



## Research Briefs

### Books: The Gateway to Education

As parents of a gifted child, you are surely interested in his or her education. However, education need not stop at the classroom door. In fact, a recent multi-national study by Australian and American researchers found that the number of books in the home is associated with large education attainment differences. The fact that the number of books in the home is related to subsequent educational outcomes is hardly surprising. But how much so might grab your attention.

#### How Many Books?

According to the survey, 10% of those responding worldwide grew up without any books at home, whereas 18% reported having hundreds of books. On average, there were 112 books in each home. In the U.S., 3% reported having no books in the home, with the average number of books being the same as the worldwide average of 112. The authors report that, given the relative wealth and high education levels within the U.S., they expected American book ownership to be higher.

#### Books and Education Differences

Overall, children who grew up in homes without any books averaged about seven years of education whereas children who grew up with a reported 500 books averaged about 14 years worth of education—twice the number of years.

#### The Importance of Books

To put the importance of books in perspective, the authors looked at the education gains from other important factors such as parent education and place of birth. The education difference between growing up with 500 books at home instead of having no books at home was about 3.2 years of additional education. This was about the same as the difference as having your parents be college graduates instead of them having only 3 years of education. Your country of birth is also commonly considered an important factor in how much education you will receive. However, the researchers found that growing up in a rich country was only associated with receiving about 2 years more of education than those growing up in poorer nations.

Put another way, growing up in a house with many books was associated with being 19% more likely to earn a college degree than a similar child who did not have books at home. However, gains are not spread equally; having more books is associated with larger education differences when parents have less education themselves. If parents have graduated from college, then having more books appears less strongly associated with children's education attainments. But, even among parents who are college graduates, the number of books in the home still matters. Consider the following: in families with parents who graduated from college and had:

- No books in the home: 21% of children graduated from college.
- About 75 books in the home: 48% of children graduated from college.
- About 500 books in the home: 58% of children graduated from college.

## Further Reading

To read the full report, Scholarly culture and educational success in 27 nations visit:

<http://arts.anu.edu.au/sikora/ScholarlyCulturein27nations.pdf>.

—*Matthew C. Makel*

*Matthew Makel is a Gifted Education Research Specialist at Duke TIP and the editor of DGL.*

Duke University TIP. 1121 West Main Street, Durham, NC 27701-2028. Phone: (919) 668-9100. Fax: (919) 681-7921. Visit the [contact us](#) page if you have questions.  
For website concerns, contact the [webmaster](#).  
Copyright © 2010 Duke University Talent Identification Program.