

Viewing the world through a baby's eyes

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Researchers at The University of Nottingham are studying the way in which babies look at colours and numbers in an attempt to find out more about how they view the world around them.

The Baby Lab research facility is testing babies as young as three months old to find out whether they recognise differences between colours and numbers and how this impacts on the way children develop in their early years.

The work also looks at which colours and colour combinations children prefer, which could be used to inform the design of early learning toys and other baby-related products.

Dr Gaia Scerif, who is leading the project in the University's School of Psychology, said: "The main focus of the project is looking at whether we can find early predictors of later development. We are interested in finding out why some children learn more quickly than others or in a different way. For example, if babies like looking at certain colours, does this influence the way in which they learn to name those colours?"

Testing babies involved carefully measuring what attracts their attention. For example, a colour or number of dots is repeatedly shown to a baby on a screen until the baby becomes bored and looks away. A new colour or number of dots is then shown instead. If this attracts the infant's attention and they can detect the change they will look for a long time at the new information. The researchers use a small camera mounted above the screen to track where the babies are looking and to time how long the

babies spend looking at each colour or number of dots.

So far, the research has shown that babies like to look at blue, red, purple and orange, while they don't like looking at browns and greys. Intriguingly, brown and grey are also the colours toddlers find most difficult to name.

The Baby Lab is the latest facility to be unveiled as part of the research programme conducted by the Nottingham Toddler Lab, which was launched last year and looks at the development during the pre-school years. The researchers are currently recruiting parents of babies and toddlers who are willing to take part in the study. They hope by testing the babies as they grow older — first in the Baby Lab and later in the Toddler Lab — they will be able to build a unique picture of how children develop during their early years.

Source: University of Nottingham

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