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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Toddlers Learn Better through Interactive Video**

Given that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in the United States watch an average of one to three hours of television and videotapes a day means the entertainment market for these young viewers (and their parents) has exploded in recent years. But there is very little information on what makes effective programming for these tiny viewers. Now a study from researchers at Vanderbilt University finds that if you really want the diaper crowd to learn from a TV program or video, it's probably best to choose programs with characters that directly relate to and interact with the children.

The researchers conducted two experiments to better understand which type of video best engaged toddlers. In the first, they tested differences in learning from video and face-to-face interactions among 24 two-year-olds. A woman on a TV screen told the children where to find a stuffed animal hidden in another room. For other children, the same woman told them the same information in person. The toddlers rarely found the stuffed animal after watching the TV woman, suggesting they just didn't believe or listen to her, but usually found the toy after the "real" interaction.

In the second experiment, the researchers used a closed-circuit video system to make the video interactive. The woman on the screen could see, hear and respond to the children through conversation and games. After five minutes of interacting with the woman on the TV, children used the information she provided to find the hidden object.

"It appears that toddlers do not perceive standard video as providing information that applies to the real world because they look to social cues such as eye contact and responsiveness to decide when to pay attention to what is being conveyed," said lead researcher Georgene L. Troseth, PhD, assistant professor of psychology "Because 2-year-olds are more likely to learn from a person on video whom they perceive as a conversational partner, video in which two-way interaction has been established can be used to convey information."

The next step, she says, is to determine whether toddlers will accept a person on a pre-taped video who repeatedly appears to talk to them (as occurs in children's programs like *Blue's Clues* and *Dora the Explorer*) as a "social partner."

"These findings have implications for educational television aimed at toddlers, as well as for the use of video images in research with this age group," Dr. Troseth noted.

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 77, Issue 3, *Young Children's Use of Video as a Source of Socially Relevant Information* by Troseth GL, Saylor MM, and Archer AH (Vanderbilt University). Copyright 2006 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.