

Topic: **Build child, family and community relationships that promote child development and learning.**

Stockall, N., & Dennis, L. (2013). Fathers' role in play: Enhancing early language and literacy of children with developmental delays. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41, 299-306. doi:10.1007/s10643-012-0557-2

Context

Involving parents in early literacy and play activities can have a significant impact on young children's later success in school. Teachers who communicate frequently with parents and actively invite parents to participate in literacy and play activities can make a critical difference in how parents support children for academic success. Researchers have studied the impact of parental involvement on child outcomes primarily with mothers; however, more research is focusing on the role the father can play in supporting his child's early language and literacy skills.

Purpose of the Article

The article provides recommendations for how special education teachers can involve fathers in supporting literacy and play development. A scenario between a father and his son is used to help illustrate how the special education teacher involved the father in his son's early education.

Activities for Father and Paternal Role Models that Encourage Early Literacy and Play

Researchers have documented that fathers and paternal role models (e.g., older brothers, uncles, neighbors) have unique ways of contributing to children's development. Their interactions may be more physical than the mother's interactions and include rough housing and tumble play (e.g., lifting the child, wrestling, chasing, jumping). These physical interactions may encourage risk taking behavior within a safe and secure relationship that "can result in increased obedience and competition skills in children" (p. 300).

By harnessing this style of interactions, fathers can enhance **early literacy activities** such as story read alouds by adding more active dramatic or pretend play games. Teachers can help fathers select books that lend themselves to more active play scenarios and that have meaning for the father and child. The authors provide a list of books that encourage adapted play, such as *Pete The Cat: I Love My New White Shoes*; *Guess Whose Shadow*; *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*; *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*; *Fire Truck*; and, *Dinosaur Roar*.

Fathers can also be encouraged to engage their children in **free play activities** that foster language development. Free play activities that connect vocabulary from the books that fathers have read are a good way of reinforcing language. Activities while playing with blocks, plastic dinosaurs in a sandbox, sidewalk chalk outdoors, or tag games can help fathers expand their children's vocabulary, early writing, and rhyming skills.

Fathers can also engage their children in **dramatic or pretend play activities**. The authors provide a list of dramatic play props that can encourage language development, such as props for a doctor's office, restaurant, woodworking, construction/farming, and office. Pretend play is especially important for teaching preschoolers symbolism (i.e., that one thing can stand for another) which helps set the stage for later reading.

Teachers can also share with fathers and other paternal role models play interventions for children with disabilities that have been proven effective by researchers. Several research-based play interventions are listed, including ways to increase motivation to play by tickling, laughing, and hugging the child; imitating the child's

behavior to encourage child engagement; and, using hand puppets to explain a story.

Conclusion

Fathers and paternal role models offer their children a unique way of playing and extending early reading skills. The authors provide ideas for teachers to use when inviting fathers to participate in their child's early education in the areas of storybook reading, free play, and pretend play.

About *Research-to-Practice Briefs*

Research-to-Practice Briefs provide summaries of key studies that inform practice related to early childhood special education. The series is designed specifically to support community college faculty who prepare candidates to work with children with special needs in the early childhood setting.

About the ACCEPT Project

The ACCEPT (Advancing Community College Efforts in Paraprofessional Training) Project is a federally-funded cooperative agreement between the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte College of Education. The focus of this effort is the inclusion of special education content in the coursework and experiences provided within the associate degree program in early childhood education at targeted state-supported community colleges in North Carolina.

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