

Non-Compliance in a Democratic Classroom: Is it Prevalent?

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Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education International
Education Research Conference, Brisbane, Australia 2008.

Paper Code: OVE08528

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Student non-compliance in classrooms leads to a loss of effective teaching and learning time for teachers and students. Limited research examining reasons for non-compliance indicates factors such as differences in teachers' and students' perceptions of events, task engagement and classroom management styles impact on levels of compliance. Democratic teachers, who share power in the classroom, are likely to have students who comply with classroom expectations and norms because these students have contributed to the generation of the classroom rules. Therefore, it would be expected that these students would be less likely to exhibit non-compliant behaviour. However, little is known about non-compliance in such democratic classrooms.

This paper reports a qualitative case study examining the nature of non-compliance, particularly from the student perspective, in a democratic Australian primary school classroom. The findings show that non-compliant behaviour did occur occasionally in this democratic environment. Student explanations for their non-compliant behaviour included a lack of motivation to participate or lack of engagement with classroom activities, and power struggles and conflict disrupting work.

The discussion reveals that during the occasions on which non-compliant behaviour occurred, the teacher shared less power with students and students lacked a clear meaningful purpose for their activities and learning. Furthermore, levels of non-compliance were not consistent but rather dynamic and influenced by a combination of factors. In conclusion, this paper argues that teachers should consider adopting a democratic approach to managing their classrooms. Furthermore, teachers should seek students' perspectives to reflect on their classroom management beliefs and practices to reduce non-compliance in their classrooms, thereby increasing the available teaching and learning time for all students.

This paper reports a case study that examined the nature of non-compliance in a democratic classroom, especially from the students' perspective. First, literature and research related to non-compliance is reviewed. Second, the paper argues why the presence of non-compliance should be explored in a democratic classroom. Next, the details of the study are outlined. The findings are then presented which indicate that non-compliance did occur in the democratic classroom selected for the study. Furthermore, the findings show that low levels of motivation and engagement, power struggles and conflict lead to student non-compliance. It was found that during the occasions on which non-compliant behaviour occurred, the teacher shared less power with students and students lacked clear meaningful purpose for their activities and learning. Additionally, levels of non-compliance were not consistent but rather dynamic and influenced by a combination of factors. Finally, the paper argues that teachers should consider adopting a democratic approach to managing their classrooms. It is further suggested that teachers could gain valuable insights by seeking students' perspectives,

enabling teachers to reflect on their classroom management beliefs and practices to reduce non-compliance in their classrooms, thereby increasing the available teaching and learning time for all students.

The findings are significant because student non-compliant behaviour in the classroom reduces the teaching and learning time available to all students. Disruptions to the progress of normal classroom activities can have an impact on student motivation and levels of engagement by exposing the students to numerous interruptions while the teacher manages a non-compliant student's behaviour (Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). Little research has examined non-compliance in a democratic classroom and there is a dearth of research that examines students' perceptions of non-compliance in such an environment. By understanding what is driving non-compliant behaviour if it is present in a democratic classroom, teachers may be able to reduce the prevalence of non-compliance. Reducing non-compliance is important because it can have a positive affect on both the teaching and learning time, and student motivation and engagement (Good & Brophy, 2000; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006).

Non-compliance

To gain an understanding of the nature of non-compliance it is useful to firstly define compliance. The literature suggests that student compliance involves adherence to school and classroom rules and the teacher's instructions. This includes students behaving in a manner appropriate to the school environment, respecting other students and teachers, following directions and concentrating on their learning without hindering others, and allowing teachers to concentrate on their teaching (Balson, 1991; Cipani, 1993; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006).

Non-compliance can be described as students not behaving in a manner appropriate to the classroom environment or not respecting other students and teachers. Students who do not follow directions or do not comply with the school and classroom rules are also acting in a non-compliant manner (Balson, 1991; Cipani, 1993; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). Additionally, non-compliance describes events when students are not concentrating on their own learning but hindering others' attempts to engage themselves with the classroom activities (Balson, 1991; Cipani, 1993). Therefore, non-compliance can be conceptualised as students' refusal to follow or respond to teachers' demands or instructions, or failure of students to abide by school and/or classroom rules (Cipani, 1993; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006).

Non-compliance can take many forms. Some examples of non-compliant behaviour are not following classroom or school rules, disruptive behaviour, being off-task or moving around the classroom without permission. Other examples of non-compliant behaviour include talking out of turn, not being punctual, verbal or physical abuse of the teacher or peers, physical destructiveness, not respecting others or leaving the school without permission (Johnson & Oswald, 1993).

Limited research has explored students' perceptions of non-compliance. For example, students have reported being aware of their countercontrolling behaviour and identified both pro-social and anti-social reasons for engaging in this behaviour (Carey, 2002). However, if students' reasons for non-compliant behaviour are to be understood, teachers need to acknowledge that the students act according to their perceptions of how events unfold

regardless of the teacher's perception of events (Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). If the teacher does not recognise the students' reasons for non-compliant behaviour, any discipline enacted by the teacher will potentially be responded to with further misbehaviour, because the students may feel like they have been treated unfairly. Teachers may think they understand the reasons for the non-compliance but research shows that there is often a lack of congruence between students and teachers' perceptions of events (Friedman, 1995; Wragg, 1995). Therefore, the lack of congruence between teachers and students' perceptions of events could relate to the level of non-compliance in the classroom.

In addition, research shows that if students do not engage with the curriculum and classroom activities then non-compliance is more likely to occur (Jeanpierre, 2004; Youssef, 2003). In a study observing two urban elementary teachers, one having an 'intrinsic' and the other an 'authoritarian' management style, the findings showed that limited stimulation of students' thinking and exposure to real life experiences lead to a lack of engagement or motivation to participate (Jeanpierre, 2004). In another study, Youssef (2003) found that teachers need to engage students with the curriculum content and activities to gain compliant behaviour, but also require compliant behaviour to effectively deliver the curriculum. Thus, it is apparent that students' level of engagement with the curriculum and the type of classroom activities offered to them affects their compliance.

A classroom management style that is highly-controlled can promote students' resistance to comply. Appleton and Stanwyk (1996) examined teacher personalities and classroom management styles via a questionnaire and found that teachers who identify their management style as strong on taking charge, tend to display greater levels of dominance, aggressiveness and taking control. The research also found that rigid, highly controlled classroom settings promoted more instances of teachers and students engaging in power struggles (Appleton & Stanwyk, 1996). This finding was supported by research that examined the prevalence of countercontrol, a form of non-compliance (Carey, 2002). The study found that students engaged in countercontrolling behaviour which was non-compliant to re-gain the control that they felt was being taken from them by teachers, or to entice teachers to behave in a particular way (Carey & Bourbon, 2005). Classroom management styles seem to have an influence on levels of non-compliance, so to what extent would non-compliance occur in a democratic classroom?

Democratic Classrooms

Classroom management styles can be described as varying along a continuum ranging from a humanistic, through democratic, to an authoritarian style of classroom management (Porter, 2000; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). Teachers who adopt a more democratic classroom management style tend to share power with students rather than exert power over them (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001). Furthermore, they consider the students' emotional needs when establishing the classroom environment to provide optimal conditions to facilitate their learning (Balson, 1982; Good & Brophy, 2000; Rogers, 1983; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). Additionally, a democratic classroom is conceptualised as one supporting a negotiated classroom environment involving engagement in cooperative interaction, encouraging self-discipline, and characterised by social equality and mutual respect (Balson, 1982; Cameron, 1998; Fields, 2000; Good & Brophy, 2000; Hoy & Jalovick, 1979; Porter, 2000).

In democratic classrooms where teachers share power with students, students might not feel the same need to resist or non-comply (Carey, 2002). Students are more likely to comply with

rules and instructions because they would experience a sense of ownership. Furthermore students in such classrooms would more likely to be able to renegotiate aspects of the classroom environment with peers and teachers. For these reasons, it is argued that students are more likely to comply in a democratic classroom. Yet, there is a dearth of research that examines the extent of non-compliance in a democratic classroom.

The purpose of this paper is to present a study which explored the nature of student non-compliant behaviour in a democratic classroom. Furthermore, it attempts to gain some insight into the students' perspectives on those occasions when they did not always comply with the teachers' directives.

Methodology

This research was part of a wider investigation into the nature of non-compliance in a democratic primary classroom and students' explanations for such non-compliance (Overton, 2007). A case study using an interpretive qualitative approach was used in the natural setting of an Australian inner-metropolitan public primary school classroom.

A purposive sample of one composite year four/five class was used. The selected school was situated in an inner metropolitan community, north of the Adelaide CBD. The local area had a population of about 19,000 people representing a wide range of socio-economic groups and several cultural groups. There was a small enrolment of Aboriginal students. The total school enrolment was 397 students, with a school card percentage of 34.5%. "Rachel" the teacher of this class was selected because she was described by an academic colleague as having a democratic approach to classroom management. The characteristics of a democratic classroom were expected to be those that support a negotiated classroom environment involving engagement in cooperative interaction, encouraging self-discipline and characterised by social equality and mutual respect (Balson, 1982; Cameron, 1998; Fields, 2000; Good & Brophy, 2000; Hoy & Jalovick, 1979; Porter, 2000) together with a teacher who shared power with the students (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001) and considered the students' emotional needs when establishing the classroom environment (Balson, 1982; Good & Brophy, 2000). The philosophy of the selected classroom teacher was examined further through interviews with Rachel and by observing classroom life over a period of five full days to confirm that the classroom environment did indeed reflect democratic principles.

There were three stages to the data collection process. The first stage was an interview with the teacher that occurred prior to the observation sessions and recorded the teacher's philosophy, beliefs, goals and needs, to clarify the nature of the classroom in which the study was undertaken. The second stage included the non-participant observations and informal interviews with students that investigated the presence of non-compliant behaviours and the students' explanations for such non-compliance. The third stage was a final interview with the teacher after the observation sessions to confirm the accurateness of the initial teacher interview transcription and give the teacher the opportunity to add any other information that she believed might be relevant to the study.

All collected data were coded for analysis using open-coding methods to gain a sense of the emerging ideas (Creswell, 2003). The data were then analysed to identify patterns to assist with the description of the findings. Triangulation was incorporated into the design to ensure the quality of the study was high.

Findings

Analysis of the data indicated that the teacher's beliefs and practices were consistent with a democratic approach to classroom management. Furthermore, data analysis showed high levels of student compliance occurred but additionally non-compliance was evident on occasions, mainly during reading. The findings showed that not only low levels of motivation and engagement, but also power struggles and conflict lead to student non-compliance.

Teacher's beliefs about increasing compliance in the classroom

Rachel held strong beliefs about how to increase compliance in her classroom. These included a) developing positive relationships amongst all members of the classroom, b) giving students choices about their learning to increase student motivation and engagement levels, c) including the students in decisions about classroom organisation to encourage them to take responsibility for their own behaviour, and d) negotiating clear expectations with the students to encourage appropriate behaviour.

Developing Positive Relationships

Rachel considered that establishing positive teacher-student and peer relationships contributed to a classroom environment that encouraged student compliance. She valued relationships as the most important influence on compliance levels within the classroom. Rachel argued that teacher-student and peer relationships had an impact on the smooth running of the classroom as well as the learning and levels of engagement that took place:

Rachel ..relationships to me are the key to achieving engaged kids, kids that are engaged in their learning, so I guess it all impinges on if the kid's got a good relationship with the teacher and their peers that they will be more focused and more in a positive frame of mind to be able to engage in their learning. (TI1-1 – Interview)

Rachel identified that developing positive relationships depended upon establishing trust and nurturing a feeling of security in the students.

Student Choices: Effect on Motivation and Engagement

Rachel believed that if students were motivated to participate in an activity by being given some choices about the task then they would be engaged in their learning and compliance levels would increase. For example, Rachel stated:

Rachel I believe for kids to be engaged they need to make choices. And they need to have a purpose. (TI1-8 - Interview)

Rachel stressed the importance of providing students with a choice of learning strategies to suit individual learning styles to increase students' successful outcomes. She believed that this would lead to an increase in student motivation to be willing to take risks and challenge them further.

Classroom Organisation: Involving Students in Decision Making

Rachel argued that if the students were involved in the classroom processes then they were more likely to take responsibility for their behaviour and off-task behaviour would be reduced. Students were involved in the classroom organisation processes, which included deciding on the classroom rules at the beginning of the year, understanding both their rights and responsibilities and acting accordingly at all times and ensuring their behaviour respected the differing values of all the classroom members. Additionally the students were provided with the opportunity of introducing activities and special project ideas by negotiating the timetable and work deadlines with the teacher and ran the morning organisation period within small groups set up to ensure the morning housekeeping was completed. This student involvement appeared to contribute significantly to the effective running of the classroom and levels of student compliance. Rachel established the learning teams to facilitate the morning organisation and work together on other tasks during the day. Furthermore, Rachel arranged class meetings that were held each morning, during which the timetable was negotiated and committees were formed to explore ideas raised on the agenda. Rachel acted in this forum as a facilitator and the children ran the meeting in an organised manner with a chairperson, a timekeeper and an observer. An example of Rachel acting as a facilitator was recorded in the field notes:

Rachel then sits at the back of the classroom and only intervenes when organisers move on before the class are given enough thinking time. (Field Notes FN1-1)

Teacher Negotiated Expectations: Encouraging Appropriate Behaviour

To maintain high levels of appropriate behaviour in the classroom, Rachel believed that negotiated expectations had a higher degree of success than a negotiated set of rules and consequences typical in many classrooms. Rachel explained that using a list of rules and consequences might work in some cases, but not always. For example:

Rachel You can't come up with a consequence for every rule because every situation is different...it's all about problem solving. There's an issue and we have to solve it. (TI2-9 - Interview)

Rachel It's teaching kids to solve problems, work it out, what is the issue? Rather than it being top down with the teacher saying, right you're misbehaving, step 1 (lock-step approach to discipline), and that's about the teacher having complete control. These consequences and responsibilities are about kids having control of their issues. (TI2-10 - Interview)

Rachel's negotiated expectations included the need to respect others and be aware of their own and others' rights and responsibilities. Rachel asserted that it was necessary to draw the students' attention to the interconnected nature of rights and responsibilities.

In summary, Rachel had strong beliefs about how to achieve compliance in the classroom. She argued that encouraging positive relationships was the key to creating a caring secure environment. She insisted that by giving students choices about their learning and a purpose

for doing a task, the students felt they were contributing to the classroom processes and were more likely to comply with the teacher-negotiated expectations because they understood the reasons for the expectations of behaviour.

Compliance in a Democratic Classroom

Analysis of the data showed that the students in this classroom were very compliant across all curriculum areas and activities. However there were some instances of non-compliance, particularly during reading lessons, which will be presented in the following section. Before considering what non-compliance was like in this democratic classroom, it is helpful to present a description of the nature of student compliance. An instrumental case study (Stake, 2000) which describes what happened during spelling group activities is used to illustrate student compliance in this classroom.

Spelling Group Activities

Compliance levels in the classroom were higher when the students were engaged, working together for a common goal and when they saw a purpose for what they were doing. An example of this was the students working in their spelling groups. The students were given many choices when participating in these groups. The students were able to choose a topic to study, select a list of words and choose the strategies they were to use to help them learn the words. Additionally they were able to choose whom they worked with in these groups, however they were not permitted to work with the same person more than once each term. This resulted in the students working with almost everyone in the class at some point. They were also given a choice of how to present their learning at the end of the week. Rachel explained her spelling program:

Rachel ..how are they going to make choices about what they are doing? And how are they going to have a purpose? ...what I ended coming up with was this 'word experts' spelling program... an analysis of a particular word using all the skills we teach them like word building, antonyms and synonyms and all the usual stuff... if they could share facts about their topic that they're learning, if they can work collaboratively in a group, then I'm okay with that. (T11-9 - Interview)

The students were very engaged in their daily spelling groups and always appeared on-task. No observations were made of any off-task behaviour whilst the spelling groups were working.

The students perceived they could work quicker and the work was easier when it was done in a group during spelling. The students explained that they liked being able to help each other, share knowledge and ideas, feelings and the workload. Additionally, they enjoyed being able to work with their friends and the opportunity to make new friends. The following interview extracts illustrate students' perceptions of working in groups:

Rebecca I like interacting with other people, I like doing it with my friends because, um, I just like it because you get to share work and you don't have to do it all by yourself. (S11-1- Interview)

Nicholas *You can get different ideas from everybody. It's easier to get the job done because there are more people on it. (SI1-6 – Interview)*

Alicia *Yeah I like group work because you can sit wherever you want in class and that's..., so you can be with your friends as well. I learn more when I'm with my friends because they can teach me sometimes more than somebody else would know because I have a lot of friends and they all know different things so I learn more. (SI1-3 – Interview)*

The choices that Rachel gave the students generated feelings of personal freedom which most of the students had not experienced before. Mike explained:

Researcher *Why do you like having those choices?*

Mike *More freedom.*

Researcher *And why do you like that?*

Mike *Well you can't muck around but you have the choice, it just feels good, not having anyone bossing you around. (SI2-10 – Interview)*

The students believed that being given choices led to greater levels of enjoyment in completing their work and appeared to also lead to greater levels of engagement. For example:

Jordan *Well, we just use to do look cover write check all the time (last year) and that was quite boring, we did sentences, dictionary meanings, they were really, really boring.*

Researcher *And what happened when you got bored.*

Jordan *Well, I lost concentration and I didn't want to do it and I was a bit angry because the teacher made us do it. Yeah.*

Researcher *So now you look forward to spelling?*

Jordan *Yes, really look forward, because we do word experts, that means now we have presentations and you've seen one today. Yeah, I'm really excited. (SI2-5 – Interview)*

When the students were motivated to participate and felt they were contributing to the group, then there appeared to be less reason for any non-compliant behaviour.

The spelling groups had strict deadlines for their final group presentations. The students identified that they did not have time to waste during spelling, because they had to be ready for their presentations as described in the following extract:

Researcher *What about spelling group?*

Mike *It's kind of stressing in spelling, there's no time for talking. We have to finish by a certain date, kind of stressing, so you wouldn't have time to talk about anything else. (SI2-9- Interview)*

Rachel required the students to give a presentation of their spelling explorations which gave the students a meaningful purpose for completing the set assignment and helped them to focus on the task.

In summary, when the groups worked effectively, as they did during spelling, the level of non-compliance was minimal. The students clearly saw the benefits of working in groups, appeared to enjoy working collaboratively and looked forward to taking responsibility for completing tasks over an extended period. The students also affirmed that they enjoyed having choices about who they worked with, where they worked and which topic they were going to study. Furthermore, the students identified that having a real purpose helped them to focus on what they were doing.

Non-compliance in a Democratic Classroom

While the students in this classroom were observed to be complying with the teacher's directives most of the time, however there were times when they were less compliant. Non-compliance in this classroom predominantly occurred during reading group activities.

Almost every student was observed to be behaving in a non-compliant manner at some time during the five 45 minute reading sessions observed, and every group was disrupted by students behaving inappropriately for the majority of the reading session times. This non-compliant behaviour reduced only when Rachel was in sight of the students. Student non-compliance did not appear to be a deliberate refusal to follow Rachel's directions during reading group time, but rather it appeared to be prompted firstly, by a lack of motivation to participate or lack of engagement with an activity, or secondly, incited by conflict or power struggles between students working within the groups.

Low Levels of Motivation and Engagement: Affects on Non-compliance

According to the students who were interviewed, inappropriate behaviour increased for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons cited by the students for this non-compliance included lack of interest or lack of engagement with an activity.

Non-compliant behaviour was mostly observed during reading group sessions, where students felt they were not given many choices or levels of freedom. The students were allowed to choose where they worked and which book they read, but each book could take weeks to complete and some of the students appeared to have regretted their choice of book. The students were not able to choose whom they worked with as the groups were organised by the teacher according to ability. The students took turns to read from a book and it appeared that other students became bored waiting for their turn. The students tended to talk amongst themselves and disrupt the group until it was their turn, as was evident in the following example:

Jasmine, Sam and George begin to wander around. Jasmine goes outside and makes faces through the window to students in the ante-room. Jason wanders over to another group where the boys are discussing football. (Field Notes FN2-2)

The high level of engagement observed during spelling group time contrasted with the level of engagement noticed during the reading groups. The students were observed chatting,

wandering around the room, visiting the toilet and generally disturbing the other students. Examples of this behaviour are included in the following extracts from the field notes:

One reading group, previously working with Rachel, start playing around when she has left the group. Two girls start clapping hands together. Jeremy starts wriggling around on the floor. When they notice me watching them, they get back on task. (Field Notes FN3-2)

After a few minutes, the noise level increases. The students start moving around the room. A small group of students gather around another team's area and start playing with a stopwatch. (Field Notes FN2-2)

George and Matt start disturbing Sebastian and Jordan. Jasmine begins to chat with Rebecca and Claire who were previously working well. George and Sam start growling at each other and are off-task. Jasmine and Emma start to rummage through Rachel's desk looking for something. Claire starts looking around the desk for something also. (Field Notes FN4-2)

When the students were asked why such off-task behaviour was happening, they identified that they found the reading groups boring. The students recognised that when they were enjoying what they were doing, they were more engaged with the task and they noticed that the behaviour of their peers was generally more appropriate than when they were distracted or bored. Some examples of this are illustrated in the following extracts:

Sam Well, when I'm on-task I'm usually, like, enjoying it. (SI2-1- Interview)

Mike Yeah, it depends on what we are reading. Now there's no real point..., well you read it but I'm not too interested in it, not happy with the book we're reading. I don't really like it but we have to go on with it.

Researcher If you are reading a book that everyone is enjoying, what happens then?

Mike No chatting.

Researcher No chatting huh? It changes?

Mike Yeah, it changes. (SI2-9- Interview)

Power Struggles and Conflict: Disruptions during Collaborative Group Work

Power struggles and conflict were common during reading group time. Power struggles included students vying for control over the group or over the group decisions. In interviews, the students discussed their perspectives of the problems they encountered when interacting in collaborative group work. Some of the problems they identified were being distracted by others who were not on-task or conflict amongst group members.

When some students lost interest or became bored with the group work, they often distracted the students who were trying to get on with the work. There were examples of group members becoming frustrated or annoyed at individuals who were seen to be not contributing equally to the workload or generally disrupting the group. For example:

Jason ..she kept on interfering so we couldn't share our ideas...she was like talking, doing silly stuff. (SI1-6 – Interview)

Additionally, the following was noted in the Field Notes:

Simon and Mike are chatting in the reading group while Phillipa is reading. Mike is yawning. They look bored. Various conversations are going on. A few girls are 'shhing' the group. Mike and Simon are clearly off-task. Two of the girls lose patience and go to tell Rachel. (Field Notes FN3-2)

Another group reading session resulted in one student being sent to buddy class. Rebecca explained:

Researcher Was everyone on task?

Rebecca Well one person wasn't but we were trying to ignore her.

Researcher What was she doing?

Rebecca She was, like, reading the book over and over again and talking. At one point she got up and started doing a dance. It was kind of annoying.

Researcher Why was it annoying you?

Rebecca Umm, well we had to, like, wait for her to stop, and then we had to go tell Rachel and she got, umm, she went to buddy class and then we all got on pretty well.

Researcher Does it stop you getting your work done?

Rebecca Yeah, it stops us reading the book because we have to, we've only got 10 pages to go and it took a whole lesson to read 2 pages with her. (SI1-1 – Interview)

The disruptions during reading group work often led to further conflict between group members who wanted to get on with the work and students who were bored or distracted.

In summary, non-compliance was observed most often in specific situations; where students were not motivated to participate, were not engaged with an activity or when they were attempting to work in a collaborative group. The students suggested that their lack of motivation was most often related to their lack of interest in an activity or choices about how they should complete an activity. The students' attributed their lack of engagement with an activity to not being interested or being bored. Additionally, whilst working in a collaborative group, the students noted that disruptive behaviour from peers who were off-task and conflict amongst group members contributed to higher non-compliance levels in the group.

Discussion

This section will firstly discuss the nature of compliance in this classroom to enable a greater understanding on non-compliance. The discussion reveals that during occasions on which non-compliant behaviour occurred, the teacher shared less power with the students and students lacked a clear meaningful purpose for their activities and learning. Moreover, levels of non-compliance are dynamic rather than consistent and influenced by a combination of factors.

The Nature of Compliance in a Democratic Classroom

In this study, the teacher facilitated and promoted compliance by developing positive teacher-student relationships and encouraging healthy peer relationships. She gave the students a level of responsibility for their own learning by encouraging the students to work collaboratively in small groups for much of their learning time. The teacher shared power with the students by giving them choices about the classroom processes and their learning to promote self-regulation. The findings suggest that the nature of compliance in this democratic primary classroom included students taking responsibility for their own learning and internalising an understanding of the reasons for negotiated expectations (McCaslin & Good, 1998), together with mutual respect for all members of the classroom.

Rachel's expectations of compliance were different to a more authoritarian teacher's expectations as they were specific to her teaching philosophy. Rachel did not give the students rigid rules and instructions to follow as they had the freedom to make many of their own decisions about their work. Therefore, observations of compliance were less clear than they would have been if the students had been expected to carry out clearly defined instructions with attention to set rules. The students were expected to take responsibility to complete the set tasks by working collaboratively in a small group or independently and they were generally compliant in achieving this. By giving the students responsibilities and choices, Rachel was sharing power with the students, resulting in a heightened sense of student self-control. By giving students choices, Rachel reduced the likelihood of students feeling like they were being controlled and probably satisfied their personal needs for enjoyment, to learn or to belong (Dreikurs & Cassel, 1990; Glasser, 1990; Marzano, 2003). Schmuck and Schmuck (2001) confirm that when students feel a greater level of self-control, then non-compliant behaviour would be less likely to occur.

The findings suggest that the expectations of compliance will not always be the same in every classroom but depend, at least in part, on the classroom management style used by the teacher. However, this study also suggests that expectations of compliance may not always be the same in every lesson with the same teacher and peers. This confirms the findings of the studies conducted by Friedman (1995) and Jeanpierre (2004) on student compliance. These studies suggested that compliance is dynamic and rarely influenced by one thing alone such as classroom management style or curriculum content, but rather by a combination of events.

The Nature of Non-compliance in a Democratic Classroom

Despite Rachel's attempts at achieving compliance, non-compliant behaviour did occur occasionally. This study sought the students' explanations for this non-compliant behaviour.

The students were able to identify when their behaviour was inappropriate and articulate why they believed they acted in this manner.

Firstly, non-compliant behaviour was observed in the form of off-task behaviour such as wandering around the classroom, chatting with others or disrupting other students who were trying to work, but only during reading group time. The students confirmed in their interviews that during reading group time they were not motivated to participate because they did not see a meaningful purpose for completing the task. Furthermore, the students reported that if the task did not interest them, they were more likely to lose concentration and engage in non-compliant behaviour. Such off-task behaviour then often distracted other students who were trying to work and stay on-task.

As this type of non-compliant behaviour was not observed during other classroom activities, it was necessary to examine why this occurred only during reading group time. The analysis of the data suggested that the students became bored in reading groups because they were given few decisions about what they did or with whom they worked. The students were given a purpose for the set task but apparently it lacked meaning for the students. Additionally, they were given no deadlines for completing the set task. Many of the students had become disinterested with the book they were reading. The students had to wait a long time before it was their turn to read again and became distracted by other people in the group who were also waiting. For these reasons, students became distracted and behaved in a non-compliant manner. This confirms Youssef's (2003) study which drew similar conclusions, although her data were not obtained through interviewing students, but rather through observations and interviews with teachers.

Secondly, during reading group time when the students' non-compliant behaviour increased, the teacher shared less power with the students by giving them fewer choices about how they worked. The students had explained during their interviews that they enjoyed being able to contribute to their spelling group processes, but found reading group boring. By offering students choices during spelling, Rachel was sharing power with the students and developing a level of self-control in the students (Ashcroft, 1987; Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001; Sullivan & King, 1998). Rachel's students may have had less reason to behave in a non-compliant manner during spelling group work as they were not being made to feel powerless or trying to assert their need to regain power (Carey, 2002; Carey & Bourbon, 2006; Glasser, 1986). The students seemed to perceive Rachel as a facilitator of their learning rather than an authoritarian figure in the classroom. However, during reading group time, the students had few choices and may have felt that they had less power than they were given during other lessons such as spelling. This may have resulted in the students asserting a need for self-control in the form of non-compliant behaviour (Ashcroft, 1987; Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001; Sullivan & King, 1998).

Thirdly, almost all the students became less compliant with the teacher or group-expected norms when they were attempting to work collaboratively in their reading groups. The students were observed arguing about whose turn it was to read, about group members not listening to the reading or about what they would include in the chapter summary they were required to write. The students appeared to lack conflict resolution skills and had difficulty managing their behaviour during this time. The students displayed poor co-operation and negotiations skills. Interestingly, the students did not display this same apparent lack of co-operative group skills or off-task and disruptive behaviour during spelling group work or at any other time. As discussed above, the difference appeared to lie in the students' level of

motivation to participate or engagement with the set task. Many students became irritated or annoyed with their peers' inappropriate behaviour and this led to conflict. Often, the student who was reading became annoyed at his/her peers who were not paying attention, but many then acted in the same manner when others were reading.

In summary, Rachel developed positive relationships with her students, promoted a culture of peer support and collaborative learning, motivated students to understand the importance and need for compliance and shared power and responsibility with the students by giving students choices about classroom processes. Rachel's expectations of compliance were probably somewhat different to those of a more authoritarian teacher and her classroom experienced high levels of compliance. However, compliance levels were not high across all learning areas, suggesting compliance is dynamic and influenced by a variety of things. Interestingly, the students were able to articulate their perceived reasons for their non-compliance, although it must be considered that these year 4/5 students may not yet be capable of truly understanding what was influencing their behaviour. Nevertheless, students were able to recognise that their behaviour was influenced by their interest in and purpose for participating in an activity, their ability to have choices about the classroom processes and their still developing conflict resolution skills. These students' perceptions can provide teachers with valuable insights into what motivates student behaviour.

Conclusion

This study has drawn attention to the need for teachers to try to gain an understanding of students' perspectives of classroom processes as this study highlighted that the students understood and were able to articulate their reasons for their non-compliant behaviour. Teachers need to reflect on their classroom management beliefs and practices, to gain some insight into how to reduce the level of non-compliance in classrooms by talking with students about their behaviour.

The findings from this research suggest that there is a need to advocate for teachers to manage classrooms in a democratic manner. This study has shown that a classroom management style, which incorporates democratic processes and shares power with the students, can increase compliance levels through increased satisfaction of students' needs, a reduction in students feeling controlled, and increased motivation and engagement. By increasing compliance in classrooms, available teaching and learning time will also be increased as teachers are not otherwise occupied dealing with non-compliant students (Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006).

This study has explored aspects of the nature of non-compliance in a democratically managed classroom. Furthermore, it has provided student perspectives on why they choose not to comply with the teacher's directives. By gaining a greater understanding of the reasons for student non-compliance, teachers can become better informed on how best to create a positive learning environment which will promote the academic, emotional and social well-being needs of students and provide students with opportunities for enjoyable learning and development.

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