

Verbal learning in children and the influence of age and sex

*Meijs CJC, Hurks PPM, Jolles J*

Dept of Psychiatry and Neuropsychology, University Maastricht, Maastricht

The aim of the present study was to examine the development of verbal learning in school-aged children aged 5 to 12 years and the influence of sex on it. Within a cross-sectional design, 86 children (42 boys, 44 girls), frequenting grade 2 till 8 of a Dutch school, were included in the study. None of these children had skipped or repeated a grade at school. All participants were tested neuropsychologically by use of an estimate of IQ and a visual verbal learning test, that is a learning test in which a child has to learn a list of fifteen words that is presented five times. After the presentation of a trial, the child is asked to repeat all words that he/she remembered (i.e., immediate recall). After the immediate recall is administered, the child carries out other, non interfering, tests for a period of 20 minutes. After this period, the child is asked (a) to repeat all words again without presentation (delayed recall) and (b) to recognize the words out of a list containing thirty words (delayed recognition). Because of the relatively small sample sizes, the grades were clustered: (1) 'low' (grade 2 and 3), (2) 'middle' (grades 4 and 5), (3) 'high' (grades 6, 7 and 8). After correction for IQ, performance in terms of immediate recall and delayed recall of words was found to increase as children grew older. On the delayed recognition, no differences between the grades were found. Also, older children tended to use different strategies than the younger children. Finally, sex differences in performance were found on the immediate recall and the delayed recall only for the low grades: girls in the low grade performed better than boys. No sex differences were found for the middle and high grades.

Celeste J.C. Meijs, Dept of Psychiatry & Neuropsychology, University Maastricht, P.O. Box 616, 6200 MD Maastricht, t 043-3877445, e-mail [c.meijs@np.unimaas.nl](mailto:c.meijs@np.unimaas.nl)

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