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RUNNING HEAD: RESPONSES TO AUTHORITY

Observations of Children's Responses to Different Types of

Adult Authority Figures

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Abstract

The present study examined children's responses to directives from teachers and student teachers in the classroom. According to previous interview data, children should demonstrate greater obedience to a teacher than to a student teacher due to her higher social position and greater knowledge. Seventeen second grade children were observed in their classroom as they interacted with the different authority figures. The authority figures' directives and the children's responses were categorized using coding systems developed for the study. Results show an interaction between gender and response to authority figure directives. Children, in general, were less compliant with the student teacher and this was more so for the boys. It was also found that student teachers use more requests as directives than teachers.

Observations of Children's Responses to Different Types of

Adult Authority Figures

A child can respond to different authority figures in many different ways. This research examined children's responses to different authority figures depending on the social status and knowledge possessed by the authority figure. The observations were made within the context of the school. How a child responds to authority and obedience is one aspect of moral development and different theories regarding this development will be examined in the following paragraphs.

Moral Development

A moral individual can be characterized by possessing traits such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility and caring (Rice & Dolgin, 2008). It can then be questioned how these traits develop in children; are they born with them, do they develop throughout childhood or not until adulthood? In addition, do children learn morality? If so, is it through observing other individuals or is it learned through obedience to authority? The particular interest in the present study is obedience to authority. There are various theories concerning the above questions and two relevant and rather different perspectives will be explored next.

Kohlberg is one of the leading moral development theorists of the twentieth century and his theory is in the constructivist paradigm, describing different stages of moral reasoning. He proposed that people respond to moral dilemmas depending on which stage of moral reasoning they have reached. According to Kohlberg, people go through three levels of moral development with two stages on each level. The lowest level is called preconventional morality. Individuals on this stage will evaluate moral dilemmas based on punishments or rewards in a concrete way. The next stage is called conventional morality. On this level, people approach moral dilemmas as members of a society; they want to be good, responsible members of the society in order to please others (Feldman, 2006). It is important to note that

this type of morality involves obedience to authority. For Kohlberg, obedience to authority was a lower form of moral reasoning. The last stage is the stage of postconventional morality, which most people do not even reach. Individuals who use this kind of moral thinking do what is right because it is in accord with their individual conscience. They will obey the law, however, they will only obey the law if it is based on universal ethical principles; laws that are not, can be disobeyed because they consider authority as subordinate to morality (Feldman, 2006).

Contrasting research on moral development has been conducted by Turiel (1983), who has studied the development of children's judgments on morality and conventions. Turiel claims that even quite young children, as young as three years of age, form concepts of rules of different types. Observations of and interviews with preschool children (Nucci & Turiel, 1978) have shown that they can distinguish between social conventional and moral events. This is, essentially, the opposite of what Kohlberg stated; i.e., at a much younger age, than Kohlberg claimed, children's moral judgments are not based on authority.

A moral rule is, for example, that one should not push the child next to you and a conventional rule is, for example, that one should eat spaghetti with a fork; not with one's fingers. Turiel's distinction between a moral rule and a convention includes that moral rules are considered as consistent across situations and are not changeable by authority. For example, children were asked if a (moral) rule should be the same in a different country and they answered "yes". They were also asked if the teacher can change the rule and they answered "no". In contrast, conventional rules can be changed by authority, such as a teacher, and will not be judged as wrong; furthermore, children judge that conventional rules can legitimately be different in different schools and in different countries (Turiel, 1983).

Through his research (1978a), Turiel was able to categorize different ways that children and young adults organize and understand social conventions. He identified seven

levels; level one starting with six to seven year olds and level seven being 18-25 year olds. The age group that was observed in this study would belong at level two. It was found that eight and nine year olds, level two, did not believe that conventions had to be followed in order to create social uniformity, because they are arbitrary. Children in this age group did not see conventions as a structure of a larger social system nor as a result of social interactions. A concept of a social system first develops when the children become a little older.

Dodsworth-Rugani (1982) also identified different levels regarding children's reasoning concerning only conventional rules, not moral. The researcher focused on the purposes and functions of conventional rules in the classroom and the school and they identified five levels. The second grade was associated with level one, which is the age group relevant for this study. Level one is characterized by the concept that rules control the behavior of individuals and that they are unchangeable and without the rules individuals would be out of control. Children at this level have not yet realized that rules are there to coordinate the relationship between individuals, not just to control their behaviors.

Both of the studies mentioned above were concerned with conventional rules. Those are the rules that are changeable and enforceable by the authority figure, such as the teacher. Teachers can, of course, enforce moral rules, but they cannot alter them. It is rather interesting that the eight and nine year olds in Turiel's study (1978a) considered conventional rules to be arbitrary and therefore they did not have to be followed. However, Dodsworth-Rugani (1982) found that the second grade students judge the conventional rules to be unchangeable and necessary in order to control individuals' behavior. Thus, there are inconsistent findings for this age group.

Obedience to authority

Obedience is a type of social influence in which one person directly orders one or more individuals to behave in a certain way and the persons will then comply or not (Baron, Byrne, & Branscombe, 2006). Any situation such as that can be seen as an instance of an authority interaction (Laupa, Turiel, & Cowan, 1995). Obedience to authority is a well studied concept with some well-known studies, such as the Milgram (1963) and Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (1973) studies. The above experiments showed blind obedience to authority.This is the kind of obedience that is undesirable and that we wish to prevent ourselves from engaging in. Nevertheless, obedience to authority is also an important matter that our society would not function well without. Obedience is one aspect of moral development which plays an important role when children need to obey authority figures such as parents and teachers. Children who are brought up by parents too lenient might have problems developing a sense of who is in charge and whom to obey. It creates a sense of security when the child knows what is allowed and what is not. For instance, research (Turiel, 1983) on rules and prohibitions has showed that children evaluate the rules in school positively and as necessary. The participants were asked about task rules, moral rules and conventional rules. Task rules were defined as specific to activities and learning, e.g., make sure you learn how to spell these words. A moral rule would be that it is wrong to steal and a conventional rule is associated with game rules, for example.

Children and obedience to authority

Research has shown that morality comes from children's constructive interactions with children and adults as opposed to a result of sheer obedience to authority (Turiel, 1983) and they do not only take obedience to authority commands into account when making their judgments regarding authority legitimacy (Laupa & Turiel, 1986). It has been indicated that children's authority judgments incorporate three important components. These components

are: (1) the type of command, (2) the attributes of the authority figure and (3) the social context (Laupa, 1991).

Type of command: Children do not take a unitary orientation toward authority, which means that they accept directives coming from an authority in some situations and reject them in others (Laupa & Turiel, 1986). Research indicates that children as young as four years of age consider the type of command issued when making authority judgments. They reject commands of authorities they consider morally unacceptable or that violate what children conceive to be their boundaries of personal autonomy (Laupa, 1994; Laupa & Turiel, 1986; Turiel, 1983). Laupa (1994) found that preschoolers would accept a command given from a person who lacked authority attributes if the command given was meant to prevent harm, e.g. telling the children to stop fighting. The preschoolers would also reject a command that could lead to harm, e.g., allowing the children to fight, even if it came from a person who possessed authority attributes, such as a teacher.

Authority attributes: Authority attributes are characteristics possessed by the person that make them legitimate as authorities and force obedience to their commands (Laupa et al., 1995). The attributes are adult status, knowledge and social position. Social position interacts with the social context. Research has shown that children will obey the principal of a school in the context of the school. However, if the social context changes, the principal's social position no longer exists in that context (Laupa & Turiel, 1993). This is why a child judges that sometimes when in the context of the school a child should obey the teacher, but not the parent (Laupa, 1995). The parent is considered legitimate at home, but when the social context changes, so does the authority. Social position is the attribute that, overall, is very important in children's authority judgments and studies (Turiel, 1983; Laupa & Turiel, 1986) have shown that adult status does not carry much weight. Third graders are stricter than first and seventh graders in their judgments concerning whether the authority figure possesses the

attributes of social position and knowledge. More third graders reject an adult authority if he or she does not possess social position or knowledge. Knowledge, just like social position, is judged as more important than adult status (Laupa, 1991).

Social context: Authority interactions involve at least two persons, one in a dominant and one in a subordinate position. The person in the dominant position is giving a command to the individual in the subordinate position. Authority is a social position and not a characteristic of a person and therefore can vary across different social and physical contexts (Laupa et al., 1995). As mentioned above, an individual who is considered an authority figure in one context might not be legitimate as one in a different social context.

Obedience in the school context

It is essential in a school environment that the children obey and listen to their teachers. However, some educators seem to have a greater ability to get the children's attention and maintain the order in the classroom. Are there certain techniques these teachers use or do other factors matter as well? Children take many different factors into account when they judge authority figures; for instance, the attributes of the authority figure and the types of directives they give. As previously mentioned, Laupa (1991) found that children's obedience judgments are highly correlated with the presence of social position, which makes the individual more legitimate when combined with any other of the attributes. For any authority figure it is important that the social position coordinates with the social context. Findings have shown that children also accept peers in positions of authority, as far as they possess special knowledge or skills (Laupa & Turiel, 1993). For instance, if a child possesses good social problem-solving skills or is high in social competence, he or she might gain a higher status. Since social conflicts are of frequent occurrence among school children, these skills can be quite important in terms of social success. If a child is socially successful it leads to higher status in the dominance hierarchy, which also can be described as an authority

position (Feldman, 2006). However, younger children seem to give greater weight to physical attributes, such as adult status, and will often choose an adult nonauthority over a peer nonauthority (Laupa & Turiel, 1986).

The majority of previous research (see Tisak, 1995 for review), has involved interviews with children, not observations of their actual behavior, examining their responses to hypothetical situations that involve different authority figures. This study focused on observations of children's actual behavior in the classroom to further understand their responses to different authority figures in the classroom. The different authority figures involved in this study are teachers and student teachers. These two authority figures' attributes vary, such as knowledge and social position, i.e., from the child's perspective, the teacher has knowledge and social position, whereas the student teacher has less or none. These attributes have been said by children to matter in their judgment of the authority (Laupa et al., 1995). It is of great interest to see if the observations will be consistent with the interviews that have been done. Turiel (1983) brought up the issue of incongruence between moral thought and actual behavior. In order for an individual to have consistency between moral judgments and moral behavior the person must possess a certain level of self-control.

Although the greater part of research on children's responses to different authority figures has been conducted through interviews, there has been some research where children's actual behaviors have been observed and examined (Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Smetana, 1984; Turiel, 2008). Smetana examined toddlers' responses to naturally occurring moral and conventional disobedience in the context of a daycare. The observed events were classified as either aggression (intentionally physically harm another child), resource violation (e.g. take away a toy from another child), disorder (i.e. making a mess) or norm deviations (e.g. standing up during snack or talking during story time). The children's responses to conventional transgressions were found to be much less distinguished than their

responses to moral ones. Smetana found that conventional disobedience was most often met by the caregiver by a command that the behavior ends; without any explanation why. The researcher suggests that one reason for the later development of conventional knowledge might be the use of unexplained commands that the behavior cease. Hence, social interactions in the moral and conventional domains have different origins (Smetana, 1984).

An examination of judgments of experienced events and judgments of hypothetical situations was made by Turiel (2008). The research was conducted including elementary school students (grades one, three and five) and junior high school students (grade seven). Observations were made of events categorized as either moral, conventional or mixed-domain events. Shortly after the event had occurred, students participating in the event were interviewed about what had just happened. About a month later, the same students were interviewed again, but this time concerning a hypothetical event similar to the one they had experienced earlier. Turiel also had a comparison group where the participants were only interviewed about hypothetical situations. Overall, the results of this study showed that the children assigned the events to the same category as the observer (i.e., moral, conventional or mixed) and their judgments about the experienced events were, in general, consistent with their judgments about the hypothetical events. Nucci and Turiel (1978) observed preschoolers engaging in social conventional or moral acts and also interviewed other preschoolers who had witnessed the events. Even children at this young age agreed, in most cases, with the observer in which category the events should be placed.

The hypothesis of this study is that the teacher is the individual with the highest social position within the context of the classroom. The teacher is also chosen to do the job and is therefore considered to possess special knowledge. This means that the children will be more obedient to the teacher than to the student teacher when they give children directives.

Method

Participants

The participants for this research study were recruited from the Henry Barnard School. For the purpose of the present research, a school that offers training for teachers was needed so there would be two different types of authority figures present in the classroom simultaneously. The Henry Barnard School has student teachers in training on a regular basis and was therefore a good place to recruit the participants from. All of the teachers and the student teachers were female. The classroom teachers and administrators refer to the student teachers as college teachers. The participants were 17 students (m = 8, f = 9) in two second grade classes; twelve students from one class and five from the other. Informed consent forms were distributed to the children to bring home for their parents to read and sign if willing to let the child participate in this research study. As the informed consent forms were picked up, the child assent forms were read to the children who had received consent from their parents to participate. The assent forms were also signed by the participating children.

Measures

Coding systems. The researcher used event sampling and looked at the type of directive the authority figure (teacher or student teacher) expressed to the child (see Table 1) and, in return, how the child responded to the given directive (see Table 2). The coding systems were developed by the researcher and the first few sessions of observations confirmed that the appropriate directive and response categories were included for the purpose of this study.

Coding Reliability. Interrater reliability was determined by two raters observing the same events. Eight events were observed; eight directives given by either the teacher or the student teacher and eight student responses. Interrater reliability was 87.5%.

Procedure

Observations were made three hours per week in each of the two second grade classrooms. Class lists were obtained from the Henry Barnard School main office and the participating children were numbered from one through twelve on one list and one through five on the other, based on the number of children participating from each class. The children were observed in a random order, which was determined by using a random number table. After it had been determined which child was in turn to be observed during that session, the observer waited until a directive was given to the child by the authority figure; the directive and the child's response were then coded according to the coding system. When possible, each child was observed responding to both the teacher's and the student teacher's directive during the same session of observation.

Results

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with the type of authority figure (teacher or student teacher) as the within subject variable and the child's gender as the between subjects variable. A significant difference was found in the way the children responded to the teacher versus the student teacher when they gave directives to the children ($F = 7.963$, $p = .001$) (see Table 3). Children were more compliant with the teacher thsn the student teacher. Unexpectedly, the way the children responded to the teacher versus the student teacher also interacted with the gender of the child ($F = 3.227$, $p = .002$, see Table 4).

Chi-square tests were done; to look at the teacher directive by child response to the teacher and the student teacher directive by child response to the student teacher. No statistical differences were found (n.s.). Another chi-square test was done; teacher directive by student teacher directive, but, again, no statistical difference was found (n.s.). Teacher directive categories were combined due to the low number of participants and further chi-

square tests were done. In this case it was found that student teachers use a request as a directive more often than do teachers ($\chi^2 = 4.156$, $p = .041$, see Table 5).

Conclusion

The hypothesis, that the children would demonstrate greater obedience to the teacher than to the student teacher, was supported. Previous research (Laupa, 1991; Laupa & Turiel, 1993) has, through presenting children with hypothetical situations, found that children consider a number of factors when judging adult authority figures. Two of the authority attributes that were of particular importance for the present study were social position and knowledge. It was hypothesized that the children would be more obedient to the teacher than to the student teacher, based on the attributes social position and knowledge. The children were more obedient to the teacher, possibly, because the teacher possesses a higher social position and more knowledge than the student teacher. Studies (see Blasi, 1980 for a review) have shown that moral reasoning and moral action are moderately related. Based on that, it is interesting to see that children appear to act the way they have said they would when judging an authority figure. There are, nonetheless, many variables that can influence the relationship between judgments and actions, such as self-control (Turiel, 1983), social influences and affective reactions (Turiel, 2008).

A difference was seen in the way the two types of authority figures interact with the students; the number of times a request was used as a directive was greater for the student teacher than for the teacher. A request can be viewed as a rather soft way of communicating with the child. Several speculations can be made concerning the student teachers' choice of directive. Maccoby (1990) has conducted research on the relationship between individuals' gender and the way they interact. The researcher discusses interactive styles of the two genders and reports that females tend to be more concerned with expressing agreement and sustaining the interaction, whereas males are more direct in their way of interacting and

generally keep it short. According to Maccoby, these two styles can be seen in individuals from a young age, through adolescence and into adulthood. In this study, the teachers and the student teachers were all females, which is reflected in the way they interact. However, the classroom teacher might have learned that a more direct, masculine, interactive style is more efficient when working with the students, particularly boys. Therefore, one possible reason for the greater number of requests given by the student teachers could have to do with their lesser experience in the classroom. Since boys interact with each other in a more direct, dominant way, a command given by an authority figure is more familiar and logical to them. When the student teachers use a request, the boys might judge the directive as optional. Girls, on the other hand, are used to the softer, facilitative style and do not judge the request as voluntary.

As suggested in the previous paragraph, there also appeared to be sex differences in the way the children respond to the authority figures in the present study. The boys demonstrated less compliance to the student teacher than the girls did. Overall, girls have been found to be more compliant to authority figures than boys (Stake & Katz, 1982; Berk, 2006). In the present study, it is interesting that the boys seemed to show a greater obedience to the teacher and less obedience to the student teacher than the girls. There are several possible explanations for this behavior. The student teacher might have been less comfortable working with the boys and therefore had a more difficult time controlling them in the classroom. Another reason could be that the boys viewed the student teacher as less of an authority figure as opposed to the teacher and hence disregarded her directives to a greater extent. If this is the case, the boys might have assigned the student teacher less authority because of the fact that she possessed less knowledge and had a lower social position than the teacher. Furthermore, since all of the student teachers were women, the girls might feel a certain affiliation with the student teachers that made less sense for the boys. The student

teachers younger age, compared to the teacher, could also be a factor that influenced the girls' relationship with the student teachers. Lastly, as previously mentioned, it could be that the teachers' and the student teachers' interactive styles reflect in the way the children responded.

Research (Laupa & Turiel, 1993; Kim, 1998) has shown that children also accept peer authority under certain circumstances; the authority has to be delegated from an adult authority figure, the peer has to possess particular knowledge or skill or when the matter is a question of morality. Examination of peer authority was not a part of this study, but it was, nonetheless, observed on several occasions. Most of the peer authority instances were seen while the student teacher was in charge of the students. The student teacher would, for instance, ask the children to be silent while receiving instructions, but was ignored by the students. A child would then step in and tell his/her peers to be quiet and they would then obey. The fact that most of the peer authority instances were observed when the student teacher was working with the students, probably has to do with the children judging her as having a lower social position and possessing less knowledge. It is rather interesting that the children accept a peer authority over the student teacher, since she still possesses the attribute adult status. However, it has been found (Turiel, 1983; Laupa & Turiel, 1986) that children do not judge adult status as being a particularly important attribute compared to social position and knowledge.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

There were several strengths with the present study. The Henry Barnard School has student teachers and observers in the classrooms on a regular basis. Hence, the students are used to adults, other than the classroom teacher, being in the classroom and did not seem concerned with the researcher during the times of observations. When observations are done, it is important that the individuals who are being observed act the way they normally do;

modified behaviors due to the presence of the observer can negatively influence the reliability of the study. Another strength is the interrater reliability percentage (87.5%), which is of great importance when conducting observations. One can then be fairly certain that the observations were not significantly influenced by the observer's individual perspective.

In forms of limitations, the number of participants in this study was too small in order to generalize the results to other settings. It would also have been preferable to have different age groups included for comparison. The Henry Barnard School does have racial diversity among the students, but class diversity is rather limited. It would be interesting to do observations of children from various socioeconomic status backgrounds in the future and examine the differences, if any. It would have been ideal to have coders that were unaware of the study's hypothesis, but this was not feasible for the purpose of this project. However, it could have increased the reliability.

If this study is being expanded in the future, it would be valuable to include both male and female teachers and student teachers. As discussed in Maccoby's (1990) research, males and females do have different interactive styles and the interactions between the authority figures and the students would perhaps look different. The male, more direct, style might be more useful in the classroom in order to receive compliance. It would be interesting to see the boys' and girls' responses if the authority figures were of different gender. The intention was not to investigate whether there would be a gender difference among the children or not, but since a gender difference was found, it would be useful to examine this further. The reasons behind the gender difference would be valuable to know more about; whether the differences were due to the authority figures way of interacting, the way boys and girls interact or some other explanation.

Observations with additional age groups for comparison included, could contribute to the knowledge about children's judgments of authority figures. Laupa (1991) interviewed

first through seventh graders concerning their judgments of adult authority figures. It was found that third graders were the most demanding of the authority figures possessing the attributes social position and knowledge. Since the participants in this study were close to the age of third graders, it can be speculated that they were particularly demanding as well. Hence, older children may be less concerned with these attributes and cooperate with the student teacher more readily. Future research will have to investigate these matters further.

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Table 1

Directive Categories

Directive	Description
Implicit statement	"I don't see you sitting down"
Command	"Sit down"
Request	"Please sit down"
Question	"Can you sit down?"

Table 2

Response Categories

Response	Description
Comply	The child does what he/she has been told to do.
Object	The child does not do what he/she has been told to do.
Increase the disobedience	The child starts doing something completely different than asked.
Object/Comply	The child first objects to the directive, but then complies.
Repeated	The directive has to be given more than once. Every time the directive is given, the child complies.

Table 3

Percentages of Children's Responses to the Teachers' and the Student Teachers' Directives.

Type of teacher	Comply	Object	Increase the disobedience	Object/ comply	Repeated	N =
T	76.5	0	0	23.5	0	17
ST	70.6	0	0	17.6	11.8	17

Table 4

Percentages of Boys' and Girls' Responses to the Teachers' and the Student Teachers'

Directives.

	Type of teacher	Comply	Object	Increase the disobedience	Object/ comply	Repeated	N =
Boys	T	75	0	0	25	0	8
	ST	50	0	0	25	25	8
Girls	T	78	0	0	22	0	9
	ST	89	0	0	11	0	9

Table 5.

Crosstabulation of Teacher request by Student Teacher request.

	Student Teacher Other directive	Student Teacher request	Total
Teacher Other directive	64.7 (11)	23.5 (4)	88.2 (15)
Teacher request	0 (0)	11.8 (2)	11.8 (2)
Total	64.7 (11)	35.3 (6)	100 (17)

Appendix A

Example Recording Sheet

T = Teacher

ST = Student Teacher

O = Observer

Adult	Implicit statem.	Command	Request	Question
Child	Comply	Object	Increase the dis.	Object/Comply

Adult	Implicit statem.	Command	Request	Question
Child	Comply	Object	Increase the dis.	Object/Comply

Adult	Implicit statem.	Command	Request	Question
Child	Comply	Object	Increase the dis.	Question