What is Literacy?

- Definitions of Literacy
  - Ability to read and write (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2003)
  - Reading, writing, other creative or analytic arts, and knowledge and skills in specific subject matter (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998)
Alternative Literacies

- Literacies represent ways of seeing, understanding and responding to problems and may include:
  - Linguistic (talking, reading & writing)
  - Mechanical (creating and building with tools)
  - Consumer (awareness of products and advertising)
  - Interactive ("reading" people)
  - Computer

Voss (1996)

Fathers and Literacy

- Important Questions
  - How does gender socialization influence the development of different literacies?
  - Are men less likely than women to value, model, and teach linguistic literacy to young children?
Review of Research

- What do we know about dads and early literacy?
  - What are the benefits of father involvement in early literacy?
  - What is the level of involvement in reading to young children?
  - What kinds of materials do fathers read?
  - Why do fathers engage in literacy activities?
  - What are some of the differences between mothers and fathers related to literacy?

Benefits of Fathers Reading to Children

- Flouri (2003)
  - Fosters emotional security
  - Aids relaxation
  - Vital means of transmitting shared values

- Green (2002)
  - Children are superior readers
  - Children perform better in school
  - Children have better relationship skills
Level of Fathers Involvement in Reading to Children

US Studies

- Brown et al. (2001) Children ages 3-12
  - 39% of resident fathers read at least once a week
  - 55% of resident mothers

- National Center for Fathering (1999) Fathers of children K-grade 12 read:
  - 25% every day
  - 23% 1-2 times a week
  - 40% never

Level of Father Involvement in Reading to Children

UK Studies

- Flouri & Buchanan (2003) Children age 7; parent reads most weeks
  - Fathers 37% of children
  - Mothers 50% of children

- National Literacy Trust (2003) ages 5-11 helped with reading at home
  - Fathers 50% of 5-7 year olds, 25% of 7-11
  - Mothers 75% of 5-7 year olds, 50% of 7-11
What do dads read?

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Dictionaries
- Maps
- Telephone Directories
- Manuals

Ortiz, 1999

What Dads Like to Read

Dennis the Menace

"When you're learnin' to read, it's best to start with the funny stuff!"
Why do Fathers engage in literacy activities?

- **Skill Building** - getting children ready for school - 60%

- **Bonding with children** - Comfortable and fun activity to share with child - 35%

Ortiz, 2000

Mother/Father Comparisons

- Dads are less certain about expected reading behaviors (Bus, et. al., 1997)
- Dads have less experience reading to children
- Dads are less inclined to participate in conventional print-related activities (Clark, 2005)
Mother/Father Differences

- Mothers more likely to recognize importance of early exposure to books
- Mother more likely to initiate book reading at various times throughout the day
- Fathers more likely to read only at bedtime
- Reading by fathers often delegated and supervised by mothers

Nichols, 2000

Fathers’ attitudes & behaviors

- Fathers are more likely to report a history of school failure in literacy
- Fathers more likely to dislike reading aloud
- Fathers are more likely to use strategies to shorten time spent reading

Nichols, 2000
Dads’ Reading Style

“You’re a better story reader than Daddy. He skips pages.”

“You’re overacting, Daddy.”
Characteristics of Dads Involved in Early Literacy Activities

- Fathers who share child rearing duties are more involved in child’s reading & writing (Ortiz et. al, 1999)
- Father’s reading habits provide a model for child (Clark, 2005)
- Father’s level of education is a factor (Gadsden & Ray, 2003)
- Fathers are more likely to be involved when the family context is positive (Clark, 2005)

Barriers to Father Involvement in Early Literacy

Group Exercise

What are the top 10 reasons that more dads are not more involved in reading and related early literacy activities?
Lessons from Practice Literature

- Teachers should not exclude or underestimate fathers
- Communicate directly with fathers
- Fathers may be unsure of where to begin with literacy activities
- Teachers may want to start with books with traditional male themes
- A broad view of literacies and valuing fathers abilities and interests can increase motivation

Karther (2002)
Fletcher & Dally (2002)

Major Conclusions about Fathers and Early Literacy

- Father involvement is an important factor in child’s learning and school success
- Fathers are involved in a number of formal and informal ways but less than mothers
- Fathers may be limited in knowledge and skills involved in supporting literacy
- Strategies to engage fathers should build on fathers’ interests and strengths
- Fathers’ attitudes and beliefs about literacy are important to consider
Fathers are an important and understudied resource for promoting literacy with young children

Adam@Home