Abstract: Caregivers are children’s first teachers, and their informal instruction influences how children learn about objects. Yet, the techniques caregivers use to support object learning are relatively unexamined. Study 1 is a semi-naturalistic study testing which everyday caregiver teaching methods benefitted object learning in 32 22-26-month-olds (Brezack, Radovanovic, & Woodward, in prep). Results indicated that toddlers learned when they were active during instruction; observing their parents demonstrate negatively predicted learning. Instead, caregivers promoted learning by enhancing children’s active experience.

Study 2 is a follow-up study experimentally testing the findings of Brezack et al. (in prep) by pitting active and observational instruction against one another. In this preregistered study, 48 22-26-month-olds were taught by a parent and by an experimenter. The experimenter used two different teaching styles: active and observational. Surprisingly, initial results did not show a difference in learning from either instruction type. However, children’s cognitive problem-solving skills influenced learning. Coding is ongoing to determine whether parent teaching also affected learning. Together, these studies have implications for understanding how everyday teaching interactions benefit learning early in development.

Bio: Natalie Brezack is a fourth-year doctoral student and Institute of Education Sciences (IES) fellow in Developmental Psychology working with Dr. Amanda Woodward. She graduated with a B.S. in Psychology from the University of Oregon Honors College and then worked as a laboratory manager at the University of Delaware. Currently, Natalie studies children's early social development. She researches features of everyday instruction that benefit toddlers' learning, and how exploration affects problem-solving. Natalie also studies the development of social learning skills including perspective-taking.