

## **Playful Games Promote Reading Development**

*ScienceDaily (May 15, 2012)* — Short but intense training sessions in the form of structured language games from the age of four can stimulate children's early language development and may also make it easier for children to learn to read. This is found in a current research project at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

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Previous research has shown that children's reading development can be stimulated with structured and playful language games from the age of six. In a current three-year study, researchers at the University of Gothenburg are exploring the effects of having children as young as four participate in such games. The hypothesis is that young children who are actively stimulated in their development of so-called linguistic and phonological awareness end up better prepared for dealing with written language. Linguistic awareness means that the child is aware of his or her own language, what it sounds like and how it consists of words and sentences. Phonological awareness implies an awareness of the sound structure of the language, which is important for the early stages of reading development and for understanding the connection between letters and sounds.

The study includes 370 children as well as a number of pre-school and special needs teachers in eight municipalities. The studied children receive phonological training for 25 minutes a day for six weeks. The six-week period is repeated with the same children for a total of three years, with pre- and post-tests during the three years. The children are divided into three groups -- one phonological group, one group receiving alternative training, and one control group that is not receiving any particular training. In the third and final year, all three groups are offered phonological training within the framework of the regular pre-school work.

The preliminary findings indicate that the phonological training had an effect immediately following the training, and that the effect can be observed one year later as well. 'The children in the intervention group had a higher level of phonological awareness. They were for example able to identify and manipulate speech sounds. Rhyming is one example of this. The ability to recognize the form of the language is something that researchers know is important for early reading development,' says Senior Lecturer Ulrika Wolff, who is heading the project together with Professor Jan-Eric Gustafsson.

Since the studied children are still in pre-school, they are not yet being taught the art of reading. The researchers are planning to follow the same group of children for a few years once they start school in order to investigate the more long-term effects of early intervention on the development of reading and writing skills. Doing so will show whether or not the children who have not received the training are able to catch up with the intervention group.