le travail des éducateurs de l'enfance : le cas des arrivées des enfants à la crèche. *Revue @activité, 18*(2), 168-198.