

Preschoolers performance on a causal reasoning task: The development of response strategies

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Abstract: Several studies have demonstrated that preschoolers use causal reasoning (e.g. Sobel, Tenenbaum & Gopnik, 2004). The conclusions generally drawn from these studies are based on the percent of children within each age group demonstrating causal reasoning. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the diversity in response strategies children of different ages use when confronted with cause-effect problems and the accuracy with which they apply these strategies. 78 Preschoolers participated in 4 successive items of the blicket detector task. With latent class analysis, three latent groups of children were identified: 1) a group applying a strategy similar to causal reasoning, 2) associative reasoning and 3) imitation or uncertainty avoidance. As most 2-years-olds reasoned associatively and most 5-year-olds applied the causal strategy, it can be concluded that strategy use is age-related. These findings show the importance of paying attention to individual differences when investigating childrens causal reasoning skills.