Do children learn more easily from what they see or what they hear?

- Until four years of age, most children expect that a ball rolled off an inclined ramp will fall straight down (Kim & Spelke, 1999). In fact, because of acquired forward momentum, the ball will hit the floor some distance from the ramp’s edge.

- One might expect that children who have their expectation disconfirmed when they witness the ball’s actual trajectory would learn that the ball will not fall straight down.

- Learning about a dynamic event from personal experience, however, can be a challenge because it requires children to attend to the relevant information at just the right moment in time. Blink, and the moment has passed.

- Learning about a dynamic event from testimony may be more efficient because an informant can highlight the relevant information. But this requires the learner to trust what the informant says — which can pose a challenge if it conflicts with what the learner expects spontaneously (e.g., Jaswal, 2010).

- We compared how likely children were to update their expectation about the trajectory of a ball based on personal experience versus testimony.

Participants

- Witness condition: 36 3-year-olds
- Testimony condition: 36 3-year-olds

References
