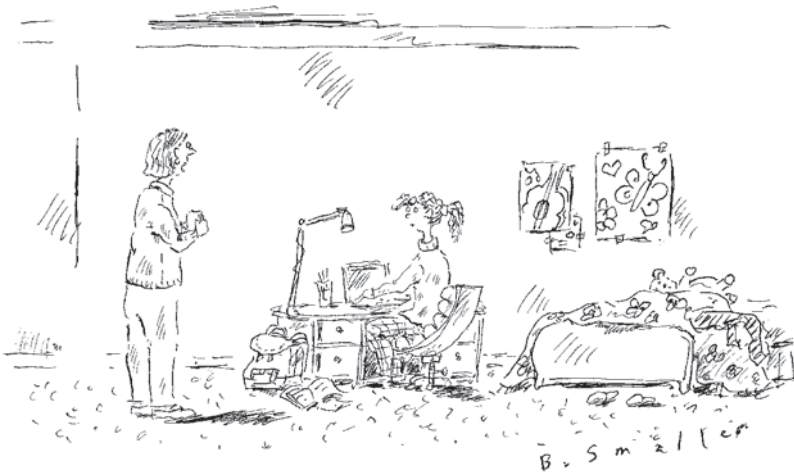




3

## Talk with Your Children about the World around Them

Older children benefit from their parents' involvement, too. This chapter discusses how talking about social and political issues, or about books, films and television programmes with adolescent children is related to better reading performance at school.



*"It's you who don't understand me—I've been fifteen, but you have never been forty-eight."*



Some parents believe that once their child begins formal schooling, only teachers are responsible for educating them. But education is a shared responsibility; and results from PISA show that even older students benefit when their parents are actively engaged in their education. And, as it turns out, that involvement doesn't even have to be directly related to school work.

To find out what types of parental involvement are beneficial to older students, PISA asked parents how frequently they discussed political or social issues, or had discussions about books, films or television programmes with their 15-year-old children. Parents were also asked whether they eat the main meal with their child around a table; whether they go to a bookstore or library with their child; whether they talk with their child about what he/she is reading on his/her own; and whether they spend time just talking with their child.

In general, 15-year-olds whose parents show an active interest in their lives and thoughts are more proficient in reading. As with parent-child activities when children are very young, some types of parental engagement with older children are more strongly associated with better reading proficiency than others. For example, talking with 15-year-olds is more beneficial than going to the library or to a bookstore with them. Students seem to benefit particularly from discussions with their parents about political or social issues. In all countries and economies, students whose parents discuss social or political issues with them perform better than students whose parents do not. This relationship is strong in some countries, including Italy, where the difference in PISA scores between those students whose parents discuss these kinds of issues with them and those students whose parents do not is 42 points,

### Box 3.1 **Worldwide: Reggio Emilia approach**

The Reggio Emilia approach is an educational philosophy that privileges the natural development of the child and his or her relationship with the outside environment. The involvement of parents and communities is at the very core of the philosophy.

The approach was born in the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy, in the aftermath of the Second World War. As parents and communities worked together to reconstruct schools for their young children, they developed a pre- and basic school programme now adopted by many institutions around the world.

According to the Reggio Emilia philosophy, **parents are considered to be the “first teachers”**. The “second teachers” are classroom teachers; the “third teacher” is the environment. Consequently, parents are involved in every aspect of schooling: they are invited to participate in schools' decision-making processes; they participate in the discussions on school policies, curricula and assessments; they are regularly apprised of their child's progress in school and, in turn, are asked to report on their child's learning experiences at home; and they are often involved in students' activities and projects. Parents often participate in classroom activities and they are encouraged to apply Reggio Emilia principles at home. Meetings are usually held after working hours so more parents can attend.

<http://zerosei.comune.re.it/inter/index.htm>

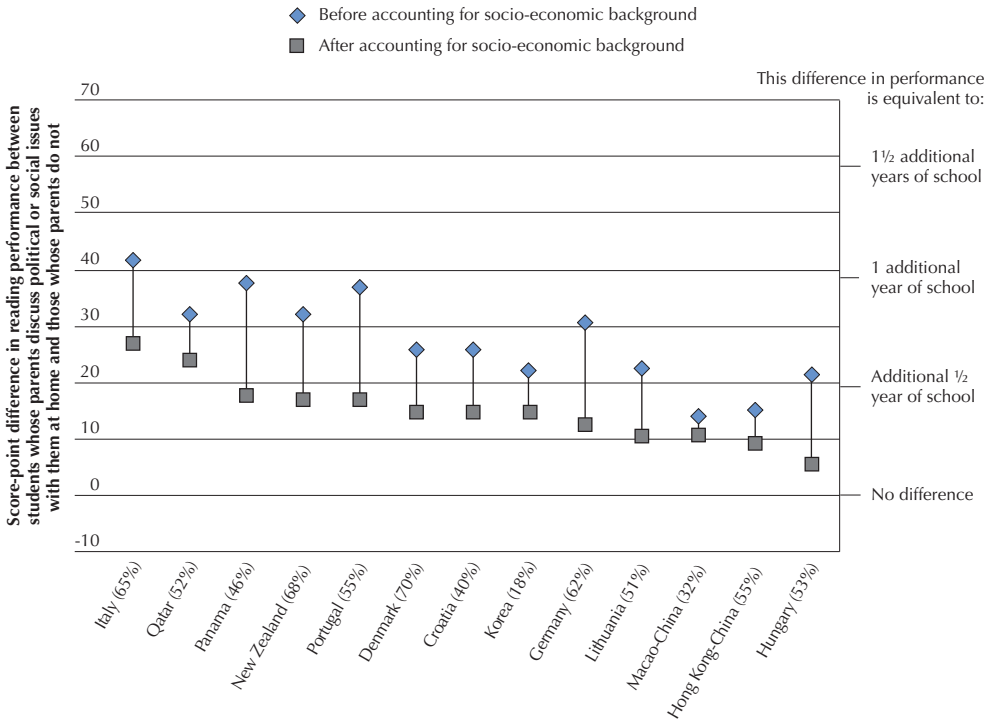


Panama (38 points), Portugal (37 points), New Zealand and Qatar (32 points). Given that 39 score points in PISA is the equivalent of one year of formal schooling, this result confirms that parents don't have to spend long hours or have specialised knowledge to make a substantial difference in their children's reading proficiency. All it requires is a parent's genuine interest in his or her child and in the world around them.

In all countries and economies except for Hungary and Lithuania, students who discuss books, films and television programmes with their parents also show better reading performance. This relationship is especially strong in Italy, New Zealand, Portugal and Qatar, where students who discuss these subjects with their parents score over 25 points higher, on average, than students who do not.

■ Figure 3.1 ■

### Teenagers who have regular discussions with their parents about political and social issues are proficient readers



Note: The percentage of parents who discuss political or social issues with their child is shown in parentheses after the country/economy name.

Countries/Economies are ranked in descending order of the difference in reading performance after accounting for socio-economic background.

Source: Table A3.1.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932606473>



These relationships are evident, but not as strong, even after accounting for differences in students' socio-economic backgrounds. That might be because more advantaged students tend to have more involved parents and/or that parental involvement is an attribute of socio-economic advantage and so is one of the ways in which socio-economic background influences reading performance. Still, in all countries and economies, students from similar backgrounds who discuss political or social issues with their parents achieve higher reading scores than students who don't discuss these issues with their parents. In New Zealand, Panama, Portugal and Qatar, this difference in performance is greater than 15 score points.

PISA also finds that students who discuss political and social issues with their parents enjoy reading more than students who don't. This might be because students who inherently enjoy reading tend to have these kinds of discussions with their parents. Whatever the reason, the strength of this association

### Box 3.2 Israel: Family as Educator<sup>1</sup>

Following a research project run in the 1990s, some schools in Israel adopted the use of “probes” to encourage parental involvement in education. Probes are interview questions on a specific topic that are used to **prompt discussion**. For example, questions related to the topics “family stories” and “family foods” include discussions about different modes of celebration and different styles based on the family's ethnic origin. Every holiday is celebrated with its own typical foods; and every ethnic group of Jewish immigrants uses different types of foods at the same holiday. This provides the basis for discussions between parents and students.

These probes were used as a basis for **curriculum units**, such as the Family Album, or the Bible Family Curriculum. The Family Album is begun in first grade and developed throughout the six years of primary school. It is based on the “family photographs” and “naming” probes. For this programme, families are asked to collect photographs and write accompanying stories in a special album. The Bible Family Curriculum, still used in around 20 schools, combines several probes, such as “family stories”, “family rituals”, “family foods”, “family home” and “child's room”, to trigger discussions at home about issues raised in the Bible. It makes the Bible more accessible and relevant to students by drawing similarities between biblical family stories and stories from the child's own life.

The initial research project, and development of the subsequent programmes and curricula, were funded by the school where the experiential work took place and by several foundations: the Jewish Agency for Israel, The Metro-West Jewish Federation, the Hadassah Organization, and the Jewish National Fund in Israel. Additional funding is raised by selling curriculum units to various educational agencies and schools.

An evaluation conducted at the end of the research project showed that it raised awareness among parents about their role as educators. The school climate also improved, with more positive relations between schools, students and their parents; and the academic achievement of students who participated in the programme was higher than that of children who did not participate.



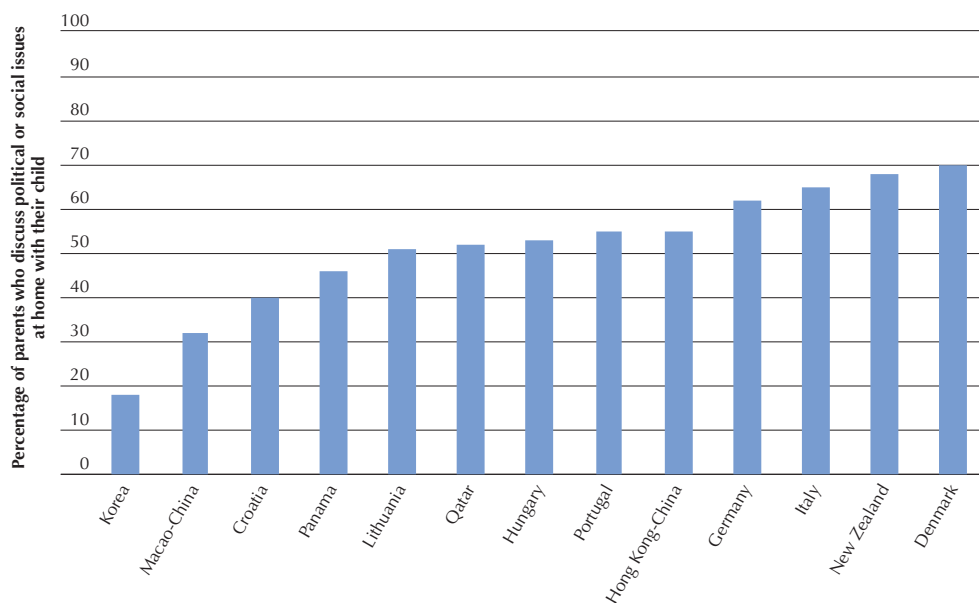
transcends socio-economic background. In all countries and economies, students from similar backgrounds whose parents discuss political or social issues with them enjoy reading more. This relationship is particularly strong among students in Germany, Italy, Korea, Lithuania and New Zealand.

Talking with older children about complex subjects, such as political or social issues, also appears to be associated with students having greater awareness about effective learning strategies, in this case, how to summarise information acquired through reading. In all PISA-participating countries and economies, students whose parents discuss social or political issues with them are more aware of these kinds of strategies. This relationship is particularly strong in Denmark, Italy, Korea, Panama and Portugal.

This relationship might simply reflect the likelihood that more advantaged students – who are more likely to have these kinds of discussions with their parents – are more aware of effective summarising strategies than their disadvantaged peers. But analysis of PISA results shows that in Denmark, Italy, Korea, Lithuania, New Zealand, Panama and Portugal, when students from similar backgrounds are compared, those who discuss political or social issues with their parents are more aware of effective strategies to summarise information than students who do not engage in these kinds of discussions with their parents.

■ Figure 3.2 ■

### Talk about political and social issues with your teenage child



Countries/Economies are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of parents who discuss social or political issues with their child.

Source: Table A3.1.

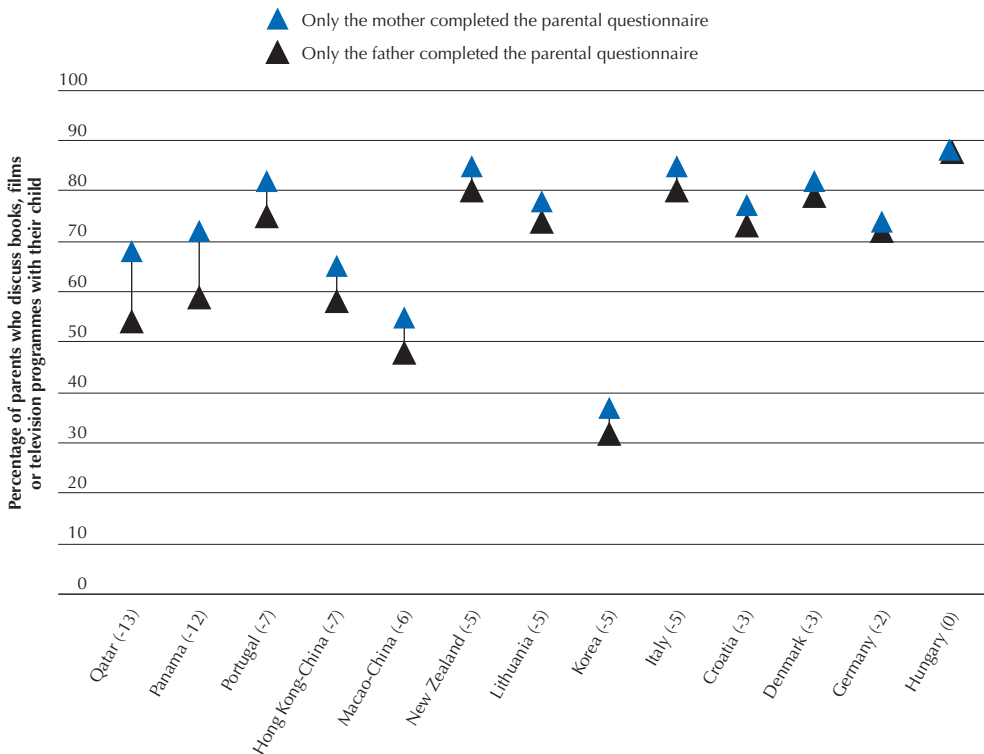
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On average across the countries and economies that are examined in this report, about half of the parents reported that they discuss social or political issues with their children. Around two-thirds of parents in Denmark, Italy and New Zealand discuss such topics with their 15-year-old children, but only around a third of parents in Korea and Macao-China does. On average, advantaged parents are around 20 percentage points more likely than disadvantaged parents to discuss political or social issues with their children. This difference is particularly large in Germany, Italy and Portugal. Parents in advantaged households are, on average, also more likely than other parents to discuss books, films or television programmes with their 15-year-old children.

■ Figure 3.3 ■

### Moms and dads: Encourage your teenagers to share their thoughts on what they read and watch



Note: The difference between the percentage of fathers who completed the parental questionnaire and discussed books, films or television programmes with their child, and the percentage of mothers who did is shown in parentheses after the country/economy name.

Countries/Economies are ranked in descending order of the difference between the percentage of fathers who completed the parental questionnaire and discussed books, films or television programmes with their child, and the percentage of mothers who did.

Source: Table A3.2.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932606511>

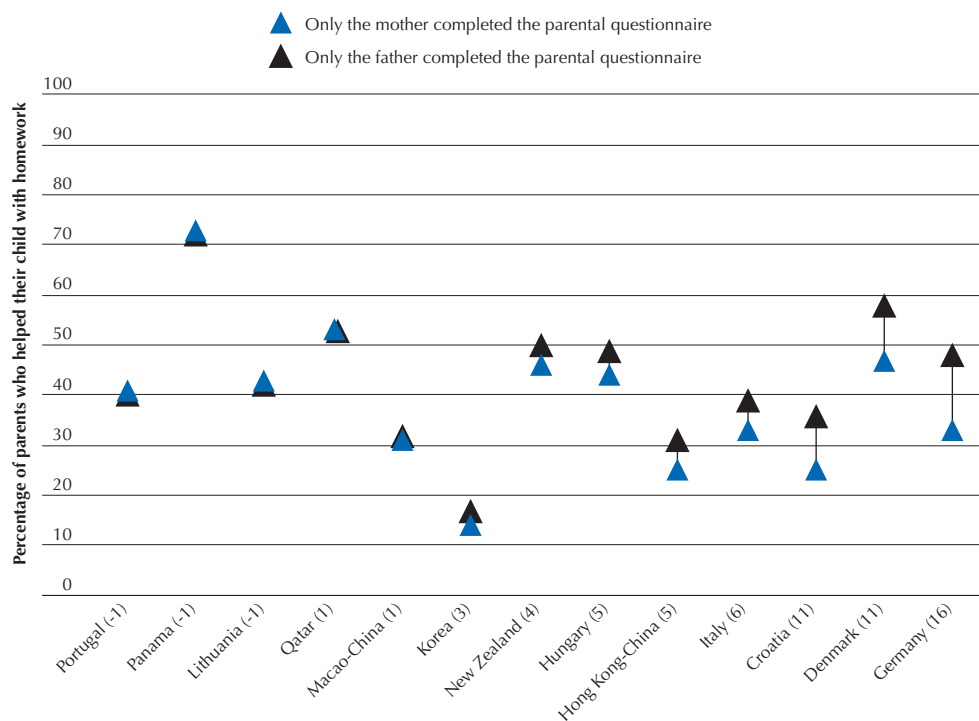


Schools, too, seem to make a difference to whether or not parents are involved in their child's education. For example, parents whose 15-year-old children attend advantaged schools are more likely to discuss social and political issues with their children than parents of similar socio-economic backgrounds whose children attend schools with a largely disadvantaged student body. This may be because parents are more encouraged – or pressured – to be involved in their child's education by other parents and teachers in schools whose student body is predominantly advantaged. Or it might be because these schools attract parents who are keen to be involved in their child's education.

Mothers are slightly, but consistently, more likely to discuss books, films or television programmes with their children, talk with their children about what they are reading on their own, discuss how well their children are doing at school, and just spend time talking with their children than fathers are. In eight of the countries and economies considered in this report, however, fathers are more likely than mothers

■ Figure 3.4 ■

### You don't have to be an expert in a subject to help your child with homework



Note: The difference between the percentage of fathers who completed the parental questionnaire and helped their child with his/her homework, and the percentage of mothers who did appears in parentheses after the country/economy name.

Countries/Economies are ranked in ascending order of the difference between the percentage of fathers who completed the parental questionnaire and helped their child with his/her homework, and the percentage of mothers who did.

Source: Table A3.3.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932606530>



to help their children with their homework – an activity that, in most families, means helping struggling students. This suggests that many fathers are able and willing to be engaged in their child's education despite the still-prevalent notion that it's the mother's role to be more involved with the couple's children. Still, fathers generally appear to get involved only reactively, such as when their child appears to be faltering at school. As this report shows, earlier involvement – by both parents – can prevent poor student outcomes and promote overall student well-being.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Having open discussions with adolescents about social and political issues, books, films, music and other cultural expressions and events allows children to develop informed opinions and helps to improve their critical thinking. Children may also find that they enjoy reading more when they have parents who want to hear about what they have just read. This kind of parental involvement can take place during the family meal, for example, and requires only as much time as parents have to devote to an engaged discussion with their children.

### WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO?

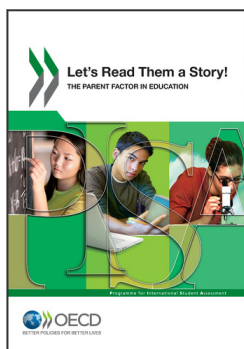
Teachers can help to promote parents' involvement at home even when this form of involvement is unrelated to what happens in school; parent-teacher partnerships need not be restricted to school-based activities. When teachers have trusting relationships with parents they can share with parents their knowledge about their students, their aspirations, needs and preferences. By so doing teachers can help their students and their students' parents develop common ground on which to build an open relationship. Teachers can also support and inform parents on how best to engage with their children at home and develop engaging conversations with them. Teachers can also engage in open discussions with the students directly, whenever parents face constraints that make regular involvement with their children difficult.





## Note

1. Serok, E. (2004), *The Family as Educator – Using the Cultures, Traditions and Heritages of Families as Enrichment Resources for an Israeli School: An Educational Chronicle*, Proquest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan.



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