



UNIVERSITY OF
STIRLING

Child Development Newsletter

Autumn, 2010

Psychology Department, University of Stirling

Here's a summary of the studies we've completed this year in developmental psychology:

Baby & Toddler Lab

Preschoolers are comedians!

Dr. Hoicka led a study to discover whether 30- and 36-month-olds can create their own jokes. An experimenter kept giving the wrong object (e.g., a book instead of a car). When the experimenter did it as a joke, children also gave the wrong objects when it was their turn, making their own jokes. But when the experimenter gave the wrong object by mistake, children preferred to give the right object.

In a similar task, one of the experimenters mislabelled objects, e.g., calling a toy duck an "oogle boo". Like before, children made up their own silly words when the experimenter was joking, but not when the experimenter had made a mistake. For example, one child called a cup "goojooboojoo", a joke no one has ever made up before!

Toddlers are comedians too!

MSc student Jennifer Dent wanted to see whether children between 19 and 24 months could tell the difference between a joke and a mistake. Jennifer did actions with objects that could look like either jokes or mistakes (e.g., putting a hat on over her eyes). When joking, Jennifer gave the kinds of cues that parents use (e.g., laughing, funny tone of voice, explaining the joke), or said, "Whoops!" It turned out that these cues did not really help kids to tell the difference between jokes and mistakes. However when Jennifer performed actions that were very clearly jokes (e.g., putting a boot on her hand) or mistakes (e.g., slipping the lid off a jar) children copied the jokes, and corrected the mistakes.

Intonation & word-Learning

MSc student Hannah Newall sought to discover how intonation affects word-learning in 17- and 18-month-olds. Babies visiting the Edinburgh Zoo watched a video in which two novel objects were labelled with the same novel word (e.g., modi). For one object, the word was said with a rising intonation (like a question), while for the other object, the word was said with a falling intonation (like a statement). Hannah found that when both objects were shown together, children initially looked longer toward the object paired with the rising contour. This suggests that infants better learnt the word when it was spoken with a rising contour. This might be because rising contours often gain infants' attention.



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Baby & Toddler Lab

We are looking for children from 0-3 years of age to participate in fun studies in child development at Stirling University. If you would like to take part or find out more information please go to our website:

www.psychology.stir.ac.uk/babytoddlerlab

or email:
babytoddlerlab@stir.ac.uk

Can infants predict jokes?

MSc student Bebhinn O Gara examined whether 15- and 16-month-old infants could use humorous cues to predict humorous actions. Babies visiting the Edinburgh Zoo watched a film in which someone either did something sweet (stroke a toy cat) or did something funny (stroke a toy cat on her head!) The person in the video then either gave a humorous cue (laughter and a funny tone of voice) or a sweet cue (saying "Awww!" and using a sweet tone of voice). Bebhinn looked at whether infants anticipated that the experimenter would do the funny action when giving funny cues, and the sweet action when giving sweet cues. Infants did not use the cues to predict the actions.

Nurseries

What's the difference between joking and pretending?

UG student Melissa Hope examined whether 3- and 4-year-olds could tell the difference between joking and pretending. Both joking and pretending involve doing something that is technically wrong. However joking can be something that is simply silly (e.g., putting a shoe on your head) while pretending involves acting as though the wrong act is right (e.g., putting a cup on your head because you're pretending it's a hat). Children were shown 8 pictures with short stories. Half of them involved pretending, while the other half involved joking. While children were not very good at distinguishing the two concepts in general, 4-year-olds did much better than 3-year-olds, suggesting that children start to understand the difference as they get older.

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Toddler Group



The Toddler Group is open to children from birth to three years.

Situated in the Cottrell Building, Room 3W8, the Toddler Group operates every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoon from 1.30pm to 3.30pm from August to June at a cost of £2.00 per session.

Rota Duty is not required of parents.

The Play leader provides toys and equipment.

If you would like any more information, arrange a visit or to put your child's name on the waiting list please contact:

Aileen Schmidt

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01786 466836

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Kids helping kids

UG student Ailish Cleary wanted to see whether 3-year-olds were willing to help other 3-year-olds. Children sat at separate tables. One made a puzzle, while the other built a house out of megablocks. The experimenter poured out some more mega blocks from a bag, and out of the bag spilled a puzzle piece! For some children, the experimenter told the child that the other child needed the puzzle piece, and would be sad without it. However the experimenter did not directly tell the child to help the other child. These children tended to leave their own activity to help the other child. Other children were told that the other child did not need the puzzle piece. These children tended to stay put. This suggests that 3-year-olds are happy to help their peers, without direct instruction to do so, but only when they need help.

Children don't trust jokers

MSc student Felicity Malla examined whether 3- and 4-year-old children were more likely to trust someone who was ignorant or someone who was previously joking to learn new words. It was thought that kids might realise that the joker probably knew the right words, but said the wrong words as a joke, so would be a good source of information when the joker was later serious. In contrast, it was thought that kids might realise that the ignorant person just wasn't very good at labeling objects, so should not be trusted in future. However when learning new words, children were just as likely to learn from a previous joker versus an ignorant person.

Would you like your nursery to get involved in research? If so, contact us at:

babytoddlerlab@stir.ac.uk

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Playgroup



The Playgroup is open to children aged 2 years 9 months to 5 years.

Situated in the Cottrell Building, Room 3W8, the Playgroup operates Monday to Friday from 9am to 12noon from August to June at a cost of £5.00 per session. Attendance is permissible on a full or part time basis.

The playgroup serves as a dual purpose of providing pre-school experiences for children along with the opportunity for staff and students to study aspects of child development during this period.

Rota Duty is not required of parents.

If you would like any more information, arrange a visit or to put your child's name on the waiting list please contact:

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Schools

Brain-Training

Dr. Tracy Alloway recently completed a study in conjunction with Dyslexia Scotland and the Autistic Treatment Trust on the impact of brain training. A group of students aged between 8 and 16 years old took part. They completed some tests of IQ and working memory and then participated in an 8-week training programme called Jungle Memory (www.junglememory.com).

The findings were very exciting! The students who used the Jungle Memory training programme regularly (4x a week for 30 minutes) had higher IQ and memory scores, compared to those who only trained 1x a week or not at all. By training your brain you will be able to improve your child's prospects in classroom and beyond.

If you would like further details on this study, please contact Dr. Tracy Alloway at: t.p.alloway@stir.ac.uk

Happy interviewers lead children to use more abstract language

UG student Calum Robson showed 8- and 9-year-olds a Pengu animation of a penguin interacting with a seal. After watching the video, Calum asked children to describe what they saw. For half the children, Calum had a happy expression and a relaxed body posture while he was listening. For the other half of the children, Calum had a neutral facial expression, and he crossed his arms. When Calum was happy, children spoke more overall, and used proportionally more abstract language. That is, instead of simply describing what happened visually, they made inferences about what the animals felt or thought. This suggests that we can encourage children to talk about other people's thoughts and feelings through being happy open listeners.

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