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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: R=4;22-8;0,Mage=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 (rs=.49,p¡.001) and procedural information (rs=.60,p¡.001) to describe an artifacts function, but used questions (rs=.79,p¡.001) and comparisons (rs=.64,p¡.001) to discuss an artifacts identity. These patterns are compatible with the broader literature on how children learn non-obvious information best (Gelman, 2009).