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AUTHOR upi.com

NOVEMBER 10 2011 01:25h

Study: Early spatial term use important

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CHICAGO, Nov. 9 (UPI) -- Young children who learn and use their parents' words for the size and shape of objects do better on tests of their spatial skills, U.S. researchers say.

University of Chicago researchers say their study suggests learning to use a

wide range of spatial words predicts children's later spatial thinking, important as they begin to study mathematics, science and technology.

Children who heard and then used 45 additional spatial terms showed, on average, a 23 percent increase in their scores on a non-verbal assessment of spatial thinking, a university release said Wednesday.

In a study group of 52 children and 52 caregivers, researchers recorded words related to spatial concepts used by both children and caregivers, including names for two- and three-dimensional objects, such as "circle" or "triangle"; words that described size, such as "tall" and "wide"; and words that described the features of shapes such as "bent," "edge" and "corner."

The researchers found children who were exposed to more spatial terms during their everyday activities and produced these words themselves performed much better on spatial tests at 4 1/2 years of age than children who did not hear and produce as many of these spatial terms.

"In view of findings that show spatial thinking is an important predictor of STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics] achievement and careers, it is important to explore the kinds of early inputs that are related to spatial thinking," University of Chicago psychologist Susan Levine wrote.

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