"Characterizing Individual Differences in Spatial Language Development: Examining the Causes and Consequences of Variability"

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4:00 PM
315 PH

My research program, the Project on Language and Spatial Development, aims to understand how children acquire language, particularly those words that describe the spatial and relational world (e.g., motion verbs, spatial prepositions and dimensional adjectives; e.g., “running,” “under,” and “big”). Critically, children’s facility to use spatial terms in their productive vocabularies by the age of 4 predicts later spatial ability. These early spatial skills are not only critical to preK–12 mathematics performance, but are also linked to success in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines, with skill level predicting subsequent entry into these fields. The goal for today’s talk is to describe children’s spatial language production and spatial language comprehension. First, I will describe my research showing that children vary widely in their production of spatial language, and talk about how one factor, parent spatial language input, explains these individual differences. I will also describe my work showing the consequences of individual differences in spatial language production on children’s later spatial ability. Second, I will present my recent work aimed at characterizing variability in spatial language comprehension utilizing a newly-developed interactive assessment and describe the consequences of this variability in comprehension on children’s spatial ability.