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Developmental Origins of Ordered Memory Recall Tendencies

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Abstract

Across two experiments, we presented children ($N = 168$; 3 to 6 years) with a memory task in which three targets were hidden sequentially before a search period. In both experiments, younger children were significantly more likely to first search for the last target hidden (in line with the recency effect), whereas older children were significantly more likely to first search for the first target hidden (in line with the primacy effect). In a separate test phase where some but not all targets were externally marked, younger children were biased towards selecting the marked target first, whereas older children were significantly more likely to search for unmarked targets before marked targets (thus reducing the time spent maintaining the location of the unmarked targets in memory). These results indicate marked shifts in young children's ordered memory recall tendencies, much earlier in development than suggested by previous research.