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A Puzzle for your thoughts: Information about the difficulty of one task influences preschoolers' exploratory play with a novel toy

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Abstract: Exploration is an important component of learning. Previous research has focused on how information in a particular situation affects exploratory play. An important question is the degree to which past exploration and learning experiences affect exploration in novel contexts. In particular, children often get information about the difficulty of a completed task (“that was hard!”), but we do not know whether such information affects how children approach new tasks. We present preschoolers with information about an initial task, explaining that it was hard or easy (or no information). Preschoolers are then invited to explore a novel toy where no information about the difficulty of the toy is given. We find that preschoolers explore and discover more features following information that the initial task was difficult, than following easy or neutral descriptions. We suggest that children are extending expectations about previous events to novel ones.