PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT IN PRE-SCHOOL READINESS

By

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School readiness is the result of children’s direct and indirect interactions with environmental resources, and it is through those social relationships between children, peers, families, and teachers that children come to acquire the academic, language, and social emotional skills that prepare them to enter school. The purpose of this study was to investigate the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs fathers have about being involved in their pre-school children’s education. A review of the literature indicated that the topic of school readiness would benefit from the addition of information from this particular population. I contacted preschools in the local area as a venue through which to recruit fathers of children who were currently attending the preschool. Sixteen fathers responded and completed the questionnaire, providing information on their backgrounds, school readiness activities in which they engaged with their children, father/school interactions, barriers and support systems they had in place in regard to their relationship with their children and their priorities for their children.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

School readiness is a multidimensional concept which is the result of children’s direct and indirect interactions with environmental resources, and it is through those social relationships among children, peers, families, and teachers that children come to acquire the academic and social emotional competencies. School readiness is dependent not only on the qualities that children bring to the learning experience but also the context in which those experiences occur (Hair, Halle, Lavelle, & Calkins 2006; Mashburn & Pianta 2006; Pelletier & Brent 2002). Children’s level of academic readiness at school entry has continual indirect effects on later academic achievement and socioemotional adjustment. Lack of school readiness among children has been found to strongly predict employment difficulties, criminality, and psychological morbidity, as well as short-term academic problems (Connell, & Prinz, 2002; Pelletier, & Brent, 2002). As children’s first and most important teachers, parents provide the early learning experiences that promote life skills, abilities, and attitudes that are the foundation to school success (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Unfortunately, an important yet often overlooked target in the effort to increase parental involvement in early childhood programs has been fathers. Fathers provide specific resources that when absent cause key components of children’s development to be missed. Children from fatherless environments are less likely to
be adequately prepared for school as children whose fathers are actively involved in their education (Krohn & Bogan, 2001; McBride & Rane, 1997).

The focus of this thesis is the topic of school readiness as it relates to the involvement of fathers. The research question addressed in this study is: How do a selected group of fathers perceive their role in helping their preschool age children become ready for school? The next chapter presented in this thesis is a review of the literature which will challenge the past conception of school readiness as a measurable concept which is completely embedded in the child and present the model of school readiness that defines the concept as the environment through which children develop and the ways relationships within that environment shape children’s readiness to learn. Next, it explores the role that parents play in their children’s education and the ways in which they positively influence their children’s ability to learn. The next component of the literature review is the explanation of the role that fathers play in their children’s development and education. The importance of fathers’ influences is addressed as well as predictors and barriers to their involvement. Finally, the literature review ends with possible interventions to increase the involvement of fathers in their children’s education.

The third chapter of this thesis is the methodology which will provide a detailed description of the survey I used in order to collect data on fathers’ perceptions of their roles in helping their pre-school children become ready for
entrance into school. This chapter will also explain who the participants were, as well as how and why they were chosen. The survey used in this study was designed from a previous pilot project I conducted, and this chapter will describe that project and how it related to this study. The survey used for this project contained five sections: background information, school readiness activities, father/school interactions, barriers and supporters, and priorities, and in the methodology chapter I will describe the types of questions asked in each section and explain the relevance. Finally in this chapter I will explain the methods used to extract and analyze the results.

The fourth chapter of this thesis presents the results; data gathered on fathers’ perceptions of their roles in helping their pre-school children become ready for entrance into school followed by the fifth chapter which offers an analysis the data. The final chapter is provides conclusions, limitations of the research, and implications for future research.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A recent change in societal attitudes has caused a shift toward the belief that men should be more involved in caregiving and childrearing activities than in the past. Given this, there has also been a 360 degree turn in the focus of educational research from the involvement of fathers to the role played by mothers to finally back to the contributions of fathers. This review of literature describes the topic of school readiness as it relates to the involvement of fathers. The beginning of this review challenges the past conception of school readiness as a measurable concept which is completely embedded in the child. Additionally, it assesses a holistic model of school readiness that defines the concept as the environment through which children develop and the ways relationships within that environment shape children’s readiness to learn. Next, it explores the role that parents play in their children’s education and the ways in which they positively influence their children’s ability to learn. A major component of this literature review is the breakdown of the role that fathers play in their children’s development and education. The importance of fathers’ influences is addressed as well as predictors and barriers to their involvement. Finally, this review ends with possible interventions to increase the involvement of fathers in their children’s education.
School Readiness

Approximately 1.9 billion dollars is being spent on efforts to implement state-wide pre-kindergarten programs, large-scale initiatives, and pilot programs to provide high-quality preschool and early education programs for four-year-olds (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004). Policy makers and community members have recently pushed for increased information as to how to better use resources to improve the quality of school readiness programs (Pianta & La Paro, 2003). Some of the questions often discussed by parents and school staff about school readiness include how to know if children are ready for school and how to measure their level of readiness. These questions assume a common definition of readiness that can be measured and that such measurements accurately predict how well children will perform in school (Pianta & La Paro, 2003). Currently in educational research, a continuing controversy exists over how to define readiness with a major issue being that it cannot be defined as residing only in the child (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Definitions are important because how the term readiness is defined will affect later decisions about programs and policies related to early schooling (Pianta & La Paro, 2003).

School readiness is most commonly defined in terms of children’s assortment of skills once they enter school, such as their academic and cognitive proficiency, language and literacy capacity, and social-emotional functioning (Mashburn &
Pianta, 2006). The concept of readiness implies the mastery of certain basic skills or abilities that allow children to perform successfully in a school setting (Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle, & Calkins, 2006). Although kindergarten teachers value academic skills and capability, they have also indicated that social and task-oriented skills are indicators of children’s readiness for school, labeling these skills as indicators of how teachable a child is (Pianta & La Paro, 2003).

These standard definitions of school readiness do not identify or take into account the variety of environmental influences and processes that explain how children acquire the skills they need to be successful in school (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). A child-focused definition of school readiness is also limited because it fails to recognize children’s dependence on environmental opportunities within positive settings that add to the development of these competencies (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). The term school readiness should take into consideration the joint responsibility that families, communities, and schools share in providing beneficial environments that promote children’s learning (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews 2000). School readiness is a multidimensional concept and is not only dependent on the qualities that children bring to the learning experience but also the context in which those experiences occur (Hair et al., 2006).

A foundational theory in the recent development of the definition of school readiness is Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory (Comer, & Haynes, 1991;
The general concept of this theory is that during children’s lives development takes place through progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between children and their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The primary individuals and environmental influences with which children interact regularly over an extended period of time are their parents, but as children get older others such as siblings, peers, and teachers will act in this role (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

School readiness is the result of children’s direct and indirect interactions with environmental resources, and it is through those social relationships among children, peers, families, and teachers that children come to acquire the academic, language, and social emotional competencies that are so highly valued by educators (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006).

Children are ready for school when, for a period of several years, they have been exposed to consistent, stable adults who are emotionally invested in them; to a physical environment that is safe and predictable; to regular routines and rhythms of activities; to competent peers; and to materials that stimulate the exploration and enjoyment of the world and from which they derive a sense of mastery. These factors alone would be better indices of readiness for school than measurable aspects of child performance. (Pianta & Walsh, 1996, p. 34)
Thus, ecological definitions of school readiness have challenged the idea of defining the concept in such ways that focus solely on children’s attributes as they enter school. Instead, it is a multidimensional concept which includes not only the child but also the environment surrounding that child. Families and schools must be ready for the children to learn in order for the children to be ready (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews 2000). If we conclude that children’s skills are dependent and developed through interactions and relationships, then the assessments of school readiness require a different course of action and may focus on observations of their interactions in home and in school settings (Pianta & La Paro, 2003).

Early assessment of children’s readiness plays an important role in several aspects of their education, such as special education placement, ability grouping, and grade retention (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000). As states become more involved in early childhood education, there is a possible threat that the negative aspects of standard movements such as high stakes testing will descend to preschool and create more barriers to school entry (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000).

The next section offers an examination of the consequences suffered by children who are labeled as inadequately prepared to enter school.

Children who are unprepared for school.

Failure in school can begin as soon as preschool, and these problems are serious and have ongoing consequences (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthew, 2001).
Children’s early education experiences have long lasting effects on their academic achievement such as social development and behavioral competencies (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004). Their level of academic readiness at school entry has continual indirect effects on later academic achievement and socioemotional adjustment (Connell & Prinz, 2002). Experiences prior to school entry can be used to predict first-grade academic performance with the demonstration of cognitive skills developed at the end of pre-school (Downer & Pianta, 2006). Early academic problems place children at risk for grade retention and school dropout (Downer & Pianta, 2006). Children who experience failure early in their academic career are most likely to become inattentive, disruptive, or withdrawn from school (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Later, these same students are more likely to drop out of school early; engage in irresponsible, dangerous, and illegal behaviors; become teen parents; and depend on welfare and numerous public assistance programs for survival (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Lack of school readiness among children has been found to strongly predict employment difficulties, criminality, and psychological morbidity, as well as short-term academic problems (Pelletier & Brent, 2002).

The consequences of deficient early learning experiences build and become more serious over time (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). However, these consequences are unnecessary and preventable (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). A major force in helping children get prepared for school is their
parents. The next section explores the role that parents play not only in their children’s early development but more specifically their educations.

*Parental Involvement*

In March of 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the National Educational Goals as placed by the U.S. Department of Education. Goal number eight stated that by the year 2000 every school in the nation would have a program to promote partnerships that would increase parental involvement and participation in facilitating the social, emotional, and academic growth of young children (National Educational Goals Panel, 1994). Readiness for school is a developmental task that involves change and adjustment for both the children and their parents (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Teaching is an interactive and interpersonal process (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004). As children’s first and most important teachers, parents provide the early learning experiences that promote life skills, abilities, and attitudes that are the foundation to school success (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Positive reciprocal parent and child interactions facilitate cognitive development (Parker et al., 1999). Parent/child interactions which are characterized as warm, structured, and emotionally responsive are related to positive cognitive and behavioral gains in children, regardless of racial/ethnic group or social class (Connell & Prinz, 2002). Children’s interactions with adults and more competent peers support their language
and literacy development, cognitive functioning, emotional development, and social
competence (Pianta & La Paro, 2003).

Parenting interactions characterized by more positive affect, reduced
criticism, and a less controlling or directive approach are associated with higher
performance on school readiness indicators at school-entry and later school
achievement, regardless of factors such as socio-economic standing and maternal IQ
(Connell & Prinz, 2002). Parents can contribute insights and knowledge that enhance
the school staff’s academic and social programs (Comer & Haynes, 1991). They also
bring an understanding of needs and experiences of their own children that can help
teachers plan age- and culturally-appropriate social and academic programs in the
classroom (Pianta & La Paro, 2003). Parents bring a community perspective to
planning and management activities for school programs (Pianta & La Paro 2003).

Parental involvement, parental self-efficacy, and parenting style are all
factors that influence parent/child interactions and contribute to early development,
the transition to school, and future child outcomes (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Family
culture such as the values and rules for appropriate behaviors define for children a
clear set of expectations to follow that is acceptable within the home (Mashburn &
Pianta, 2006). If the values and expectations with which children are raised are not
supported by those that children experience during entry to school, then these
children are more likely to be characterized as having behavioral problems and be
labeled as unready for school (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Therefore, the degree to which children’s regular behaviors within the family are in alignment with the daily behaviors that children experience while in school may play an important role in sustaining the demands between these settings which may help bridge the cultural gap between homes and schools (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006).

*Parents as partners with the schools.*

Parents cannot be ignored in the equation of their children’s education. The significance of parental involvement reaches far beyond the first three years of life, and the school community needs to expand activities that empower parents to take ownership in their role as their children’s first teacher (Sacks & Watnick, 2001). Parenting effects on early school achievement are numerous and multidimensional, their beliefs, attitudes, and personal circumstances will affect the type of childcare that parents seek in their absence (Ahnert & Lamb, 2003; Hill, 2001; Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Through their involvement in school, parents gain clearer insights into the expectations and demands that their children face while at school which may lead parents to better align expectations and acceptable behaviors at home with those that children experience at school (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Parents and teachers share a combined responsibility for the education of young children (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Programs that promote the parent as teachers at home provide parents with various opportunities for the attainment of skills that will enhance their efficacy.
beliefs (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). When parents believe they are able to effectively influence their children’s education, they may be more capable and willing to become involved (Pelletier & Brent, 2002).

Family-school partnerships enhance children’s educational experience, and these relationships are important for children’s transitions through school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). Family-school communication provides the foundation needed to develop shared goals and decision making as well as the support needed to avoid misunderstandings and help parents understand how to reinforce learning and school instruction at home (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang 2005). Children whose parents are more involved in their education have higher academic performance as this involvement contributes to the children’s achievement, attitudes, and aspirations (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). Strong relationships with teachers may serve as a protective factor that shields at-risk children from experiencing negative effects on school performance associated with an unsupportive home environment (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). The school site is an effective point of delivery for family-focused services (Sacks & Watnick, 2001). When parents learn how to talk to and interact with teachers, they feel capable of making changes themselves and realize their own possibilities for involvement; teachers, in turn, come to recognize these parents as effective participants in their children’s education (Pelletier & Brent, 2002).


Barriers to parental involvement in education.

Many families’ first interactions with schools can be interpreted negatively due to the evaluative and judgmental questions often needed to discover information about children’s readiness for school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). A major challenge to early childhood professionals is the reconstruction of current policies and practices aimed at increasing parental involvement to reflect more current family structures, life styles, and ethnicities (McBride & Rane, 1997). Many parents of low socioeconomic status believe that learning starts when their children enter school, and when that time arrives, because children lack the critical early childhood experiences, the chances of them being successful without the high quality support that they need are low (Wright, Diener, & Kay 2000). Stress due to low-income status may take away from parents’ psychological resources, making them less available to visit, volunteer for school functions, or assist at home with school work (Hill, 2001). Some parents may feel unprepared to help their children get ready for school because of a lack of effective parental modeling during their own childhood and an insecure sense of their personal efficacy to manage in a role as educator (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Parents are more likely to become involved in their children’s education when they believe that the schools are working to involve them (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999).
Parents play an important role in their children’s development, specifically in their education (Mashburn & Pianta 2006). Parental partnership with school programs can be beneficial for the school, the family, and the child’s overall academic development (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). In the past, the focus of parental involvement as it relates to school initiated and implemented programs have been developed specifically for mothers (McBride & Rane, 1997). Fathers often fall in between the cracks due to the perception that they are unconcerned or unavailable for the participation in their children’s education (McBride, Thomas, & Ji-Hi, 2001). The next section will introduce the role that fathers play in all aspects of their children’s development and more specifically the importance of their role in their children’s early education.

The Role of Fathers in Education

This section offers an examination of the father/child relationship and the ways in which this relationship shapes children’s interactions with their environment. It begins by introducing father and child interactions and explores how those interactions add to development. Next it provides an overview of how fathers’ involvement influences children’s education and the problems that develop when fathers are not involved. The last component to this section is an examination of the predictors and barriers to father involvement in their children’s development.

Father & child interactions.
An important, yet often overlooked target in the effort to increase parental involvement in early childhood programs has been fathers (McBride & Rane, 1997). Changes in the families and in work/family patterns in the United States have influenced research on paternal involvement in child rearing, predictors of paternal involvement, and barriers to involvement by fathers (McBride & Rane, 1997). Much of this research has been focused specifically on the involvement of fathers in two parent, single and dual-earner families (McBride & Rane, 1997). Fathers contribute to the lives of their children by assuming diverse roles appropriate to their children’s development through their life cycle (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). However, men continue to lag behind women in terms of their involvement in caregiving and parenting tasks (McBride, Thomas & Ji-Hi, 2001).

The involvement of fathers in the lives of their children does not just affect the father/child relationship; limited and insignificant participation can also have a negative affect on the mother/child relationship (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004). Mothers raising their child without their children’s father reported more severe arguments with their children than did mothers in families in which fathers are present (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004). Mothers in families where father involvement is low have a more negative outlook regarding their children’s behavior compared to mothers in families where father involvement is high (Culp, Culp, Robinson, & Schadle, 2000).
High father involvement is associated with an increase in children’s feelings of paternal acceptance, a factor that plays a role in the development of self-concept and self esteem (Culp, Culp, Robinson, & Schadle. 2000). Children do better in school when their fathers are involved in their progress regardless of whether or not they live with them (McBride, Thomas, & Ji-Hi, 2001). Fathers are influential in five specific areas of child development:

- Fathers encourage independence; they are generally less protective, promoting exploration and risk taking and model aggressive or assertive behaviors.
- Fathers expand the child’s horizon; they are the link to the outside world through their jobs.
- Fathers serve as alternative parent; they can improve the quality of the mother’s parenting by reducing her stress and stepping in to give the mother a break during a crisis.
- Fathers are strict disciplinarians; they accept fewer excuses and demand more of their children at each stage.
- Fathers are men; treating their children respectfully can put children at ease with other men throughout their lives (Grimm-Wassil, 1994, p. 29).

Men add to the development of their children’s lives that differ from the involvement of others in specific ways (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). This is also true in terms of paternal involvement in their children’s
education. The next section explores how paternal involvement influences their children’s education.

*Effects of paternal involvement in education.*

When men get involved in child care, everybody benefits (Franklin, 1999). When fathers participate in their children’s education, they are involved in an important aspect of their children’s lives (Franklin, 1999). The centers that their children attend benefit from involvement of more parents (Franklin, 1999). Children who are cared for by their fathers during the first year of life have higher cognitive scores compared to children who were in center-based care, despite the inclusion of measures such as demographic characteristics, household compositions, and mother’s education (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). Fathers can significantly impact their children's reading and writing while improving father/child bonding and enhancing their own self-esteem (Stile & Ortiz, 1999). Infants of fathers who are very involved in their care may be more social than infants of fathers who are less involved or not involved at all in terms of proximity or contact-seeking, avoidance, and distance interaction (Frascarolo, 2004). Several factors influence the ability of a father to be involved; the following section explores predictors of father involvement.
Predictors of paternal involvement.

Men’s beliefs about fathering and the perceptions they have of themselves as capable caregivers are one set of determinants of father involvement in their children’s lives (McBride & Rane, 1997). Men who value the fathering role are more likely to be involved with their infants (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). The father’s attitude about the infant and his parenting roles as well as the time spent with the child are strong predictive factors of the infant/father attachment (McBride & Rane, 1997). However, it is unclear whether spending more time with the child creates the positive attitude towards the child, or if the positive attitude encourages the time spent (Cox, & Owen, 1992). Men with more favorable attitudes toward the paternal role are significantly more involved in child rearing activities than those with negative attitudes (McBride & Rane, 1997). Fathers’ attitudes toward parenting and their attitude about employment may also be important correlates to paternal involvement (McBride & Rane, 1997). When fathers are employed, they are more capable of fulfilling the provider role and contributing financially to the child’s care (Coley & Hernandez, 2006). Among nonresidential, low income, and minority fathers, employment status has been found to be a significant predictor for father involvement (Coley & Hernandez, 2006).

A father’s motivation to be involved in his children’s care and development is in part influenced by his own developmental history (Coley & Hernandez, 2006).
Some fathers may want to follow the model set by their own fathers, while others may try to provide a different type of father/child relationship than what they experienced (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). Fathers who experienced consistent & positive parenting by their own fathers during childhood have a healthy model of fathering to follow which supports their own positive involvement (Coley & Hernandez, 2006). Other child factors such as age, sex, and temperament can influence fathers’ involvement with their children (De Luccie, 1996). The age of the child is the most powerful predictor of fathers’ involvement, and fathers of older children tend to be less frequently involved than those of younger children (De Luccie, 1996). Other factors that predict paternal involvement are satisfaction with parenting, father’s perceptions of their influence on their children, and fathers’ geographic proximity to the children (De Luccie, 1996). Satisfaction with parenting may be the strongest predicting factor for paternal involvement (Fine, McKenry, Price, & Serovich, 1992). Along with factors that can predict paternal involvement, several aspects of the father/child relationship serve as barriers to paternal involvement. The following section explores these barriers.

**Barriers to paternal involvement.**

As the primary caregiver in most families, mothers often have the ability to play a gate keeping role, controlling or influencing fathers’ access to and interactions with their children (Coley & Hernandez, 2006). Women often discourage the
relationship between the father and child because of traditional notions that men are unaccustomed to and careless about performing the daily duties of care giving (De Luccie, 1996). Therefore, when mothers do allow participation, it has to be done on their terms (De Luccie, 1996). In this way, they actively manage their partner's participation, but this type of management may also be seen as discouraging to the father (De Luccie, 1996). Mothers can also serve as an indicator for the level of involvement that fathers have with their children. Mothers’ perceptions of their husbands’ investment in parent and worker roles of parenting accounted for a larger percentage of the variance in the total father involvement, while fathers’ scores on these measures accounted for only 8% (McBride & Rane 1997).

On any given day, fathers are presented with many situations that are not necessarily major life events but nevertheless challenge their ability to parent (Fagan, 2000). These daily hassles take away from the time they spend with their children and overall paternal involvement (Fagan, 2000). As children grow older, their father’s involvement and participation decrease over time (Lambert & Shapiro, 1999). In the case of adolescents, parents are often confronted with dramatically changing children who are also more emotional, egocentric, sensitive, and challenging (Davis & De Luccie, 1991). In addition, adolescents are forming a cohesive set of values and beliefs as well as establishing themselves as distinctive from others (Davis & De Luccie, 1991). This process necessarily involves
establishing their separateness and individuality in their relationships within the family as well as a reconstruction and redefinition of the parent/child relationship (Davis & De Luccie, 1991). Some fathers may tend to be critical, judgmental, and demanding of their teens, particularly their sons (Davis & De Luccie, 1991).

Financial status can also be a barrier to paternal involvement. When fathers are unable to provide financially for their children, they are less likely to be engaged and nurturing with their children (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). This may be caused by feelings of inadequacy due to their incapability to fulfill the provider role often placed on men by societal expectations (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). A change in the structure of families has also had a very influential effect in the way that fathers are able to parent (Lambert & Shapiro, 1999). Many non-custodial fathers are still very involved in their children’s education, and the next section explores the role played by those fathers who do not reside with their children.

*Non-custodial fathers.*

Due to high rates of divorce and non-marital childbearing, increasing numbers of children live apart from their biological fathers; however, lack of co-residence does not necessarily prohibit fathers from remaining actively involved in the lives of their children (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). Unfortunately, even for fathers who were initially active in their children’s lives,
nonresidential support often gradually decreases over time (Lambert & Shapiro, 1999). Non-custodial fathers do not parent away from their former partners, and their level of involvement with their children after separation is dependent on the parents' ability to cooperate with each other (Fine, McKenry, Price, & Serovich, 1992). Men will only take on childrearing responsibilities to the extent that there are demands placed on them to do so, and they have the capacity to respond to those demands (De Luccie, 1996; Lambert & Shapiro, 1999).

Although fathers’ location is a strong factor in predicting the frequency of visits with their children, it is not a useful gauge to predict telephoning, letter writing, and spending time in meaningful activities (Fine, McKenry, Price, & Serovich, 1992). Factors that contribute to likelihood of non-residential fathers’ involvement with their children include residential proximity, a positive relationship between mother and father, the father’s financial resources, father’s work experience, and mother’s education which can serve as a substitute for the father’s education (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001) However, the frequency of contact does not adequately reflect the relationship between non-residential fathers and the children in part because such a measure does not distinguish between positive and negative father-child interactions (Greene, Halle, Le Menestrel, & Moore, 2001). Nevertheless, the idea that children from low income and high-risk backgrounds have little or no contact with their father is a myth that negatively affects program
development efforts in educational settings (McBride, Thomas, & Ji-Hi, 2001). These fathers specifically need more support and encouragement to continue consistent participation (Lambert & Shapiro, 1999). The link between father involvement and children’s achievement is evident regardless as to whether or not the father resides with the child (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005). There are specific differences among children with and without paternal involvement, and the next section explores these differences.

*Differences among children with & without paternal involvement.*

Children from households with a long-absent father will be less well prepared for school and perform poorer on early achievement tests (Fowler & Richards, 1978). A father’s absence is particularly deleterious for boys who may suffer from the lack of appropriate role models (Featherstone, 2004). Compared to those with involved fathers, children from fatherless homes are more likely to drop out from high school, less likely to attend college, more likely to marry and have children are teenagers, and be single parents. (Krohn & Bogan, 2001) Children from fatherless homes are more likely to runaway from home, exhibit behavioral disorders, engage in chemical abuse, and be placed in juvenile prisons and state-oriented institutions (Krohn & Bogan, 2001).

In summary, the benefits of father involvement are numerous and essential for their children’s healthy development. Fathers add to the lives of their children in
ways that other adults do not, and it is important to include them in their children’s education. There are specific barriers to paternal involvement; however there are also interventions and strategies that can serve as buffers. The next section examines some intervention strategies designed to increase the involvement of fathers in their children’s education.

*Interventions*

The commitment to improving K-12 academic achievement must begin by providing children in the pre-K years with a full range of learning opportunities (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). In addition to early intervention prior to school entry, strategies need to be identified to support children who have entered school with fewer developmental strengths than their peers (Hair et al., 2006). Poor children do not start school with the same level of skills as children from more privileged backgrounds (Schonfeld, 2004). However, just because children are poor does not mean that they are all the same or that their development is linear (Schonfeld, 2004). The stimulation and instruction provided by early childhood education experiences are particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds because the experiences are almost nonexistent at home (Lamb, 2004). In addition, when given the right types and amounts of language and cognitive experiences within a nurturing and responsive social context, high-risk children will show gains in their intellectual and linguistic competence (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Unfortunately, the benefits
from early improved experiences diminish over time unless they are aided by continued support after the beginning of school (Lamb, 2004). Identifying the circumstances under which school settings offset the early negative social or academic development can serve as important documentation for later development of positive adaptation implications (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

Enhanced parent-child relationships and home learning environment have important roles in promoting school readiness (Parker et al., 1999). Primary prevention and intervention efforts that improve school readiness include building and strengthening relationships between children and parents, children and teachers, and parents and teachers (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Changing families’ concepts of school readiness may influence their children’s chance to achieve success in school (Wright, Diener, & Kay, 2000). Another goal of intervention efforts should include developing better communication skills between mothers and fathers around parenting issues as well as helping them develop a shared set of values and beliefs relating to their parenting behaviors, specifically as they relate to decisions they will make about their children’s education (McBride & Rane, 1997). The development of parental involvement and support programs designed specifically for fathers is one way to encourage and prepare men to assume more active roles in their children’s education (McBride, Thomas, & Ji-Hi, 2001).
The teacher has been identified as the key to facilitating parental involvement in early childhood education programs (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). This implies that teachers possess certain skills, attitudes, and behaviors that translate into strategies to encourage parent participation (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Furthermore, teachers have the potential to have a positive or negative influence on children’s ability to succeed in school (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). For example, teacher-reported closeness with students was positively correlated to growth in children’s vocabulary and reading abilities from preschool to second grade (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). However, early childhood teachers need the financial and societal support given to K-12 teachers in order to complete the difficult tasks placed on them of undoing social, economic, and educational inequalities through education (Pianta, 2007).

“Daunting challenges remain, but the science of early education holds considerable promise for further development and scaling up of effective approaches for training and supporting teachers of our youngest, and often the most vulnerable, citizens” (Pianta, 2007, p. 49).

Summary

School readiness is a multidimensional concept which is obtained through consistent positive interactions within children’s environment (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). As children’s first and most important teachers, parents provide the early learning experiences that promote life skills, abilities, and attitudes that are the
foundational to school success (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Paternal involvement is an overlooked yet essential component for early child development and preschool educational (McBride & Rane, 1997). Fathers provide specific resources that when absent cause key components of children’s development to also be absent. Children from fatherless environments are less likely to be adequately prepared for school as children whose fathers are actively involved in their education (Krohn & Bogan, 2001). School officials and administration need to make a stronger effort in recruiting the participation and involvement of fathers (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Many intervention strategies provided by schools can offset the barriers to paternal involvement in order to ensure that their students receive all of the support they need to fully be prepared for school (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). When considering all the harm that can result from lack of clarity about what children are expected to know and be capable of before entering school, it is important to gain more understanding about the beliefs and ideas of parents in order to prevent school failure (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Thus, it is important to understand the ideas and beliefs that fathers have about the influence they have in their children’s education, specifically fathers of preschool age children, in order to ensure that strategies can be developed to prevent and offset the damages caused by the environment of children at risk for school failure. Therefore, this study focuses on the question: How do a selected
group of fathers perceive their role in helping their preschool age children become ready for school?
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology I used while collecting data on fathers’ perceptions of their roles in helping their pre-school children become ready for entrance into school. This chapter will also explain who the participants were, as well as how and why they were chosen. The survey used in this study was designed from a previous pilot project, and this chapter provides an overview of that project and the ways in which it related to this study. The survey used for this project contained five sections: background information, school readiness activities, father/school interactions, barriers and supporters, and priorities. This chapter provides a description of the types of questions asked in each section and an explanation of their relevance. Finally, I offer an explanation of the methods used to extract and analyze the results.

Participants

Fathers of two to five-year-old children were recruited from a university’s Children’s Center in Northern California. The community of this area is populated of predominantly middle class highly educated European Americans. Within the community, there is a state university, and many of the community members here have attended the university and lived in the area most of their lives. This particular
childcare facility was chosen because it provided care for children of students, faculty, and community members from which I hoped to derive a diverse population of fathers in terms of ethnicity, income level, and educational achievement. Eighty-four families were originally contacted to participate in the survey. These families were chosen based solely on their children’s enrollment in the Children’s Center which served as verification that they currently had children who were preschool age. I had no information about the structure of each family prior to the dispatch of the surveys. Consequently, families without fathers or families with no father contact received the survey packages. In order to recruit the fathers, survey packages were sent home via what the Center called parent pockets. Parent pockets are individual mail slots available to every family. Because this is a regular form of communication between parents and the school, I believed that this would be an effective way of reaching the target participants. Of the 84 families contacted in this manner, 58 did not respond to the survey packages sent home, three were unreachable (father was unknown or unavailable), two completed and returned surveys other than those intended for this research project, and five indicated no interest in participating. As a result, 16 fathers consented to participate in this study.

Of the 16 participants, 81% reported their ethnicity as European American, 6% as Latino, and 12% declined to respond. The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 55 years of age with 68.8% of the participants being between the 26 and
The overall mean age was 33 years. The annual income level of the participants ranged from $0 to $97,000. Thirty-one percent of the participants earned less than $20,000 a year, and 31% made more than $51,000. The mean annual income of all the participants was $33,000. Twelve percent of the participants reported that their highest level of education was high school, 19% had completed some college work, 25% had a Bachelor’s degree, 31% had a Master’s degree and 12% had Ph.D.s. Of the participants, 87% reported their marital status as married, 6% as single, and 6% did not report marital status. Forty-three percent of the participants had one child, 31% had two children, 19% had three children, and 6% had more than three children.

Procedure

The present study investigates the ideas and beliefs fathers of preschool age children have about their involvement in their children’s education. Fathers were recruited through the Children’s Center via parent pockets. Fathers completed self-report surveys at the center or at home and provided information about the quantity and variety of interactions between themselves and their children. Preaddressed and postage-paid envelopes were provided with each survey package, and a letter accompanying the survey indicated this as the means by which to return the survey. I placed survey packages in every parents’ parent pocket. I put reminder notices in the parent pockets three weeks after the original survey packages had been sent home.
Survey.

I designed the survey used in this study based on a pilot project I completed six months prior to the start of this study. The pilot project consisted of individual interviews conducted with eight fathers whose children attended the same school used in the current study; however, their children were not in classes selected for the current study. Therefore, none of the fathers from the pilot project also participated in the current study. The interview questions addressed how fathers felt about the role they played in their children’s school readiness. I taped, transcribed, and analyzed all the interviews for the purpose of designing the survey used in this thesis. During the interviews, I asked fathers to describe the type of activities they did at home to encourage school readiness in their children. I also asked them to describe what they perceived as barriers and supporters to the relationship they had with their child. Lastly, I asked them to describe the most important aspects of their role as fathers. The results of the interviews provided numerous examples of perceived barriers and supporters to the father/child relationship. Many of the factors identified as barriers by some fathers were also identified as supporters for others. For example, the mother/father relationship was reported as a supportive factor by some fathers and a barrier for others. The results of the pilot project also provided a brief summary of the different ways fathers described their roles and the ways they organized the importance of their responsibilities. The information gathered from
these interviews, along with a review of the research, provided support for the questions and concepts addressed in the survey.

The survey contained five sections: background information, school readiness activities, father/school interactions, barriers and supporters, and priorities. The first section of the survey asked participants to provide information about their income, ethnicity, education level, and marital status. Participants were also asked about the number of children they have and their residential proximity to their children. This section was included in order to observe trends among fathers with similar backgrounds.

Certain home activities and experiences, such as parental participation with the child in art, reading, and musical exploration, are important in increasing children’s readiness for entrance to school (Pianta & La Paro, 2003; Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthew, 2001). Many of these activities are not being experienced enough prior to children’s entry into school, particularly among low income children (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthew, 2001). Because this study sought to uncover how fathers perceived their role in helping their children get ready for schooling, fathers were asked to rate how frequently they engaged in the activities previously deemed as essential to school readiness. Fathers were asked how frequently they participated in activities such as art, reading, musical exploration, and other readiness activities.
In order to provide the type of experiences needed for a child to be successful in school, parents and teachers need to be on the same page about what those experiences are and how to provide them (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang 2005). Children whose parents are more involved in their education have higher academic performance as this involvement contributes to the children’s achievement, attitudes, and aspirations (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). Based on this information, I decided to have participants rate how frequently they interacted with their children’s school. Fathers were asked to rate how often they spoke with their children’s teacher, visited the school, attended parent/teacher nights, spoke with their children about their school activities, and inquired about their children’s development.

The pilot project interviews provided generous information to begin to understand some of the reasons why fathers fail to participate in their children’s development as well as some of the resources that could counter barriers to their involvement. Based on the data collected in the pilot project as well as a review of the literature, I decided to ask participants to rate how often variables such as their financial status or the relationship they have with the child’s mother served as either a barrier or a support to the involvement they have with their children. Fathers were asked to rate their education status, their financial status, the relationship they had with their children’s mother, the experience they had with their own father, societal expectations of their role, their knowledge of child development, and their residential
proximity to their children. These variables were rated based on how frequently they served as a supporter and how frequently they served as a barrier to the father’s interaction with their child.

How important a father feels one activity is versus another may impact the decisions he makes as a parent. I decided to explore how fathers ranked the importance of some of the responsibilities and functions associated with the father role. Using the phrases and categories provided by the pilot project, I asked fathers to rank the importance of ten behaviors with ten being ranked as the most important and one being the least important. I asked them to rank the importance of providing emotional support to their child, providing for their child financially, participating in their child’s education, being involved in decision-making about their child’s health, having regular close interactions with their child, having open communication with their child’s mother, sharing their culture with their child, sharing their religion with the child, seeing their child on a regular basis, and participating in building their child’s morals and values.

Data analysis.

All survey data collected were extracted and input into SPSS. To evaluate the survey data from the first section, background information, I categorized all of the possible responses and organized each response based on the appropriate category. I then used the categories to report the responses for this section. In order to analyze
the second section, school readiness activities, I charted and measured the frequency of responses for every question within this section and calculated the percentages of responses for each question. This is also how I analyzed the data for the father/school interactions and barriers and supporters sections. Finally, to analyze the priorities section, I categorized the surveys based on the participants who did not respond at all, only partially responded, and those who completed this section fully by rating each item. Then I measured the frequency of the responses for each item within the last section. Finally, I examined all of the responses for trends between different sections like education and responses to father/school interactions.

Summary

This chapter provided an outline of the methodology I used to gather data on fathers’ perceptions of their roles in helping their pre-school children become ready for entrance into school. It provided a description of the participants and an overview of how and why they were chosen. The survey used in this study was supported by a previously completed pilot study, and this chapter described that project and how it related to the current study. It also described how I distributed and collected the surveys. The survey contained five sections: background information, school readiness activities, father/school interactions, barriers and supporters, and priorities, and each section contained specific questions. Finally, I
described the methods used to extract and analyze the data collected. The results of the study are presented in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results of the data I collected via the survey on fathers’ perceptions of their roles in helping their pre-school children become ready for entrance into school. The survey used for this project contained five sections: background information, school readiness activities, father/school interactions, barriers and supporters, and priorities finally, I provide graphs and charts to more clearly present the data.

School Readiness Activities

The survey used in this study measured the frequency of fathers’ engagement in school readiness activities with their children. In reporting the results, I have combined responses in order to portray positive versus negative trends. For example, I asked fathers how often they engaged in certain activities with their children: daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, or never. I considered daily and weekly to be positive trends of father/child interaction and so combined those results and yearly and never to be negative trends which are also combined in the reporting of the results.

All participants reported that they read to their child at least weekly. When responding to how frequently they participated in various art activities with their
children, 81% of the fathers reported that they did this at least weekly, and 19% stated at least once a month. Rating how frequently the participants engaged in puzzles and other shaping activities, 63% responded at least once a week, and 37% responded at least once a month. All participants reported speaking to their children about their activities at school at least once a week. Ninety-four percent of respondents reported that they played games or sports with their children at least once a week, and 6% at least once a month. Lastly, 56% of fathers participated in a musical activity with their children from daily to weekly, 13% responded at least once a month, and 31% responded from at least once a year to never.

Table 4.1

School Readiness Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Readiness Activities</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Once a Year</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read With Children</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate In Art</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puzzles &amp; Shapes</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk About Routines</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Games</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate In Music</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Father School Interactions

The survey measured the frequency of fathers’ interactions with their children’s schools. When rating how frequently they spoke with their children’s teacher, 56% responded daily to weekly, 13% responded at least once a month, 31% responded at least once a year to never. Describing how frequently fathers visited their children’s schools, 44% stated daily to weekly, 25% said at least once a month, and 31% reported at least once a year to never. Addressing how frequently participants attended a parent/teacher night, 19% reported daily to at least once a month, and 81% reported at least once a year to never. When asked how frequently fathers spoke with their children about their activities at school, all participants responded daily to weekly. Twenty-five percent of fathers rating how frequently they inquired about their children’s development reported daily to weekly, 44% said at least once a month, and 31% responded at least once a year to never.
Table 4.2

Father/School Interactions

The survey measured the frequency that various life factors provided support to the father/child relationship. Thirty-one percent of fathers reported that their experiences with their own fathers provided support to their relationship with their children frequently to always, 44% reported that it sometimes provided support, and 25% reported that it seldom provided support. Describing how frequently relationships with other parents supported the relationships fathers had with their children...
own children, 31% responded that it frequently or always provided support, 63%
responded that it sometimes provided support, and 6% responded that it never
provided support. Sixty-three percent of participants reported their knowledge of
child development frequently or always supported their relationship with their
children, 25% stated that it sometimes provided support, and 13% stated that it
seldom or never provided support. Fathers responded to how frequently the
relationship they have with their children’s mother provided support to their
relationship with their children. Nine-four percent reported that it frequently or
always provided support, and 6% reported that it sometimes provided support. Sixty-
three percent of participants reported that their financial status frequently or always
supported the relationship they have with their children, 19% responded that it
sometimes provide support, and 19% responded that it seldom or never provided
support.
Table 4.3

Support to Father/Child Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experience w/ Father</th>
<th>Relationship w/ Other Parents</th>
<th>Knowledge of Child Development</th>
<th>Relationship w/ Child’s Mother</th>
<th>Financial Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Barriers**

The survey measured how often various life factors served as a barrier to the father/child relationship. When asked how often the participants’ relationship with their children’s mother was a barrier to their relationship with their children, 12% responded sometimes or frequently, and 87% responded their children’s mother was
seldom or never a barrier. Nineteen percent of fathers reported that their level of education provided a barrier to their relationship with their children sometimes or frequently, and 81% stated it was seldom or never a barrier. Fathers rated how frequently their financial status was a barrier to the relationship they have with their children, and 19% responded it was sometimes to always a barrier, and 88% responded it was seldom or never a barrier. Twelve percent of fathers rated societal expectations as being sometimes or frequently a barrier to their relationship with their children, and 88% responded it was seldom or never a barrier. All of the participants responded their residential proximity to their children was never a barrier to the relationships they have with their children.

Table 4.4

*Barriers to Father/Child Relationship*
Priorities

This section of the survey asked participants to rate ten items from most important to least important with ten symbolizing most important and 1 being the least. Thirteen percent of participants did not respond to this section of the survey. Nineteen percent of the participants rated all ten items as being most important, and 25% rated all ten items as being most important except for one or two of the items. This left 44% who rated every item and their responses are presented in the following table.

Table 4.5

Ranking of Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANKING:</th>
<th>1 Least Important</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10 Most Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing Emotional Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Financially</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being involved in Health Decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Close Interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Communication w/ Child's Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

This chapter presented the data gathered on fathers’ perceptions of their roles in helping their pre-school children become ready for entrance into school. The results from this chapter indicated a positive trend towards paternal interactions with their children and their children’s schools. Relationships with other parents and co-parenting relationships were reported by the participants as beneficial and supportive factors. Participants reported financial status as the most frequent barrier to the relationship with their children. Finally, this chapter revealed that providing emotional support and regular close interactions were rated as the most important priorities, and sharing culture and religion were rated as the least important.
CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will offer an analysis of the results presented in Chapter Four.

Background Information

Because age has been shown to have an impact on the type of responsibilities to which fathers respond, I initially thought the wide range of ages of the participants had the potential to increase the variety of responses to the priorities section of the survey. When I originally reviewed the results, I felt the relatively high income levels and education levels of my participants could be a limitation to my study because they are not reflective of the general public. However, the literature I previously reviewed focused on low income families and did not explore the possible benefits of comparing the experiences of fathers of both low and high income and education levels. When exploring the comparison of these two groups, I found that low income fathers reported their relationship with their father as a support factor more frequently. These comparisons also revealed that fathers with higher levels of education interacted with their children’s school more than those with lower levels of education. It is possible that fathers with higher incomes have more resources available to them that would allow them to interact more with their children’s school.
Perhaps fathers with lower incomes need this time to work more and support their immediate needs.

*School Readiness Activities*

All of the participants engaged in school readiness activities with their children at least once a month. For example, all of the participants read to their child at least once a week. Clearly, these school readiness activities were valued by the fathers, and this could be because of their own level of education. Eighty-seven percent of the participants had educational experiences past high school, with 67% having earned a degree from B.A. to Ph.D. Such a group already shows a clear value for education which appears to be impacting their interactions with their children. These fathers, with a high level of education themselves, would be more likely to understand child development and critical early experiences, to understand the parental role in helping their children become ready to enter school, and to engage in activities that would promote school readiness (e.g., reading, art, and music).

*Father/School Interactions*

All of the participants in this study reported that they spoke with their children about their activities at school at least once a week, and 56% of the participants reported speaking with their children’s teacher at least once a week. The results for speaking with the teacher and visiting the school were similar which could be because they are related to the availability of the father and how frequently he is
able to participate in such activities as picking his child up from school. When parents communicate regularly with teachers about the development of their children, their children benefit, and clearly these fathers value those beneficial interactions. A large majority of participants reported at least some monthly level of interaction with their children’s school which does indicate their willingness to participate in these types of activities. One participant indicated that he attended parent/teacher nights daily, a response that is not useful because no school offers nightly parent/teacher events. It is probable that he misinterpreted the question and was reporting a daily interaction with his children’s school. In fact, 100% of participants reported talking to their children about activities at school at least weekly which further suggest that they value knowing the experiences that their children are having at school. The response rates for the other questions point to the need for schools to reach out more to fathers and negotiate availability in order to share the importance of parent school interactions and the benefits of this partnership.

Support Factors

The most influential of support factors was relationships. For example, all of the participants reported that to varying degrees the experiences they had with their own father provided some support to the relationship with their children. A large majority of the participants reported that a relationship with other parents was a
supportive influence, and all of the participants reported that the relationship they have with their children’s mother provided some level of support. This also is evidence that relationships serve as strong supportive factors. These results could be in part related to the fact that 88% of the fathers reported that they were married, and it is possible these fathers were reporting from their experiences of co-parenting. Another influential factor could be that the children at this school are grouped in the same classes through their development which give parents the opportunity to build relationships with other parents with whom they frequently come in contact. Eighty-eight percent of the participants also reported that their knowledge of child development supported their relationship with their children. This may reflect the high education mean of the participants.

**Barriers**

Many of the barriers reported by the participants in the pilot study were not indicated as barriers for the participants in the current study. Twelve percent of the participants reported their children’s mother as a barrier to the relationship they have with their children. This response could relate to the fact that 12% of the participants also reported themselves as single. This could reflect what has been labeled as the gate keeping effect that mothers can sometimes have on fathers by trying to monitor the interactions fathers have with their children.
Financial status was a barrier to 19% of the fathers and never a barrier to 50%, reflecting the 50% of the participants who reported an annual income of more than $36,000. Residential proximity was reported as never a barrier for any of the participants, a by-product of the fact that 94% of the fathers lived in the same home as their children and 6% in the same city. A large majority of the participants reported high levels of education which could have affected their responses about societal expectations and their level of education.

Priorities

Fewer than half of the participants responded to this section of the survey, making these results of dubious utility. In order to track any positive trends that appeared, I combined the positive results (responses rated as 6 through 10), and as a result, several positive trends emerged. Eight-seven percent indicated a value for providing emotional support, 72% valued regular close interactions with their children, 57% valued seeing your child regularly, and 57% indicated a value for providing for their children financially. In light of the 87% who valued providing emotional support to their children, it seems clear that these fathers do not see this activity as solely part of the gender role of mothers, and as a result view this as an important part of their paternal responsibilities. A large majority of the participants lived in the same home as their children, and these fathers valued the close
interactions they have with their children, seeing them on a regular basis as a result of their residential proximity.

A review of the literature indicated that fathers related providing financially for their children as a major gender role and responsibility of fathers, and evidently these fathers shared in those same values. Conversely, fathers rated sharing religion and culture as the least important of the priorities. One possible reason for not wanting to oblige their children with religion and cultural ties, the fathers were expressing a value of giving their children the opportunity to be independent and critical thinkers. This type of socialization has been found prominently in Hispanic and African American families.

One of the most important responses was that only 6% of the participants ranked education as being important, while the remaining fathers rated this low (a 3 or 4). I believe that if we were able to measure on a larger scale the way that fathers prioritize their responsibilities more could be done to provide fathers support and adequate resources. However, with such a low response rate on this portion of the questionnaire, it is difficult to discern additional useful patterns of paternal priorities.

Summary

The majority of the participants in this study were married and highly educated. Contrary to societal expectations, these fathers reported high father/child interactions and positive father/school interactions. Relationships were shown to be
very important support factors for these fathers, and financial status was ranked as a barrier by some of the participants. Providing emotional support and having regular close interactions were ranked by the participants as being most important. Seventy-one percent of the participants’ ranked sharing religion and culture as the least important of their priorities. The next chapter will conclude this thesis by summarizing the main points and explaining limitations to the current study.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Fathers provide specific resources that when absent cause key components of children’s development to also be absent. Children from fatherless environments are less likely to be adequately prepared for school as children whose fathers are actively involved in their education. This is why it is important to understand the ideas and beliefs that fathers have about the influence they have in their children’s education, specifically fathers of preschool age children, in order to ensure that strategies can be developed to encourage and support all of the factors that influence school readiness.

This thesis sought to answer the question: How do a selected group of fathers perceive their role in helping their preschool age children become ready for school?

Sixteen fathers completed self report surveys about the quantity and variety of interactions between themselves and their children and their interactions with their children’s school. Participants also reported information about the perceived barriers and supporters to the relationship they have with their children. Finally, participants were asked to rank various responsibilities based on how important the fathers viewed these responsibilities. Surveys were collected via mail, and every participant received a preaddressed and postage-paid envelope with which to return their survey. The results of the study indicated that the majority of the fathers did participate in a variety of school readiness activities with their children at least weekly. Father
school interactions were also frequently reported; however, these interactions were
more likely to happen on a monthly basis. These responses were probably influenced
by the high education levels of the participants. Relationships were found to be the
most supportive factors for the participants, and this included the mother/father
relationship and that with the participant’s own father. Because 88% of the
participants were married these results are most likely indicators of their experiences
from co-parenting. The only barrier reported by the participants was financial status,
and this was only true for half of the participants which could reflect the 50% of the
participants who made an annual salary of less than $35000. The majority of the
participants viewed providing emotional support and having regular close
interactions as the most important priority and religion and culture as the least
important of the priorities. Education was ranked only between 3 and 6 by all of the
participants, and this point to a need for more understanding of the importance of
education.

Limitations to the Research

The largest issue with this research study is the small sample size. This may
have been caused by a lack of interest in the study by potential participants, the need
for more time to return the surveys, or a more targeted approach to finding potential
participants, to name a few. The small sample size makes it difficult to generalize
these results to other populations of fathers.
Another limitation is the lack of clarity in the directions of how to complete the priorities section of the survey. Many of the participants responded that this request was too difficult and were not sure if they should rank or rate the items, resulting in many individuals not responding at all or marking all ten items as a top priority. In future research on fathers’ priorities, it would help to clarify the need to rank the items using each number only once. A model for how to do this might be of assistance as well.

Due to lack of time another limitation to my study was the use of only one form of data collection. In the future it would be important to triangulate the data by possibly measuring responses from the mothers and the children’s school.

The final limitation was the lack of ethnic diversity among the participants and lack of educational background diversity. It would be beneficial to compare the data collected cross-culturally. This is also true in terms of marital status. The majority of the participants were married which left unexplored the perceptions of recently single, non-custodial fathers. These fathers are in a much different situation regarding parenting and participating in their children’s education than those who are married and live with their children, regardless of income or ethnicity.

Implications for Future Research

Areas of future research include conducting a comparative survey or interviews to uncover which priorities are consistent across all groups of fathers and
which priorities vary across cultures, age groups, income levels, and educational background. This would help in the creation of more effective intervention strategies to more deeply engage fathers in their preschool children’s school readiness. This type of study could also inform mothers and school officials whose priorities may differ from those of the fathers. Ultimately, with all parties working together and understanding each other, only benefits could come for the children involved. The final possible benefit of this particular study would be a better understanding of the resources needed to bridge the gap between those fathers who are active and participate in their children’s lives and those who are not involved. This could ultimately encourage more paternal involvement in preschool education and bring society to the point at which all children are exposed to consistent and stable adults who are emotionally invested in them, to a physical environment that is safe and predictable, to regular routines and rhythms of activities, to competent peers, and to materials that stimulate the exploration and enjoyment of the world and from which they derive a sense of mastery.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Sample of Pilot Study Interview Questions

Interview questions

1. What were your experiences with your father’s interactions regarding your education?

2. What role do you feel father’s play in preparing their children to enter school?

3. Do you believe that it is important for children to experience learning opportunities at home before they start school?

4. Whose responsibility is it to educate children and to make sure that they are receiving all the help that they need to be successful?

5. What responsibilities if any do you have to make sure that your child is academically prepared to start school?

6. What barriers if any do you feel keep fathers from being actively involved in their children’s education?
APPENDIX B

Paternal Participation in Children’s School Readiness

What is your age?____   What is your marital status?________________________
How many children do you have, and what are their ages?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
How many of your children attend or have attended preschool?________________
Using the following scale, rate the following items based on how frequently you engage in these activities with your child.

1-  Never
2-  At least once a year
3-  At least once a month
4-  Weekly
5-  Daily

1. Reading with your child.

   1  2  3  4  5

2. Participate in drawing or other art activities with your child.

   1  2  3  4  5

3. Construct puzzles or shaping activities with your child.

   1  2  3  4  5

4. Talk with your child about everyday routines or activities.

   1  2  3  4  5

5. Play games or sports with your child.

   1  2  3  4  5
6. Sing or play instruments with your child.

Using the same scale (never – 1, at least once a year – 2, at least once a month – 3, weekly – 4, and daily – 5), rate how frequently you engage in the following activities at your child’s school.

1. Speak with a teacher about your child.

2. Visit your child’s school.

3. Participate in parent-teacher nights or open houses.

4. Talk to your child about activities from their school.

5. Inquire about your child’s performance or development.

Using the following scale, rate the following items based on the level of support they provide your involvement with your child.

1- Never Provide Support
2- Seldom Provide Support
3- Sometime Provide Support
4- Frequently Provide Support
5- Always Provide Support
1. Past experiences with your father provide support for your involvement with your child.

2. Relationships you have with other parents provide support for your involvement with your child.

3. Your knowledge about child development provides support for your involvement with your child.

4. The relationship you have with your child’s mother provides support for your involvement with your child.

5. Your financial status provides support for your involvement with your child.

Using the following scale, rate the following items based on how frequently you perceive them to be a barrier to your involvement with your child.

1- Never a Barrier
2- Seldom a Barrier
3- Sometimes Barrier
4- Frequently a Barrier
5- Always a Barrier

1. Your child’s mother is a barrier to your participation with your child.
2. Your level of education is a barrier to your participation with your child.

1  2  3  4  5

3. Your financial status is a barrier to your participation with your child.

1  2  3  4  5

4. Societal expectations for fathers are a barrier to your participation with your child.

1  2  3  4  5
5. Your residential proximity to your child is a barrier to your participation with your child.

Rate the following from 1 to 10 with 10 being most important and 1 being least important:

___Providing emotional support to your child
___Providing for your child financially
___Participating in your child’s education
___Being involved in decision-making about your child’s health
___Having regular close interactions with your child
___Having open communication with your child’s mother
___Sharing your culture with your child
___Sharing my religion with the child
___Seeing your child on a regular basis
___Participating in building your child’s morals and values