Research Spotlight

The Zibbo the Zookeeper Game

Layla Unger, a graduate student working with Dr. Anna Fisher, is testing the validity of a task her research group has used previously for investigating children’s organization of animal concepts. In the Zibbo the Zookeeper Game, children assist Zibbo as he organizes animals in a zoo. The zoo is represented as a game board that is divided into squares. In this task, children are told where Zibbo will put a particular animal in the zoo. Then, children are asked to predict where they think Zibbo will put a second animal. In the previous version of this task, each animal was represented as a wooden block that the researcher described as a particular animal. In the current version, each animal is represented with its picture on a card. The researchers use the distances between each pair of animals to infer how the children’s mental concepts that correspond to these animals are organized. They aim to determine whether children understand the game instructions by replicating their previous findings on the wooden blocks task in this new picture version of the task.

The Breathing and Thinking Games

Graduate student Emma Satlof-Bedrick, a student of Dr. Carl Johnson in the Psychology Department at the University of Pittsburgh, is conducting a study to assess children’s developing knowledge about and awareness of physical and mental processes, such as breathing and thinking. The study will be conducted at several local schools with children between the ages of 4 and 8 to determine when exactly children develop general knowledge about how breathing and thinking work and when children become able to monitor these two processes. Because Emma is a Pitt not a CMU researcher, this study requires additional parental consent, so watch for a consent form to come via the children’s backpacks sometime in March. Children whose parents submit the signed consent form will participate in two short games within one 15-minute session. The Breathing Game will consist of children sitting for 30 seconds and indicating whether they are breathing. The Thinking Game will consist of children sitting for 30 seconds and indicating whether they are thinking. Children will also be asked approximately 10 questions to assess general knowledge about breathing and thinking. The researchers are interested in differences between children of different age groups, not in differences between individual children. These data will help the researchers determine the developmental timeline for awareness of and knowledge about breathing and thinking.