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Cognitive Development 15 (2000) 115–134

COGNITIVE
DEVELOPMENT

Developmental trends in children's memory monitoring Evidence from a judgment-of-learning task

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Received 1 October 1999; accepted 1 August 2000

Abstract

Two experiments were conducted to explore young children's memory monitoring abilities on a judgment-of-learning (JOL) task. Recent research on adults' JOLs has shown that predictions about subsequent recall for items that have been recently studied have never been very accurate immediately after learning but have been very accurate when judgments were delayed. One of the major goals of the present studies was to investigate whether the delayed-JOL effect could be observed in children of different ages. A secondary goal of the study was to compare individual-item JOLs with aggregate JOLs based on all items of a given list. If young children possess basic monitoring skills, both their delayed JOLs and their aggregate judgments should be comparably realistic. Our two experiments confirmed this assumption for all age groups involved (kindergartners, second and fourth graders). That is, JOLs were much more accurate when given after a delay of about 2 min than immediately after study, and overconfidence was typically larger for item-by-item JOLs than for aggregate-item JOLs. In fact, the pattern of findings for the older school children was very similar to that found for adults. Overall, these findings support the position that developmental trends in children's procedural metamemory are not due to differences in basic monitoring skills but attributable to developmental changes

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concerning the interplay between monitoring and self-regulation activities. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Judgment-of-learning; Metacognition; Metamemory

Research on children's metamemory (i.e., their knowledge about memory processes and contents) has focused on two areas of research, namely, declarative or factual knowledge about memory and monitoring and regulation of memory processes (cf. Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1983; Flavell & Wellman, 1977; Schneider, 1985, 1998a; Schneider & Pressley, 1997). Developmental studies on the declarative, factual metamemory component have repeatedly shown that children's knowledge about their memory increases steadily with age (for recent reviews, see Holland Joyner & Kurtz-Costes, 1997; Kail, 1990; Schneider & Pressley, 1997). Although children's procedural metamemory, that is, their monitoring of their memory performance and subsequent self-regulation activities also received a lot of attention from developmental researchers, the pattern of findings regarding age-related changes in monitoring and control is not similarly clear. The main goal of the present study is to investigate the question whether young children already possess sufficient monitoring skills, and whether substantial developmental trends regarding monitoring proficiency can be observed during the elementary school years. To illustrate our difficulties with evaluating this issue, the state of the art regarding the development of monitoring and self-regulation in children is shortly summarized.

Overall, the findings regarding developmental trends in monitoring skills are inconsistent. By far, most studies have focused on "ease-of-learning (EOL)" tasks that require young children to predict their future performance. Most studies on young children's performance prediction revealed developmental trends in that preschoolers and kindergarten children tend to overestimate their future performance, whereas school children's predictions are much more realistic. However, this does not necessarily mean that young children do not monitor their memory performance. It has been repeatedly shown that even kindergartners and first graders are quite accurate when evaluating their past performance (cf. Pressley, Levin, Ghatala, & Ahmad, 1987). In addition, they can be rather accurate when asked to predict the performance of other children, as compared to their own performance (see Schneider, 1998b; Stipek & Mc Iver, 1989). Thus, developmental trends observed in performance prediction tasks may not be primarily due to developmental changes in monitoring but seem caused by changes in motivational factors such as wishful thinking or effort attribution which lose their impact with increasing age.

Similarly, the literature on children's feeling-of-knowing (FOK) judgments shows inconsistent findings. In the FOK paradigm, children are typically asked whether they will be able to recognize items that they currently cannot recall.

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