

Assisting children's thinking: What kinds of knowledge does it take?

Early studies of parent-child dyadic learning emphasize the sensitivity of the forms of assistance that parents provide. However, in these studies the tasks are easily solvable by parents and are familiar enough so that parents have a good basis for understanding how their children are likely to perform. Once children get to school, the situation can change. As anyone with a teenager has probably learned, parents can find themselves in the uncomfortable position of trying to help children with problems that they themselves do not understand well. Moreover, their knowledge of their child's thinking about these problems is liable to be sketchy, at best. In spite of recent evidence about the value of domain-specific knowledge for teaching, even pre-service teachers are rarely taught much about important benchmarks in the development of students' domain-specific knowledge. Without attention to these issues, teachers tend to focus instead on their own goals, intentions, and actions rather than on student learning. I will be sharing a series of studies that illustrate how investigations of the development of student thinking can serve as underpinning for investigations of how adults can better support student learning.