



## **FI Research Summary: Fathers' Impact on Young Children's Language and Literacy**

- The time spent by fathers in reading to very young children is the strategy most consistently associated with their early reading and writing skills (Clark, 2009)
- When fathers of 1-2 year olds read lots of books to them, their children tend to be more interested in books later (Lyytinen et al, 1998).
- Pre-schoolers whose dads read and talk to them a lot behave and concentrate better at nursery, and do better in maths as well (Baker, 2013).
- Such early, sensitive involvement by dads continues to deliver benefits. At age five, their children know and use more words, can pick out letters more accurately, and are better at problem solving; by age ten, their vocabulary is wider and their maths skills are better, too (McKelvey et al, 2010).
- Verbal exchanges between fathers and their infants and between mothers and their infants are each found independently and uniquely to predict pre-schoolers' social competence and lower aggression. These, in turn, shape their verbal skills in adolescence (Feldman et al, 2013).
- Sex-of-child makes a great difference to parents' behaviour: both fathers and mothers are more likely to engage in literacy activities with girls (Leavell et al, 2012).
- Fathers tend to be more 'demanding' of their young children conversationally – asking lots of 'wh' questions, for example. By contrast, mothers tend to repeat their children's utterances back to them. Fathers' 'wh' questions may result from fathers' being less familiar with their children's speech than mothers (for review, see Tamis-LeMonda et al, 2013).
- Recent research is showing far more similarities than differences in mothers' and fathers' speech with young children, possibly as fathers spend more time with them (for review, see Tamis-LeMonda et al, 2013).
- A 'Head Start' intervention with fathers of 3-5 year olds found the more the fathers participated in the programme and the more the fathers' 'play behaviour' with their children improved, the more the children's 'academic readiness' skills improved (Roggman et al, 2004).

- A case study approach explored the effects of a family-environment literacy intervention with 25 fathers and their 5-year-old children. The findings indicated that the fathers promoted their children's literacy development when they learned literacy strategies and activities in the programme (Saracho, 2007).
- When addressing literacy in the home, it's important to work with both parents, since both fathers' and mothers' participation in home literacy activities is connected with children's progress (Tamis-LeMonda et al, 2013).
- Low income fathers' and mothers' joint supportiveness of their two-year-olds correlates (independently of other effects) with the child's language and arithmetic scores at age 'rising five' (Martin et al, 2007).
- Young children with two unsupportive parents score lowest on language development (Martin et al, 2007).
- Toddlers with two supportive parents do best of all (Ryan et al, 2011)

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