

Childrens age-related transition from associative learning processes to reasoning-based social learning strategies

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Abstract

To differentiate associatively learned strategies from explicitly reasoned selective social learning, we can look for age-related changes in childrens behaviour that might signify a switch from one process to the other. We presented 4-to-8-year-old children (N=109) with a task in which they could at first succeed by forming an associative rule, but following a switch had to explicitly reason the demonstrators perceptual access to a critical event to continue to be successful. The switch occurred after 10 trials, or if the appropriate demonstrator was selected in five consecutive trials (met criterion). Success in post-switch trials was significantly greater in older children and children who met criterion. A large proportion of children failed to reach criterion indicating that the ability to use reasoning-based understanding of others knowledge (perceptual access) develops relatively late. This late development and apparent cognitive challenge serves as potential evidence for being implicated in human cumulative culture.