

Individual differences in how parents and children discuss future concepts

Miranda Black, Nadin Abu Khalaf

Mechanisms responsible for the development of future-oriented cognition during early childhood remain poorly understood. This study investigates one possible mechanism: parent-child conversation about future concepts. This study examined individual differences in language use between parents and children across 5 prompts about varying future concepts. N=70 parents and their four- to five-year-old children were prompted to talk about 5 topics which spanned Szpunar et al.'s (2014) taxonomy of future thought (*near-future simulation, distant-future simulation, prediction, intention formation, planning*; see Table 1 for examples). Parent-child conversations were videotaped and transcribed in CLAN. Transcripts were coded for quantity of talk (in utterances) and the extent to which speakers elaborated about the future and drew upon past events. Table 1 indicates that speakers' quantity of talk was similar across the 5 prompts, but that there was significant between-dyad variation. Both parents and children used significantly more future and past references during *simulation* conversations than other prompts, particularly conversations which prompted the dyad to simulate near-future events. Dyads used the fewest future references during *planning* conversations. The results of this study suggest that parent-child communication may be an important mechanism for acquiring an understanding of abstract concepts such as the future.