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### **Engaging children in activities and interactions. What strategies do educators use in early childhood education and care?**

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#### **Abstract**

In early childhood education and care (ECEC), children do not participate in the same way and to the same extent in various kinds of interactions. One of the challenges for educators is to succeed in involving every child in the proposed activities, thereby enabling them to benefit from these experiences for language acquisition. The present exploratory study was conducted through video recordings of educator-child interactions in French ECEC contexts. The analysis focused on sequences where one or more children either withdrew or stayed in the background of the ongoing activities. The sequences were categorised according to the type of activity, the educators' language strategies, and their outcomes in terms of the children's participation. By focusing on the role and impact of language practices, our discussion re-examines the notion of involvement/engagement, its achievements in ECEC, and the effects of the educators' moves on child involvement.

**Key words:** early childhood education and care, child involvement, adult responsiveness, pragmatics, educators' language strategies

#### **1. Introduction**

According to interactionist and socio-pragmatic approaches (Bruner, 1983; Nelson, 2007; Tomasello, 1999; Vygotsky, 1962), language acquisition is grounded in children's communicative and linguistic experiences. Not only do children grasp the forms and patterns of their language from the caregivers' speech (e.g. Ambridge & Lieven, 2015; Cameron-Faulkner et al., 2003) but they also learn about pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic meaning in interaction (Nelson, 2007; Tomasello, 1999). As Tomasello (1999) suggested, language acquisition is a side effect of interaction. Therefore, it is through their active involvement in various social activities and interactional contexts that children develop skills and knowledge about the language of the culture in which they grow up (François et al., 1984; Salazar Orvig et al., 2021). Furthermore, involvement in interactions allows children to integrate the relationship between their interlocutors' communicative intentions and linguistic forms (Halliday, 2003; Snow, 2017; Tomasello, 2000). In that sense, it can be considered one of the driving forces of language acquisition.

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As a collaborative process between adult and child, language acquisition involves the active participation of children in multiple interactions. It also entails a co-construction between the children and the adults, provided that the former are more than just spectators. In conversation, children are encouraged to speak while the adults target their participation through the use of responsive language (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002). Adult responsiveness is defined as the ability to respond sensitively, contingently, and directly to the child's communicative and language behaviors (e.g. gestures, gaze, vocalizations, utterances) while following the child's interests (Gest et al., 2006; Rhyner et al., 2013; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2001). Responsiveness supports children's participation by encouraging the children to engage in extended exchanges and make linguistic attempts (Piasta et al., 2012). Cues of responsiveness include repeats and recasts, open-ended questions, interpretations, and responsive labels, all of which are strategies that engage and promote children's interactions (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Salerni & Suttora, 2022). Responsiveness is known to significantly contribute to language acquisition (for a review, Masek et al., 2021a). The adult's focus on objects and events in the environment engages the child in interactions and provides information about the linguistic symbols and functions of language (Carpenter et al., 1998; Kaplan & Hafner, 2006; Scaife & Bruner, 1975; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2001). When adults are responsive, they provide contingent and appropriate input, with a temporal link to the child's vocal, verbal or gestural production, thereby promoting the development of language skills in addition to the quantity of input (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Masek et al., 2021b; McGillion et al., 2013). The more adults follow children's attention, encourage, and respond to the child's attempts, the more they support language development and social abilities (Bornstein et al., 2008; Veneziano, 2014; Yoder et al., 1993).

Apart from Ninio and colleagues (Ninio et al., 1994; Ninio & Wheeler, 1986), who considered the specificity of communicative acts according to the interactive dimension to which they apply (i.e. managing co-presence, involvement in focused interaction and in joint action), few studies have dealt with children's engagement in interaction in relation to language development. Based on the idea that lexical acquisition is highly correlated with the episodes of joint attention experienced by children (Morales et al., 2000; Tomasello, 1999), Bakeman and Adamson (1984) developed an analytic tool to describe children's engagement in family interactions. They distinguished various levels of engagement ranging from "non-engagement" to "full engagement" in the interaction, via onlooking, engaging with one person, engaging only with objects, passive joint engagement when the involvement is elicited by the interlocutor, and finally, coordinated joint engagement when the children are fully involved in an interaction.

All of the studies mentioned above dealt with dyadic (parent-child) interactions where the adults' attention and responsiveness are totally focused on one child. Yet in some settings, in ECEC, in extended families, or in families with siblings close in age, multi-party interactions are frequent (Sperry et al., 2018), so dyadic settings are only a small part of the frameworks compared to polyadic

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situations (one or more adults with two or more children; van Schaik et al., 2018). Fewer studies have investigated the issue of engagement in these more complex interaction settings.

The present exploratory study aims to examine how educators in ECEC situations deal with children's involvement, whether in interaction, in activity, or both. The study focuses on educators' interactional and linguistic moves aimed at involving children who are disengaged in an activity (booktime, free or structured play) and/or in communication (vocal and/or verbal and/or gestural modalities).

## **2. Engaging in interactions**

### **2.1 Defining the concept of involvement/engagement in focused interactions**

In his early work, Goffman (1963) brought out the centrality of engagement in interactions:

In face-to-face interactions, participants engage one another in focused interaction, the unit of which I [Goffman] shall refer to as a face engagement or an encounter. Face engagements comprise all those instances of two or more participants in a situation joining each other openly in maintaining a single focus of cognitive and visual attention - what is sensed as a single mutual activity, entailing preferential communication rights. (Goffman, 1963: 89)

Engagement in a focused interaction therefore implies joint attention, intersubjectivity, and mutual ratification by participants as interlocutors. In their book on pragmatic development, Ninio and Snow (1996) adopted Goffman's conception of engagement in order to better describe young children's first steps in dialogue. Verbal discussions and joint actions are considered to be the achievement of an interactional activity; in their scheme the first level of an encounter is co-presence, which does not necessarily involve an interaction, but in co-presence, participants can build focused interactions that can give rise to joint attention. Joint attention, in turn, is the basis for joint activities and discussions. At each of these thresholds (e.g. when engaging in joint attention in focused interaction), participants frame and negotiate their involvement in the interaction. However, involvement depends on the framing of the social activity, which is multidimensional (Goffman, 1974) and depends on the type of activity and the participation framework. For instance, moving from one activity to another is likely to give rise to disengagement from the whole interaction or from some aspects of it (Goffman, 1957). An interaction may unfold on various simultaneous tracks that involve several channels of joint action (e.g. preparing dinner and having a conversation at the same time) and multimodal communication (vocal and/or verbal only or with gestural communication). On each of these tracks, participants may experience "main involvement", which occupies their individual attention in a sustained manner, or "side involvement", where they can also focus on something that can be present or achieved without hindering the main involvement.

The participation framework is also a source of heterogeneity in terms of engagement. Polyadic interactions such as children's experience in ECEC offer a relevant example of participation

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instability. For Goffman (1981), as we know, it includes both the ratified or authorised participants (addressed or unaddressed) who are officially part of the activity and the interactional group on the one hand, and the bystanders (intruders, spectators or witnesses), who in principle are excluded from the interaction, on the other. Finally, Goffman distinguishes among the bystanders, labelling them as “overhearers” (persons visually accessible to the speaker who cannot ignore their presence within the interlocutionary space), and “eavesdroppers”, who are intruders in the participation framework (they act in the shadows, without the speaker being aware of their presence). Whereas the category of eavesdroppers seems less relevant here, in polyadic interaction contexts such as ECEC, each participant’s footing is permanently changing as it moves back and forth from the status of ratified participant to that of a bystander throughout the setting and the course of activities. This heterogeneity challenges educators who are creating opportunities for focused interactions and joint activities. Educators have to deal with the various levels of engagement children may display and, when relevant, deploy interactional resources in order to enlist the children in an activity, at least minimally. Enlisting or recruiting is an important aspect of scaffolding mentioned by Wood et al. (1976).

## **2.2 Engagement and language use in early childhood education and care**

### *2.2.1 Educator-toddler interactions in ECEC*

The issue of children’s engagement in childcare interactions cannot be addressed solely in terms of conversational participation as is typically done for dyadic interactions. Polyadic contexts in these settings paint a more complex picture. Some studies have focused on how group size affects the language behaviours of both children and adults in childcare centres. Schaffer and Liddell (1984) and Morra Pellegrino and Scopesi (1990) highlighted that as group size increased, educators’ attention became more dispersed, leading to reduced participation in activities and decreased responsiveness. In turn, children made fewer attempts to interact or to get an adult’s attention. Reciprocal conversations were thus more limited (Dalgaard et al., 2022). Depending on the number of children per educator, the amount of talk increased in polyadic situations and individual interactions decreased (Torr & Pham, 2016). According to Morra Pellegrino and Scopesi (1990), the smaller the group, the more the adult’s behaviour was oriented toward conversational moves (e.g. phatic utterances, comments and open-ended questions) and empathetic contributions (e.g. repetitions, confirmations, consolations). In contrast, the larger the group, the more the adult’s behaviours pertained to organizational moves (e.g. controlling activity and children’s attention via speech). Smaller groups provided adults with more opportunities to talk with children rather than to them, and to reduce directive discourse (Durden & Dangel, 2008). Other studies on children’s behaviour in ECEC also emphasized low child involvement in interactions (Durden & Dangel, 2008; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002), with a predominance of adult speech (Degotardi, 2021) and a large proportion of questions (de Rivera et al., 2005). The

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polyadic context played a role in reducing children's opportunities to participate (Degotardi et al., 2016).

Not only does responsiveness decrease in polyadic situations (Dalgaard et al., 2022; Schaffer & Liddell, 1984), but joint attention also exhibits qualitative differences from dyadic situations, such as greater instability. Therefore, interlocutors may be less effective at initiating and maintaining interactions (Cain et al., 2007). However, the children's rare discursive contributions may also depend on their status in the participation frameworks of each activity, i.e. whether they are categorized as either ratified participants or bystanders.

Adult-child interactions are also shaped by educators' representations and perceptions of language and language development. In high-quality ECEC (i.e. with educators trained in child development and, in particular, in child language), the educators are aware of the importance of child-directed speech. However, research has pointed out a general lack of knowledge (Moitel Messara et al., 2023) and requests for learning (Masson & Bertin, 2023) about children's language production. This means that educators are in fact interested in the child's communication and are aware of their role in language acquisition, but do not sufficiently deploy communication and language promotion strategies (Bouchard et al., 2010; Laurin et al., 2021).

### *2.2.2 Child engagement and adults' strategies during activities*

In their daily lives, children encounter language in contexts, not abstract forms and patterns. Children first experience particular uses of language, and not language itself (Nelson, 2007). They begin their acquisition with language functions that are gradually associated with linguistic patterns (Halliday, 2003). Moreover, they grasp the forms and functions of language through formats (Bruner, 1983) and activities (Salazar Orvig et al., 2021) in which participants assume social and linguistic roles subject to constraints (Levinson, 1979). Through these various "language-games" (Wittgenstein, 1953), children understand the meaning and uses of language. Activities reveal not only language uses, but also ways of interacting and the expectations of the community. Thus, the language practices of speakers represent "social practices that are determined by and act upon social contexts" (Boutet, 2021: 282, our translation).

Engagement in interactions and activities in childcare provides children with multiple opportunities to experience various forms of language and discourse. This experience is determined by the specific characteristics of the communicative environment in ECEC (e.g. polyadic situations, interactions with an adult that is not a parent, etc.) and the activity being carried out (e.g. mealtime, booktime, manual activities). As seen in section 1.2.1, children's engagement is rather low in polyadic contexts.

However, the rate of participation depends on the time of day and the type of activity. Soderstrom and Wittebolle (2013) conducted a quantitative and comparative study of adults' speech addressed to children 12-29 months old. They took into consideration the time of day, the type of activity (e.g.

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mealtime, playtime, booktime, naptime), and the setting (home vs. childcare centre). Their results revealed the impact of these factors. The adults talked to the children mostly during booktime and organized playtime<sup>1</sup>. Note that in childcare, children are prompted to listen to the story more than to participate, as Girolametto and Weitzman (2002) and Torr (2019) pointed out. Child participation was low during booktime, and as a consequence, the educators' responsiveness was low too. Dialogic asymmetry during booktime tended to inhibit children's participation, whereas conversational behaviours observed in playtime (organized or not) promoted their involvement (Girolametto et al., 2000; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002). In Girolametto and colleagues' (2000) study of interactions during two activities in ECEC (booktime vs. play-dough time), the children talked less in the first activity because educators' linguistic moves were mainly intended to check understanding (closed questions and verification questions aimed at labelling referents). Moreover, the children did not always respond. In contrast, the play-dough activity was more conversational due to the use of open-ended and clarification questions.

Educators provide activities to children who can choose whether or not to participate. Depending on the features of the educator (e.g. educational goals, attitudes), children may be more or less inclined to join the ongoing activities (Ree & Emilson, 2019). Thus, activities are more or less controlled by adults, both in childcare situations (Cadima et al., 2023) and in family settings (Holme et al., 2021). In ECEC, this control influences children's participation, because the less adults regulate children's behaviour and/or activities, the more they create opportunities for children to communicate (Emilson & Johansson, 2013). According to Rhyner and colleagues (2013), booktime is the activity with the highest degree of adult control: the children's autonomy is reduced because adults control the material, the actions, and the communicative moves. In contrast, free play allows children to take control of the material and the actions, and lead the interactions. Therefore, on the one hand, adult moves are more often contingent and stimulating, and on the other hand, children have more opportunities to participate in conversations in free play (Cadima et al., 2023; Rhyner et al., 2013).

### **2.3 Aim of the current study**

The way educators deal with challenges in child engagement has been described in North and East European countries (Cadima et al., 2023; Ree & Emilson, 2019) and in North American ECEC (e.g. Girolametto et al., 2000; Soderstrom & Wittebolle, 2013), but not in any French ECEC settings.

Research in this context focuses on children's language development (see Berger et al., 2021) rather than on participation in communication and/or activity. The present study thus aims to describe and identify educators' strategies in cases of child disengagement. More specifically, we investigated how

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<sup>1</sup> "Organized playtime" was defined by Soderstrom and Wittebolle (2013) as an activity in which children sit and participate in a group activity, in contrast to "general playtime" when children play as they wish or are not engaging in a defined activity.

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educators attempt to involve children partially or laterally in the ongoing activity or communication, i.e. the child is participating in the activity but not in communication (no gazing, gestures and/or talk), or is outside the participation framework without acting or talking, with or without gazing toward the activity. The analysis of child engagement involves analysing the nature of disengagement.

Our study aims to i) describe the strategies educators use to (re)involve disengaged children, in terms of linguistic, multimodal, and interactional features, ii) demonstrate their effects on the children's engagement in activities and/or communication, and iii) highlight the educators' strategies and their outcomes according to the characteristics of the ongoing activity. Our analysis leads to a discussion of the issue of involvement/engagement in ECEC. The quantitative results (section 3) and the qualitative analysis (section 4) represent a first step to understanding the challenges of engagement in ECEC discussed in section 5.

Based on previous research, we assume that educators' strategies of (re)engagement will focus more on communication than on activity because in activities, educators allow children to choose whether or not to participate. We also expect that the adults follow the children's focus of attention when attempting to involve them in an activity and/or communication. Finally, we hypothesise that educator's strategies are influenced by the child's degree of disengagement and the type of activity.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1 Data**

Our study is based on videos recorded in five French ECEC for children between three months and three and a half years of age. Eighty hours of video-recordings in ecological contexts were collected. The university ethics committee validated the protocol. Written informed consent was obtained from parents of recorded children as well as from professionals who participated in the study. The corpus consists of typical ECEC situations (mealtime, booktime, playtime, etc.) and diverse interaction configurations (dyadic, polyadic, peer interactions, etc.), with various materials and children of different ages (infants and toddlers). From these data, ten sequences (for a total duration of 1 hour 23 minutes) were selected. The selected sequences are related to moments when, in the context of the activity, one or more children were partially or totally disengaged (see sections 2.2 and 2.3 for the selection and analysis criteria). In these ten sequences, engagement moves were analysed quantitatively to describe their general features. Then three sequences in three different activities (booktime, structured play, and free play) were chosen in order to qualitatively illustrate some of the involvement moves in our corpus.

A description of the data sample is presented in Table 1.

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Booktime is fully guided by the educator, in terms of both the material and the activity (talking together about the pictures in the book). The joint participation of child and adult is known to contribute to co-constructing the activity (de Weck et al., 2019). Structured play, as compared to other types of activity, requires greater involvement by the adult in terms of interaction and action (Fisher et al., 2013). Furthermore, participants are involved in various simultaneous tracks (Goffman, 1974), including the material task and the vocal and/or verbal interaction. In free plays, there are no constraints for the participants, who can freely take part or not take part in the playing activity (Ree & Emilson, 2019). Educators have the choice of letting the children play by themselves while supervising them or building an activity with them.

### **3.2 Selection criteria**

We focused on activities involving three to five children, considered to be “small groups” in Morra Pellegrino & Scopesi’s study (1990). This group size was the most frequent in our recordings in cases of booktime and playtime, and more particularly in structured play.

We selected ten sequences based on the following features of the situation:

- the children and adults shared a common activity, even though the educators were more committed to managing the activity than taking part in it;
- at some point, one or more children were laterally involved or partially withdrew from the activity or the communication;
- the educators made at least one attempt to enlist or involve the child in the activity or the communication.

### **3.3 Analysis criteria**

We adopted a socio-pragmatic and dialogic approach that involves studying each participant’s behaviour (adults and children) in order to grasp the way in which they impact their interlocutors.

We identified:

- the type of child disengagement from the activity (the child was next to the other children but did not participate actively) and/or from the communication (the child could be active in the activity but not involved in communication with the adult or the other children whether by gestures, gaze, or in the vocal and/or verbal modality) and the degree of child disengagement (partial, complete) based on the child’s position in space (in, near, or out of the participation framework);
- the status of the focus of attention (an object already in their focus or a new object);
- the interactional moves of educators aimed at involving the child. These moves were categorised according to their modality, their illocutionary value, and their discursive

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functions. Each move entailed one modality, one illocutionary value, and one discursive function. The modalities were vocal and/or verbal (vocal and/or verbal productions that had a symbolic function), gestural (symbolic gestures produced with the hands, the head or the face), or multimodal (vocal and/or verbal with gestures). The illocutionary values included assertions (declarative statements), questions (to trigger a verbal answer from the interlocutor), requests (to induce an action), phatic moves (to establish and maintain contact), proposals (to suggest some behaviour/action to the child), permissions (to ask the child for consent to perform a behaviour/action), and “other” (including all other moves and uncertain moves). The discursive functions were broken down into explaining (an event or a behaviour), describing (objects, actions, events), labelling (naming objects or events), regulating (managing the child’s activity or behaviour) and “other” (all other types of discursive functions including uncertain ones).

The outcome of these strategies in terms of the children’s participation was also assessed. We considered the child’s participation in the main activity with vocal and/or verbal, gestural and/or multimodal resources as a sign of involvement, whereas a brief glance at the adult immediately followed by return of attention to the side activity and/or communication was not enough to indicate involvement. In the first step, the authors coded several sequences individually. In the second step, the analyses were compared to obtain a consensus.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Types of child disengagement and educator (re)engagement moves**

In the ten sequences selected we identified 64 attempts to (re)engage children in the activity or the communication. Table 2 shows the distribution of the types of child disengagement for all ten sequences. In most cases, the children’s partial involvement at least concerned communication (92.19%;  $N = 59$ ): the children did not take part in the interaction either with verbal or gestural modality, whereas they could be involved in the activity.

----- @Insert Table 2 -----

Consequently, the educators mainly attempted to engage children in communication (71.88%;  $N = 46$ ), whether they were disengaged from the activity or from the interaction (Table 3).

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Therefore, the educators fostered the children's active involvement in the framework and were less focused on their participation in the activity.

Most of these attempts (for activity or communication) succeeded in integrating the children in the interaction (68.75%;  $N = 44$ ) (Table 4).

----- @Insert Table 4 -----

### 4.2 Status of children's focus of attention

We also looked into i) whether the educator was attuned to the disengaged children's current focus of attention or brought a new object into attention, and ii) how this strategy affected the child's engagement.

In general, the educators tended to be attuned to the children's focus of attention (62.50%;  $N = 40$ ), whether this focus was inside (27/40) or outside the activity (13/40) (Table 5). The introduction of a new object of attention often occurred when the child's focus was outside the activity and the educator was trying to reintroduce an object of attention related to the main activity (23/24).

----- @Insert Table 5 -----

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the types of child engagement for each type of attunement by the educator. For their part, the children were re-engaged either into the main activity (29.63%;  $N = 8$ ) or into the communication (25.93%;  $N = 7$ ). In contrast, when the children's attention was focused on something external to the current activity, they were mainly re-engaged in the communication (53.85%;  $N = 7$ ). Finally, when the educator led the children towards a new focus of attention, they engaged in the activity (41.67%;  $N = 10$ ) and to a lesser extent, in the interaction (25.00%;  $N = 6$ ).

----- @Insert Figure 1 -----

There was no quantitative difference in child involvement according to whether or not the educator was attuned to the child's focus of attention (involvement was accomplished in two-thirds of the events). To summarise, the educators seldom brought a completely new element to the attention of the children. At most, they redirected the children's attention to elements that were part of the main activity.

### 4.3. Modalities and interactional moves of the educators

We observed the forms and functions of the educators' moves. Whether they sought to engage the child in the activity or in communication, they combined vocal and/or verbal and gestural resources

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(78.13%;  $N = 50$ ). Most of the educators' multimodal moves included at least one ostensive gaze toward the child (26.56%;  $N = 17$ ), combined with a gesture (such as pointing) (20.31%;  $N = 13$ ) and/or a change in their body orientation (12.50%;  $N = 8$ ) (Table 6).

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In most cases, these multimodal combinations ended up being successful: the child returned to the activity and/or communication (Figure 2).

----- @Insert Figure 2 -----

Our analysis of the verbal moves intended to involve the children showed that the educators used three main illocutionary values: mostly questions (40.35%;  $N = 23$ ), and to a lesser degree assertions (19.30%;  $N = 11$ ) and requests (17.54%;  $N = 10$ ) (Table 7).

----- @Insert Table 7 -----

Three types of moves promoted child involvement. Questions led them to engage in communication (47.83%;  $N = 11$ ), whereas assertions and requests led them to engage in activities (27.27%;  $N = 3$  and 60%;  $N = 6$ , respectively) (Figure 3).

----- @Insert Figure 3 -----

Among the discursive functions, we found that describing (38.60%;  $N = 22$ ) and regulating (29.82%;  $N = 17$ ) were the most frequent (Table 8).

----- @Insert Table 8 -----

However, the children were not very reactive to descriptions, which is not surprising. They were less involved when educators addressed descriptions than they were for other types of utterances: only half of these moves affected their participation in the activity and/or the communication. By contrast, labelling, regulating moves and explaining had a greater impact on the children's participation in the activity and/or communication (Figure 4).

----- @Insert Figure 4 -----

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The results of our quantitative analysis revealed that

- the educators reacted to partial (subtle) disengagement at the communication level;
- they enhanced involvement in communication, and frequently did so by attuning to the child's focus of attention;
- their strategies tended to be multimodal, combining the vocal and/or verbal and gestural modalities (mostly gazing and/or pointing);
- depending on the illocutionary value, questions were a preferred method for bringing the child back into the communication or activity, and to a lesser extent assertions and requests;
- labelling, regulating and explaining involved the children more in the activity and/or communication;
- the educators adapted their moves and involvement tracks to the degree of child engagement and the reactions of the child laterally involved in the activity.

### **5. Qualitative analysis**

As previously mentioned, our qualitative analysis focuses on three sequences from three activities: booktime (section 4.1), structured play (4.2) and free play (4.3).

#### **5.1 Engagement in communication during booktime**

In this activity, one educator (EDU) and three children (CH1, CH2, CH3; all girls) were gathered around a picture book without text chosen by the children themselves. Two of the three children (CH2 and CH3) were in front of the educator, and the third (CH1) was on her right (Figure 5).

----- @Insert Figure 5 -----

The educator held the book open in front of the children so that all of them could see, touch, and point to the pictures. The vocal and/or verbal and gestural behaviours used by the educator were aimed at attracting the children's attention to each picture in the book and naming them ("what is it?"). The educator described the scenes and provided metalinguistic information (e.g. labels for objects, functions). The children pointed to the book and attempted to answer the educator's questions. Both the educator and the children exhibited characteristic behaviours during booktime, an activity in which the production of linguistic units is one of the purposes<sup>2</sup> (de Weck et al., 2021). The adult's prompts were ritualised, starting with an initial labelling question addressed to the three children each time a page was turned, followed by gestural pointing to the picture. Repeats and requests for clarification

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<sup>2</sup> This is not only purpose of course. Booktime is also an activity for talking about other cultures, the imaginary, etc.

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were used when the children did not answer. CH2 and CH3 showed interest in the activity, frequently trying to find the right words in response to the adult's questions. The educator strived to engage each child individually by looking at each one alternately, and addressing each one directly. However, the educator had to redirect the attention of the two children in front of her, who occasionally argued. Although the activity was interrupted and restarted by the educator, she managed to maintain the children's interest in the book.

The educator turned more towards CH1, whose attention and participation were less consistent. CH1 listened attentively and looked at the face of the educator, who dramatized the activity by mimicking the events in the book (e.g. storm, wind, rain).

CH1's disengagement was gradual: initially, she was very attentive (although silent), but she became distracted by the sudden and brief participation of a child in another part of the room. From that point on, CH1's attention appeared to wander. While she remained involved in the activity (looking at the pages and observing the reactions of the educator and of the other two children), she seldom participated, even when directly addressed by the educator's requests for descriptions (Example 1) combined with an ostensive gaze (see Figure 5)<sup>3</sup>.

|     |      |                                                                                                     |                                 |
|-----|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (1) | EDU: | qu'est-ce que c'est cette image ?<br>'what is this picture?'                                        | points to a picture in the book |
|     |      |                                                                                                     | CH1 seems to lose her balance   |
|     | EDU: | alors on a perdu [prénom CH1] !<br>'so! we lost [CH1's name]!'                                      |                                 |
|     | EDU: | qu'est-ce que tu vois [prénom CH1] ? là c'est quoi ?<br>'what do you see [CH1 name]? what is here?' | shows the page                  |

The educator addressed questions to CH1 that elicited a labelling by the child. These moves were clearly intended to fully re-engage the child, whose attention had been diverted to an external event outside the group.

Considering the expectations of this type of activity, the educator's involvement moves had only a limited impact, as CH1 did not respond either vocally or gesturally to the adult's requests.

Nevertheless, the educator's persistence in repeating her questions is indicative of her willingness to provide CH1 with opportunities to participate in an activity whose discursive space was largely occupied by herself and CH2 and CH3. These moves were only successful at the end of the booktime, when CH1 labelled several pictures. This sequence illustrates a case of partial involvement. While CH1's interest in the picture book indicated her engagement in the activity, the educator failed to lead her to active participation throughout the interaction.

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<sup>3</sup> Transcription conventions are: CHI = Child; EDU = Educator; xxx = Uninterpretable segment.

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### 5.2 Engagement in the activity and communication during structured play

Our second case, structured play, involved an excerpt of a drawing activity with three girls. In this case, the adult's participation mostly consisted of guiding the children's attention to the elements of the activity. This role could be quite significant, especially when the adult supported the learning (e.g. holding a pencil, providing comments on the drawings). The participants engaged in simultaneous tracks. The main track corresponded to the material task (in this case, drawing). Another track could involve vocal and/or verbal interaction. This second track could be related to the primary one (involving discussions about the drawings and/or the activity itself) or could be detached from the current situation and provide an opportunity for participants to talk about other topics, such as their personal experiences.

At the beginning of this sequence, the educator asked the children to start drawing. All of the participants sat at the same table (Figure 6).

----- @Insert Figure 6 -----

The educator distributed drawing materials without any instructions. The children began to draw, and the adult watched them without engaging in any other activity (e.g. neither drawing nor tidying up). The children were fully involved in the main task. However, one of them (CH1) remained notably quiet and was therefore less involved in communication. Consequently, CH1 did not participate in the interaction at any point, neither by taking the initiative nor by responding, and remained focused on her drawing instead.

As the educator observed the children, she periodically asked them to talk about their drawings, using labelling questions ("what did you draw?", "what is this?") and eliciting verbalizations ("tell me", "you don't want to tell me?"). These strategies were initially addressed at each of the three children individually. However, the questions did not elicit any reactions from the children. More specifically, the educator shifted her focus to CH1's involvement more than to that of CH2 and CH3, with whom she had talked at the beginning of the sequence. Following CH1's lack of reaction, the educator redirected the dialogue using a new strategy: she stopped asking questions and used other illocutionary strategies like assertions (Example 2) and exclamations (Example 3).

(2) EDU: je mets de nouveaux crayons tu apprécies ceux-là  
'I put out new color pencils, you like these'

(3) EDU: wah un doré ! looks at CH2 and CH3  
'wow a gold one!'

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EDU: un doré ! looks at CH1  
'a gold one!'

When she stopped asking questions, the educator began handing out her pencils (Figure 6) several times without expecting vocal participation. This strategy temporarily captured the child's attention but did not result in substantial involvement in the interaction.

Since CH1 did not provide any vocal responses, the educator gave up involving her in the interaction. However, she maintained frequent instances of brief gaze towards CH1. Then she shifted her attention to CH2, and to a lesser degree, to CH3. She successfully engaged these children in communication, particularly when she aligned with the girls' interests (Example 4).

(4) EDU: [prénom CH2] c'est quoi ? looks at CH2's drawing  
'[CH2 name] what's that?'

CH2 looks at her sheet

EDU: tu veux pas me dire ?  
'you don't want to tell me?'

CH2 looks at what CH3 is doing

EDU: qui est-ce qui a mis le pansement à ton doigt ?  
'who put the bandage on your finger?'

shows her thumb

CH2: moi  
'me'

points to herself

EDU: c'est toi qui l'as mis?  
'it's you who put in on?'

points to the bandage

EDU: c'est maman qu(i) a fait un dessin dessus?  
'it's mummy who made a drawing on it?'

CH2 nods

CH2: ça c'est une marionnette [prénom CH3].  
'it's a puppet [CH3 name]'

turns to CH3 and shakes her thumb

EDU: ah !  
'ah!'

Given that these two girls had been involved in communication at the beginning of the activity, the adult probably thought that they were more likely to respond to her questions. This may have influenced her choice to interact with them rather than with CH1.



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Although these moves appeared to have left out the silent child (CH1), they effectively maintained the interactional complexity of the activity. While setting up a new activity at the request of CH2 and CH3, who had completed their drawings, the educator continued to make numerous gazes and gestures towards CH1, indicating that CH1 was still a ratified participant for the educator. Even if the educator did not see it, CH1 regularly watched her and the other children.

During this drawing activity, CH1 was involved in material tasks, while CH2 and CH3 were involved simultaneously in both the activity and the interaction. While the educator initiated the activity with the same moves to engage the three children in vocal and/or verbal interaction, she adjusted her moves (both the modality and the type of utterance) to favour one track or the other, based on the reactions of each child.

### **5.3. Engagement in the activity during free play**

The last sequence was taken from a free play activity involving three toddlers. We focused specifically on the enlisting of a one-year-old girl (CH3), who barely walks and does not speak. The educator chose a building activity with the children, and the challenge was to succeed in enlisting the three children, particularly CH3<sup>4</sup>.

At the beginning of the sequence, CH3 was sitting near the right wall in the room. The educator was sitting on the floor at the opposite end of the room, against the left wall. Her verbal and gestural behaviours were oriented towards CH2 who was standing against a big basket full of balls. At the same time, the educator was holding another child (CH1) against her. The adult and these two children were involved in a focused interaction revolving around the balls, whereas CH3 was a few metres away (Figure 7).

----- @Insert Figure 7 -----

Throughout the sequence, the educator made various moves to catch CH3's attention and involve her in the interaction. The first was throwing a ball to the girl (CH3) across the room, a move she repeated several times. This kind of move is remarkable for at least two reasons: throwing the ball allowed the educator to open an interactional channel with the girl without interrupting her interaction with CH2. Additionally, it aligns with their shared activity, indirectly inviting CH3 to join. The educator combined these actions with vocal and/or verbal moves, addressing CH3 by her name, describing her actions, and uttering exclamations. The educator also reacted to CH3's interactive action with exclamations and gestural production (wide-open eyes, obvious smiles). To reinforce her verbal and

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<sup>4</sup> Note that in the following description, we do not assume that the educator was actually following this explicit aim. There is, however, a clear pattern in her actions that suggests that she is sensitive to CH3's positioning.

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gestural moves, she also changed her position to sit on the floor, thus creating a new interactive space (Figure 8).

----- @Insert Figure 8 -----

In this new configuration, the educator informed the other children, mainly CH2, about the actions conducted towards CH3, as if seeking their approval (Example 5).

|     |      |                                                                                   |                                                                 |
|-----|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| (5) | EDU: | merci !<br>'thanks!'                                                              | takes the ball in her hands                                     |
|     | EDU: | moi je l'envoie à [prénom CH3] le ballon<br>'I'm throwing the ball to [CH3 name]' | throws the ball to CH3                                          |
|     | EDU: | xxx pas à [prénom CH1] xxx<br>'xxx not to [CH1 name] xxx'                         | looks toward CH2 and briefly to CH3, takes a ball in her hands  |
|     | EDU: | ah je l'envoie à [prénom CH3] !<br>'I'm throwing it to [CH3 name]!'               | addresses CH2 but including CH3 by briefly pointing towards her |
|     | EDU: | je l'envoie à [prénom CH3] ?<br>'I'm throwing it to [CH3 name]?'                  | pretends to throw the ball                                      |

The adult's verbal moves provided another way to include CH3 in the ongoing interaction with CH2, forming a triangular link between her and the two children.

At the same time, the educator followed CH3's focus of interest, actions, and moves. For instance, at certain moments (after the first series of ball throws), CH3 focused on a small bowl on the floor. The educator threw the next balls towards and into the bowl. At another moment, CH3 lost interest in the balls and picked up her cuddly toy. The educator immediately smiled at CH3 and acknowledged the action ("you found your cuddly toy"), incorporating this non-communicative action in an exchange. This fine-grained observation sequence reveals that CH3 was smoothly involved in the activity, thanks to the educator's attempts to engage her. In the first part of the sequence, her involvement went from an almost imperceptible reaction (she barely followed the ball's movement), to orienting her body towards the arriving ball, to responding to the last throw by grabbing the ball and throwing it back. In this sequence, the educator used vocal and/or verbal and gestural modalities to involve the children in the activity and in communication, particularly the one/s only laterally involved. She gradually adapted her engagement moves to the children's interests and especially to the children's reactions. But, in tune with the nature of this free play activity, she never imposed actions or involvement. Her moves were indirect: throwing a ball seemed to be more efficient than a solely verbal invitation. The

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educator did not invite the laterally involved child until the child had moved towards the other participants.

## **6. Discussion**

Our study aimed to explore the strategies childcare educators adopt in order to involve children in activity and in communication. To this end, we focused our analyses on the interactional moves of the educators. In order to involve children, childcare professionals can make various vocal and/or verbal and/or gestural moves. Given that children can be more or less involved in communication and/or the activity, they can be engaged by an educator to different degrees in any given track of interaction (Goffman, 1974). Thus, an educator's moves can be aimed at involving children more in the interaction, in the activity, or both.

Our analysis of the educators' strategies revealed that they responded to partial disengagement, especially in terms of communication, by emphasizing the (re)engagement of the child in the communication rather than in the activity. These results are consistent with our hypotheses about the positioning of educators aimed at encouraging communication rather than participating in an activity. To do this, the educators of the study most often followed the child's focus of attention in accordance with the situation. We will discuss engagement in ECEC along two lines: in relation to the educator's strategies and the type of activity being carried out.

### **6.1 Engagement in relation to the educator's strategies**

Depending on the type of illocutionary value and the discursive function, the child reacted by participating either in the communication or in the activity. Questions are the main illocutionary value intended, followed by assertions and requests. In line with the adults' expectations, questions most often led to child involvement in communication, whereas requests and assertions (re)engaged the children in the activities. Regarding the discursive functions used by the educators, they were mainly describing and regulating. Describing had little impact on the children's engagement in activities and/or communication, as compared to labelling, regulating and explaining. Finally, in most cases, the educator's focus converged with that of the child, establishing thematic contingency and responsiveness, both of which seem crucial for involvement (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Masek et al., 2021a, 2021b; McGillion et al., 2013).

Our results are consistent with those of other studies in ECEC, in which questions are described as widely used by educators (de Rivera et al., 2005), as are regulating (organizational) moves (Morra Pellegrino & Scopesi, 1990). However, considering the small sizes of our groups, we expected to find more phatics, requests, and proposals (i.e. conversational and empathetic moves, as in Morra Pellegrino and Scopesi, 1990). Our study sheds further light on previous studies, by emphasizing that

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the most frequent moves in adult discourse are not necessarily those that have the greatest impact on children's engagement.

Child involvement here was also allowed by strategies aimed at promoting interaction. This encouraged the engagement of withdrawn children when they were called by their name, thus creating individualised exchanges, and when they were asked various questions or prompted to take a turn via the vocal and/or verbal or gestural modality. These observations provide nuance to the results of earlier ECEC studies (Schaffer & Liddell, 1984; Thor & Pham, 2016), where few individualized interactions and few strategies for communication and language promotion were found (Bouchard et al., 2010). However, our study is too exploratory to conclude that educators use these strategies on a regular basis.

### **6.2 Engagement in relation to the type of activity**

The activity in which the children were laterally involved affected the aim of the educator's engagement moves. The educators of the study chose to involve the children in the activity depending on the activity itself or on the reaction of the children. Their involvement could also depend on the educator's level of control in the activity, as shown by Rhyner and colleagues (2013). To bring all the children into the participation framework, the educators relied on acts and moves related to the activity, and adapted their moves according to the evolution of the children's engagement.

Furthermore, the educators of the study seemed to favour the child's freedom to choose, i.e. whether or not to join in the activity, as shown by Ree & Emilson (2019).

In activities centered around language such as booktime (de Weck et al., 2021), our educators' moves tended to engage children simultaneously in both the activity and the communication. This joint involvement may have been the result of the type of book chosen, a picture book. The picture book activity was focused on labelling, which necessarily constrained production on both sides even if it also served to initiate narrative schemes linked to the children's experiences and the events shared between the interlocutors. In structured play such as drawing, the focus of the children's engagement could shift. When the rules of the activity are followed, the educators can engage children in communication about the activity itself or about other topics (e.g. personal experiences, noises from nearby rooms). However, if the children are only laterally engaged in this activity, the educators could adapt by involving them in the ongoing activity or by following the children's focus to interact with them. Finally, in free play, the educators adjusted their involvement moves based on the objects the children were playing with or on their current focus. They could engage the children in activity or in communication.

Our results align with previous studies on ECEC activities. Free or structured play tends to promote more conversational engagement moves, as compared to booktime, in which engagement moves are

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mainly labelling questions (Cadima et al., 2023; Girolametto et al., 2000; Rhyner et al., 2013;

Soderstrom & Wittebolle, 2013; Torr, 2019).

### **6.3 Questioning the issue of involvement in ECEC**

What criteria can be used to consider that a child has withdrawn from an activity or communication?

Based on previous research, our observations allow us to place the level of child involvement along a continuum (Figure 9).

----- @Insert Figure 9 -----

At one end of this continuum, children are fully involved both in the current activity (for instance, participating in a booktime session) and in the communication. This interaction may either be part of the main activity or take place as a secondary activity (e.g. talking while drawing). In some cases, a child involvement may be partial, sometimes taking part in the activity while not participating in the interaction. In contrast, a child may be more involved in communication while becoming detached from the activity. Even in these situations, children can still be considered as ratified participants if they maintain a level of interaction through the vocal and/or verbal or gestural modality. A third degree of involvement can be observed when children show subtle or lateral involvement in either the activity or the communication, as if they were bystanders. However, when educators make moves to enlist these partially involved children in the activity, it suggests that they view them as potential participants in the situation. So even when they appear to be in a bystander position, children can be seen as potential interlocutors by the educators (Bertin et al., 2021). Finally, children may completely withdraw from the situation. They can be physically distant from the group, or if they are nearby, they might stay apart from the general activity or the interaction. Educators' practices are aimed at allowing the children to choose whether or not to participate in any activity.

The observations and results of this study prompted us to question the relevance of the notion of disengagement in the context of ECEC. In these centres, educators do not impose any activity on the children but allow them to participate or not in the ongoing activities (Ree & Emilson, 2019).

However, at the same time, our results show that the educators exhibited an ongoing concern for ensuring children's active involvement in interactions and/or activities. This tension between freedom and social constraint highlights the challenge of defining children's disengagement in ECEC.

When considering this continuum, we first selected children who seemed to be disengaged before analysing the educators' moves. Our first observation revealed that the children whom educators aimed to (re)engage were in close proximity to the activity, usually ratified participants and in some cases, overhearers (Goffman, 1974). Furthermore, the educators often employed (re)engagement moves when the children were subtly or laterally involved. In contrast, such moves were seldom

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observed when the children were inactive within the participation framework. In short, children cannot be considered disengaged if they have not been ratified as participants, or if they are not perceived as potential interlocutors (bystanders) by the educators, by showing an interest in the current activity, either by taking part in it or by observing the proceedings.

The issue at stake here is understanding what, in the children's footing, behaviour, or attitude, prompts an educator's (re)engagement moves. Our observations suggest that the condition for this type of initiative is for the child to exhibit at least a minimal degree of engagement, as described by Bakeman and Adamson (1984). Moreover, the attitudes of a child suggesting possible engagement in the communication or activity led the adults to address them and mutually ratify them as participant in the interaction. Thus, the educators exhibited a professional attitude of constant attention and responsiveness to any subtle signs of interest in the ongoing situation (activity and/or communication), such as brief glances, body orientation or movement. However, whether or not a child watches the activity and/or participants cannot be the only criterion for determining their level of engagement. The various participants are not systemically aligned on the same communication track: some may actively engage with their gaze, while others may just listen to vocal and/or verbal production. As a result, relying exclusively on joint attention as the criterion for assessing a child's involvement is insufficient. Children can show minimal involvement as bystanders without directing their attention and gazes towards the situation in which educators are engaged.

## **7. Limitations and future directions**

When a child does not react after an involvement move, it is easy to assume that the move is not having the expected effect. It is more difficult to assess the effects of the engagement moves when the child does react. The various different child reactions we observed led us to wonder how to assess the impact of such behaviours. Is this even possible? Should we consider a minimal reaction to be a successful involvement? Our data contained child responses ranging from a brief glance at the adult, to the setting up of a conversation or an active participation in the activity. So, is a gestural reaction or brief object manipulation sufficient to consider the child to be involved in the activity and/or communication? Is a short participation time in a dialogue or a minimal implication in an activity sufficient to consider the engagement moves to be effective?

It seems relevant to consider engagement along a continuum, not in terms of the effectiveness of these moves but according to the children's reactions. For instance, does a gestural or vocal and/or verbal engagement move towards the activity lead more frequently to a longer engagement of the child than a verbal move alone?

Future research should attempt to describe the effects of the different involvement moves of educators. Further studies are needed to investigate the modalities of the children's reactions on a larger sample, in various types of activity, and with different group sizes, in order to identify the degrees of child

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engagement and the use of these results by the educators in childcare. Physical contact to engage or maintain the child in the communication, a strategy in several situations, is also a modality we need to examine more precisely. In addition, more advanced analyses (for instance, on multimodal combinations) are needed to understand, within strategies, which elements most effectively involve the children.

Finally, while children's involvement in various activities is clearly essential for the educational outcomes of childcare, it is also crucial for language acquisition. Most studies on the impact of child-directed speech deal with dyadic and/or family contexts. Recent debates stress the greater importance of the quality of the input as compared to its quantitative aspects (Golinkoff et al., 2018; Rowe & Snow, 2020). Three dimensions – interactive, linguistic and conceptual – are known to jointly contribute to language development (Rowe & Snow, 2020). In this context, children's involvement appears as both a prerequisite and an outcome of quality interactions. In ECEC, the issue at stake is also the quality of the adult's actions. Children's involvement seems to be a prerequisite of adapted scaffolding. However, as we have seen, polyadic contexts force us to consider interactions in a less binary way: children can be placed along a continuum of engagement with various statuses. Therefore, we also need to address the issue of "multiparty and bystander speech" as suggested by Sperry et al. (2018). A promising avenue of research opens up here for language acquisition in ECEC and in the home where we find multiparty interactions (Morgenstern et al., 2021).

## **8. Conclusion**

There are many different situations in ECEC and many different child profiles to which educators adapt their strategies. These include children who do not participate via vocal and/or verbal and gestural modalities but who get involved by listening or looking around, children who prefer to stay away from the main activity rather than be involved, but who are perhaps receptive, and children who are used to occupying the discursive space, that the educators need to keep away from the interaction to let less talkative children speak. Studying the disengagement of children (and therefore their (re)engagement) in ECEC involves considering the presence of children in the participation framework as a gradual process.

Our study contributes to current knowledge of engagement in interactions but focuses on issues not studied in previous research: examining child behaviour before the adult strategies are used, and going beyond the sole focus on joint attention (Bakeman & Adamson, 1984). By considering ecological situations, one can better answer educators' questions about the involvement of all children and their language acquisition. Our results should also be further examined for their applied purposes since this could offer professionals insight into their own practices and representations (Davis & Torr, 2016).

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## Résumé

*Dans les établissements d'accueil du jeune enfant (EAJE), les enfants ne participent pas tous de la même façon et dans les mêmes proportions aux interactions. L'un des défis pour les éducatrices est de parvenir à impliquer chaque enfant dans les activités et de leur offrir ainsi une expérience nécessaire pour apprendre à parler. Cette étude exploratoire s'appuie sur des données vidéo d'interactions éducatrices-enfants dans des établissements français d'accueil du jeune enfant. Les analyses se focalisent sur des séquences dans lesquelles un ou plusieurs enfants sont désengagés ou restent en retrait de l'activité en cours. Ces séquences ont été analysées selon le type d'activité, les pratiques langagières mises en œuvre par les éducatrices et leurs effets sur la participation des enfants. Notre*

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*discussion, centrée sur le rôle et l'impact de ces conduites linguistiques, réinterroge la notion d'implication / réengagement, sa réalisation en EAJE et les effets des pratiques professionnelles sur l'engagement de l'enfant.*

**Mots-clés** : Établissement d'accueil du jeune enfant, implication de l'enfant, responsabilité de l'adulte, pragmatique, stratégies langagières professionnelles

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**Table 1. Description of the sample**

| Activity                                | Booktime   | Structured play       | Free play  | Total       |
|-----------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>Quantitative Analysis</b>            |            |                       |            |             |
| Number of selected sequences            | 3          | 6                     | 1          | 10          |
| Number of children during each sequence | 3 / 5 / 2  | 3 / 4 / 4 / 4 / 3 / 5 | 3          | M = 3;0     |
| Age of children                         | 2;0 to 2;6 | 1;0 to 2;10           | 1;0 to 1;4 | 1;0 to 2;10 |
| Duration of selected sequences          | 24m 26s    | 38m 37s               | 20m        | 1h 23m 03s  |
| <b>Qualitative Analysis</b>             |            |                       |            |             |
| Number of children in the sequence      | 3          | 3                     | 3          |             |
| Average age of the children             | 2;0 to 2;6 | 2;6 to 2;9            | 1;0 to 1;4 |             |
| Duration of the sequence                | 12m 54s    | 17m 55s               | 13m 36s    |             |

**Table 2. Number and proportion of each type of child disengagement in the data set**

| Child disengagement | Proportion and number |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Activity            | 7.81% (N = 5)         |
| Communication       | 92.19% (N = 59)       |

**Table 3. Number and proportion of each type of adult engagement in the data set**

| Adult engagement | Proportion and number |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| Activity         | 28.13% (N = 18)       |
| Communication    | 71.88% (N = 46)       |

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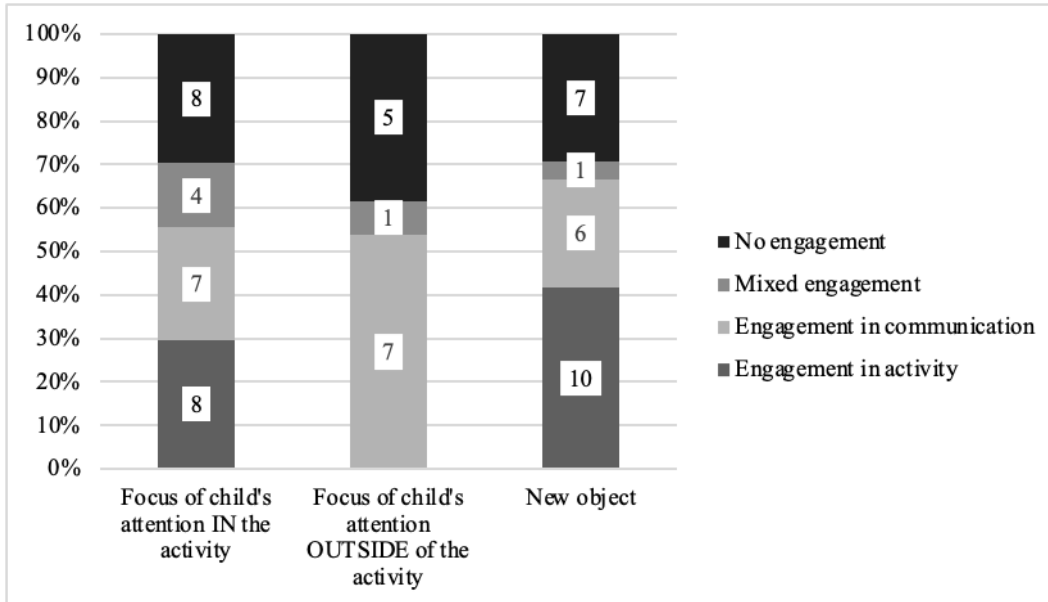
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**Table 4. Number and proportion of successful and failed engagement attempts in the data set**

| Engagement attempts | Proportion and number |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Failed attempts     | 31.25% ( $N = 20$ )   |
| Successful attempts | 68.75% ( $N = 44$ )   |

**Table 5. Number and proportion of attunement moves in the data set, depending on the child's object of attention**

| Attunement moves        | Proportion and number |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| In the activity         | 42.19% ( $N = 27$ )   |
| Outside of the activity | 20.31% ( $N = 13$ )   |
| New object              | 37.50% ( $N = 24$ )   |



**Figure 1. Number and proportion of child engagement types in the data set, depending on the types of educator attunement.**

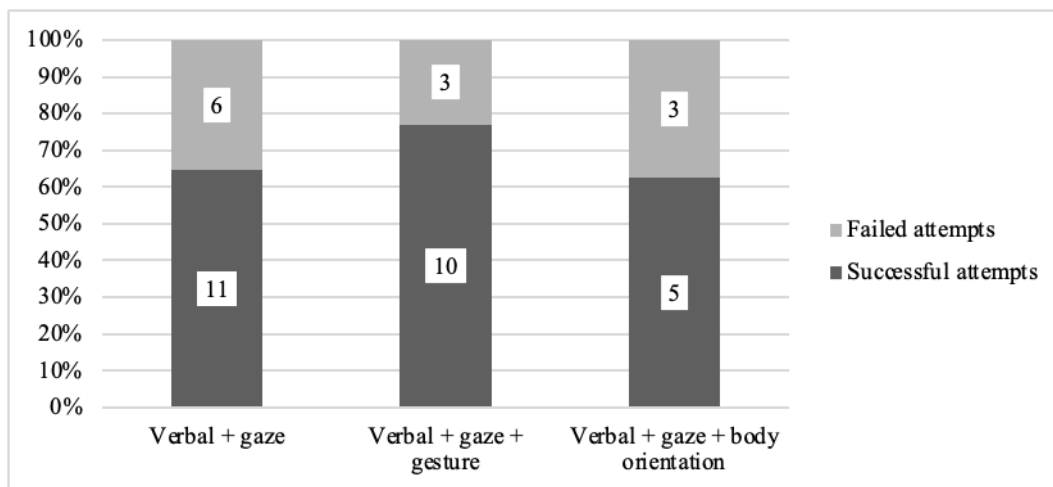


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**Table 6. Modalities of educators' moves in the data set**

| <b>Modalities of educators' moves</b>                             | <b>Proportion and number</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Vocal and/or verbal modality                                      | 10.94% ( $N = 7$ )           |
| Gestural modality (without vocal or verbal)                       | 10.94% ( $N = 7$ )           |
| Gestural modality (vocal and/or verbal + gaze)                    | 26.56% ( $N = 17$ )          |
| Gestural modality (vocal and/or verbal + gaze + gesture)          | 20.31% ( $N = 13$ )          |
| Gestural modality (vocal and/or verbal + gaze + body orientation) | 12.50% ( $N = 8$ )           |
| Other modalities combinations                                     | 18.75% ( $N = 12$ )          |



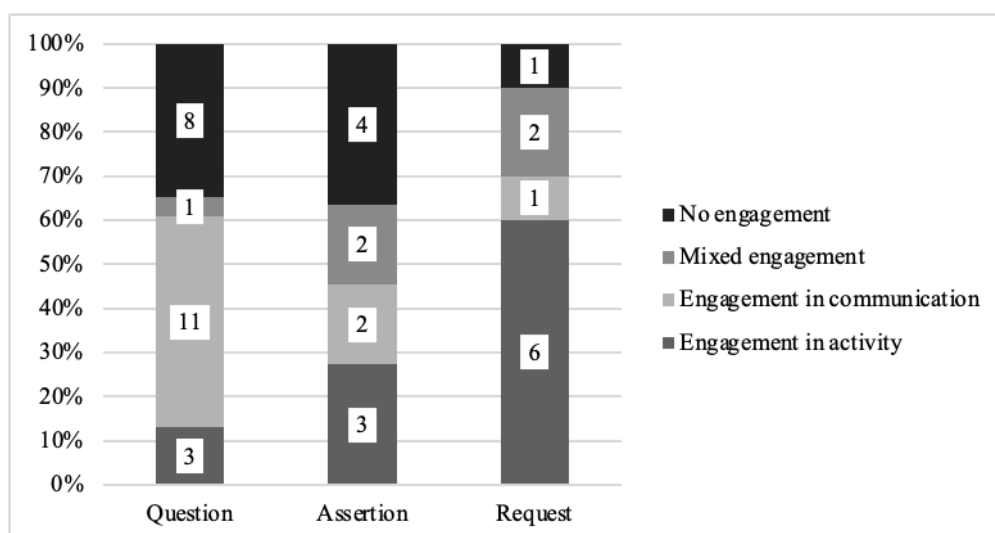
**Figure 2. Number and proportion of successful and failed engagement attempts in the data set, depending on the multimodal combinations.**

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**Table 7. Number and proportion of illocutionary moves in the data set**

| Type of illocutionary move | Proportion and number |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Question                   | 40.35% (N = 23)       |
| Assertion                  | 19.30% (N = 11)       |
| Request                    | 17.54% (N = 10)       |
| Phatic                     | 5.26% (N = 3)         |
| Proposal                   | 3.51% (N = 10)        |
| Permission                 | 1.75% (N = 1)         |
| Other                      | 12.28% (N = 7)        |



**Figure 3. Number and proportion of child's engagement types in the data set, depending on the type of illocutionary moves by the educators.**

**Table 8. Number and proportion of each discursive function in the data set**

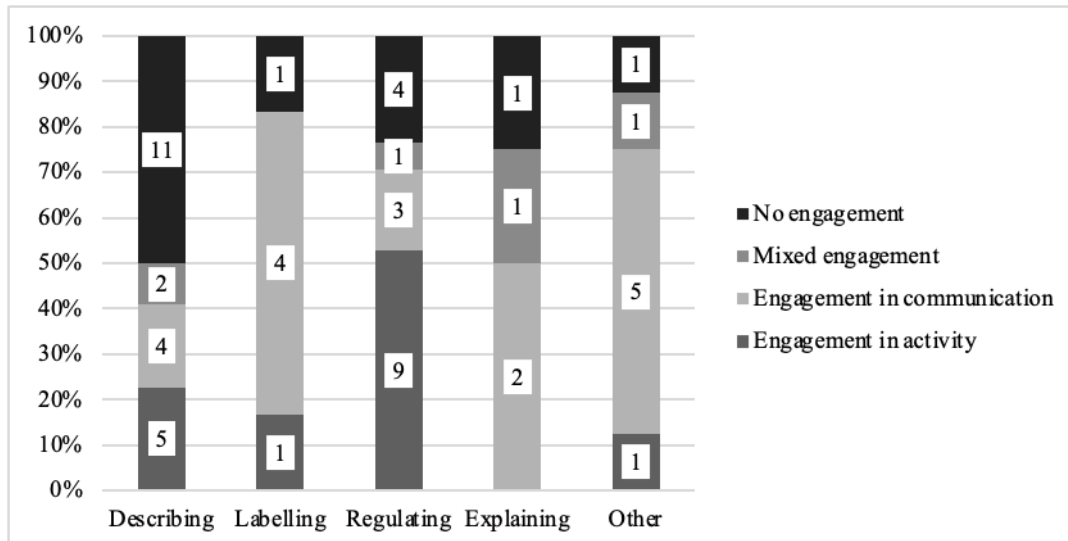
| Discursive function | Proportion and number |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Describing          | 38.60% (N = 22)       |
| Regulating          | 29.82% (N = 17)       |
| Labelling           | 10.53% (N = 6)        |

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|            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| Explaining | 7.02% (N = 4)  |
| Other      | 14.04% (N = 8) |

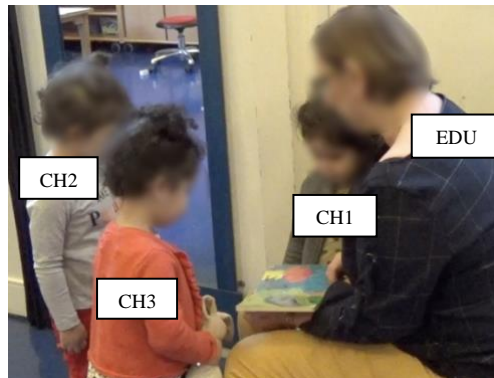
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**Figure 4. Number and proportion of child engagement types in the data set, depending on the discursive function used by the educators.**

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**Figure 5. Spatial organisation of the participants during booktime**



**Figure 6. Spatial organisation of the participants during structured play**



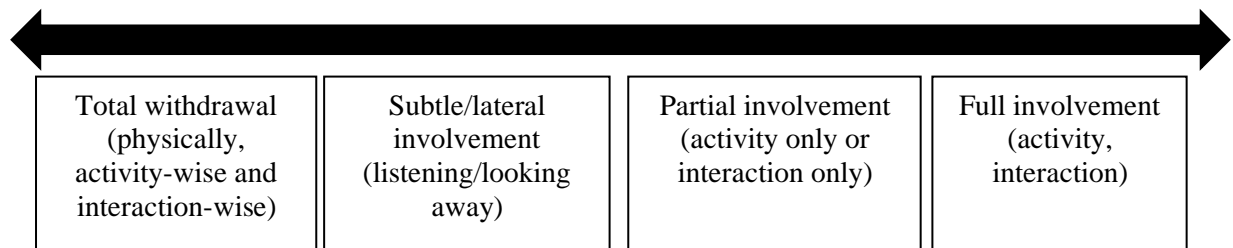
**Figure 7. Illustration of CH3's disengagement during free play**

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**Figure 8. Illustration of the educator’s body move seeking to involve CH3 during free play**



**Figure 9. Continuum of child engagement**