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Review of Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED): Leader's Guide

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Review of *Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED): Leader's Guide*

Abstract

There is a growing need for science-based, effective programs that enhance child-father relationships. This article reviews *Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED): Leader's Guide*. The authors found FRED to be clearly research-based, to address the need to improve father-child relationships, to have limited empirical evidence of program effectiveness, and to be ready for busy Cooperative Extension agents and other professionals to use. It is recommended that further pretest-posttest, experimental-control group studies be conducted on its effectiveness.

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The Need for Programs That Involve Fathers

Research indicates that children fare better when fathers are involved in their lives, and current trends indicate this relationship may be interrupted. Births to unwed parents have increased from 5% in 1960 to 32% in 1995, and only 68% of children lived with two parents in 1996 (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1997). In 1998, 22.9 million children under 21 years lived with a custodial parent while their other parent lived elsewhere (U.S. Census, 2000). Eight-five percent of those families were headed by the mother.

Studies suggest that for non-residential fathers, it is the quality of interactions with children that is important rather than time (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Reading to children provides an atmosphere for quality interactions between fathers and their children, and the benefits are evidenced by multiple outcomes. Academic benefits include improved cognitive abilities, self-esteem, competence, expressive language development, and less school delinquency (Bronstein, Stoll, Clauson, Abrams, & Briones, 1994; Clark, 2005; Magill-Evans & Harrison, 2001; Marsiglio et al., 2000). Meanwhile, inadequate paternal involvement is related to poorer academic achievement and cognitive abilities, which transcends the effects of low socioeconomic status (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). Paternal involvement also has positive psychological effects, including less depression, higher self-esteem, and fewer behavior problems (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Bronstein et al.; Marsiglio et al.).

In the home, only 57% of children aged three to five are read to every day by a family member (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1997), and fathers unfortunately tend to read to their children less often than do mothers (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). The *Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)* 4-week program aims to meet two objectives related to this problem: (1) to improve children's reading skills and academic performance through reading and paternal involvement and (2) to strengthen the emotional bond between fathers and their children (Green, 2004).

Evaluation Criteria

The *Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED): Leader's Guide* was reviewed using four evaluation criteria:

- Is this curriculum clearly research based?
- Does this curriculum address the needs of child-father relationships and child literacy as identified in the research literature?
- Is there empirical evidence of program effectiveness for improving the father-child relationship and child literacy?
- Are the materials ready for busy Cooperative Extension agents and other parent educators to use?

Program Description

Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED): Leader's Guide was originally developed by Lynn Bourland White and Stephen Greene in 2001 at the Texas Cooperative Extension at Texas A&M University System (S. Green, personal communication, March 27, 2006). The program was titled after Fred Bourland, who read to his children as they grew up (Green, 2004). The program is targeted to fathers (and father figures) of young children and can be adopted for use with other male role models if the father is not present (Green, 2002).

The materials are sensitive to ethnic diversity, including the graphics. The authors suggest contact with libraries to obtain books in languages needed for the population served. The program can encourage literacy for fathers who speak English as a second language (Green, 2003). Complimentary Spanish materials are available.

Green (2004) provides a 14-page curriculum with supplements. The curriculum justifies the program using empirical evidence. It provides information about target audiences and program structure. It also provides guidelines for planning, implementing, and evaluating the FRED program, including finding a location, contacting donors, conducting events, data entry and analysis, and practical tips.

Program implementation and evaluation are especially easy. The guide comes with pre-made overheads and informative handouts. Summary reports are available to evaluators who enter pre- and exit-intervention data on the FRED website.

Key teaching strategies include informal classes and an emphasis on self-guidance. The authors target both the parent and child. They utilize lecture, handouts, and transparencies for teaching. The format of the class allows its use in conjunction with other programs and settings. Community collaboration is encouraged with educational institutions and local libraries. The curriculum is implemented with two face-to-face events and information sheets that are mailed weekly. The program costs \$240.00. No formal training is needed because the facilitator guide is self-explanatory. The leader's guide covers organizing, planning, recruiting participants, involving donors, implementing, and evaluating the program.

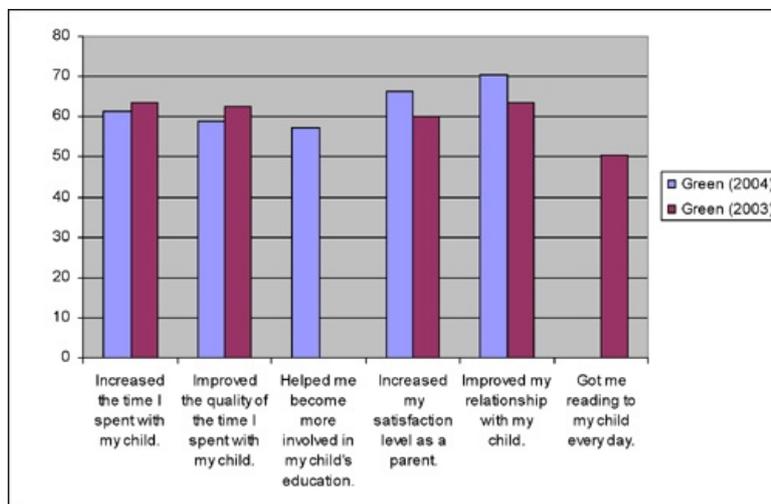
Evaluation Conclusions and Ordering Information

The curriculum was evaluated on four criteria:

- Is it clearly research based? Yes. All materials are provided with documented references.
- Does it address the need to improve father-child relationships and reading together as identified in the research literature? Yes. The program evaluations provide support that the program does increase quality time between fathers and children, improved relationship, and involvement in education.
- Does it have empirical evidence of program effectiveness? Yes. While no control group was utilized, two published studies of the program effectiveness are provided. Two studies by Green (2003, 2004) provide preliminary results for improvements in relationship quality and educational involvement for fathers and their children (cf. Fig. 1). In both studies, the highest reported gain was that involvement with FRED "improved my relationship with my child." Further pretest-posttest, experimental-control group studies are needed.
- Is it ready for busy Cooperative Extension agents and other parent educators to use? Yes. The materials are ready to use. Copies of the handouts for parents need to be obtained prior to the first face-to-face event.

Figure 1.

Percentage of Fathers Reporting Positive Outcomes as a Result of Involvement in the Fathers Reading Every Day Program



Further information about the curriculum and ordering is available from Texas Cooperative Extension by contacting Stephen Green at (979) 458-4224 or via email at s-green@tamu.edu.

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