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**Children learning to count at earlier age**

**Sentence Count = 15 (including title)**

**Word Count = 365 (round to 370)**

**Researchers at the University of Sheffield have shown that children begin to learn to count at an earlier age than previously thought.**

Professor Michael Siegal, from the University's Department of Psychology, worked with colleagues at the University of Queensland and Kyoto University to study how young children responded to videos of counting.  
  
The researchers found that by the age of 18 months, toddlers could recognise basic arithmetic.

Children were shown two videos, each of six fish, with a hand pointing to each fish alongside a verbal commentary counting up to six in the first video.

However in the second video, the hand moved between only two of the fish, but was accompanied by the same commentary.  
  
The study showed that those aged 15 months showed interest in both the correct and incorrect counting sequences, however once they reached 18 months, the infants showed a much greater level of interest in the correct sequence.

This showed the researchers that even before children can count themselves, they recognise that each single object must be counted, in order for counting to be correct.

The research, published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B, also studied how children reacted when counting took place in their native language, rather than a foreign one.

For the study, the researchers counted in Japanese for children of English speakers, and English for children of Japanese speakers.  
  
The study demonstrated that children are learning counting events by being exposed to them, as they are more familiar, and interested in, the regular routine of counting in their native language rather than an unfamiliar one.  
  
Professor Michael Siegal said: "This work represents three years of research carried out by an international team in Australia, Japan and Britain.

The results show that children learn to count much earlier than is often thought based on initial experience with their own language."  
  
Professor Virgina Slaughter, from the University of Queensland, said: "These results show infants start to acquire the abstract principles governing correct counting prior to producing any counting behaviour.  
  
"Our data suggest that between the ages of 15 and 18 months, infants begin to learn the abstract principles governing correct counting via exposure to their cultural counting routine."

**Notes for Editors:** To view the research paper, 'Learning to count begins in infancy: evidence from 18 months old' visual preferences', visit:  
  
[Proceedings of the Royal Society B](http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/early/2011/02/09/rspb.2010.2602.abstract)

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