The Fathers for School Readiness project

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Some background work
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The *Fathers for School Readiness* project

- A long term strategy by The University of Newcastle for increasing participation in Higher Education

- Targets the early years

- A focus on fathers’ contribution to children’s development

- Information and practical strategies for school readiness offered to fathers, mothers and educators
Percentage of low SES students attending university

- University of Newcastle: 28%
- Australian average: 16%
Why early years?

Rates of return to human capital investment

- Preschool programs
- Schooling
- Job training

Rate of return to investment in human capital vs. Age

Opportunity cost of funds
Fathers’ contribution to children’s development

- General impact of fathers on children’s development
  - If the father is sad
  - If the father is overweight
  - If the father is involved
Fathers’ impact on child development

- If the father was depressed (K6 > 12)
- Children three times as likely to have behaviour problems
- Twice as likely after controlling for early maternal depression and later paternal depression


(Same results were found by Ramchandani 2005 in The Lancet for UK children)
The risk of child becoming obese?

Fathers

- **4.18** (95% CI: 1.01–17.33) If your father was overweight
- **14.88**, (95% CI: 2.61–84.77) If your father was obese

Mothers no effect

Father’s contribution to school success

- Fathers teaching at age 2 predicts children’s reading and maths scores
- Tasks: threading beads or standing on one leg
- Father–child interaction predicts
  - Vocabularies at ages 5, 7, and 10
  - Maths skills at ages 5 and 7

Father’s contribution to school success

- How often fathers
  - Sang songs, read stories, told stories, and took child to a museum

- Children tested in 5th Grade
  - Reading
  - Maths

- Fathers’ involvement predicts
  - Language, reading, and maths skills

Father’s contribution to school success

- Fathers’ and mothers’ interaction with preschoolers
- Teachers assess the children

- The most competent and least problematic children
  - fathers are sensitive and supportive of their children’s autonomy
  - mothers’ parenting beliefs support self-directed child behavior
  - parents have an emotionally intimate relationship

School readiness

- Reading
- Maths
- General knowledge
School readiness – essential skills

Wait your turn

Co-operate
A very popular resource

First Year at School
Getting off to a good start

Your child’s

Jenni Connor and Pam Linke

A guide for parents
School readiness

- Reading
- Maths
- General knowledge
- Self regulation
Self regulation
The brain connection

Rules + Wishes + Data
Self regulation

1. If Simon says....
2. I want to do it right
3. She didn’t say Simon says
Self regulation is learnt from day 1
But the preschool period is key

- Working memory
- Delay response
- Motor co-ordination
Mammals develop self regulation through Rough & Tumble Play
R&TP in mammals

- Wrestling, grappling, kicking, and tumbling
- Dominance swapping
- Play signals
- Different from fighting
R&TP experiments with RATS

- Can touch and smell
  but...
No R&TP
leads to..
- Poor social skills
- Poor problem solving
R&TP alters DNA methylation status in the developing brain

Auger AP, Jessen HM, Edelmann MN (2010) Epigenetic organization of brain sex differences and juvenile social play behavior. Horm Behav, 10.1016/j.yhbeh.2010.06.017
R&TP in humans

- Human toddlers start R&TP between 2 and 3 years of age
- Quality Father – child R&TP is associated with fewer behaviour problems
- Intense learning of self regulation in R&TP

Self Regulation

- Fathers interaction with young children can change the connections in their brain
Including fathers for school readiness

- Reading
- Maths
- General knowledge
- Self regulation
Fathers for School Readiness

- Information evenings for fathers, mothers and educators.
- Literacy and Play Activity Workshops for fathers and their children
- Information distributed through professional and public media
Two key areas for fathers

Literacy

Physical play
Two important aims for the Fathers for School Readiness project

1. Make it father-specific (and active)
2. Make it wonder-based
Generic programs struggle to recruit dads

The Triple P-Positive Parenting Program is widely reported as an effective, evidence-based program for parents.

- Few dads attend
- Many drop out
- Fathers’ parenting not improved as much as mothers’
Raising Clever Kids – A Father’s Contribution

The Family Action Centre
University of Newcastle
The wonder of learning
"Between the age of two and six..."

- most children will learn more than 10,000 words
- The level of vocabulary directly predicts success in literacy
- Children learn to regulate their behaviours
- They can stop action
- They can switch focus

Talking boosts Literacy
Rough & Tumble Play boosts Self regulation
The wonder of learning
“Between the age of two and six...”

TEST ONE
Red Orange Green
Yellow Pink Orange
Green Orange Blue
Pink Blue Yellow Green
Red Blue Pink Green
Pink Yellow Orange
Red Yellow Pink Green

TEST TWO
Pink Orange Red
Orange Blue Green
Yellow Pink Blue Red
Green Yellow Blue Red
Pink Orange Blue
Green Blue Red Pink
Orange Red Green

Stroop Test
They can switch focus
A useful resource
The Engaging Families in the ECD Story is a national project supported and funded by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC).

The project supports the reform priority under the National Early Childhood Development Development Strategy to engage parents and the community in understanding the importance of early childhood.

Led by the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development.

ARACY is helping develop a social marketing campaign.
For educators

Fathers for School Readiness

by Dr. Jennifer McGeorge and Dr. Richard Fielder
Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle

Self-regulation is an important component of school readiness. When educators and researchers talk about self-regulation, they usually mean a person's ability to control and manage thinking and feeling as part of the learning process. Children who display balanced and consistent self-regulation have higher achievement, language, and social outcomes (NICHD, 2005).

Various studies have confirmed that positive parenting practices, such as supporting children's curiosity and encouraging affection for the child, are linked to their capacity to self-regulate their behaviors and emotions, as well as to their cognitive and intellectual development (Deater-Deckard & Pollio, 2004). Similarly, most of these studies have focused on mothers' influence, yet there is now increasing acceptance that fathers are central to children's development, and their influence may be separate to that of mothers (Pasquale, 2004).

So, give kids being ready to cope with school life separate on socio-emotional competence, language skills, and physical activity. What do fathers do that helps their child move successfully from home to school?

Fathers' Role and Contribution to School Readiness

Building Social-Emotional Competence

A key component of school readiness is the child's ability to recognize and manage their own emotions. Children who throw tantrums or have emotional outbursts have not learned how to do this! Children also need to be able to recognize and understand other people's emotions.

Research has shown that father-child interactions with their children, in particular, are important in learning to regulate emotions. Parental attentiveness and support can enhance children's positive social interactions with peers (Hart & Risley, 1995); and it also helps their children make good relationships with peers and teachers (NICHD, 2005). An important factor here is Dad's social skills. Teaching humor, fun, and physical rough-and-tumble may help the child to develop mental strategies such as perspective-taking and emotion management.
Handout for parents

Get resources from the website
New Postgraduate Programs in Family Studies

In 2013 The University of Newcastle is introducing Graduate Certificate and Masters programs in Family Studies, featuring the option of a specialisation in Working with Men and Fathers.

Engaging Men and Fathers in Human Services: Theory and Practice
(http://www.newcastle.edu.au/course/HLSC6503.html)

Father – Infant Attachment and Co-Parenting: Theory and Intervention
(http://www.newcastle.edu.au/course/HLSC6504.html),

Working with Fathers in Vulnerable Families
(http://www.newcastle.edu.au/course/HLSC6505.html)

Will provide an evidence-based, practical understanding of how to include men (fathers, uncles, boyfriends) in the services and programs aiming to support families.

These online courses will be available in 2013 as stand alone courses or through enrolment in new postgraduate programs in Family Studies.

If you haven’t already...

How father-baby bonding helps a child for life