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Five-Year-Old Children Transfer a Metacognitive Strategy to a Novel Task

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Abstract: Previous work has demonstrated that interventions like 1) giving in-the-moment performance feedback and 2) providing a strategy rule can improve children's metacognitive learning. However, there is little evidence to suggest that this learning transfers to a novel task. We trained 5-year-olds' metacognitive control in a task requiring participants to select the easier of two games to acquire the highest amount of points. Compared to a control group who received no training, children who were trained to control behavior (by selecting an easier dot discrimination task) showed greater evidence of transfer to a novel task (by selecting an easier line length discrimination task). This suggests that the learned strategy rule (i.e., to select an easier task) was not stimulus-specific, and was abstract enough to apply to a novel task with new stimuli. In sum, 5-year-olds were able to learn a strategy rule and spontaneously apply the strategy to a novel task.