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Infants are more likely to imitate novel actions when receiving ostensive and referential signals. Newborns imitate facial gestures, 1,2 13-month-olds imitate inefficient, non-goal directed actions, 3 14-month-olds imitate unusual actions after a 1-week delay, 4 14-month-olds selectively imitate unusual actions, 5 if the action is demonstrated with ostensive and referential signals, 6 3- and 5-year-olds imitate both causally necessary and irrelevant steps in an action sequence and interpret them as normative. 7

Theory of Natural Pedagogy 8,9,10 Imitation supports learning of cognitively opaque information (e.g. cultural practices). Imitation is facilitated by teaching: knowledge demonstrations with ostensive, referential cues (e.g. eye contact, pointing). RQ: Do ‘pedagogical signals’ need to be presented for every demonstration of a novel action or do children take and maintain a ‘pedagogical stance’?

Method

Participants: 10 18-month-olds and 4-year-olds.

Materials: 2 novel toys with multiple hidden function actions.

Procedure: 1. Parent watches 2 videos: action demonstration on toy A, no action on toy B (counterbalanced)
2. Parent (P) and child (C) play freely for 10 min. with both toys

Discussion

Communication facilitates imitation in infants. However, when investigating how often children copy a novel action, children perform the novel action many times, irrespective of pedagogical communication during action observation. Furthermore, infants are more likely to imitate a familiar person than a stranger.

Results of imitation studies are likely influenced by the familiarity of the participant with the experimenter (e.g. through warm-up).

How does imitation develop with age? Do parents actually teach their children as described by natural pedagogy?

Study II: Do parents actually teach their children?

Results example

Method

Participants: 10 18-month-olds and 4-year-olds

Materials: 2 novel toys with multiple hidden function actions.

Procedure:
1. Parent watches 2 videos: action demonstration on toy A, no action on toy B (counterbalanced)
2. Parent (P) and child (C) play freely for 10 min. with both toys

Discussion

Sometimes, parents use pedagogical signals to teach their children. Then, children might imitate their parents.

But often times parents direct their child’s attention and then ‘leave them space’ to detect the toy’s function themselves. The actions are then together developed further. Parents seem to direct and guide younger children more than older children.