booktrust
Inspiring a love of books

Evidence summary - The importance of reading with children frequently/ every day

The following document highlights key research from academic literature, government research and OECD reports on the importance and impact of reading frequently with children. For research which is open access, a link to the full report is included.

Educational benefits of reading everyday: language and literacy development

There is a large body of research which indicates a strong positive relationship between the frequency of book sharing and children's language and literacy development, and attainment at school:

- Regular and consistent reading to and with babies and young children in the home literacy environment was a key feature in those children who were reading in advance of their peers (Collins et al, 2005)
- The more children read, the more they progress: there is a relationship between reading frequency and children's cognitive and language skills in the first years of life (Raikes et al, 2006)
- Reading 3-5 days per week has the same effect on a child's reading skills at age 4-5 as being six months older. Reading to children 6-7 days per week has the same effect as being almost 12 months older (Kalb et al, 2012)
- U.S. Department of Education analysis found that "children who were read to at least three times a week by a family member were almost twice as likely to score in the top 25 percent in reading than children who were read to less than three times a week"(Denton, Kristen and Gerry West, 2002)
- Children of all backgrounds who were read to regularly by their parents at age 5 performed better in maths, vocabulary and spelling at age 16 than those who were not read to. (Sullivan and Brown, 2013)
- Fifteen-year-old students whose parents often read books with them during their first year of primary school showed markedly higher scores in the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluations than students whose parents read with them infrequently or not at all. The average difference was 25 points - equivalent to well over half a school year (PISA in Focus 2011/10, OECD see here)
- "The research shows that a child who is read to every day at age 3 has a vocabulary at age 5 that is 1.92 months more advanced than a child who has exactly the same observable characteristics (including income group), but who is not read to every day at age 3" (Washbrook and Waldfogel, 2010 available here)
- There are data that suggest half the deficit in readiness for school associated with low income can be reversed by reading to children daily. (Prof Marmot, BBC website, 2012 see here)
- There is a strong link between being read to frequently as a child and the likelihood that an individual will escape poverty; individuals who are poor at age 30 are significantly less likely to have been read to once a week at age 5 than those who escape poverty (Blanden, 2006)
- The embeddedness of literacy in everyday life is an important basis for the confidence which underpins later academic success' (Nutbrown, 1997 in Hall, 2001)

bookstart

Cumulative benefits of reading everyday:

- The hours add up: if daily reading begins in infancy, by the age of 5 the child is likely to have been exposed to books (including nursery rhymes, fairy tales, stories and vocabulary development) for roughly 900 hours. Conversely, if this experience is reduced to 30 minutes a week the child could lose out on 770 hours of education before starting school (US Department of Education, 1999 see here)

The need to increase reading frequency:

- UK children may be underperforming by international standards: the recently released results from the 2012 PISA report have reinforced concerns about reading achievement in relation to other countries (Wheater et al, 2013) and may lead to an intensified focus on promoting reading amongst children and young people.
- Most children are not currently reading every day: in the 2006 PIRLS study, just a third of 10 year olds surveyed reported reading for pleasure every day (Twist et al, 2007) and the 2009 PISA study found that about 40% of 15 year olds said they only read when obliged to do so (Bradshaw et al, 2010).

Pastoral benefits of reading everyday – improving relationships and well-being

Research indicates that reading to and sharing books with babies helps emotional bonding, and promotes strong and loving relationships and secure attachment. These bonds are key to developing the building blocks for positive emotional health and wellbeing in later life.

- An experiment focusing on Dutch children aged three years old found that children who were read to frequently were more likely to be securely attached than children who were read to infrequently (Bus, 1995)
- Daily reading can help with establishing a 'calming routine' (Hall, 2001)
- Research by Professor Yvonne Kelly (2011) suggests that if five-year-old children who are read to less than daily were instead read to on a daily basis there would be a substantial reduction in the proportion of five year- olds with socio-emotional difficulties.

References

Blanden, 2006. 'Bucking the trend': What enables those who are disadvantaged in childhood to succeed later in life? Department for Work and Pensions Working Paper 31. London: DWP

Bus, A.G. 1995. 'Mothers Reading to Their 3-Year-Olds: The Role of Mother-Child Attachment Security in Becoming Literate', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30(4): 998-1015

Collins, F and Svensson, C., 2005. Bookstart: Planting a seed for life

Denton, Kristen and West, (2002) Children's Reading and Mathematics Achievement in Kindergarten and First Grade, U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Washington, DC

Hall, e., 2001. 'Babies, books and "impact": problems and possibilities in the evaluation of a Bookstart project', *Educational review,* 53(1):57-64

Kalb et al . 2012. *Reading to young children: a head-start in life*

Kelly, Y., Sacker, A., del Bono, E., Francesconi, M. and Marmot, M. 2011 'What role for the home learning environment and parenting in reducing the socioeconomic gradient in child development? Findings from the Millennium cohort study', *arch dis child*, 96(9): 832-7

Raikes, H., et al. 2006. 'Mother–child book reading in low-income families: correlates and outcomes during the first three years of life', *Child development,* 77: 924-953

Sullivan, A & Brown, M (2013), Social Inequalities in Cognitive Scores at age 16: The Role of Reading. Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education)

US Department of Education . 1999. 'Start early finish strong: how to help every child become a reader', Washington DC

Washbrook and Waldfogel The Sutton Trust, 2010. Cognitive gaps in the early years. A summary of findings from the report 'Low income and early cognitive development in the UK'

Wheater, R., Ager, R., Burge, B. and Sizmur, J. 2013. National foundation for educational research achievement of 15-year-olds in England: PISA 2012 national report (OECD programme for international student assessment)