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Jargon Jinx: An Early Bias Toward Opaque Explanations

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Abstract

As adults we understand that effective teachers cannot rely solely on expertise (content knowledge) in a domain, but that teachers must also be able to efficiently communicate that knowledge to students (pedagogical skill). In three studies, we demonstrate how children fail to appropriately integrate their intuitions of expertise (Study 1) with those of understandability (Study 2) to make coherent judgments of teacher quality (Study 3). In the context of repairing an unfamiliar mechanism, adults and children recognize that teachers should provide relevant causal information. However, children (6- and 7-year-olds and 8- and 9-year-olds) fail to acknowledge that, while jargon may indicate expertise, it is inaccessible to a student with no prior knowledge. Our data suggests that children as old as 9 years have immature conceptions of what constitutes great teaching. Childrens misconceptions of what characterizes good pedagogy raise questions about students attentional allocation in educational contexts and subsequent learning gains.