

How children learn non-obvious conceptual information from caregivers in naturalistic settings

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Abstract

A long-standing question in cognitive development asks how young children learn non-obvious conceptual information (i.e., information that is not directly perceptible). For artifacts, this non-obvious information includes the categories items fall into (Rhodes, Gelman & Karuza, 2014), and their functions (Matan & Carey, 2001). We investigated how children learn non-obvious information about novel artifacts from their caregivers during naturalistic interactions in a living history museum. Forty caregiver-child dyads (Ages: $M = 4;22-8;0$, $M_{age} = 5.98$ years) visited two exhibits for 8 minutes each (i.e., a heritage store and house). Using a series of GEEs and correlational analyses, we found caregivers used different pedagogical techniques to teach their children about different artifact properties. Namely, they used causal ($r_s = .49, p_i .001$) and procedural information ($r_s = .60, p_i .001$) to describe an artifact's function, but used questions ($r_s = .79, p_i .001$) and comparisons ($r_s = .64, p_i .001$) to discuss an artifact's identity. These patterns are compatible with the broader literature on how children learn non-obvious information best (Gelman, 2009).