

A degree of eloquence

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Children whose parents went to university are more advanced before they start primary school

THE language skills of children whose parents went to university are already 18 months more advanced than their peers before they start primary school, according to a major study.

Such a large gap at the age of only five illustrates the vital importance of the early years of a child's life.

According to the report, children with degree-educated parents are also 13 months ahead in problem-solving ability, compared to youngsters whose parents have no qualifications.

The study also found that simple activities, such as reading, drawing and singing nursery rhymes at the ages of two and three, produce a major benefit for children – and particularly for those from less-educated backgrounds.

The report, *Growing up in Scotland*, also highlighted the benefits of attending antenatal classes, breastfeeding and sending children to a private nursery school.

The research is part of a study, launched in 2005 by the Scottish Centre for Social Research, which gathered the experiences of 14,000 youngsters and their families, including attitudes towards children's services,

parenting, childcare, healthcare and education.

Angela Constance, the Minister for Children and Young People, said last night: 'Our priority is to create a fairer start for all, to provide the most important people in a child's journey, their parents and carers, with the right support.'

'That work includes encouraging parents to play, talk and read to their children every day to give them the best start in life.'

'The aim of the Play Talk Read campaign is to make parents and carers, particularly those in deprived areas, aware of how interacting can stimulate and promote child development. These early experiences provide the essential skills, motivation and capabilities that will last a lifetime.'

'We will also engage with parents, carers and professionals in the coming months to

create a comprehensive national parenting strategy which will support all parents, regardless of their circumstances.'

The report states: 'The largest differences in ability are between children whose parents have higher and lower educational qualifications.'

'At age five, compared with children whose parents have no qualifications, those with a degree-educated parent are around 18 months ahead on vocabulary and 13 months ahead on problem-solving ability.'

The study concludes: 'To ensure that children's cognitive ability is maximised in the pre-school period, our findings suggest that, in the home, strategies should focus on the quality of the parent-child relationship and the frequency of home learning activities.'

'By improving children's cognitive ability

ahead of their entry to primary school, there is a greater likelihood they will achieve better educational and employment outcomes over the longer term.'

The report revealed that 66 per cent of parents with no qualifications smoked between their child's birth and their third birthday, compared to only 11 per cent of degree-educated parents.

Similarly, only 24 per cent of parents with no qualifications breastfed their child, compared to 84 per cent of university-educated parents.

Scottish Conservative education spokesman Liz Smith said: 'There are some worrying statistics here. They clearly tell us we need to do much more to address the gap in educational attainment levels between children whose parents come from different educational backgrounds.'

'In particular, we need to provide more help for children whose parents have few or no qualifications and who find it difficult to help their families learn the basic skills.'

'We should be conscious of the fact that the local authorities which have given additional focus to reading, writing and arithmetic in the early years of primary school have had a good level of success in raising standards across all pupil categories, including those in more disadvantaged groups and where teachers have worked with families to provide good support programmes at home.'

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Daily Mail 9/6/11.