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Melting chocolate and melting snowmen: Analogical reasoning and causal relations

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Abstract

Children's performance in the classical **a:b::c:d** analogy task is traditionally very poor prior to the Piagetian stage of formal operations. The interpretation has been that the ability to reason about higher-order relations (the relations between the **a:b** and **c:d** parts of the analogy) is late-developing. However, an alternative possibility is that the relations used to date in the analogies are too difficult for younger children. Two experiments presented children aged 3, 4 and 6 years with **a:b::c:d** analogies which were based on relations of physical causality such as melting and cutting, for example *chocolate bar: melted chocolate:: snowman:melted snowman*. Understanding of these particular causal relations is known to develop between the ages of 3 and 4 years. It was found that even 3-years-olds could solve the classical analogies if they understood the causal relations on which they were based.



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