

Hierarchical Structures and Group Dynamics in Early Elementary Education

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Observations from the Community School of Davidson



Chavajay (2006)

Types of mother-child interaction in problem solving task:

- Hierarchical: allow all students to have turn with turn-taking and hand-raising, teacher-run with clear power dynamics and centers of authority, known-answer questions, community aspect of learning.
- Egalitarian: equal relationships across ages, children help adults in problem solving and brainstorming, collaborate among peers and with adults in promotion of self-regulation.

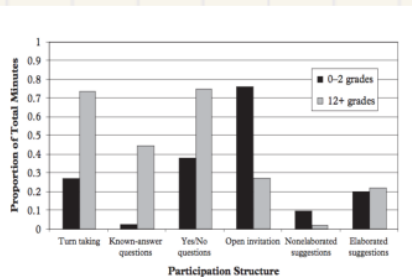


Figure 2. Mothers' coordination of a problem-solving discussion with related children.

Where do we go from here?



Policy Makers: Incorporate egalitarian principles into the education system

Hierarchical

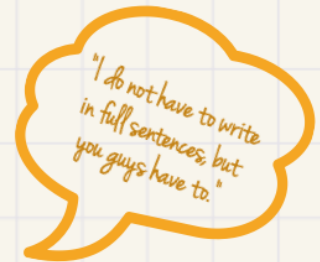
- Whole-class instruction allows for more hierarchical styles through teacher lead lessons.
- Positioning of teacher above students physically
 - Known-answer questions e.g. thumbs down or up for what was good or bad behavior)
 - Some close-ended questions
 - Turn taking e.g. raising your hand, drawing names from can
 - Teacher is authority e.g. reprimanding problem behaviors, lecture on healthy snacks

Egalitarian

- Small groups and pairs allow for more egalitarian styles through collaboration and peer-based problem solving without known answers.
- Treating children like adults
 - Open-ended questions
 - Students asked to elaborate on answers
 - Allow students opportunity to participate or not
 - Allow students to be slightly fidgety

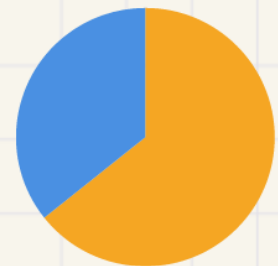


Principals: Be aware of strong hierarchical power structures and work to dismantle them



Teaching Styles Observed in CSD Classrooms

Grades 1-3



■ Hierarchical (64.29%)
■ Egalitarian (35.71%)



Teachers: Focus on activities fostering collaboration and children's autonomy

References

Chavajay, P. (2006). How Mayan mothers with different amounts of schooling organize a problem-solving discussion with children. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 30(4), 371-382. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025406066744>
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