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The Role of Inquiry in Childrens and Adults Memory, Categorization, and Explanation of New Information

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Abstract

Asking questions is a fundamental part of learning. Previous research has touched on the types of questions we ask to gather information (e.g., Ruggeri & Lombrozo, 2015), but not yet on whether there are developmental differences in questions that go unanswered. In this study, we looked at the unanswered questions children and adults ask when presented with new information. We found that adults asked questions on many topics such as behavior, category membership, and social relevance, while children mainly asked feature-related questions. Additionally, these unanswered questions were related to learning outcomes after the questioning period. For instance, results revealed that the presence of feature or category questions predicted how narrowly or broadly children categorized novel objects. These findings indicate that unanswered questions may have consequences for learning outcomes, and that there are likely developmental differences in how unanswered questions affect cognition.