Introduction

• Children are faced with peer interactions in a variety of competitive contexts, including the classroom.
• Peer interactions can differ in valence; some children may come across as mean in a competitive context while others come across as nice and supportive.
• Interactions with other children during competition may elicit an emotional response that could affect performance based on the type of input (e.g., nice or mean) received.

Procedure (cont.)

• Participants received prerecorded verbal input from the other child via a baby monitor after the peer “won” the practice task and before each block of the Flanker task. The recorded voices were matched by participant gender (see Figure 1 for example dialogue).
• Mean Peer: Took half of the participant’s points following practice and provided overly competitive dialogue
• Nice Peer: Shared half of his points with the participants following practice and provided encouraging dialogue
• Neutral Peer: Neither took points nor shared points and provided neither competitive nor encouraging dialogue

Results (cont.)

The results for older children suggest that the presence of affective input across task blocks was only observed in the nice condition, perhaps because the presence of a friendly and supportive peer motivated children to persevere during a difficult task (e.g., Smiley & Dweck, 1994).

The results for older children suggest that the presence of affect-laden input may have ameliorated an effect of increased distractibility throughout the course of the task, indicative of a facilitatory effect of any valenced input on children’s sustained attention

• The effect of the nice input may be similar to that observed in younger children (Hoffman, 1987) and goal perseverance (Smiley & Dweck, 1994).

Discussion

• The results for younger children suggest that affect-laden input facilitated their abilities to sustain attention on the task from the outset.

• The continued benefit of affective input across task blocks was only observed in the nice condition, perhaps because the presence of a friendly and supportive peer motivated children to persevere during a difficult task (e.g., Smiley & Dweck, 1994).

• The results for older children suggest that the presence of affect-laden input may have ameliorated an effect of increased distractibility throughout the course of the task, indicative of a facilitatory effect of any valued input on children’s sustained attention

• The effect of the nice input may be similar to that observed in younger children, but mean input may also be a motivating factor for older children. Perhaps the possibility of losing to a mean peer acted as a type of aversive reinforcement for older children.

• Indeed, Farblish and Berger (2016) found that the introduction of aversive reinforcement in a competitive setting (i.e., being last place) boosted performance on a cognitive task in children.

• Together, the results from older and younger children suggest that affect-laden messages in a competitive setting may help children increase their focus on the task at hand, but there could be an added facilitatory effect on sustained attention in the presence of supportive

References


