

Two-year-olds are vigilant of others' nonverbal cues to credibility

Susan A. J. Birch, Nazanin Akmal, and Kristen L. Frampton

Abstract

Data from three experiments provides the first evidence that children, at least as young as age two, are vigilant of others' nonverbal cues to credibility, and flexibly use these cues to facilitate learning. Experiment 1 revealed that two- and three-year-olds prefer to learn about objects from someone who appears, through nonverbal cues, to be confident in performing actions on those objects over someone who appears uncertain when performing actions on those objects. Experiment 2 revealed that when two-year-olds observe only one model perform a single action, either confidently or unconfidently, they do not use the model's level of confidence in this single instance to influence their learning. Experiment 3 revealed that two-year-olds will use a single model's level of confidence to guide their learning if they have observed that the model has an enduring history of being either confident or uncertain. These findings reveal that young children selectively alter their learning based on others' nonverbal cues of credibility, and underscore the importance of an early sensitivity to socio-cognitive cues on human learning and development.