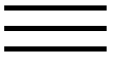


Boost your preschooler's brain power! An analysis of advice to parents from an Australian government-funded website.

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Synopsis

It is argued that expectations of mothers intensified over the course of the twentieth century, culminating in an ideology of intensive mothering, which many find difficult to meet. This intensification was a natural corollary of the widening definition of a mother's responsibilities towards her child over the last century. In this paper, I examine cultural messages communicated to parents concerning their responsibility for fostering their preschool child's cognitive development through an analysis of a selection of content downloaded from an Australian government-funded parenting website. The analysis shows that the message that parents are responsible for fostering their preschool child's cognitive development pervades the analysed content. It is conveyed through the *“pedagogic discourse”* of the content, by the discursive construction of parents as *“pedagogic subjects”* and bolstered by the scientific framework in which the

information and advice are embedded. This expectation demands intensive parenting practices, and it is directed at mothers to a far greater extent than fathers. This paper argues that early years parenting in Australia has become increasingly cognitively-focused and that the gender neutral "parent"™ is subject to the expectation that she should foster her child's cognitive development in the preschool years.



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Ciara Smyth is a researcher at the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. Ciara has expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methods and her research interests include parenting culture, gender, work and family and social policy.

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