3-9-2012

Research on Play: Dads and Moms Both Contribute to Education Success

Center for Persons With Disabilities

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cpd_blog

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cpd_blog/515

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Persons with Disabilities at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Blog Posts by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.
RESEARCH ON PLAY: DADS AND MOMS BOTH CONTRIBUTE TO EDUCATION SUCCESS

March 9, 2012 by JoLynne Lyon

Results from a 15-year study out of the Family, Consumer and Human Development Department at Utah State University show that the way parents play with their toddlers predicts their children's academic success. These findings are getting national recognition. So far, stories have appeared in the TodayMoms blog, Education Week’s Early Years blog and Medical News Today -- with more coverage likely to follow. 


We're proud to say that the researchers have ties to the Center for Persons with Disabilities. Kudos to Dr. Gina Cook, who works here at the CPD's Interdisciplinary Training division. Congratulations also to Faculty Fellows Lisa Boyce and Lori Roggman, both of FCHD.

Here's the press release:

15-Year Study Shows Positive Connection Between How Parents Play with Toddlers and Their Children's Academic Success

- 229 Children from Low-Income Families Across the Nation were Studied as Part of this Research
- Mothers Do More Teaching With Their Child When the Biological Father is a Resident in the Home

LOGAN, UT (March 6, 2012) – Results from a 15-year research project show that the ways in which fathers and mothers play with children at age two predicts their children's future academic outcomes.

Among the highly stimulating activities parents engaged in that were shown to have a positive impact on children’s later academic performance are:

- Encouraging and engaging in pretend play
- Presenting activities in an organized sequence of steps
- Elaborating on the pictures, words, and actions in a book or on unique attributes of objects
- Relating play activity or book text to the child’s experience

Since 1996, researchers from Utah State University's department of Family, Consumer and Human Development (FCHD) have studied families enrolled in the “U.S. Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project” to determine the range of influence early parent-child
engagement has on later academic achievements.

“There has been extensive research done on the importance of early parent-child interactions on future educational experiences, but most have focused on the relationship with the mother,” said Gina Cook, FCHD research assistant professor. “Our study looked at the combined long-term impacts of both maternal and paternal interactions in those critical stages of early development, and discovered that children not only benefit from the interactions they have with their mothers, but also their fathers.”

Observations of mother-toddler and father-toddler interactions in 229 low-income families made at age 2 were examined in relation to child outcomes at age 3 and then again in the 5th grade. The researchers looked at two different family types, those with resident biological fathers and those without, and found that in both these family situations, children perform better academically when mothers teach more during play with their toddlers. When resident biological fathers teach during play with their toddlers, they make an additional positive contribution to their child’s 5th grade math and reading performance on top of the mother’s play, the child’s gender, and participation in the Early Head Start Program.

The study determined that these biological fathers weren’t actually stimulating their children’s brains more than the fathers in other family situations. Rather, the research indicates that in homes with both biological parents, the mother provided higher levels of cognitive stimulation with the toddlers, and those fathers contributed to later academic outcomes above and beyond mothers.

“Interestingly, when the biological father is living with the mother and child, mothers provide more cognitive stimulation to their toddlers, but it is the fathers in only these families who really add something more to their children’s early environments,” added Cook. “It is important for parents to engage with their children during the vital, early stages of brain development, because that early exposure to cognitive stimulation with both mothers and fathers can have a long-lasting and positive influence on the educational success of at-risk children.”

The FCHD department is part of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University. Results from this study will be published in an upcoming special issue on fathers in the Family Science journal.

About the College of Education and Human Services

The Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University is committed to offering high quality graduate and undergraduate programs in education and human services that are innovative and widely accessible. The college is also dedicated to establishing and maintaining nationally visible research centers that advance knowledge and professional practices. For more information, visit http://www.cehs.usu.edu/. For press contacts, scroll down.

Press Contact:

Jacob Moon

Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services Public Relations

801.461.9797

Jacob@methodcommunications.com

Amanda Butterfield

Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services Public Relations

801.461.9786

amanda@methodcommunications.com