

CONGRUENCY BETWEEN SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND GUIDANCE BELIEFS
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

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The language in a child's environment either supports or weakens the growth of conflict resolution skills. A study using the language sampled from three early childhood educators, (two in family childcare homes and one in a childcare center) found that those in family child care programs reported stronger beliefs that children can solve problems, teachers support the development of problem solving skills, and conflict can create opportunities for learning than was recorded in practice. This was determined with a frequency count of unilateral strategies employed during perceived conflict. The third participant in a childcare center demonstrated congruency between questionnaire-reported positive beliefs and recorded practice determined by a higher frequency count of bilateral strategies employed. The results suggest further investigation needs to be conducted evaluating the influence of program structure, education and training, and implementation of reflective practice on increasing the congruency between guidance beliefs and language used during perceived conflict.

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INTRODUCTION

If how we speak to others is a window into our thoughts and actions, how important are the words we choose (Bandura, 1992; Vygotsky, 1962)? In *Thought and Language* (1962), Vygotsky stated, “Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect something with something else, to establish a relationship between things. Every thought moves, grows and develops, fulfills a function, solves a problem” (p. 218). Language is an important aspect of teacher-child interaction and contributes to the growth and development of young children (Ahn, 2006; Blank, & Jasinski Schneider, 2011; CSEFEL, 2015; CDE/CDD, 2011; O’Keefe, 2015; Test, Cunningham, & Lee, 2010).

Teacher language provides a foundation for guidance, instruction, and connection with children (O’Keefe, 2015; Test et al., 2010). It was found that preschool teachers talk with children about 60% to 80% of the time they interact (Test, 1988, cited in Test et al., 2010); however, the benefits to child learning and development were only linked to language that was considered to be high-quality. “High-quality language means that teachers ask many thought-provoking questions, respond to children’s vocalizations and words, and talk frequently to children using a positive tone of voice” (Test et al., 2010, p. 8). The authors found within the literature evidence that intentional language and conversation “are a fertile ground for helping children learn to solve social problems” (p. 6). Additional benefits to young children include an increased level of social awareness, increased cognitive gains, increase in vocabulary, and gains in reading and

writing skills (Meacham, Vukelich, Han, & Buell, 2014; Test et al., 2010; Wilcox-Herzog & Ward, 2004).

With this in mind, the current study will address the patterns of teacher language in three early childhood programs with reference to individual beliefs on the role of the teacher and guidance in the classroom. There are two main research questions:

1. What are the language patterns of early childhood educators in early childhood programs?
2. How congruent are an educator's choice of words with their stated beliefs on the role of the teacher and the role of guidance in an early childhood program?

The questions are important because the literature points to incongruities between teacher belief and teacher practice in response to conflict resolution; however, there appears to be a gap in studying teachers' use of language and adherence to beliefs in practice. When the physical environment is removed through blind audio recording, and the context of activity or daily schedule is muted, there lies an opportunity to hear the utterances of the teacher in its received form.

In studying the choice of words that teachers use both during and outside of child interactions, this study shoulders the premise that the acquisition of social negotiation strategies extend beyond situations of conflict and into the daily lexicon. In the next section, a definition of terms will be discussed, followed by the construction of a theoretical framework.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the study, language is defined as intentional, spoken language omitting scripted language from written material. Conflict is defined as a perceived misalignment in ideas or actions between two or more entities (individual – peer, individual – teacher, or individual – material). The terms guidance and/or strategies are used to identify interactional exchanges used as a means of supporting at least one of the entities involved in the conflict. Verbeek, Hartup, and Collins (2000) define two types of conflict management strategies: unilateral and bilateral. Unilateral strategies are described as “opportunism and lack of consideration for the opponent’s perspectives and wishes” (p. 35). These include subordination, coercion, separation, standing firm, and physical or verbal power assertion. Bilateral strategies are described as “mutual perspective taking and often by dovetailing of opposing goals and expectations” (p. 35). These include justification, negotiation, compromise, continued interaction, and cooperation.

Early childhood educator or teacher is defined as the person(s) responsible for creating a stimulating and nurturing environment for young children, birth to five years old in a licensed family child care or child care center. Teacher beliefs are defined as self-described ideologies about views on roles in the classroom. According to California Community Care Licensing, family child care is defined as “regularly provided care, protection and supervision of children, in the caregiver’s own home, for periods of less than 24 hours per day, while the parents or authorized representatives are away,” and

child care center is defined as “any child care facility of any capacity, other than a Family Child Care Home, in which less than 24-hour per day, non-medical care and supervision are provided to children in a group setting.”

Theoretical Framework

The following theories will be discussed to create the framework for the stated research questions: social development theory, the ecological systems model, and linguistic relativity. Central to the theories are the following propositions:

1. Acquisition of language is culturally influenced and socially constructed (Kay & Kempton, 1984; Hussein, 2012; Vygotsky, 1962; Whorf, 1956).
2. Language is learned throughout one's lifetime (Hussein, 2012; Vygotsky, 1962).
3. There is a dyadic relationship between language and thought (Kay & Kempton, 1984; Hussein, 2012; Vygotsky, 1962; Whorf, 1956).
4. Social groups share linguistic commonalities (Kay & Kempton, 1984; Hussein, 2012; Whorf, 1956).

Social development theory

The sociocultural developmental theory suggests language is acquired in childhood through a socio-historical process thus generalizing influential thought through internalized speech (Vygotsky, 1962). "The specifically human capacity for language enables children to provide for auxiliary tools in the solution of difficult tasks, to overcome impulsive action, to plan a solution to a problem prior to its execution, and to master their own behavior" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 28).

In discussing the role of the more advanced learner, such as the teacher, he emphasized the zone of proximal development, which is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of

potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1962, p. 86). He redefined the term scaffolding to mean the supports that a teacher provides, whether physical, verbal, or emotional, in order to assist the child to the next developmental level. According to this model, the teacher gradually minimizes the scaffolds as the child achieves the task or level independently. This process requires that the teacher be aware and intentional in his or her actions for each individual child, so that learning continues through a variety of stages.

In concurrence regarding the influence of social systems on the development of the child, the social cognitive theory further posits that “human beings have evolved an advanced capacity for observational learning that enables them to develop their knowledge and skills from information conveyed by modeling influences (Bandura, 1986; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978). Modeling is not merely a process of behavioral mimicry. Modeling conveys rules for generative and innovative behavior” (Bandura, 1999, p. 25). Beyond behavioral modeling, “self-efficacy beliefs are (also) influenced by the words (and the actions) of others, whether these be intentional or accidental” (Pajares, 2005, p. 348)

Ecological systems model

There are layered spheres of influence which surround the development of a person. Through his introduction of the Ecological Systems Model, Urie Bronfenbrenner states that a child develops within the context of his or her environment from proximal interactions such as parent-child or teacher-child, as well as patterns found between

settings and outside influences, such as rules, legislation, and cultural norms (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). He proposes five systems while placing the child at the center: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, as illustrated in Figure 1.

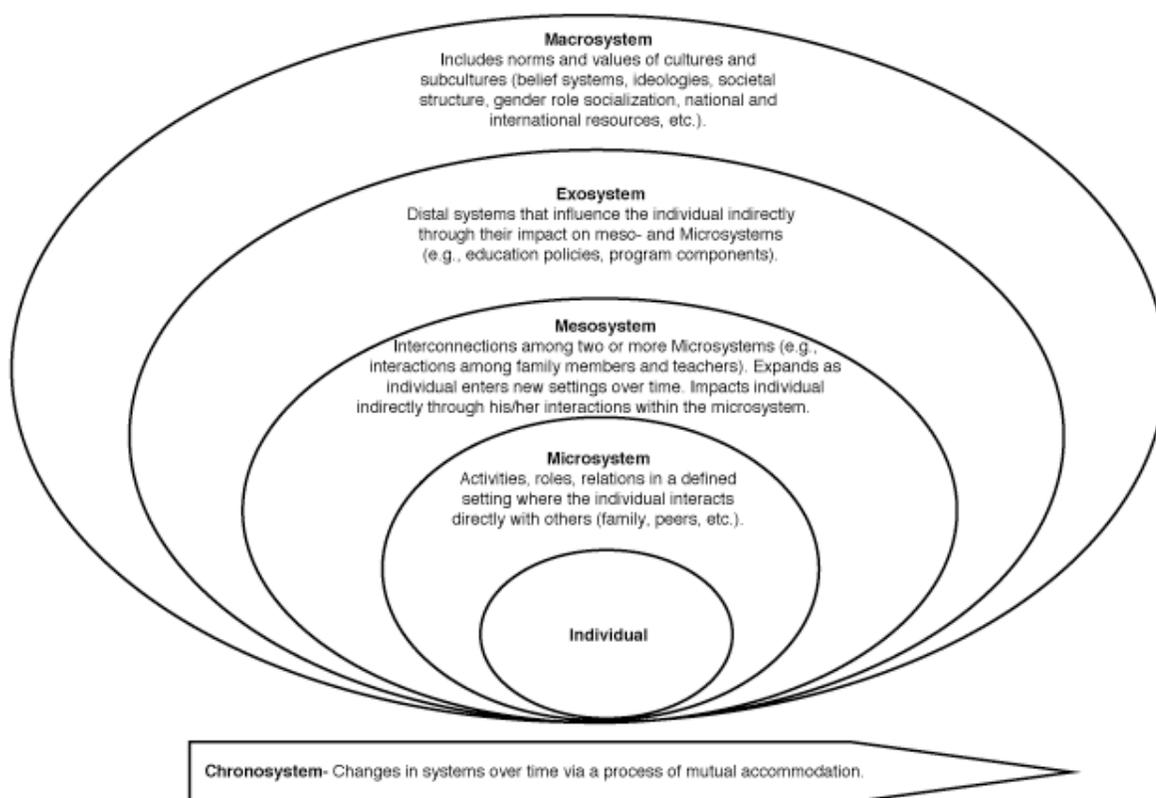


Figure 1. Ecological model of interplay among persons and contexts (University of Minnesota, 2011).

Specific to an early childhood program, Bronfenbrenner suggests “an alternative hypothesis focuses attention on yet another element of the microsystem: how the staff members in each setting view their role, that is, to what extent the caregiver in family day

care is perceived by himself and others not only as caring for the child and playing with him or her but also as engaging in formal and informal teaching. We have already seen powerful evidence that, when such differential perceptions exist, they are likely to be implemented in actual behavior” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 196). Further, Belsky and Steinberg write, "Like all social and educational efforts, day care programs are likely to reflect, and in some measure achieve, the values held explicitly or implicitly by their sponsors, and, through them, by the community at large" (1979, p. 942 cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The Ecological Systems Model recognizes the diverse mechanisms through which development in early childhood can be influenced. Verbal language is among those mechanisms in a child’s environment.

Linguistic relativity

Language shared by social groups create a collective lens for how the members in the group both perceive the world around them and conceptualize experience (Kay & Kempton, 1984). The Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, or Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis used linguistic research as a platform for offering empirical evidence to support the claim that language has a profound effect on the way we construct our world view. As Hussein, (2012) explains “The influence of language on thought and perception, ... implies that the speakers of different languages think and perceive reality in different ways and that each language has its own world view” (p. 642).

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinary understood, but are very much at the mercy of the

particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because of the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (Sapir, 1929b, p. 2017, found in Hussein, 2012, p. 643).

This echoed the views of German philosopher, Wilhelm von Humboldt, who emphasized the influence language has on the formation of ideas and attitudes (p. 642). In contrast, however, to the cultural adherence to language, Humboldt implied an individualistic determinacy to change found in language (Humboldt, first published in 1886, edited by M. Losonsky, 1999):

Only in the individual does language receive its ultimate determinacy. Nobody means by a word precisely and exactly what his neighbor does, and the difference, be it ever so small, vibrates, like a ripple in water, throughout the entire language. Thus, all understanding is always at the same time a not-understanding, all concurrence in thought and feeling at the same time a divergence. The manner in which language is modified in every individual discloses, in contrast to its previously expounded *power*, a dominion of man over it.

Further, German linguist, H. Gipper countered the deterministic claims of Sapir and Whorf and said, "There can be no doubt that our mother tongue influences our

thinking process, but since we are capable of initiating changes in our language and in our thinking habits, the question of relativity cannot be posed in terms of absoluteness or determinism, but in terms of degree” (Hussein, 2012, p. 645).

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis was developed on a macro-cultural level proposing the theory that language developed by a group of people over time changes the experience from one language to the next. For example, people who speak a language with many words for “snow” may experience snow in a different way than those who have only one word claiming its description (Whorf, 1956). However, as claimed by Humboldt and Gipper, there are individual determinacies within shared linguistic groups which result in different perspectives of experience.

Summary

The words and phrases used by early childhood educators during program interactions and routines can be heavily influenced by both the linguistic register specific to the early childhood teaching profession and personal tendencies. Through a social developmental perspective, children learn by individual experiences constructed within their social and environmental contexts (Bandura, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978). Using this framework, it is presupposed that when discussing the environment within which children reside on a daily basis during childcare hours, this choice of language becomes very much a part of their surroundings, and thus should be approached as an influential piece of their development.

The Cycle of Acquired Language Model

The Cycle of Acquired Language Model is proposed as a constructed lens for this study (Figure 2). The cycle of language input, language internalization, and language output create a key component both in how adults choose the words they direct toward children and the relationship between belief and language.

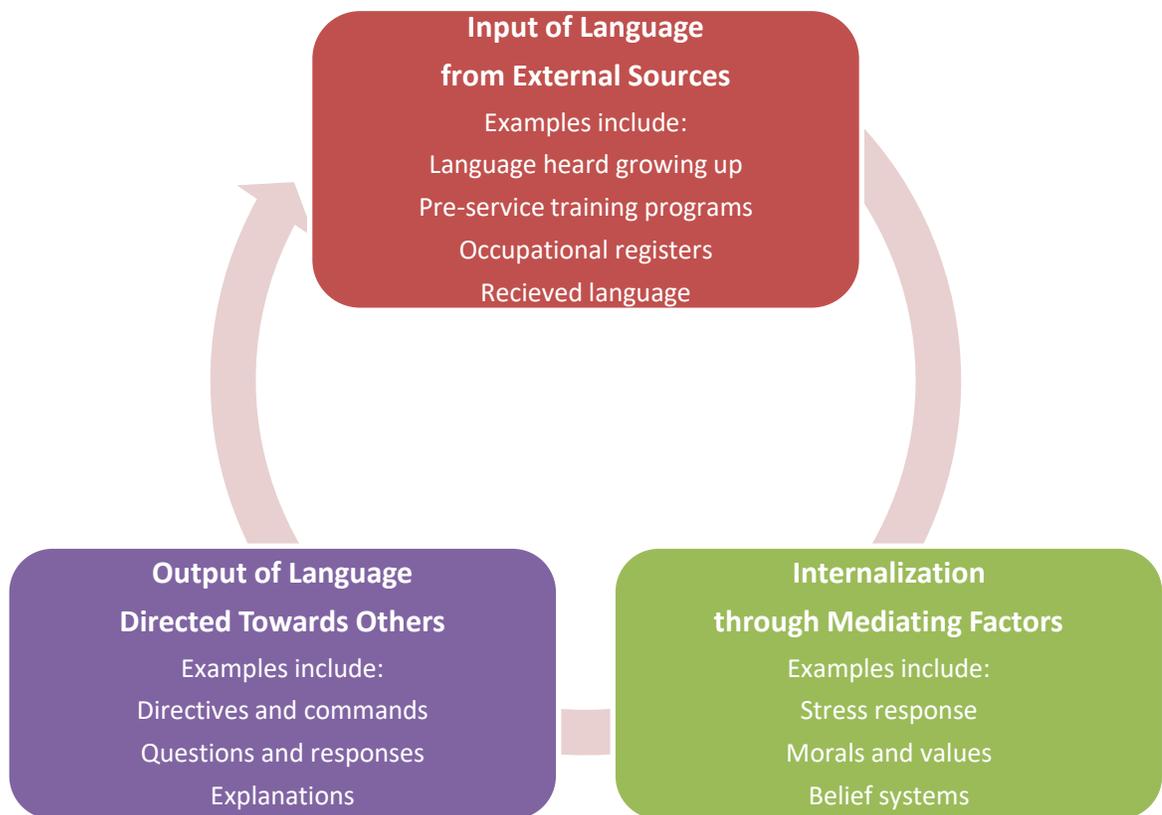


Figure 2. Cycle of acquired language model

This is important on two counts: the cycle can reflect the adult speaker, but also can represent the child's process of internalizing language that is directed toward her.

The literature implies that training and education specializing in child development will

influence the practice of the early childhood education. This would be considered one way to contribute as an input of language. The literature continues that reflective practice, monitoring, and mentoring increase congruency between belief and practice, which contributes to the process of internalizing the language offered through the education and trainings. The output of language reflects observed practice in an early childhood program.

In the next chapter, the literature review provides a comprehensive comparison of resources and studies that discuss factors which contribute to the incongruities between early childhood teacher beliefs and guidance strategies in the classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review investigates the incongruities between early childhood (EC) educator beliefs and early childhood language practice in supporting children to develop conflict resolution skills. According to the *Checking In: A Snapshot of the Child Care Landscape – 2017 Report*, there are a reported 1,372,878 child care spaces in California for children under the age of 6. Of these child care spaces, 53% are in child care center programs, 23% are in licensed family child care homes, and 25% are in school-age care programs (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). Though EC educators report the importance of interpersonal relationships and problem-solving opportunities, an increasing amount of standardization and expectations of accountability reaching into early childhood programs has led to teacher-dependent environments and, consequently, a lack of autonomous opportunities for children (Carlson-Paige, McLaughlin, & Almon, 2015; Katz, 2015).

This review begins with examining the differences in program structures between family child care homes and child care centers. Next, the beliefs held by EC educators on the role of the teacher and the child, as well as the nature and role of classroom conflict will be addressed, followed by strategies for conflict resolution that are generated, facilitated, encouraged, or discouraged in early childhood programs. In conclusion, successful examples of professional development that encourage EC educators to reflect on and improve how they respond to conflict in their classroom will also be described.

Difference in Early Childhood Program Structures

Early childhood programs can be differentiated by structure and process. Structure includes child-teacher ratio, educator training and education, group size, and licensure; whereas process involves sensitive and responsive caregiving, positive and negative peer interaction, cognitive and language stimulation, and health and safety practices (NICHD ECCRN, 2002 cited in Dowsett, Huston, Imes, & Gennetian, 2007, p. 70). “The purpose of regulating structural quality is to improve process quality, i.e. children’s daily experiences while in child care” (Lanigan, 2010, p. 400).

Investigation into structural differences between educators in family child care homes and child care centers conclude highly varied educational background in caregivers (Dowsett et al., 2007; Fuligni, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo, and Karoly, 2009). Prior to being employed as an early childhood teacher in a licensed child care center in California, educators must complete a minimum number of child development courses. The California Education Code § 8360 (1997) refers to a six-level permit structure established by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (2013) that requires greater educational qualifications and experience as the teacher’s role increases in responsibility. EC educators working in licensed programs are required to obtain 105 hours of professional growth within a five-year period for permit renewal regardless of level.

Fuligni et al. (2009) found that while teachers in child care centers are required to have some level of early childhood formal education, education and training varied significantly in family child care home programs, “where educators ranged from no

education and training to specialized BA and graduate training” (p. 9). There are additional structural differences unique to family child care home, such as caring for children of multiple ages (Susman-Stillman, Pleuss, & Englund, 2013) and operating as a sole proprietor and caregiver (Lanigan, 2010) that may lead to differences in the process of the program.

Teacher Beliefs

Within any position of leadership, a person must negotiate expectations that are influenced by one’s system of personal beliefs. EC educators entering the field of early childhood education have varied degrees of child development knowledge and will interpret their understandings based upon the belief systems they embrace about children, teaching, and conflict (Ahn, 2005; Aldemir, 2007; Kwon, 2011). Common beliefs about the role of the teacher, the role of the child, and the role of conflict will be briefly examined in the following sections.

Role of the teacher

Prior education and experience have an influence on the beliefs that teachers hold about their ability to manage problem behaviors and reinforce healthy socio-emotional growth. Research suggests that early memories of their teachers, educational experience in working with the parents of young children, college education, and mentor teachers affect how teachers perceive their role in the classroom (Aldemir, 2007). In a study on the beliefs held by EC teachers regarding an appropriate pedagogy for four-year-olds, Sun Lee (2006) found that what is most important in a preschool classroom is a fun

curriculum that is directed by child interest, relevant to their everyday lives, involves values learning through play and exploration, offers choices, and does not place stress or pressure on the child. It is noted in this study that “for many preschool teachers, protecting young children from any type of negative experience that could provoke stress or anxiety and hurt their self-esteem or confidence was crucial” (Sun Lee, 2006, p. 437).

Academic learning is not reported to be the most important goal in early childhood programs; rather, social and physical development hold higher value. When asked about the role of the teacher, many perceived themselves as a nurturing figure, and neutral in times of conflict (Aldemir, 2007; Blank & Schneider, 2011). Though teachers agree that they play a role in a child’s emotional development and socialization practices, the variability in how they perceive their role results in different classroom practices (Ahn, 2005).

Role of the child

In a study comparing early childhood educators in child care centers and family child care homes, child care centers report less traditional child-centered beliefs than family child care home providers (Dowsett et al., 2007); however, after participating in professional development, family child care home educators reported more modern views rather than their participating counterparts in child care centers (Fuligni et al., 2009).

A study completed by Aldemir (2007) on beliefs held by pre-service EC teachers about children, parents, and teaching, revealed a number of ways teachers perceive young children. Some perceived young children to be powerless in their own learning, like a sail, a blank book, or a sponge. These teachers assumed that children can and will absorb

the information around them. This somewhat antiquated view is in contrast with other teachers who perceive young children to be multi-dimensional, both intentionally and vicariously expanding and growing over time, like a spider web. The majority of pre-service teachers in the study held a ‘romanticized’ concept of the child, which paints a picture of the child as innocent, worry free, active, fun, and without responsibilities. In an ethnographic study of a pre-kindergarten classroom (Souto-Manning, 2014), the researcher recorded the teacher’s reflections, “You know, I am all for children as knowers, but I was not thinking of them as fully capable. They are! They showed me that” (p. 625). Woodrow & Brennan (2001) state, “It is important to truly come to regard children as experts, as capable, in terms of strengths – and learn to see and (re)position these strengths in the classroom, at the center of learning, while interrupting dominant images of young children as innocent, incapable, and needing to be sheltered from conflict” (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 625).

Role of conflict

Within the literature of conflict resolution in an early childhood program, conflict between children is considered an opportunity for learning (Blank & Schneider, 2011; Chen et al., 2001; Comparini & Perez, 2014; Piaget, 1932; Silver & Harkins, 2007; Singer et al., 2012; Souto-Manning, 2014). Conflict presents a platform for children to develop emotional understanding, language, moral reasoning, and social rules (Chen et al., 2001, Comparini & Perez, 2014; Piaget, 1932). A study that collected data from conflict events of 400 children in twenty-five EC programs supports the theory that conflict includes an emotional component, which “heightens children’s awareness of

their experience” (Chen et al., 2001, p. 261). Conflict elicits spontaneous social reasoning and negotiation strategies, and provides “natural, positive opportunities for young children to develop conflict resolution skills that recognize and appreciate the perspectives of others” (Chen et. al., 2001, p. 538).

These beliefs are consistent with early childhood development coursework on guidance and young children (Owens, 2002). But, according to Fang (1996), “teaching prospective teachers sound learning and teaching theories is not enough to translate such theoretical beliefs into sound practice” (Kwon, 2011, p. 21) that maximizes the benefits of conflict situations.

Beliefs-into-Action

There are conflicting studies on what Kyee Yum Kwon (2011, p. iv) coins as “beliefs-into-action,” also expressed as “practice what you preach.” Some research finds that teacher-reported beliefs are consistent with the behaviors observed in the classroom (Ahn, 2005; Kwon 2011). Though on other occasions, researchers have found that there is a lack of congruency between teacher-reported beliefs and practice using ethnographic studies on single classrooms (Blank & Schneider, 2011; Souto-Manning, 2013). Further, the study that provides the strongest evidence showed a weak correlation between teacher belief and practice was completed by Wen, Elicker, & McMullen (2011). Using a broad sample in a variety of programs over time, Wen et al. (2011) found that though teacher beliefs were largely consistent with established child-centered learning and developmentally appropriate practice, it was not always observed in practice, perhaps due

to the link between beliefs and practice being “fragile or context bound” (p. 962). They conclude that though there is a long-standing and wide-spread cultural and legislative acceptance of such philosophies, these do not easily translate to the reality and complexity of the classroom.

As observed in the literature, there are several strategies that EC teachers utilize in their program when conflict emerges between children. The following sections summarize these strategies: socializing emotions and the use of social-emotional curriculum, unilateral versus bilateral strategies, and teacher intervention. This section concludes with conflicting claims about the effectiveness of teacher intervention.

Socializing emotions

As suggested in the research, most EC educators agree that it is within their position to not only teach young children how to identify and cope with their own emotions, but also to do so within the context of interpersonal relationships (Ahn, 2005; Comparini, 2013). Through observations and interviews, Ahn (2005) identified the following strategies employed by teachers to socialize emotions: identify the child’s emotions, identify the teacher’s emotions, discuss the causes of emotions, physically comfort a child who is unhappy or injured, and teach alternative ways of expressing emotions (i.e. verbally rather than physically expressing oneself). Teachers, however, were less likely to identify their own negative emotions, but would instead neutralize their affect. Similarly, Swartz and McElwain (2012) found in an observation study of pre-service teachers that teachers who reported more accepting beliefs of children’s expression of emotions, in conjunction with an ability to regulate their own emotions,

were similarly supportive of children's expressions of negative emotions. It was also found in questionnaire responses that whereas verbal response and matching affect were the most frequently used responses to children's emotional displays, physical affection, problem solving, and labeling emotions were infrequently used.

In recognizing the importance of social-emotional learning, Head Start employed the Head Start CARES demonstration (2013) randomly assigning 100 childcare centers to adopt an "enhancement" to complement the existing social-emotional curriculum (SEC). Three distinct SEC were assigned: "The Incredible Years Teacher Training Program," "Preschool PATHS" (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies), and "Tools of the Mind – Play." Each of the curricula came with written materials and plans, as well as training sessions. Four outcomes were assessed at the end of the school year: 1) teachers' practices; 2) the climate of the classroom; 3) children's behavior regulation, executive function skills, knowledge and understanding of emotions, and social problem-solving skills; and, 4) children's learning behaviors and social behaviors. Changes in teacher practice were considered the primary target, which was hypothesized to result in a change in classroom interactions or the children's behaviors (Mattera, Lloyd, Fishman & Bangser, 2013).

Upon completion of the study, the report indicated that "improvements in teachers' practices and children's skills emerged when well-designed, evidence-based models with prepared written materials were supported by high-quality and ongoing training and coaching of teachers and a real-time MIS (management information system)" (Morris, Mattera, Catells, Bangser, Bierman, Raver, 2014, p. 18). Of the three

implemented curriculum, all three had a significant impact on emotion knowledge, as demonstrated by identifying emotions. Two out of three implemented curriculum had significant impacts on social problem-solving, as demonstrated through a direct assessment of responses based on social stories, on classroom management, and on learning and social behaviors. These outcomes were also demonstrated through teacher reports on behaviors such as peer cooperation and resolving conflicts. Conversely, there was not a significant impact on problem behaviors, executive function, classroom organization, or classroom climate with any of the three models.

Research also suggests that there is a connection between teacher beliefs about the importance of expression and socialization of emotions and the level of support they offer in the development of social-emotional competencies in young children (Ahn, 2005; Silver & Harkins, 2007; Swartz & McElwain, 2012). Teachers reporting more accepting beliefs about children's emotions exhibited more supportive responses to children's negative emotions, but only when they also reported high levels of reappraisal. In this study, reappraisal is the cognitive reframing of a difficult situation, rather than "suppressing emotions and avoiding emotional expression" (p. 205). Swartz and McElwain (2012) concluded that teachers' emotion-related regulation and reappraisal levels predicted their responses to children's emotions. This is described further by Silver and Harkins (2007) in a study which explored labeling of children and teacher responses. They determined that children's behaviors in the classroom will influence the teacher's perception of them, causing the teachers to employ different intervention strategies depending upon whether the child was portrayed as difficult, easy, or ambiguous. Hyson

and Lee (as cited in Ahn, 2005) found that teacher-reported beliefs on emotions varied depending on the teacher's level of education. Teachers with higher levels of education had a stronger endorsement of talking with children about their emotions, and a lower endorsement of protecting children from unpleasant or strong feelings.

In summary, EC teachers employ a variety of strategies to promote the social-emotional growth of the children in their class, including the use of pre-designed curriculum. The literature suggests that supporting emotional knowledge through direct teaching was widely used, though without direct consequences to the climate of the classroom, even though it was reported that classroom climate is “keyed to the level of social skills” of the children in the class and the “degree to which conflicts disrupt overall classroom order” (Chen & Smith, 2002, p. 310). The strategies applied by the teacher vary according to individual children and are influenced by teacher beliefs, experience, and level of education.

Unilateral versus bilateral strategies

Linguistic patterns in early childhood programs vary depending on program structure (Ota & Austin, 2013). In studies on childcare centers, the literature offers evidence that “quality and frequency of language stimulation are important indicators of the quality of child care language environments and a predictor of children's language development” (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001, 2002; Risley & Hart, 2006 cited in Ota & Austin, 2013, p. 973). It was found, however, that caregivers in family child care homes more frequently use directive language and engage in stimulating inputs that encourage language in children at only about 30% of the total verbal interactions. Ota & Austin

(2013) suggest that, “directives may be an expression of philosophies of management or indicative of providers’ sense of responsibility to maintain the group routine. The lack of change (after training and mentoring) could reflect that the providers’ directives are a necessary part of routines (i.e. washing hands, toileting routines)” (p. 980).

Teacher linguistic inputs also have the potential to support or suppress conflict resolution strategies for children. Singer, Van Hoogdalem, De Haan, & Bekkema conducted a study involving 257 children in 23 different childcare centers during which they documented 518 conflicts between children. Of these conflicts, teachers intervened in 25%, of which 22% resulted in additional conflict. Within the teacher interventions, 88% of the teachers used unilateral strategies, creating a model to the children in the area, and often focused on right versus wrong, rather than reconciliation. Teachers used bilateral strategies 40% of the time. Most often, however, teachers in the study were observed to punish unilateral strategies used by children, such as by taking away objects, reprimanding children, or physically separating children. It was also documented that over half of the teachers identified a perpetrator in the conflict, and that less than half addressed both children instead of the one identified. Only once did a teacher involve bystanders in the classroom. Of the conflicts observed, the researchers concluded that bilateral strategies increased the likelihood that children would continue to play with one another.

Whether and which to teach, teaching social negotiation strategies is determined in the moment by the teacher. Another unilateral strategy as defined by Silver and Harkins (2007) is cessation, or “maintaining peace by ending conflict” (p. 627). They

found that teachers who ranked higher in positive affect when given a fictional story were more likely to engage in collaborative social negotiation strategies with children, though overall, teachers self-reported more cessation strategies than mediation. Even during mediation, teachers often use scripted language rather than incorporating the child's language (Blank & Schneider, 2011). Though Chen and Smith (2002) noted that the more education or training a teacher has received, the less likely they are to endorse cessation as a strategy, Silver and Harkins (2007) observed that teachers in the study who received training in a social negotiation model were only more likely to use mediation strategies with children identified as 'easy.'

The literature here suggests that the interventions chosen by teachers support the claim that conflict is perceived by EC teachers as a negative event in the classroom (Blank & Schneider, 2011; Kwon, 2011; Silver & Harkins, 2007; Souto-Manning, 2014; Swartz & McElwain, 2012), and that "teachers quickly resolve conflict to minimize disruption of classroom routines" (Blank & Schneider, 2011, p. 199). In doing so, teachers often model unilateral strategies in their practice, though the level of education and training may have an impact on an EC teacher's choice of interventions and consistency between belief and practice.

Teacher intervention

The constructivist approach is centered on children constructing their own knowledge from an interchange between the child and his or her physical and social surroundings. The literature suggests that teacher intervention during peer conflicts may not be necessary to a child's development of social negotiation strategies. In fact,

without respect for a child's autonomy, adult intervention may hinder this development (Ahn & Stifter, 2006; Blank & Schneider, 2011; Chen et. al., 2001; Piaget, 1932; Roseth, Pellegrini, Dupuis, Bohn, Hickey, Hilk, Peshkam, 2008). Killen and Turiel (as cited in Chen et al., 2001) found that children were more likely to use negotiation strategies without a teacher present. In addition to the strategies described earlier, Blank and Schneider (2011) found that EC teachers often provide verbal scaffolds, such as "Use your words" or "You can say..." that may only set the platform for 'revoicing' (p. 207) the teacher's predetermined set of behavior expectations and classroom rules, thus overlooking the child's autonomy and perspective into the situation. In their study, they observed that "the use of specialized terms in (the teacher's) shared language privileges an understanding of community as a place where individuals engage in routines peaceably alongside one another, rather than one that privileges collaboration, cognitive conflict, and the give and take of contrasting ideas" (p. 206).

As children progress through their preschool years, they become more capable of negotiation and problem solving, as observed in their explanations, rationales, and increased awareness of another's perspective (Chen et al., 2001; Comparini et al., 2014; Piaget, 1932; Souto-Manning, 2014). Teachers are role models for children and have an influence on how children respond and develop (Ahn, 2005; Ahn & Stifter, 2006; Aldemir, 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Singer et al., 2012; Silver & Harkins, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). The belief that teachers are nurturing and neutral in times of conflict disregards the possibility that the teacher reacts emotionally, thus disregarding the complexity of emotional expression and the opportunity for genuine conversations with

children (Blank & Schneider, 2001). Child development theorist Jean Piaget (1932), focuses on a child's autonomy in regard to the role adults play in peer conflict opportunities:

The conclusion which we shall finally reach is that the sense of justice, though naturally capable of being reinforced by the precepts and the practical example of the adult, is largely independent of these influences, and requires nothing more for its development than the mutual respect and solidarity which holds among children themselves. It is often at the expense of the adult and not because of him that the notions of just and unjust find their way into a youthful mind. In contrast to a given rule, which from the first has been imposed upon the child from the outside and which for many years he has failed to understand, such as the rule of not telling lies, the rule of justice is a sort of imminent condition of social relationships or a law governing equilibrium. And as the solidarity between children grows we shall find this notion of justice gradually emerging in almost complete autonomy. (p. 195).

Roseth et al. (2008) support this claim by stating that children were more likely to separate following teacher intervention, increasing the likelihood that the conflict will repeat at a later time. It was also noted that the rate of reconciliation remained the same, with or without teacher intervention.

In summary, teachers set the stage of understanding social relationships by how they interact with and perceive the children in their classroom. Children will develop positive social negotiation strategies when provided the respect and guidance in using

their own voice of reason. This development is not dependent upon teacher intervention, but instead upon the positive modeling of genuine feelings and promotion of independence from the adults in their environment.

Efforts Toward Congruency

The literature suggests the following recommendations to creating a positive early childhood environment that connects the EC teacher's beliefs, child, and conflict with teacher strategies in supporting children to develop social negotiation skills. The most widely endorsed practice is facilitated reflection both at a pre-service and in-service level (Aldemir, 2008; Kwon, 2011; Silver & Harkins, 2007; Swartz & McElwain, 2012; Wen et al., 2011). Benefits of reflective practice include strengthening the teacher's emotion-regulation by increasing awareness of their own emotional responses (Silver & Harkins, 2007; Swartz & McElwain, 2012) and "enhancing emotion-related cognition by encouraging teachers to take the child's perspective in interpreting child's emotional displays and promoting belief systems that reflect knowledge of social-emotional development and acceptance of negative emotions in children" (Swartz & McElwain, 2012, p. 222). Other researchers in the literature suggest that teachers go through a process of self-reflection in order to examine the beliefs that they hold about children and school in order to increase the likelihood of transfer into their actions (Aldemir, 2008; Bandura, 1992; Kwon, 2011; Wen et al., 2011).

In addition to reflection, the implementation of social and emotional curriculum models was found to be dependent upon a number of variables. The Head Start study

concludes that supportive administrators, time and space for training, feelings of being supported and trusted, maintaining communication, and allowing the teachers to be flexible predicted that teachers both remained faithful to the prescribed curriculum and were successful in their execution. Barriers to successful implementation included a lack of resources, insufficient planning time, mismatch of language between children, teachers, and coaches, lack of support from administration, additional curricular and assessment requirements, Head Start performance standards monitoring, teacher turnover, and teacher stress (Morris et al., 2014).

Evidence points to strong associations that formal early childhood education and specialized trainings are associated with child-centered beliefs, positive change in interactions, and intentional teaching practices in early childhood programs (Cabel, Justice, McGinty, DeCoster, & Forston, 2014; Dowsett, et al., 2007; Fuligni et al., 2009; Lanigan, 2011; Ota & Austing, 2013; Ottley, Piasta, Mauck, O'Connell, Weber-Mayrer, & Justice, 2015). Alternative pathways for effective professional development include specialized workshops, supervision, monitoring, and on-site mentoring (Fuligni et al., 2009; Ota & Austing, 2013). In examining professional development specifically in family child care homes, Lanigan (2010) emphasizes a collaborative and cohort approach, relationship building between the participants and instructor, and several quality assessments over the course of the professional development.

Education standards in the field of early childhood education insure that teachers are exposed to a specified baseline of information in order to effectively implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum and provide a culturally-sensitive, warm, and

safe learning environment. Practice is guided by research and theories that demonstrate the capacity of young children to see the perspective of another person, to recognize another's emotions, and to develop prosocial behaviors that encourage interaction. Early childhood educators are expected to support peer interactions and social negotiation and develop an epistemological congruency between their beliefs and the utilization of strategies known to be best practice.

In sum, the research reviewed here suggests that to increase congruency between teacher belief on conflict resolution and classroom practice, efforts must be made to explore individual epistemologies in either pre-service training programs or specialized trainings and workshops; and to continue self and facilitated reflection while working in an early childhood program.

Conclusion

As found in the literature, there is large variance in degrees of education and training in child development which provide early childhood educators the knowledge on how to best support the social-emotional development of young children. It appears, however, that regardless of the level of education, the implemented strategies are commonly unilateral and teacher-directed (Ahn, 2001; Blank & Schneider, 2011; Chen & Smith, 2002; Singer et al., 2012; Silver & Harkins, 2007). Though it has been supported in the research that conflict resolution provides opportunities for developmental growth in both cognitive and social-emotional domains (Blank & Schneider, 2011; Chen et al., 2001; Comparini & Perez, 2014; Piaget, 1932; Silver & Harkins, 2007; Singer, Van

Hoogdalem, De Haan, & Bekkema, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2014), conflict continues to be perceived in practice as a negative event, as problem solving is infrequently applied as a solution (Blank & Schneider, 2011; Chen & Smith, 2002; Singer et al., 2012; Silver & Harkins, 2007). When EC educators model strategies that are teacher-dependent and disregard the dialogue of social negotiation, the literature suggests that instead of supporting children, they may instead be inadvertently modeling undesirable behavior (Ahn, 2005; Ahn & Stifter, 2006; Aldemir, 2008; Piaget, 1932; Roseth et al., 2008; Singer et al., 2012; Silver & Harkins, 2007).

In conclusion, though professional development and reflective practice have been found to be successful in increasing the congruency between teacher belief and teacher practice (Aldemir, 2008; Kwon, 2011; Silver & Harkins, 2007; Swartz & McElwain, 2012; Wen et al., 2011), the literature reviewed does not demonstrate the impact of language usage to support conflict in the classroom. Future investigation would benefit from analyzing language transcriptions in the course of the day as a window into spoken language practices. It may also be advantageous to examine verbal social negotiation strategies implemented by educators in early childhood programs.

To accomplish this, this study examines the language usage of three early childhood programs in connection with a questionnaire on teacher beliefs in the classroom. A description of the methodology used will be described in the next chapter.

METHODS

This chapter will describe the methods for conducting a mixed method research pilot study on the language patterns of early childhood educators. The research questions ask what are the language patterns of early childhood educators in early childhood programs, and how congruent are an educator's choice of words with their stated beliefs on the role of the teacher and the role of guidance in an early childhood program? In this next section, I will review the selection criteria for participants, how participants are recruited, and the methods for data collection and analysis.

Participant Sample

Three educators in early childhood programs in Humboldt County were recruited based on the following selection criteria: employed at an early childcare program for a minimum of 12 months at the time of recruitment, at least 18 years old, and employed for a minimum of 36 hours per week in the designated program. Participant 1 operates a large family child care home (FCCH) licensed for up to 14 children, currently serving children between 10 months and four years old at the time of the study. Participant 2 operates a small family childcare home licensed for up to six children, currently serving children between one and four years old at the time of the study. Participant 3 is an educator in a preschool program at a child care center (CCC) with a capacity of twenty

children, currently serving children between three and five years old at the time of the study.

The first layer of recruitment was through the Humboldt County Early Childhood Educators Facebook page, which resulted in the participation of one program. The second layer of recruitment was through direct outreach to programs with whom the researcher has existing associations, which resulted in the remaining two programs. Demographics collected during the study are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant sample

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	Program Type
Participant 1	Female	30-39 yrs.	BA Child Dev.	FCCH – large
Participant 2	Female	30-39 yrs.	High School	FCCH - small
Participant 3	Female	30-39 yrs.	BA Child Dev.	CCC - preschool

Collection of Data

Data was collected through two methods: questionnaire and audio recordings. The participants were individually contacted, and each received their study materials which included a belief questionnaire, release, and audio recorder. The questionnaire includes 20 statements exploring the perceived role of the educator, child, conflict, language, and environment in an early childhood program using a 5-point Likert Scale (with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree). In addition, there are six questions collecting information on the participants' previous personal experiences with

classroom, home, and work influences. The questionnaire also collects demographics on age range, years of experience in the classroom, level of education, and gender identification. The questionnaire closes with an open-response question asking participants to describe their program. The participants returned their completed questionnaire to the researcher upon completion of their recordings.

The second part of the study was the audio recording. Participants each receive a small USB audio recorder with the instruction to pin it onto outer clothing. Participants chose when to record their sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. Each participant completed two sessions on two separate days. Upon the completion of two audio recordings, the researcher picked up the recorder, questionnaire, and consent documentation. Each participant received a \$25 Target gift card for participating in the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The educator language in each sample was transcribed, while omitting all child language and names to ensure anonymity of the participant, program, and children enrolled. Data was qualitatively analyzed using anecdotal excerpts and language samples to identify patterns and context of interactions. The transcriptions are then coded and quantitatively analyzed through frequency count. Counts are used to run code x descriptor analysis comparing data from both the questionnaire and transcriptions. The codes are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Code definitions

Code	Sub-code	Definition
Concept	Interaction	Integration of pre-academic concepts, such as color, number, letter, and labeling through interaction
	Literacy	Integration of pre-academic concepts, such as color, number, letter, and labeling through literacy
Conflict Strategy	Unilateral	Educator conflict intervention strategy: unilateral, which includes aggression, physical force, coercion, standing firm, and cessation (Singer et al. 2012)
	Bilateral	Educator conflict intervention strategy: pro-social behavior, negotiation, compromise, and mediation (Singer et al. 2012)
Scaffolding Language		Intentionally modeling language; for example, “You can say, ‘I need space.’”
Behavior Feedback		Describing a child’s behavior to the child completing the act

Code	Sub-code	Definition
Choice	Open	Offering a choice to a child without predetermined options
	Closed	Offering a choice to a child with predetermined options
Socializing Emotions		Labeling and discussion of feelings

For further reduction, the questionnaire questions were organized and averaged during the analysis phase by the constructs described below. Questionnaire questions marked with (-) are inversely coded and averaged.

- Role of the child: Children can make choices and solve problems.
 - 1. Children can solve problems independently.
 - 3. Children should be empowered to make choices in their classroom.
 - 11. It is acceptable practice for children to disagree with the educator.
 - 20. It is acceptable practice for children not to participate in class activities.
- Role of the educator: Educators support the development of problem solving skills.
 - 4. Children should be taught conflict resolution skills.
 - 6. It is primarily the educator's role to resolve conflicts. (-)
 - 8. Educators should intervene when children have a disagreement. (-)

- 12. I intervene straightaway when children have a disagreement. (-)
- 17. I stop conflict in order to preserve the overall harmony of the classroom. (-)
- Role of conflict: Conflict can create opportunities for learning.
 - 7. Social negotiation is a positive experience for children.
 - 9. Conflict interrupts the classroom environment. (-)
 - 10. Problem solving opportunities disrupt the learning experience for children in the classroom. (-)
- Role of intentional language: Language is intentional throughout the day.
 - 13. I ask more open-ended questions during the day than closed questions.
 - 16. I give direct instruction for most of the day. (-)
 - 18. I talk differently to individual children.
 - 19. I give children feedback on their behavior.
- Role of the environment: Environment is intentional throughout the day.
 - 2. Children should be rewarded for good behavior.
 - 5. I greet children as they arrive for the day.
 - 14. Children perform best with a structured routine.
 - 15. I structure my program to prevent conflicts. (-)

The ratio of conflict strategies, unilateral to bilateral, will determine congruency with beliefs on the roles the child, teacher, and conflict play in the classroom. In addition, the frequency of coded language samples for behavior feedback, concept,

scaffolded language, and socializing emotions will determine congruency on the belief of the use of intentional language in the classroom.

RESULTS

The results of the questionnaire responses will be presented both by separate item and as a construct. Patterns and coding in the transcriptions will then be noted, followed by a joint analysis.

Questionnaire Results and Constructs

The questionnaire responses reported that all three participants strongly agree that children can solve problems independently (item 1), children should be empowered to make choices in their classroom (item 3), and children should be taught conflict resolution skills (item 4).

Participants strongly disagree that problem solving opportunities disrupt the learning experience for children in class (item 10); however, responses varied when asked if conflict interrupts the classroom environment (item 9) from strongly disagree (n = 1), to somewhat disagree (n = 1), to somewhat agree (n = 1).

Regarding belief of practice, participants all strongly agree that they give children feedback on their behavior (item 19). They strongly disagree (n = 2) and somewhat disagree (n = 1) that they stop conflict in order to preserve the overall harmony of the classroom (item 17). They strongly disagree (n = 1) and somewhat disagree (n = 2) that they intervene straightaway when children have a disagreement (item 12).

Upon consolidation of the questionnaire items, each participant receives an average score on how they view the five constructs below using a 5-point Likert Scale (with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree). The aggregated results of the participants (n = 3) by construct are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Questionnaire results by construct

Construct	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Average
Role of the Child	4.50	4.50	4.75	4.58
Role of the teacher	3.80	4.00	4.60	4.13
Role of conflict	3.67	3.33	5.00	4.00
Role of language	4.50	3.00	4.50	4.00
Role of environment	4.50	4.00	3.25	3.92

On average, participants report that they somewhat agree to strongly agree that children can make choices and solve problems. They somewhat agree that teachers support the development of problem solving skills, that conflict can create opportunities for learning, and that both language and environment is intentional throughout the day.

Figure 3 illustrates the variance in responses between participants.

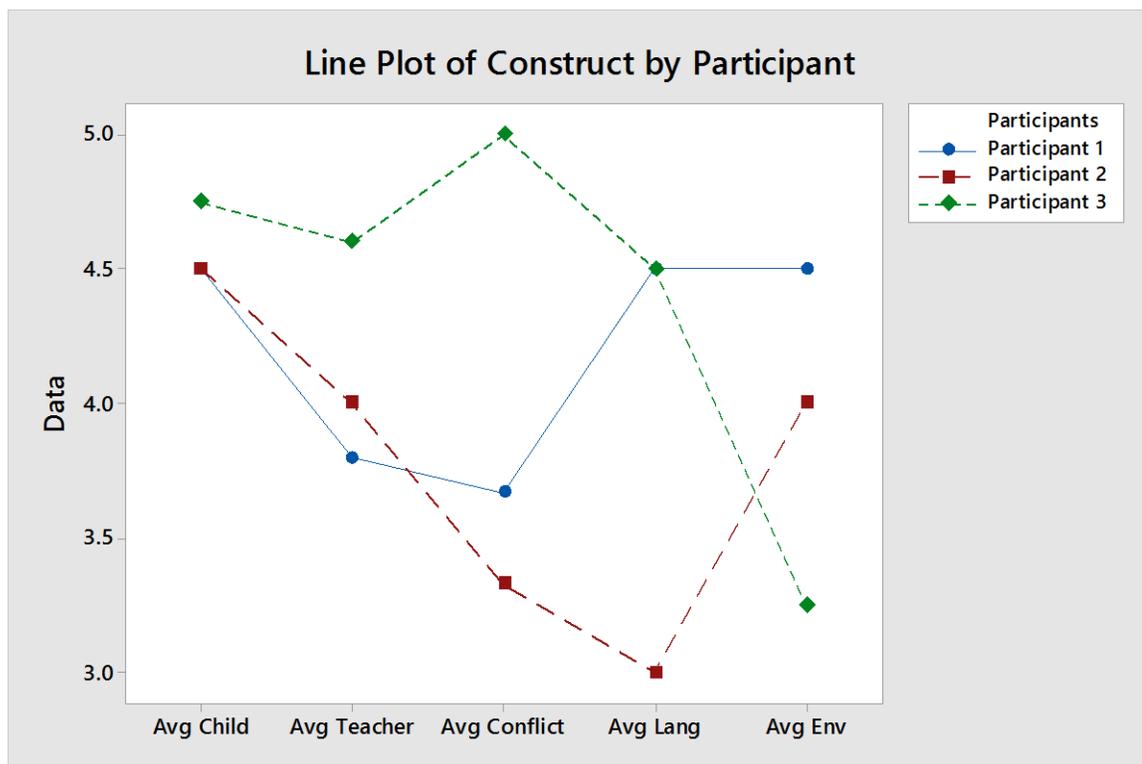


Figure 3. Line plot of construct by participant

Audio Transcriptions and Coding

Six 90-minute language samples presented a total average word tally of 6,359 words per sample, with a minimum sample size of 4,141 words and maximum sample size of 8,279 words.

Each language transcription is coded into categories. Each coded language count represents one interaction, though a single interaction may receive more than one code.

Figure 4 illustrates the number of language samples coded by strategy for each participant. Figure 5 illustrates the percentage of language use by code for each participant.

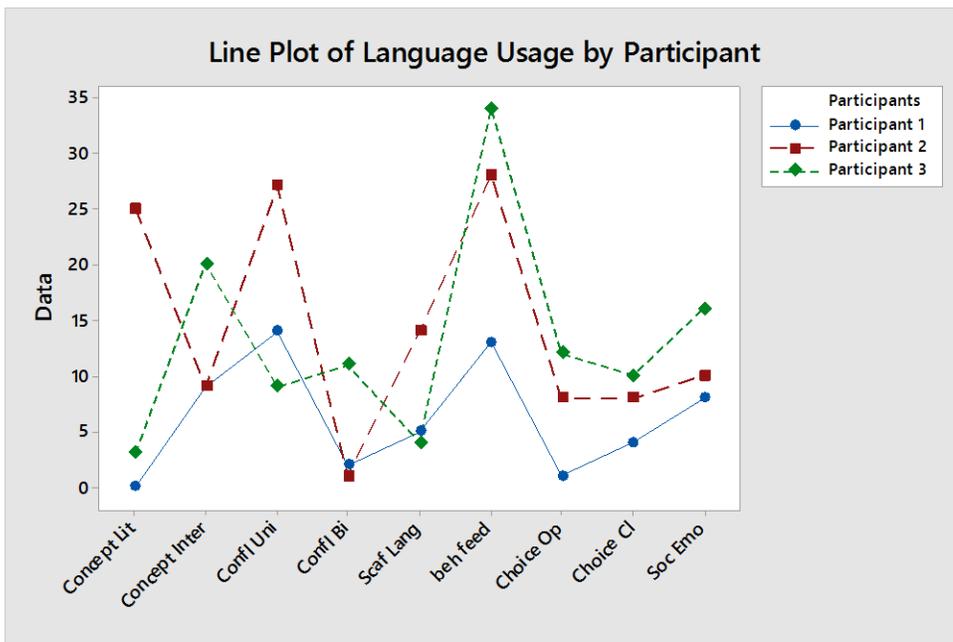


Figure 4. Line plot of language usage by participant

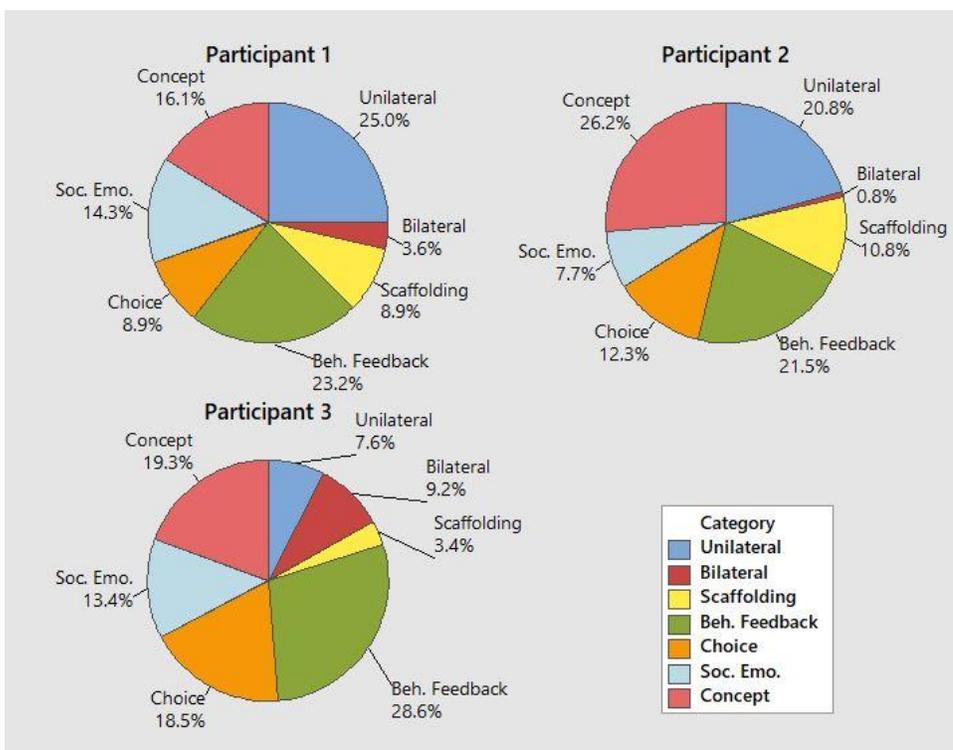


Figure 5. Pie chart of percent of language used by participant

Joint Analysis of Questionnaire and Transcription Results

Bilateral and unilateral intervention strategies

Total frequency count of teacher intervention strategies for conflict resolution is 61 counts; 14 counts of bilateral strategies and 47 counts of unilateral strategies. See Table 4 for examples of unilateral strategies and Table 5 for examples of bilateral strategies. Participants who stated that they strongly agree that children can solve problems independently held 86.7% of the total bilateral strategy count and 27.0% of the total unilateral strategy count. Concurrently, participants who reported the belief that they somewhat agree with the statement held 13.3% of the bilateral strategy count and 73.0% of the unilateral count.

In the questionnaire question, “It is primarily the teacher’s role to resolve conflicts,” the participant who reported the belief that they strongly disagree with the statement held 78.6% of the total bilateral strategy count and 12.8% of the total unilateral strategy count. Concurrently, the participant who reported the belief that they somewhat disagree with the statement held 7.1% of the total bilateral strategy count and 57.4% of the total unilateral strategy count. Further, the participant who reported the belief that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement held 14.3% of the total bilateral strategy count and total 29.8% of the unilateral strategy count. The breakdown of conflict resolution strategies by participant is illustrated in Figure 6.

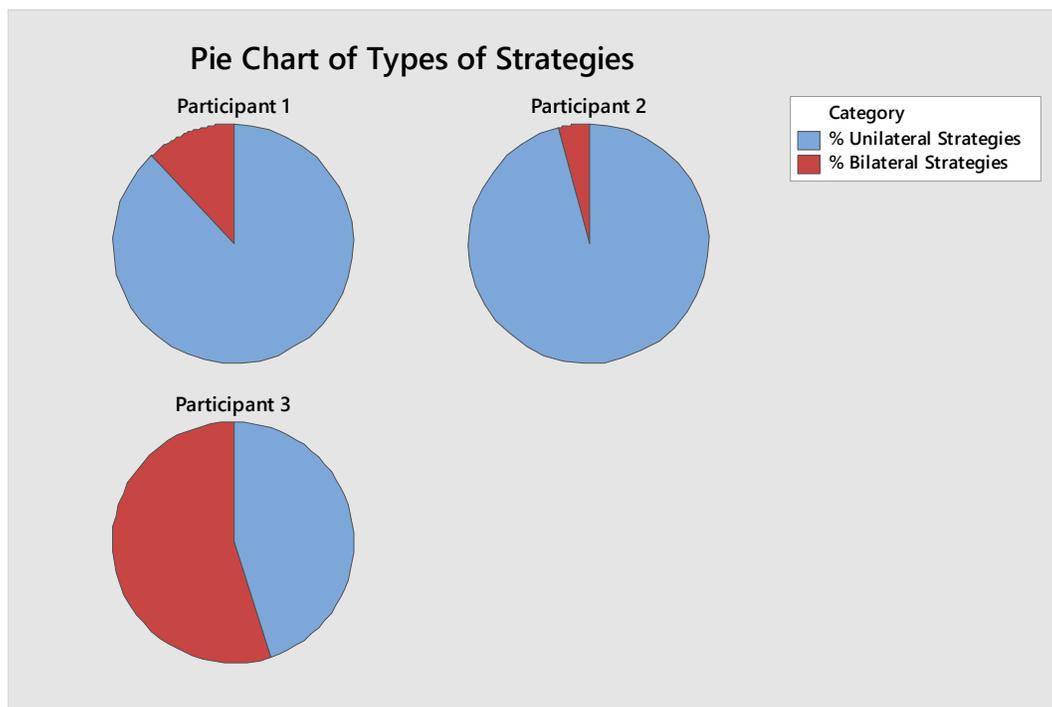


Figure 6. Teacher intervention strategies by participant

Table 4. Examples of unilateral strategies recorded

<p>“Child E, she’s playing with the phone right now, okay? Okay Child E, how about you look at this book? Child D is looking at the dinosaur book right now. You can look at the doggie book.”</p>
<p>“Well, I’m sorry, but you can have the green cup, or you cannot have any milk at all.”</p>
<p>(reading) “Child E, no hitting. No hitting Child D. That one’s not being very nice? That is? Let’s find out.” (reads) “Oh, they want to go over the mountain.” (reads) “Child D, Child A’s looking at that book. Don’t take it away from him. You’ll go to time out if you’re going to hit. No hitting. You be nice. No hitting. You don’t hit me,</p>

<p>ok? There's no hitting. You're gonna sit here. You are in a time out, you're right.</p> <p>There's not hitting at (this) house.”</p>
<p>“Hey Child A, you need to give that back to her. You don't just take puzzles out of her hand. That's not nice. And Child B, remember to use your words. Say, “Please don't do that.”</p>

Table 5. Examples of bilateral strategies recorded

<p>“Oh, I didn't hear the rules for this new game, I was watching the sandbox. How do we play? Wow, I am not a kid, so that means I can't play. Okay, but what if Child G wants to play? Okay, how do we do that? How does that look?”</p>
<p>“Who wants a turn with the boat, Child H wants a turn. Child I wants a turn. I'm thinking we need a paper and pen for a turn list. Could you be in charge of that? Oh, “Child D I can't flip it over if you are sitting on it though. If everybody scoots back I don't want to smoosh any toes or fingers. So, I noticed Child H was waiting for a turn, who is going to go with Child H? Sounds like we need to talk about it. I hear a lot of people saying, ‘Me.’ So, it sounds like everyone like being friends with Child H, but I don't know how that is going to decide who is going to have a turn with Child H. Child A sounds like she has an idea. Does it work for everybody else if Child H picks? That works for everybody? Ok. I see Child I has a turn list. Alright Child H and Child E. And then Child F...”</p>

“Child E are you wanting to take a turn with Child A? Well Child A is choosing to have a long turn, sometimes, we choose that. So, hold on, Child K, it might be someone else’s turn. Alright, Child G (calling over to the Child) it’s your turn on the boat. Alright Child K, Child G is interested in her turn. Well you said you were done so Child A said she wasn’t done. Well it’s kind of tricky because you chose to get off, and I called Child G over so what should we do? Child G it sounds like Child K is not done. She said she doesn’t mind playing for a couple more minutes, okay you can keep rocking. Child G, do you want to sign up on the turn list for a turn later?”

Scaffolding language

There were 23 instances of scaffolding language from the recorded sessions. The highest co-occurrence in codes was between scaffolding language and unilateral strategies (12 instances of co-occurrence). See Table 6 for examples of scaffolding language.

Table 6. Examples of scaffolding language recorded

“He’s sharing with you? *Say, ‘Thank you for being such a friend.’* That’s nice, huh? It’s nice when your friends share with you. He said you were sharing with him.”

“Child L would want to break them every time so if you don’t want him to break it *you have to tell him, ‘Child L, don’t break mine.’* Hey Child L, umm I’ll make some for you to smash over here. Want to smash that one, Child L? *So, when you make*

something just tell him, 'Don't smash it Child L.' Like that, 'It's not for smashing.'

Something like that, okay?"

“What’s wrong Child A? Who hit your hat? Child D, no hitting. No hitting. *Tell Child A sorry. Say, 'Sorry, Child A.' We've got to be nice to our friends. No hitting. I just told her Child A. Yes. I told her no hitting. She knows.*”

“Do you know what it means when you yell no? What are you thinking? Who are you saying no to? Child C when you are talking to us about it, we’ll know. I am not even sure who you were talking to. Were you talking to me? Child F? What happened, what were you saying no about? *So, if you don't want him to scoop sand right here, you could say, 'I don't want you to scoop sand right here.'* Child F said, ‘Okay I’ll scoop it over here.’ I noticed you are scooping sand from where Child F was scooping. Does that work for you Child F? No. *So Child F, you could say, 'I don't want you to scoop sand from over here.'*”

Verbal behavioral feedback

There were 75 instances of verbal feedback from the teacher regarding student behavior. There were 9 instances of co-occurrence between behavioral feedback and unilateral strategies. See Table 7 for examples of verbal behavior feedback.

Table 7. Examples of verbal behavioral feedback recorded

“You are, you’re doing great. What are you guys doing? You looking at a book? Is that the safari animals? Cool. They are sharing, they’re being friends.”

“Would you like to be held (baby cries). You’re telling me that you want to be held.”
“I hear Child K saying,” I want a place to sit”. I hear Child F saying there is a place to sit right here. She is gesturing with her hand.”
“So, this is another thing, I noticed that when H moves this way and Child B moves back at the same time and then you move this way together, it rocks bigger.”
“We have to put the pieces in before we take the other pieces out. You did put them back, you were quick. Ok, ours is done.”

Other coded language strategies

The total number of instances of offering choices to Children is 43, with 22 counts recording closed choices and 21 counts recording open choices. In addition, the total for socializing emotions in language is 34 instances. The total for integrating pre-academic concepts is 66 instances, with 38 instances recording language in interactions and 28 instances recording language while reading (not including the story script, but intentional language stemming from the story).

DISCUSSION

This study was completed with three participants, and so the information primarily builds upon previous literature; however, it does not yield enough data for strong correlations. The questions presented in this study will be addressed, followed by the limitations and considerations, and recommendations for future research. In close, practical implications of the study will be offered.

Language Patterns of Early Childhood Educators

There are noticeable patterns in the results of the study. There was a wide variance in the number of words spoken by participants. To some extent this may be due in part to omitting from transcription the words spoken when reading directly from a book. In one sample, there were up to four books read, which would reduce the number of opportunities for intentional linguistic strategies.

Intentional language

In all language samples, verbal feedback regarding behavior is the most frequently used language strategy. The language samples offer children a specific narration of their behaviors, at times in relation to encouragement or consequence. This can be interpreted as providing children information to support interactions observed by the teacher.

Another strategy employed by the participants is verbal scaffolding. Verbal scaffolding provides children with information, though in a more scripted manner than

general verbal feedback. In this way, the participants are giving children language that they can use in other interactions. The effectiveness of this strategy varies and is dependent upon the language being provided. For example, scripted phrases such as, “Use your words,” and “Say, I’m sorry,” have been found to be less effective as noted in the literature because they do not take into consideration the contextual factors of an interaction, such as the age of the children involved or individual perspective. The co-occurrence between verbal scaffolding and unilateral intervention strategies suggests incidences where the teacher was modeling the language in a more corrective manner.

Verbal scaffolding language that indicates a running dialogue and persistence through an exchange often prompts children to consider alternate perspectives and the situation. An example of this type of exchange is the following excerpt: “What happened, what were you saying no about? *So, if you don’t want him to scoop sand right here, you could say, ‘I don’t want you to scoop sand right here.’* Child F said, ‘Okay I’ll scoop it over here.’ I noticed you are scooping sand from where Child F was scooping. Does that work for you Child F? No. *So Child F, you could say, ‘I don’t want you to scoop sand from over here.’*”

Social emotional language, which includes labeling and discussing emotions was also present in all language samples. The percentages of coded interactions by participant indicate that participants used this language at a rate of 7.7% – 14.3% of the total coded language excerpts. In comparison, integration of pre-academic concept language happened at a rate of 16.1% - 26.2% of each language sample. The greatest variation was

found with Participant 2, with 7.7% of the excerpts coded as social emotional language and 26.2% coded as concept integration.

This suggests a stronger emphasis on introducing pre-academic concepts rather than on social emotional teaching. Interestingly, Participant 2 showed 25 counts while reading and nine counts during interactions; whereas, Participant 3 showed three counts while reading and 20 were during interactions. This could be due to the ratio of the time recorded that was spent reading books versus engaging in other activities.

The high frequency of intentional language in the classroom for providing behavioral feedback, verbal scaffolding, social emotional language, and concept language reinforces the notion that this type of language spoken by educators in an EC classroom is present in the environment of the child as illustrated by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model. Further, it demonstrates the value placed on learning in the context of play and exploration as noted in the literature.

Intervention strategies

There are significant distinctions by participant in demonstrating intervention strategies. Whereas Participant 1 and 2 overwhelmingly utilize unilateral strategies, Participant 3 appears to use both at a similar frequency, with more bilateral counts than unilateral. One factor to consider is that both Participants 1 and 2 are family child care providers and Participant 3 is a teacher at a child care center. Another factor to consider is the age variance in the children served. Participants 1 and 2 serve a mixed age group, including infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Participant 3 serves preschool-aged children. The literature suggests that older preschool-aged children may be more

developmentally prepared to engage in bilateral strategies, such as negotiation and problem solving. This may have influenced either the perception and / or action of the teacher when engaging in intervention strategies. Further investigation would be beneficial to study the effectiveness of bilateral strategies on younger children who are at various stages of language acquisition.

Excerpts coded as unilateral versus bilateral strategies offer insight into relational patterns. Though child language was not transcribed, teacher language during unilateral strategies suggested shorter phrases without expected verbal response. Teacher language during bilateral strategies suggested a dialogue between the teacher and at least one other child. It also typically involved additional strategies such as restating the problem, offering suggestions, asking for input or opinion, and follow-up. The average duration of interaction measured by excerpt word count during bilateral strategies was longer than unilateral strategies. This exchange offers evidence that engaging in bilateral strategies encourages child language use, draws attention to perspective taking, and promotes child autonomy.

Congruency between Language and Beliefs

High frequency strategies, such as giving behavioral feedback and verbal scaffolding, are consistent with all participants' responses on the role of the teacher to support problem solving skills and offering intentional language throughout the day. However, all participants reported that they felt strongly that children can solve problems independently and that children should be taught conflict resolution skills. The results

suggest that for Participant 1 and 2, this is not consistently demonstrated given their use of unilateral strategies. Their rating on the questionnaire that they strongly or somewhat disagree with the statement that they stop conflict in order to preserve the harmony of the classroom and that they intervene straightaway when children have a disagreement are also at odds with observational data. These incongruities could be a result of various factors: misperception of practice, providing socially acceptable responses, or a limited language sample size.

Greater congruency was found in the language samples of Participant 3 as evidenced by a higher bilateral to unilateral ratio. Participant 3 also demonstrated a higher frequency of choice, social emotional language, and behavioral feedback.

Of notable interest, participants responded to questions on the questionnaire differently when using different words to describe conflict. This suggests that language chosen to refer to conflict influences the perception of the event, which is supported by the linguistic relativity theory.

Table 8. Questionnaire response comparison

Questionnaire Item	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Item 9. Conflict interrupts the classroom environment.	Somewhat disagree	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree
Item. 10. Problem solving opportunities disrupt the learning experience for children in the class.	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree

Limitations, Considerations, and Recommendations for Future Research

Limitations of the study include high program variance, including teacher to child ratio, child age range, and type of program structure. The literature proposes that structural program differences between family child care and child care programs may influence the process of the program. It was also noted that differences in program structure may lead to different language patterns, such as more directive language in a family child care program due to routines orchestrated by a single caregiver, such as meal times and handwashing.

There was also variation in teacher demographics with regards to level of education in child development and amount of professional development in the past 12 months. The literature strongly states that increased hours in professional development and formal education specifically in child development result in higher child-centered practices and “modern” views of the child.

In addition, time of day may have influenced the language samples, as it may be that free choice, for example, may illicit different language than small group time or meal time. Future study would benefit by isolating these variables and examining correlations with language use and intervention strategies during predetermined activity times.

Additional considerations are the removal of child language, which limits the depth of dialogue and extent of input, and absence of tone, bringing to question the statement, “It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it.” This is an important consideration because it would place the language in an emotional context, as well as further strengthen

the suggestion that language in a child's environment influences the language and action of the actual child.

Practical Implications

This study presents a focused lens on guidance and conflict intervention strategies in both a child care center and family child care homes. Though it supports the claims that there can be a misalignment between belief and practice in early childhood programs, the participant who demonstrated alignment has participated in over 10 hours of professional development in the past 12 months and is employed in a child care center with built in reflective practice and monitoring. One participant is not sufficient to draw broad claims; however, it presents the potential impact of ensuring equitable access to professional development and reflective practice for all early childhood educator providers, including family child care homes.

With the demands of early childhood educators increasing and the incongruency of practice being noted in the research, it stands to say that EC educators need intentional support in order to be in a position to offer children opportunities to develop skills and strategies for conflict resolution. The needs of providers vary according to program structure. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), the average annual salary for child care workers in center-based programs is \$23,760. Opportunities for professional development and reflective practice should be offered within working hours for EC educators and should be built into the scope of work. Alternatively, the research suggests that family child care homes benefit from different professional development

methods, such as more relationship and cohort based, ongoing, and during after-program hours.

Consistently in the research and in the theoretical framework, people are influenced by what is modeled around them. Mentor teachers and colleagues influence the beliefs and practice of the EC educator, as well as EC educators influence the beliefs and practice of the child. The field of early childhood education would benefit by utilizing best practices grounded in research for professional growth when determining the needs of both the children and teachers in early childhood programs.

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APPENDIX

Survey on Teacher Beliefs



	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Beliefs In the Classroom					
1. Children can solve problems independently.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Children should be rewarded for good behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Children should be empowered to make choices in their classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Children should be taught conflict resolution skills.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I should greet children as they arrive for the day.	1	2	3	4	5
6. It is primarily the teacher's role to resolve conflicts.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Social negotiation is a positive experience for children.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Teachers should intervene when children have a disagreement.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Conflict interrupts the classroom environment.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Problem solving opportunities disrupt the learning experience for children in the class.	1	2	3	4	5
11. It is acceptable practice for children to disagree with the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I intervene straightaway when children have a disagreement.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I ask more open-ended questions during the day than closed questions.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Children perform best with a structured routine.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I structure my program to prevent conflicts.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I give direct instruction for most of the day.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I stop conflict in order to preserve the overall harmony of the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I talk differently to individual children.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I give children feedback on their behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
20. It is acceptable practice for children not to participate in class activities.	1	2	3	4	5
Your Personal Experiences					
21. I am comfortable disagreeing with my colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I was empowered to make choices in my household when I was growing up.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I avoid conflict because it makes me uncomfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
24. My upbringing has had a positive influence on my beliefs about children.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I have mostly positive experiences from my grade school education.	1	2	3	4	5
26. My higher education or professional development has shaped my beliefs about children.	1	2	3	4	5

Demographics

1. To what gender do you identify?

- Female Male Other: _____

2. How old are you?

- Under 21 years old
 21 – 29 years old
 30 – 39 years old
 40 – 49 years old
 50 – 59 years old
 60 years and over

3. What is your highest level of education completed? If you have completed your degree, or you are working toward a college degree, please write your focus of study in the line next to the degree.

<i>In Progress</i>	<i>Completed</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Focus of Study</i>
		Less than High School degree or GED	
		High School or GED	
		Child Development Associate (CDA)	
		Associate Degree	
		Bachelor's Degree	
		Master's Degree	
		Doctoral Degree	

4. Counting this year, how long have you been working with young children?

(Please answer in years) _____

5. In the past twelve (12) months, how many hours of professional development have you completed?

- None
 1 – 3 hours
 4 – 6 hours
 7 – 9 hours
 Over 10 hours

6. Please describe the program in which you are currently working, your role, and the age group you specifically serve.

Thank you!