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Understanding Child Noncompliance in the Early Care Setting

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Biography

Growing up as the daughter of Punjabi immigrants, Melody's ambition for equitable inclusion of linguistic and cultural diversity in education is fueled by her lived experiences. She aspires to obtain a PhD in Special Education to bring to light the significance of including immigrant families in social services such as their accessibility to early intervention and mental health care. Serving as an officer for Active Minds at San José State University, Melody has informed her graduate school decisions from her advocacy, initiative, and spirit for mental health care reformation. She currently works as a research assistant in laboratories to expand her empirical knowledge in an applicable manner. Through exploration, dedication, and commitment, she is committed to seeing her goals through in a holistic manner.

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Understanding Child Noncompliance in the Early Care Setting

Abstract

This study examines how teachers respond to children's noncompliance in early care settings. This structured observational study will focus on the moment to moment interactions occurring within the preschool classroom between both the child and teacher. It is predicted that (1) teacher's direct bids to children will promote greater instances of child compliance than indirect bids, and (2) teachers' responsive language will promote greater instances of child compliance than restrictive language. The results of this study will contribute to existing knowledge about the nature of teacher child interactions in the early care settings.

Keywords: teacher-child interaction, child noncompliance, early care settings, teacher language

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Introduction

In early childhood, children are actively exploring their surroundings to build a better understanding of the world around them. Young children have the ability to practice their autonomy in decision making because they are learning to advocate and make choices for themselves. In school, children are conditioned to conform to rigid structures of the early care setting to satisfy teacher expectations and further assimilate into societal expectations. In these environments, children have the choice to either display compliance or noncompliance towards directives, rules, and cues presented to them. Child noncompliance is a developmentally appropriate behavior that is often viewed negatively by teachers and practitioners in educational settings. Noncompliance is essential to child exploration because it allows children to make mistakes, test boundaries, and learn firsthand what is acceptable and appropriate within different contexts. This process enables children to form their own enduring perspectives and connections through trial and error.

As enriching as child noncompliance is, teachers often frown upon this behavior due to the inconvenience it brings to the classroom (Wilder & Atwell, 2006). In an early care setting, teachers are simultaneously tasked with maintaining classroom management, instructing students on an appointed lesson, and following through with district protocol. In this institutionalized system, teachers may not always respond with warmth and patience, or receive children's noncompliance in a constructive manner due to the immense stress they are under. Due to the multitude of demands placed on teachers, child noncompliance has become one of the most frequent reasons for the psychiatric referral of young children (Kalb & Loeber, 2003). This referral often results in children being prescribed rigid therapy sessions and medications to subdue their outward behaviors toward directives. With considerations that some cases may require assistive medical support, children are generally misdiagnosed due to the lack of time allotted for exploration to them in the early years of life.

Without the opportunity to test boundaries in a safe space, children will grow up to experience difficulties in their adolescence and young adulthood years (Barkley, 1987). The early care setting is an optimal space where children can engage in social interactions with teachers and peers and experiment with limits on their behavior. Noncompliance is a

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developmentally appropriate aspect of young children's behavior that typically peaks in early childhood (see Houlihan, Sloane, Jones, & Patten, 1992). By examining the way teachers issue commands or requests to children in a typical preschool context (e.g., tone of voice, word choice, request delivery) and the broader context in which teacher-child interactions occur (group vs. individual settings), we can better understand the nature of young children's noncompliance in the early years and how teachers help shape children's behavioral
outcomes (see Stone, 1993).

In the early care setting, teachers' instructions to students are an integral part of most classroom activities (Atwater & Morris, 1988). Language is a critical component to observe in the early care setting because it leads to variations in children's responses. Previous research defines that the language utilized in verbal exchanges among the teacher and child can impact the outcome of the child's compliance (Wachs, Gurkas, & Konotos, 2004).

Child Responses

Children display a variety of behaviors in early care settings which include both compliant and noncompliant responses to teachers' directives. Although teachers favor children's compliance, noncompliance is a developmentally appropriate behavior children display as they work to regulate and express themselves. Children's noncompliance peaks in early childhood (Houlihan, Sloane, Jones, & Patten, 1992). Teachers' responses to children's behaviors can promote or discourage children's self-expression and regulatory behavior.

Few observational studies exist in the field of child studies where researchers have examined teachers' use of directives in naturally occurring interactions with children, leaving little detailed information available regarding the types of interactions teachers hold in the classroom among children (Atwater & Morris, 1988). The purpose of this study is to observe teacher-child interactions as they naturally unfold in an early care setting. Teacher instructions in early care settings are typically dyadic in nature where instances of child behaviors, such as compliance, are noticeable among teacher-child interactions (Beauliue & Hanley, 2014). Specific instances of teachers' language involving typical bids to children and

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children's responses to teacher requests or commands will be documented to better understand the nature of teacher's interactions with young children. This study will also explore how different aspects of teacher request delivery and the context in which requests occur shape young children's behavior. This study seeks to understand children's interactions with teachers and the nature of noncompliance in early care settings.

Noncompliance. Practitioners, educators, and parents often view child noncompliance in a negative manner due to the unpredictability of the response. In the literature existing on child noncompliance, researchers define the behavior in numerous manners. , Noncompliance is viewed as "...instances when a child either actively or passively, but purposefully, does not perform a behavior that has been requested by a parent or adult authority figure (Kalb & Loeber, 2003). All the literature agrees that the act of child noncompliance requires two parties: an adult figure who delivers a directive and a child who does not comply with the command. Research confirms that this interactive exchange is shaped by the language, delivery, and context provided by the adult bid to the child.

There is a gap in the literature where researchers fail to address noncompliance as developmentally appropriate behaviors in early childhood. Early childhood is a time of exploration, trial and error, and learning. Most of the research existing in child studies discusses child noncompliance in context to the home, medical, and behavioral therapy settings. However, child noncompliance in the classroom environment itself is not often considered.

Compliance. Child compliance is the ideal that practitioners, educators, and parents strive for when evaluating child behaviors. Compliant child behavior is often preferred by adults due to its ease, predictability, and for the comfort associated with it. Literature describes child compliance as being positively correlated with healthy moral internalization in later life (Koenig, Cicchetti, and Rogosch, 2000). Compliance is seen as a precursor for developing proper communicative skills that are used in the workspace, relationships, and overall interactive exchanges at large (Wilder & Atwell, 2006). Thus, in early care settings, teachers focus on bolstering child compliance in order to ease transitions in both social and educational contexts.

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Hypotheses

1. Teachers' direct bids to children will promote greater instances of child compliance than indirect bids.
2. Teachers' responsive language will promote greater instances of child compliance than restrictive language.

Participants

Undergraduate Student Teachers working at the San José State University (SJSU) Laboratory Preschool at the time of any given observation who have given consent to participate in this study will serve as the subjects in this study. There are 41 Student Teachers in the laboratory, in which 13 Student Teachers consented to participating in this study. Children who were present at the lab preschool at the time of any given observation will comprise the subjects in this study.

Methods

This study employed a controlled observation methodology to chart instances of teacher-child interactions. These structured observations of preschool children and student teachers were conducted via a one-way mirror in an observation booth at the SJSU Laboratory Preschool. The instances of teacher-child interaction were recorded using pen and paper by the researcher. The data collection tool was a printed copy of an Observation Rubric that charted teachers' bids to children involving direct/indirect and restrictive/responsive language and children's compliance/noncompliance with teachers' directives. This rubric was intended to aid the researcher in documenting all facets of the interaction as it unfolded instantaneously (i.e., 0.30 seconds). To maintain participant confidentiality, children and student teachers are not identified by name, age, ethnicity, or race. This study seeks to chart the nature of interactions by focusing on the linguistic exchange in the early care setting.

In the preschool, the head teacher went ahead and distributed the consent forms the corresponding student teachers. Student teachers made up of both AM and PM sections. Each student teacher was given the opportunity to consent to participating or being excluded from the sample. Student teachers were assured that the participation was voluntary, individual identities would not be recorded, and they could withdraw their

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consent at any time. Data were collected on a total of 13 student teachers and their interactions with preschool age children.

Procedure

Observer entered the observation booth at the laboratory preschool with paper copies of the checklist held in a 3-prong binder. The observer came within the preschool's hours of operation from Monday – Thursday, 9:00AM – 11:30AM & 12:00PM - 3:30PM during the SJSU semester schedule. During these times, children were in different tasks, activities, and snack times based on their preschool schedule. The researcher had the opportunity to chart instances of teacher-child interactions during these times. Observation sessions took place 20 minutes at a time as the nature of these interactions are fast.

Observation Rubric

Background. Teachers' directives are significant within the early care setting because they are integral for numerous classroom activities and functionalities (Atwater & Morris, 1988). Child behaviors unfold naturally in the preschool setting. Children display a wide array of responses to teacher directives, peer interactions, and problem solving throughout their school day. However, charting these occurrences as an observer is difficult because they happen instantaneously and spontaneously. Inventories, assessments, and checklists are typically implemented in a researcher's approach to child interactions and behaviors to aid the data collection process. One of the most widely used rating scales is called the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (1991). This tool is shown to have high test retest reliability and efficiently collects the span of behaviors children elicit. The CBCL collects survey responses from parents regarding their child's noncompliance. However, children's behavior in the classroom and interactions with teachers in the early care setting are not considered, factored in, or accounted for. The elements of the observation rubric used in this study are based on literature documenting the nature of the relationship between teachers' behaviors and children's responses during teacher-child interactions. This rubric serves as a tool to document instances of children's noncompliance in early care classroom settings and the nature of teachers' bids to children.

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Teachers' bids to children are coded based on the following features: request delivery and language usage. Through reviewing the literature, available naturalistic studies reveal that instructions, often referred to as directives, commands, suggestions, and requests, are among the most frequently occurring forms of teachers' verbal behavior with preschool children (Atwater & Morris, 1988). As shown in Table 1, the sequence of the checklist goes from left to right. As the interaction between the teacher and child occurs, the observer starts from the first column and continues to the end in order to encompass the entirety of the interaction. Due to the rapid pace these interactions typically unfold in, the observer follows this order to capture each element needed for the analysis at the end. In addition to the directive, the observer follows through to note the nature of the bid, the child's response, delivery type, and language usage.

Context of Observation	Teacher Bid to Child	Language of Bid	Direct or Indirect	Child Compliance	What did the child do?	What did teacher do as a follow up?	Teacher Language	Group vs Individual Setting
Snack Time	Come here	"Let's try sitting on our bottoms!"	D **I**	**Y** N	Sat down quietly	Resumed distributing snacks	Restrictive **Responsive**	**Group** Individual

Table 1.0. This is a sample of a completed observation for a one-to-one interaction that took place among a teacher and a child in a group setting.

Restrictive language. Teachers use a variety of directives when communicating their expectations to children in the classroom. The language used in these directives can influence how children respond. Restrictive language involves teacher control through power, assertion, and often short exchanges (Stone, 1993). Restrictive language discourages child autonomy and room for learning in spoken conversation. Due to the nature of restrictive language, conversations are short and goal-oriented. Although this condensed form of communication is perceived negatively in literature (Stone, 1993), restrictive language is appropriate in moderation in the classroom. Restrictive language provides discipline, structure, and direction in occurrences where it is needed and required.

Responsive language. As educators employ multiple models of instruction in the classroom, their approach to conversations often differ according to each child, activity, and request. Responsive language conveys

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a positive regard for children and a respect for their individual autonomy, granting room for exploration and alternative choices (Stone, 1993). Responsive language is often seen as a nurturing form of directive delivery that is highly favored by developmental scientists.

   Indirect Bid. Restrictive and responsive language is delivered in multiple ways in the classroom. During teacher-to-child interactions, teachers often switch their delivery style for bids according to the context of the observation. Teachers can make a request that indirectly suggests the child respond verbally or through action (MacKenzie, McDonald, Tanchak, & Erickson, 1996).

   Direct Bid. In addition to indirect bids, teachers also have the option of directly addressing a child in the early care setting. Direct bids are when teachers make a request that is targeted toward a specific child and behavior that is to be initiated or inhibited (MacKenzie et.al, 1996). In the early care setting, direct bids are utilized to elicit a response or immediate action from a child.

Results

   A total of 68 teacher-child interactions were recorded in the early care setting. Out of all of these interactions, the researcher coded for teacher bids, delivery of bid, language utilized in the bid, and children's responses to the bid. According to figures 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0, the frequencies are steady across each variable, gender, and interaction style.

Individual Interaction: 38		Group Interaction: 30	
Direct Bid	Indirect Bid	Direct Bid	Indirect Bid
31	7	15	15

Figure 1.0. Represents the frequencies of teachers' bids to students and the setting by which they were delivered in.

   Teachers' direct bids to children were exponentially higher by 24 occurrences than indirect bids during the classroom observations. Teachers preferred delivering bids in individual interactions versus group settings by

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8 occurrences. Figure 1.0 represents how teachers prefer concise directives and delivering them in a personal one-to-one setting over indirect directives in group-based settings.

Direct Bids: 46		Indirect Bids: 22	
Compliance	Noncompliance	Compliance	Noncompliance
21	25	7	15

Figure 2.0. Represents the frequencies of child responses to teacher directives.

Teachers' direct bids to children were exponentially higher by 24 occurrences than indirect bids to children in the classroom which led to varied child responses. Direct bids yielded 21 instances of compliance and 25 instances of noncompliance. Indirect bids yielded 7 instances of compliance and 15 instances of noncompliance. The numbers show that direct bids promote greater instances of noncompliance than indirect bids in the early care setting.

Restrictive Language: 37		Responsive Language: 31	
Compliance	Noncompliance	Compliance	Noncompliance
19	18	11	20

Figure 2.0. Represents the rates of child response to teacher language in the early care setting.

Teacher Language. Teachers used restrictive language more readily than responsive language when delivering bids to children. There was not a major exponential difference among restrictive language and responsive language due to the difference of 6 occurrences. Child responses were rather similar in both restrictive and responsive language usage with compliance and noncompliance trailing one another in frequencies. As hypothesized, a high frequency of restrictive language utilized in the

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classroom resulted in higher rates of child noncompliance, with the exception of one occurrence more of compliance.
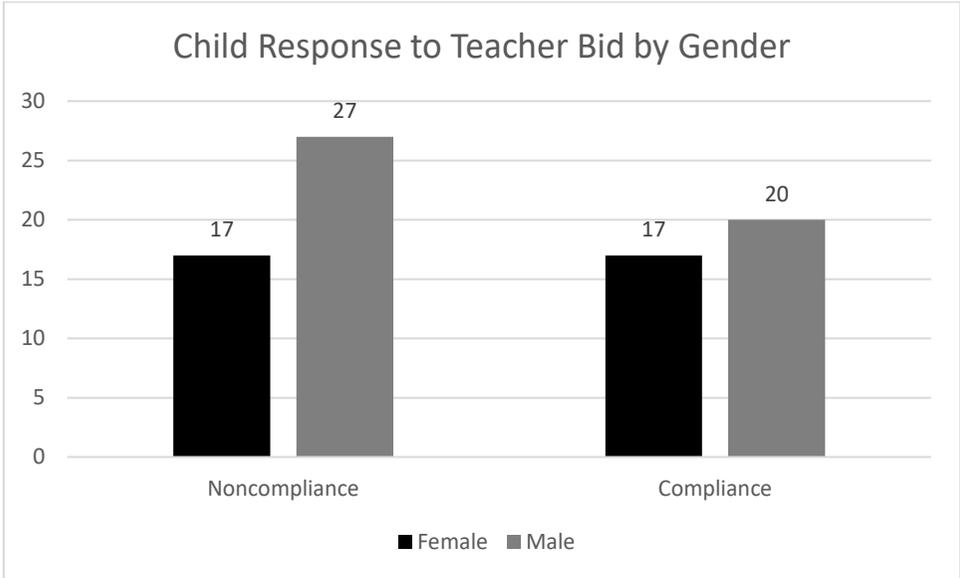

Figure 3.0. Displays the frequencies among child behavior by gender.

Gender. Gender was shown to correlate among male students more than female students in the early care setting. In both responses, females complied and did not comply with teacher directives equally, whereas males responded with variation. As seen in figure 3.0, gender was observed during the interactions to gauge whether or not there was a correlation among teacher bid and child response. Males had both a higher frequency of emitting noncompliance and compliance to teacher directives than females.

Table 1.0

Responsive Language	- "Use your words, what's wrong?" - "How can we say that differently?"
Restrictive Language	- "Don't throw blocks!" - "Read one book at a time."

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Direct Bid	- "Build your block tower higher." - "Please don't hit your friend."
Indirect Bid	- "How can we do this differently?" - "Let's see what our classmates are doing."

Language. In the classroom, teachers delivered their requests to children in a variety of ways. Table 1.0 provides samples of the verbal statements teachers made to children during the typical classroom schedule. These directives were delivered during circle time, drop off, pick up, outdoor play, and structured activities. Statements include responsive and restrictive language samples (MacKenzie et.al, 1996). Restrictive language is not negative in any sense – however, it does carry a different magnitude depending on the context it is delivered in. On the other hand, responsive language carries a lighter, nurturing, and developmentally sensitive approach to addressing child responses in the early care setting. It is optimal to use responsive language in teaching practices; however, it is not always ideal given the nature of the behaviors emitted by students. Therefore, restrictive language is useful for its concise, pinpointed, and targeted outcome.

Considerations

In this study, student teachers employed at SJSU participated. These students are part of the Child & Adolescent Development bachelor's program offered at SJSU, where they are provided a solid background, prior context, and exposure to developmentally appropriate practices, dialogue, and best practices with children in early childhood through their major courses. Student teachers are supervised by Preschool Laboratory Director and faculty member Joy Foster, who monitors and regulates staff performance. Given the dynamic of the laboratory, data may not accurately reflect teacher responses to child behavior as they would in a regular early care setting

Data was collected by an individual researcher; therefore, inter-rater reliability was not able to be performed on the observational rubric. Going forward, this study can be strengthened by having multiple raters'

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document, record, and code the data from the observation sessions. Additionally, this study can be reproduced at other early care centers to compare the results from an institutionalized preschool laboratory in contrast to a local day care center.

Discussion

Early childhood is a period of development where children are immersed in the exploration driving conceptualizations of the world around them. Through autonomy and control, children are engaging in trial and error to better themselves. Children are conditioned to conform to the rigid structures of institutionalized settings due to the nature of society and its practices. Such simulated scenes do not allow children to properly understand the scope of their behaviors (Atwater & Morris, 1988). Educators often frown upon noncompliant behaviors due to the interference it brings to the learning space (Wilder & Atwell, 2006).

This study sought to raise awareness about noncompliance being a developmentally appropriate behavior in the early care setting. Through observing teacher-child interactions, data showed how child responses were rather consistent across noncompliance and compliance to teacher directives. There were some exponential differences among the variables: restrictive language, responsive language, direct bid, and indirect bid. However, it was seen that, regardless of the delivery style and target language utilized, children responded in both manners almost similarly.

Through this study, it was found that teacher language does serve as an indicator for student responses in the early care setting. Teachers' responsive language did not promote greater instances of child compliance than restrictive language. There were 11 instances of child compliance to responsive language compared to 19 instances of child compliance to restrictive language. Additionally, teachers' direct bids to children promoted the instances of child responses in the classroom. Teachers' direct bids to children promoted greater instances of child compliance than indirect bids. There were 7 instances of child compliance to indirect bids and 21 instances of compliance to direct bids. The data recorded informs the educational community that language is not the primary influencer of child outcomes in the classroom setting. Child behaviors are autonomous in nature and self-driven in the pursuit of exploration. Direct bids to children

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are seen to be very concise and targeted to desired student outcomes, representing the significance of child compliance in comparison to indirect bids.

Going forward, this study could be enhanced by including children with disabilities and impairments in the study. Students who have been assigned an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) can be included in the participant pool. By doing so, the dynamic of interactions between a teacher and a child with an IEP/IFSP can be charted, compared, and contrasted. In addition, it would be interesting to note how children from immigrant families behave in the early care setting. Typically, children of immigrant families do not have the same accessibility to social services as native children do. In turn, this impacts children's behaviors, coping skills, and regulatory responses in the face of adult authority. By using the observation rubric, it would be interesting to chart how sociocultural influencers and immigrant status plays into child response to teacher directives. Through doing so, researchers can gauge how parental ethnotheories, cultural context, immigration, and socioeconomic status influence child behaviors. This would serve as a window into the Family Systems Theory, where children are regarded as a unit and product of their household environments and contexts.

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