

In this issue:

- Updates from the Thinking Project and other lab research
- Ongoing studies
- Find out more about how to participate

Individual Highlights:

Page 1 –
How do children evaluate the judgments of others?

Page 2 –
Do elementary school-aged children disbelieve biased claims?

Do preschoolers recognize silly explanations?

How do children ask questions to solve problems?

Page 3 –
Special thanks, about us, and how to participate

The University of Texas at Dallas
P.O. Box 830688, GR41 Richardson, TX 75083-0688, 972-883-6075
<http://www.utdallas.edu/research/thinklab>

Welcome, thanks, and more!

We are excited to present the first issue of the Think Lab Newsletter! We plan to publish an issue once a year to update the teachers, parents, and others who have been involved with our research.

Inside, you'll find summaries of some of our most recent findings, as well as descriptions of some of the projects we are just beginning. We also have some information about our lab in case you know a

family or a school that might be interested in participating—we are always looking for more people to participate in our projects!

Thank you for your support, and please enjoy our newsletter. Also feel free to look us up online at:
<http://www.utdallas.edu/research/thinklab>

The Thinking Project: How do children evaluate the judgments of others?

As adults, we recognize that there are times when other people may not be able to offer a fair and objective judgment about something, like the outcome of a court case or the results of a competition. How do children start to understand this?

For this project, we present children with stories about different kinds of contests, with different potential judges, and we ask questions to try to understand how children decide what qualities are important for making someone a good judge. For example, children might hear stories involving contests with objective criteria (e.g., running race, pie eating contest) and contests with more subjective criteria (e.g., beauty contest, talent contest). For each story, children would then hear about a potential judge, and they would be asked how good the judge would be at choosing the person who did the best in the contest.

In one part of the project, we found that by fourth grade, children predict that a judge with a personal connection to a contestant (e.g., someone's best friend or teacher) is less likely to make accurate (unbiased) decisions than a judge with no personal connection (e.g., a peer or a teacher who doesn't know anyone in the contest). Younger children, however, think differently: they think being friends with someone is good and helpful, and not knowing anyone makes someone a poor judge. However, children of all ages predict that someone with a negative personal connection (like an enemy) will be a poor judge.

Some of our ongoing research is looking at how children explain a judge's choice, as well as how much they consider context (like whether a situation is objective or subjective) when evaluating information.

Do elementary school-aged children disbelieve seemingly biased claims?

This project found that second and fourth graders are able to take into account the motivations of characters when deciding how much to believe them. When told stories in which the outcome of a contest is ambiguous (e.g., “the race was close at the end”), second and fourth graders were less likely to believe characters who claimed to have won the race than those who claimed defeat.

Kindergartners, on the other hand, were quite trusting of self-interested statements in general. However, if they had clear evidence

that someone’s self-interested statement was wrong, kindergartners could explain why. They could recognize, for example, that a boy wanted to believe that he won a race so badly that he got confused about what happened.

This project was highlighted in a December 2005 issue of *The New York Times* as well as in an interview on National Public Radio. It was also featured as one of Science magazine’s “Editor’s Choice” articles on May 13, 2005. Hear the interview and read the press on our website.



Callier Center at Richardson, where our research takes place

Do preschoolers recognize silly explanations?

Children nowadays are faced with more information from a larger number of sources than ever before, so they must decide which information is accurate and which should be discarded. One goal of our study called “The Detective Game” is to gain insight into the types of explanations children between the ages of 3 and 6 believe.

In one part of this study, the child and a researcher play a simple game that ends with the child and researcher counting a few coins. The child and researcher leave the room for a moment, and return to find that the number of coins sitting on the table has changed. A different person tells the child something about what happened to the coins. Sometimes this person says something that

makes sense, and sometimes she says something silly, like a unicorn jumped out of a book and added a coin.

We’re still working on this study, but so far, most of our 3-year-olds believe the silly explanations, but most of the 4-year-olds do not. As you might expect, the older the children are, the more skeptical they are about silly or implausible explanations. Other researchers working with preschoolers often suggest that 4 and 5 year olds are as gullible as 3-year-olds. We think, instead, that experience with the world shapes children’s understanding of what is silly or implausible, and that children understand different things at different rates. We hope to understand more about this in the future.

A new project! How do children ask questions to solve problems?

Children like to ask questions from a very young age for many reasons: to get attention, to obtain facts (e.g., “What’s that animal called?”), and to understand things (e.g., “Why do people have birthday parties?”). We know that in elementary school children have to ask questions to solve problems, but we don’t know much about how this ability develops.

We have just started a new study with children ages 3 to 7 to look at this very issue. In our new study, children have to ask questions to our two puppet experts, Zebra

and Giraffe, to figure out which key would work in each of three slots to open a box.

Kids are motivated to figure out the answers because there is a prize for them inside the box! Our puppets are supposedly experts in different things, so in order to figure out which key works in each slot, children have to ask questions to both puppets. We will be working on this project over the next year to find out more about how this develops! Stay tuned for more information.

Why do zebras have stripes?



The University of
Texas at Dallas,
School of
Behavioral and
Brain Science
P.O. Box 830688,
GR41
Richardson, TX
75080

PHONE:
972-883-6075

E-MAIL:
utdthinklab@
yahoo.com

We're on the Web!
See us at:
[www.utdallas.edu/
research/thinklab](http://www.utdallas.edu/research/thinklab)

Special thanks to...

We are extremely grateful to all of the parents, teachers, directors, staff, and children who have helped make this research possible.

Special thanks to everyone associated with the following schools, preschools, and programs for your help with some of the projects mentioned in this newsletter:

- All Our Children
- Big Springs Elementary School

- Callier Child Development Program
- Canyon Creek Elementary School
- Dallas North Montessori School
- Frisco YMCA Summer Camps
- Spring Creek Elementary School
- Teddy Bear Junction
- The Octopus Garden

We couldn't do it without you!

Participate!

Your help with this research is invaluable. We are always inviting families and schools with children between the ages of 3 and 12 to join our research family.

In our research, we generally tell children short stories and ask them questions about the stories, or we play simple games with toys and ask questions about what others might think in those situations. Most studies involve a **one-time session that lasts between 15 and 60 minutes**, depending on the study, and we do our best to **schedule appointments at your convenience** (afternoons, evenings, and some Saturdays).

These sessions take place at our lab at the Callier Center at UTD, where convenient free parking is provided, or at local daycares,

after school programs, and elementary schools. Most studies also involve a small toy or gift for your child as a thank you for participating, and parents receive helpful information about child development. Our families tell us that the experience is enjoyable and interesting for children, parents, and teachers.

If you are interested in finding out more about our research or scheduling an appointment, please contact us. You may contact us by phone at (972) 883-6075 or by email at utdthinklab@yahoo.com. Also, you can visit our Think Lab web page for more information at:

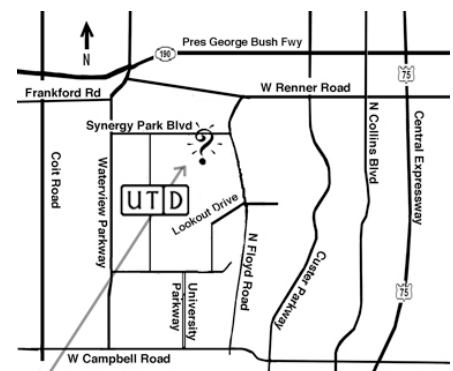
www.utdallas.edu/research/thinklab

About Us...

The UTD Think Lab is located at the University of Texas at Dallas, and is under the direction of Dr. Candice M. Mills.

At the Think Lab at the University of Texas at Dallas, we seek to discover knowledge that will contribute to the healthy cognitive and emotional development of our children, and we are looking for schools, parents, and children to take part in important and fun research studies on child development. We believe that this research can help educators, families, and scientists understand important aspects of how children think, learn, and develop.

Our location:



think? LAB at Callier Center Richardson: 811 Synergy Park Blvd.