

The Father's Role in Children's Early Literacy Development:

A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Parent involvement in helping children develop early literacy skills is found to be associated with academic achievement. Parent involvement has traditionally referred to the mother's role. Father's contribution to children's reading and writing development has not been thoroughly investigated. The purpose of this report is to present a review of the literature on paternal involvement from the latter part of the 20th century to the current time period. Research suggests that children's growth and development occur when fathers are active participants in infant care in general and early literacy activities in particular. Implications for social change and recommended strategies that teachers can use to encourage father involvement in their children's literacy development are presented at the conclusion of this report.

The Father's Role in Children's Early Literacy Development:

A Review of the Literature

A clear link has been established between parental involvement in children's learning and educational attainment (Fan & Chen, 2001; Walker, Hover-Dempsey, Whetsel, & Green, 2004). Specifically, parents helping their children learn to read and write has been found to prepare them for formal education and school success (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Morrow, 1997; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Wasik & Bond, 2001; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Because literacy skills are essential components of academic achievement, researchers have isolated early literacy factors associated with reading and writing accomplishments, such as children having the opportunity to see that literacy can be functional and parents modeling literacy activities (Mason, 1992; Teale, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

A concern in the field of education is the roles of the teacher in helping parents acknowledge the importance of their involvement in children's early literacy development (Fan & Chen, 2001; Freire, 1998). With the many issues parents face today in providing school support (Meezan & McCroskey, 1996), one recurring request is for skill building strategies they can use with their children in becoming proficient readers and writers. Sadly, many requests for information on literacy development techniques for parents are met with bewilderment or indifference. This is not because school personnel are unaware of the importance of their involvement, but because they often lack the knowledge to recommend appropriate steps to take in this area (Auerbach, 1997; Friere, 1998; Taylor, 1997). Furthermore, research on parent involvement in children's literacy development has generally focused on the contributions mothers have made (Dickinson, De Temple, & Smith, 1992; Pellegrini, Perlmutter, Galda, & Brody, 1990; Williams, 1991). The role of the father has not been thoroughly examined (Saracho & Spodek, 2008).

Therefore, the purpose of this report is to present a compendium of the literature on paternal involvement within the last 50 years, suggest implications for social change, and recommend

strategies that teachers can use to encourage fathers to take an active role in their children's literacy growth. A review of the history, dimensions, and determinants of the overall role of fathering will be presented next so that insight into paternal involvement in early literacy practices can be better understood.

Father Involvement in Children's Development

The Father's Role in Infant Caretaking

Lamb (2000) stated that to understand the concern with fatherhood and its impact on children, it is important to examine the changes in the conceptualization of paternal roles that has taken place over the years. Father as moral teacher was the prevalent concept during colonial times, followed by breadwinner, sex-role model, and currently the new nurturing father. These phases, adds Lamb, are crucial because in a pluralistic society like ours, many conceptions of fathers' role exist. Recognizing that fathers fill many roles helps to place fathering in multi-context situations, which identifies the various things fathers will do for their children (Pleck, 1997).

Researchers (LaRossa, Gordon, Wilson, Bairan, & Jaret, 1991; Pleck, 1997) feel that the image of fathers as competent caretakers and socializing agents of their children has not shifted gradually for the better, as is often assumed. Instead, the image of the American father had changed not once but at least twice during the 20th century. The depiction of father as involved and nurturing in the era between the 1970s and 1990s was observed during the 1930s and early 1940s, when, among other socio-historical factors, similarities in birth rates, rising labor force participation of mothers, and increased advocacy of egalitarianism had occurred. Interspersed between these periods, fathers as incompetent and bumbling parents were often prevalent themes.

Current research on father-child relationships suggests an increased involvement of fathers in the United States, and the complex roles they have assumed (Day & Lamb, 2004). There is a growing body of research on the nature and extent of paternal involvement (Cabrera et al., 2004; Lamb, 2004; Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004), father role identity (LaRossa, 1997; LaRossa &

Reitzes, 1993), and the potential impact of fathers on their children's language and cognitive skills, and academic achievement (Mehta & Richards, 2002; Moore & Kotelchuck, 2004; Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997).

Research in other countries has also challenged traditional father stereotypes. Bronstein's (1984) study in Mexico, and Benetti and Roopnarine's (2006) research in Brazil contradicted conservative beliefs of Latino/Hispanic fathers as aloof and authoritarian. Jackson's (1987) research in Great Britain suggested that cultural prohibitions against the expression of tender feelings and nurturing behavior by men appeared to be weakening rapidly. Studies in Sweden show the changing nature of the father's role in child care for non-disabled (Hwang, 1987) and disabled children (Olsson & Hwang, 2006). Russell (1983) found that, although the prevalent pattern of Australian fathers was one of a traditional type, a significant number of fathers were highly involved in child care. Ho and Kang (1984) suggest that, although there was a strong link with the past, younger Chinese fathers in Hong Kong showed a distinct departure from the traditional authoritarian mode of child rearing and were more involved in child care. In Japan (Ishii-Kuntz, Makino, Kato, & Tsuchiya, 2004), Canada (Zuzanek, 2000), and Malaysia (Noor, 1999), fathers are becoming increasingly involved in child care. And, in Ireland, Nugent (1991) demonstrated the increasing number of fathers who were substantially involved in infant caretaking.

Dimensional Studies on Father Involvement

Father involvement in the family is not a unidimensional construct (Volling & Belsky, 1991; Belsky & Volling, 1987). Lamb (2004) identified three types of paternal involvement. The first, labeled *interaction/engagement*, includes time that the father spends in direct one-on-one interaction with his child. The second type, *accessibility*, includes time spent in child-related housework or time spent in proximity to the child, but does not include actual interaction. The third type, *responsibility*, refers to the extent to which the father takes charge of child care and makes arrangements for such things as baby-sitters, doctor's appointments, and day care services.

In addition to the types of father involvement mentioned above, there are three bodies of literature related to paternal influences on child development: correlational strategies, the effects of father absence, and the impact of highly involved fathers (Lamb, 2004). Briefly, *correlational strategies* are concerned with relationships between paternal and filial characteristics. Since most of these types of studies were completed during the 1940s and 1950s, fathers as sex-role models were considered most important. Researchers (Mussen & Rutherford, 1963; Payne & Mussen, 1956; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1976) found that as far as paternal influences on sex-role development are concerned, characteristics of the father (e.g., masculinity) were much less important formatively than his warmth and the closeness and nature of the relationship with his child.

More recently, similar findings were obtained in studies concerned with paternal influences on achievement (Mehta & Richards, 2002; Moore & Kotelchuck, 2004), and psychosocial adjustment (Amato & Rejac, 1994; Burbach, Fox, & Nicholson, 2004); that is, paternal warmth and closeness were advantageous, whereas paternal masculinity was irrelevant. *Father-absence research*, the comparison of behavior and personalities of children raised with and without fathers, suggests that households without fathers may be harmful to the child's development not necessarily because a sex-role model is absent, but because many aspects of the father's role (e.g. economic, social, emotional, etc.) go unfilled or inappropriately filled (Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982; Lamb, 2004).

Lastly, studies on *increased paternal involvement*, as exemplified by fathers who either share in or take primary responsibility for child care (co-parenting) suggest that children with highly involved fathers are characterized by increased cognitive competence, increased empathy, less sex-stereotyped beliefs, and a more internal locus of control (Mehta & Richards, 2002; Moore & Kotelchuck, 2004; Ninio & Rinott, 1988; Ramirez-Valles, Zimmerman, & Juarez, 2002).

Determinants of Father Involvement

Researchers have examined father involvement relative to their children's moral, physical, and emotional development. Specific areas include child, father, community, and familial factors.

Child characteristics. The child's age has been shown to be related to differential paternal involvement in some studies. Researchers suggest the age of siblings can impact the parent-child relationship, with older children being less close to fathers (Roberts, Block, & Block, 1984; Steinberg, 1981). Ramirez et al. (2002), on the other hand, showed that father presence and time spent with adolescent sons were significantly associated with school achievement. Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) also found that fathers spend more time with older children. Yet, Ross (1987) noticed no significant effects of a child's age on paternal involvement.

Gender of the child may also influence within-family variability (McBride & Rane, 1997). Fathers may be seen as having an advantage in teaching sons sex-typed behavior, thus, initiating greater involvement with male siblings than with daughters. Various studies have shown the importance of gender composition in family research (Morgan, Lye, & Condran, 1988; Powell & Steelman, 1989; Harris & Morgan, 1991), demonstrating that fathers assumed more active roles in large families that included one or more boys.

Other studies show that fathers with more offspring spend somewhat additional time with their children (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992; Nock & Kingston, 1988). Blake (1989) argues, though, that the *dilution* theory may account for reduced involvement of fathers in larger families because of the spreading thinly of "parents' time, emotional and physical energy, attention, and ability to interact with children as individuals" (p.11).

Another factor found to impact father involvement is sibling position. First and second-born children may temporarily benefit from less expenditure of parental energies because of the small family size (Zajonc, 1976). Finally, Sirignano and Lachman (1985) found that fathers with infants

characterized as having difficult temperaments experienced a decrease in their sense of efficacy and control as parents.

Father characteristics. Several studies indicate that men demonstrating androgynous tendencies (i.e., male and female characteristics) are more involved with their children than fathers with traditional sex-role orientations (Feldman, Nash, & Aschenbrenner, 1983; Palkovitz, 1984). On a similar note, Levy-Shiff and Israelashvili (1988) suggest that fathers described as affiliative, caring, and nurturing appear more playful with their children. Men with child-centered attitudes participate more in child care. Men with higher self-esteem before the birth of the baby were more satisfied with the role of care giving than fathers with lower self-esteem, who reported greater stress in their parenting role (Cowan & Cowan, 1987).

In addition, men with nontraditional gender-role ideologies were likely to perceive the division of household labor as unfair and participated more in child care (Greenstein, 1996). Aldous, Mulligan, and Bjarnason (1998), suggest that men involved in one area of domestic work (e.g., cooking) were more likely to be involved in child care duties.

Furthermore, researchers (Fox & Bruce, 2001; McBride & Rane, 1997; Rane & McBride, 2000) suggest that the more prominent and pivotal fathers' role is, and the more favorable the fathers' and the mothers' attitudes toward fathers' role, the greater their involvement in child care. Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, and Hofferth (2001) found that fathers' involvement in child care increases the more hours that mothers work for pay. On the other hand, paternal involvement decreases the more hours fathers work and the higher their income. Lastly, Mondell and Tyler (1981) observed that fathers with an internal locus of control (i.e., to think of oneself as responsible for one's own behavior), high levels of interpersonal trust, and an active coping style displayed higher levels of warmth, acceptance, and helpfulness, and lower levels of disapproval during interaction with their preschool children.

Community characteristics. Researchers have looked at external-contextual influences as possible contributors to increased father involvement with their children. In sum, increasing labor force participation of mothers, social support for the women's movement, and community acceptance of role-sharing between parents are among factors felt to positively impact father-child relationship (Haas, 1982; Radin, 1981; Sagi, 1982; Russell & Radin, 1983; Lamb, 1987; LaRossa et al, 1991; Pleck, 1985).

Familial characteristics. Familial factors found to affect differential paternal involvement include parents' socioeconomic status, mothers' and fathers' employment situation, the degree of marital harmony, and education of the parents (Battle, 2002; Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997; Gable, Crnic, & Belsky, 1994; Kesner & McKenry, 2001; Nakhaie, 1995). Other researchers suggest that focusing specifically on father involvement is less important than the influences of family context, family processes, pattern of interaction, value priorities, and the quality of various relationships (Davis & Friel, 2001; Gaunt, 2005). Although it can be shown that multiple domains of influence impact the extent and quality of father-child interactions, researchers feel that the personality or psychological well-being of the father is probably the most influential determinant of a father's parenting style, since it plays a key role in determining the interpersonal environment of the other relationships he forms with his family and social contacts (Gottman, 1994; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Volling & Belsky, 1991).

Father Involvement as an Accommodation Activity

It is equally important to recognize that varied contexts may produce different outcomes in parent-child interactions. In their discussion of the specificity of environmental influences on behavioral development, Wachs and Chan (1986) note that certain parent-child relations and child development may hold in some settings but not in others. Gaunt (2005) agrees that specific types of environmental and interpersonal determinants (e.g., values and beliefs) predict father involvement with his child much better than others.

Parent-child literacy interactions may, therefore, be the result of a number of accommodation factors between family members and environmental variables. Accommodation is defined as the "process of creating a meaningful, sustainable routine of everyday life, one that is also congruent with the abilities, ages, and status of family members" (Weisner, Garnier, & Loucky, 1994, p.1). For example, a father who believes that taking his six-year-old daughter to the library will help develop her literacy skills and who also views these activities as important prerequisites for school success may require the cooperation of his wife to care for other children. These mutual arrangements may be the result of parental values that engender planned activities. The premise is that families are proactive as well as reactive bodies, seeking through various accommodations to mitigate the impact of environmental factors on daily life (Gallimore, Weisner, Guthrie, Bernheimer, & Nihira, 1993; Gallimore, Weisner, Kaufman, & Bernheimer, 1989). As a result of these dynamic processes, a child's learning experience is viewed to be a product of both environmental forces and family pro-activity on achieving set familial goals.

Given this framework on which interactive relationships are built, it is suggested that accommodation processes influence parents' involvement with their children's development (Weisner, Garnier, & Loucky, 1994; Gallimore, Weisner, Kaufman, & Bernheimer, 1989; Gallimore, Weisner, Guthrie, Bernheimer, & Nihira, 1993). In a longitudinal study, Weisner et al. (1994) compared, among other family related factors, task sharing and father participation in 207 families. They found that fathers' involvement with household and child care duties is not contingent on one single factor, such as ideological commitment, type of household, or ecological adaptation, but instead is influenced by the overall daily routines that families have established based on a varied set of values and practices. Weisner et al. concluded that, to a large extent, the personnel available to do tasks in the home greatly influences who is doing those tasks. Gallimore et al. (1989) agree that the participation of family members in various child care activities may occur because it serves familial purposes in the overall schema of task assignment and performance. Accommodation, therefore, requires that family

members reorganize their plans, resources, constraints, time availability, goals and dreams, and establish a daily routine that is meaningful and sustainable over time.

The Father's Role in Children's Early Literacy Practices

Because of the traditional roles mothers have played within the context of the family unit and their involvement in the education of young children, there is a general tendency to perceive them as having a major impact on children's early literacy and language development (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). Even as late as the 1970s, when the inclination was for professionals, educators, and researchers to view both parents as learners and teachers of their children, the literature of this period contains almost no reference to the role of fathers in their children's early literacy and language development (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990).

Yet, in spite of this oversight in research, attempts have been made to ascertain the level of father involvement in early literacy development (Karter, 2002; Lloyd, 1999; Wragg, Wragg, Haynes, & Chamberlain, 1998). In one of the earliest efforts to measure the influence of fathers on young children's reading achievement in elementary school, Durkin (1966) attempted to interview both parents regarding their reading patterns. She found it extremely difficult to get fathers to attend the interview sessions to discuss their role in early reading activities. Their absence at these meetings was often reported due to being on the road, working during the day and going to school at night, spending long hours at the office, and having two jobs. This phenomenon prompted Durkin (1966) to bring to mind the term the vanishing American father referred to in so many titles of popular magazines at the time. She did find that the few fathers who were interviewed tended to have some positive influence over their children's early reading achievement.

Taylor (1983), in looking at the ways that parents shared literacy experiences with their young children, found that through the interplay of the personal biographies and educative styles of the fathers, comparable childhood literacy experiences were mediated in different ways. That is, although some fathers had similar literacy experiences as children, these same fathers had evolved different

styles in working with their own children--an idiosyncratic process that Taylor felt could influence and vary reading experiences for individual children.

Reese, Goldenberg, Loucky, and Gallimore (1989) found that parents who assisted with their children's literacy development tended to have more education than those who did not. Reese (1992), in examining the reading achievement of fifth grade students, found a family history of literacy shared by mothers and fathers. Other studies showed an array of literacy practices engaged in by both parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1996; Goldenberg, 1987). The list of practices that were observed in these homes included literacy for entertainment, daily living, general information, religion, and others beyond activities involving books or schooling. Wragg et al. (1998) state that shared literacy experiences strengthens the father-child bond. Whereas, Lloyd (1999) suggests that father's reading habits can have a substantial influence on their children's ability to read, their levels of interest, and their reading choices.

Additional studies show that paternal early literacy practices range from fathers who rarely read with their children to those who establish consistent reading and writing patterns (Laosa, 1982; Millard & Hunter, 2001; Ortiz, 1996; Reese, Gallimore, Balzano, & Goldenberg, 1995). For example, Laosa (1982), in examining linkages between parental schooling and behavior towards their children in Latino/Hispanic families, states that although spending less time in early literacy practices than their spouses, fathers often read with their children on a regular basis. Laosa (1982) attributed parent-child early literacy practices to increased years of parents' formal education.

Ortiz (1996) investigated father-child early literacy patterns in a sample of multigenerational Mexican American families. Paternal involvement in these activities ranged from daily to yearly events. Demographic variables, such as generation status, education, and income were found to have a minimal impact. Instead, father involvement in early literacy activities were found to be associated with co-parenting responsibilities, in that, fathers who shared child care duties with their spouses, as opposed to dividing these tasks, were more likely to read and write with their children. Millard and

Hunter (2001) found that 37% of the fathers they interviewed reported that they and their spouses read to their children in equal amounts. Whereas, 40% admitted that their partners were likely to read more with their children than they would.

Saracho (2008) looked at 25 fathers who participated in a family literacy program with their 5-year-old children. She found that fathers often demonstrated to their children literacy techniques they had learned at workshops, thus contributing to their children's reading and writing development.

Kalman's (1997) case study tells the story of how a Mexican father with a fourth-grade education engaged in a multitude of literacy uses that involved work, recreation, church, home, and school. One of the father's daughters went on to become a physician, the second daughter an accountant, and the third daughter a translator. This, according to Kalman, breaks the rule of the intergenerational passing down of a weak, familial literacy legacy. Kalman suggests that reading and writing which are deeply embedded in the context of one's daily life points to evidence that literacy practices are constructed in response more to a "communicative need" (p. 55), than to unclear school reading assignments.

Finally, a study on immigrant Mexican families suggests that a positive relationship exist between the amount of literacy fathers engage in and their children's academic reading tests' scores (Gallimore, Reese, Balzano, Benson & Goldenberg, 1991).

Thus, there is strong evidence that fathers not only engage in early literacy practices but that they learn and apply strategies and activities that contribute to children's literacy growth (Ortiz, 2001; Saracho, 2007). Investigators have suggested through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches that fathers play an important role in their children's early literacy development (Ortiz, 2004; Saracho, 2007).

Where Do We Go From Here?

Research suggests that father involvement contributes to children's reading and writing development. Research also shows that today more fathers take part not only in early literacy practices with their children but also in infant care responsibilities than fathers of 50 years ago. Yet, the number

of involved fathers in their children's education and early literacy experiences, when compared to the mother's role, continues to be a national concern. A study released by the previous U.S. Vice President, Al Gore, and U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, highlighted the link between father involvement in education, literacy practices, and children's academic success. Key findings included: (a) children are more likely to receive an A and less likely to repeat a grade if their fathers are involved in their schools; (b) children do better in school when their fathers are involved, regardless of whether their fathers live with them; and (c) the relationship between fathers' involvement and children's success in school is important, regardless of income, race-ethnicity, or the parents' education. Unfortunately, the report concluded that many fathers in two-parent families, as well as fathers not living with their children, have low involvement (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

To satisfactorily understand the father's role in children's literacy development, as well as recognize their contribution to children's overall education, various questions must be asked. They include but are not limited to the following:

1. How can the image of fathers as uninvolved parents be rectified?
2. How can society's perception of fathers as ill-qualified to assist their children be mediated?
3. Why do many fathers admit that parental involvement in early literacy activities is primarily a mother's responsibility, and how can that attitude be changed?
4. How can teachers, administrators, political representatives, and policy makers, be convinced that fathers are an untapped resource of literacy experiences that children can learn from, thus supporting the need for grant monies, research, and training?

As director, trainer, and grant writer of a father early literacy training program, the author of this paper can attest to the attitudes that persistently emanate from the questions raised above. Implications for social change and recommended strategies for father involvement will be discussed next.

Implications

Administrators and teachers, with school-based programs addressing parental involvement, may wish to develop strategies on soliciting fathers in helping young children improve their reading and writing skills. Also, with current research suggesting a positive link between father involvement and children's early literacy growth, educational and political leaders, policy makers, and representatives of public and private funding sources could be approached for monies that would support research, personnel training, and materials.

Furthermore, continual research is needed on father involvement. Little data have been gathered on the contributions fathers make in the area of early literacy development, particularly the impact on children's education in multicultural contexts. Factors that have been found to affect father involvement in their children's early literacy development include environment, socioeconomic and employment status, marital harmony, and education of parents. Additional research will help shed light on whether the impact of these variables is constant across the growing ethnic populations in the United States.

Finally, from a family systems perspective (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Shellenberger, 1999), by all members of the family taking an active role in teaching, children will come to view both parents as teachers and meaning-makers of their environment. This family model essentially doubles the resources children will have available to them for assistance--an inextricably interconnected network of practical knowledge. For most parents, engaging in literacy is an everyday experience. However, many do not realize the benefits that are associated with reading and writing in the presence of their children. In demonstrating and discussing the meaning in which literacy practices occur, fathers and mothers assist their children in understanding the function and purpose of print, as well as view the family as a profoundly interdependent unit.

Recommendations

It is essential that teachers help fathers understand the impact of parental influence on children. As teachers are asked for advice on techniques in engaging children's early literacy experiences, the following recommendations may help guide fathers to take an active role in children's reading and writing growth.

1. It is never too early to begin reading to children. The benefits of early book experiences include the following as outlined by Kupetz and Green (1997): helping infants focus their eyes and recognize objects, development of language, enhancement of listening skills, building sensory awareness, reinforcing basic concepts, stimulating the imagination, and extending experiences.

2. Teachers can assist fathers in identifying specific areas in their children's literacy development that require improvement, such as sentence construction, spelling, word recognition, and writing techniques. With this information, fathers can develop fun and interesting ways to help their children understand the connection that exists between printed words and the words' function. They can serve as literacy role models and provide the motivation and encouragement to read. In addition, fathers can be encouraged not only to attend parent teacher organization meetings, open house, and other school related functions but to share the significance of these activities by reading with their children upcoming events through letters, flyers, and memoranda sent home by the school.

3. Teachers can offer a choice of child-centered, hands-on literacy experiences that parents can engage in with children. This is because children learn best when they participate in activities they personally find enjoyable rather than those that are at a relatively low-interest level. For example, a fairly new area of research in joint parent-child literacy development is computer usage. Green, Ortiz, and Lim (2009) found that parents and their children, with the aid of computers, jointly participated in recreational games and other related software programs for lengthy time periods.

4. Families can start with informal and simple activities that may involve only one parent and the child, such as reading the weekly comic strip section or rented video box. A common

misconception is that the entire family must read together to instill in young children the importance of learning to read. Although this indeed is one method of motivating children, it is not the only way. Some parents may find group reading activities uncomfortable, particularly in families where reading is infrequent, where parents work late or off-shifts or where households consist of a single parent.

5. Fathers can take advantage of spontaneous and incidental reading activities that occur during the course of the day, that is, spur of the moment events. One cannot help but notice the large amount of text and print that are deeply embedded in communities and which in all likelihood have caught the attention of the child. These types of reflex literacy opportunities can act as learning moments for both parent and child. For example, activities include children asking what the word S-T-O-P means on the red sign at the end of the street. It can also involve driving by a large semi-truck with the bright yellow *McDonalds* hamburger logo clearly visible two blocks away and spelling the word out for the child or simply responding when a child asks what it means when the car's speedometer reaches 60 MPH. Parents can read and explain these words and numbers to their children to help them understand that print not only has meaning but that it serves a function.

6. Parents should be responsive to children's questions on the meaning of words and other printed materials that adults may, otherwise, find uninteresting. Children learning to read are often curious about print that parents take for granted or ignore. Examples include mail (particularly junk-mail), TV guides, newspapers, magazines, labels, instructions, flyers, letters, restaurant menus, and the Sunday funnies. To children, these are important examples of print because they often contain child-centered topics with graphics.

7. Most importantly, fathers must be patient and allow children to become comfortable in a world filled with print. Children constantly observe adults engaged in activities such as reading and writing that they do not yet fully understand. As a result they will ask many questions. Respond with answers at the child's level. Explain to children how print will serve their purpose and how they can

interact with words in fun and interesting ways. It takes but a few minutes to help children make sense of the print around them.

In conclusion, much of the research on parent involvement in children's early literacy development tends to focus on the mother's role. Studies suggest an increase of father participation in children's development not only in the United States but in other countries as well, yet the number of involved fathers in early literacy practices continues to be low. The effects of highly involved fathers have a positive impact on children, such as achievement motivation, language and literacy competency, and cognitive improvement. Moreover, there is evidence that fathers who are involved in early literacy practices tend to motivate children to read. Parents play a significant role in the education of their young children. Encouraging and supporting parents' efforts in helping their children take their first steps toward learning to read and write is a goal well worth achieving.

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