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Representations of knowledge states when writing: Keeping the reader's mind in mind

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Abstract: By 5 years children can represent knowledge states in Theory of Mind (ToM) tasks, yet elementary-school children rarely Think about their Reader's Mind (ToRM) when writing. This research reduced the information-processing demands of writing by using dictations to examine awareness of a reader's ignorance. Children aged 5 to 7 years dictated various pairs of letters (e.g., about playing in the snow to a child who had never seen snow versus a Canadian child). Results showed that only a quarter of the 5-year-olds, half the 6-year-olds, but most 7-year-olds showed evidence of ToRM. There were significant correlations between ToRM, ToM and Executive Function, however, on a measure of ratio of changes to total words, with age partialled out, correlations with ToM and Executive Function were no longer significant. Results are discussed in terms of information processing theory. This research can help inform curriculum decisions with regard to early literacy.