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Apr 13th, 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM

Producing the Optimal Level of Disruption During Incidental Teaching: When is Too Much and Too Little?

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Poster Presentation 20

PRODUCING THE OPTIMAL LEVEL OF DISRUPTION DURING INCIDENTAL TEACHING: WHEN IS TOO MUCH AND TOO LITTLE?

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The disequilibrium theory (Timberlake & Farmer–Dougan, 1991) is a behavioral economic model of reinforcement that allows specific predictions about the direction and magnitude of reinforcement effects. Incidental teaching, a behavioral intervention often used to increase social and verbal behavior, is one procedure in which such predictions can be made. Recently, Farmer–Dougan and Dougan (1995) tested the reinforcement effects produced by changes in the probability of a teacher disrupting an initiation to a toy item on on–task behavior of Head Start preschoolers. Results indicated that there was an optimal level for disrupting ongoing behavior, above or below which reinforcement effects greatly suffered. The present experiment, a direct test of the disequilibrium model of reinforcement, examined whether an optimal level of disruption could be produced. Local Head Start preschoolers played with toys without interruptions (baseline) and with interruptions in which continued access to toys were made contingent upon a language response. Interruptions of ongoing play behavior were varied across four levels: 15 sec, 30 sec, 45 sec, and 1 minute. The amount of time in which the target children spent in play and response behavior were measured across sessions.