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# The Relationship Between Male Involvement in Early Childhood Education and Student Academic Achievement

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Carla Barnes

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MA, Alcorn State University, 2008

BS, University of Southern Mississippi, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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## Abstract

Researchers have found that the limited involvement of fathers in their children's academic activities may negatively affect children's academic development. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the role of father involvement in the academic achievement of young children in early childhood classes and to assess barriers to such involvement. Guided by Erikson, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner theories of learning and development, the research questions examined fathers' perceived level of educational involvement, barriers to educational involvement, and the relationship between the level of recorded father involvement and student achievement. Data were collected using a modified Parental Involvement Survey that was developed and used for interviewing teachers and given to fathers ($n$ = 142) of children attending an early childhood center with multiple sites in an urban, southern U.S. city. Archived student test scores and fathers' attendance records in center activities were also examined. Descriptive responses were assessed for frequency and showed fathers' perceived involvement being greatest in helping their children with homework. Their work schedules were perceived to be the primary barrier to greater involvement. An independent-samples $t$ test showed that students of fathers with higher levels of participation in center activities such as football games and field trips had significantly higher end-of-year achievement scores than did students of fathers with lower participation, $t$ (139) = 2.24, $p < 0.05$. Recommendations to local center directors include encouraging fathers' participation in educational center activities and modifying activity schedules to increase fathers' involvement, which may improve student performance and contribute to positive social change.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Researchers have questioned the nature and frequency of male parental involvement in their children's academic activities in multiple publications for more than 20 years. The limited presence of male parents in such activities as school events or assisting in homework, may negatively affect children's academic development. Male parental involvement can lead to positive changes in their children's social and emotional behavior and improvement in school behavior and attention to instructional directions. However, limited male parental involvement can produce opposite effects. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the role of male parental involvement in the academic achievement of young children and assess barriers to such involvement. Works by Erikson (1963), Vygotsky (1978), and Bronfenbrenner (1979) provided a theoretical foundation for understanding the role of males in childhood development. Bronfenberrenn's (1979) theory of human development suggests that children develop in relation to influences of others where the home or family is the initial influence.

Commonly observed is that female parents arevisible and influential during the child's early education; male parents are less visible (Mutsotso, 2011). Traditionally, school personnel in the United States have consulted with mother figures regarding early learners' performance and school activities (Gutman & Feinstein, 2010; Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011; Wardle, 2004). Factors that contribute to lack of male parent visibility include society's views regarding the knowledge and skills of the male parent involvement and the negative experiences of male parents in school settings (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011; Peters et al., 2007). On the other hand, researchers (Cabrera 2007;

Downer & Mendez, 2005; McFadden, Tamis-LeMonda, & Cabrera, 2012; Tamis-LeMonda, Cabrera, & Baumwell, 2013) found that children performed better academically and exhibited more positive behavior when their fathers were involved in their education. Cabrera et al., (2007) studied 1,685 families of children ages two and three enrolled in Head Start. Fathers responded to a questionnaire and were videotaped as they engaged in conversations with their children. Time of father engagement with their children predicted their cognitive and emotional outcomes. There was a significant relationship between children's language scores and the engagement of fathers whose educational level was above high school. A positive association was also found between father supportiveness and their two-year old children's emotional regulation (Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2013) found similar results when fathers engaged in conversations with their children. The researchers noted that fathers used questions with the *wh* stem: who, what, when, where. These questions prompted engaging conversations between father and child rather than a repetition of what their children said which assisted in their language development.

Although researchers have noted the important role played by father figures in children's education, they have found that fathers' involvement continues to be limited (Downer & Mendez, 2005; Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, & Cabrera, 2011). In another study, more than 50% of fathers had no contact with their kindergarten children's teachers (Rimm-Kaufmann & Zang, 2005). Also, in a survey of 1,000 fathers, which was conducted by the National Center for Fathering and National PTA ([NCFNPTA], 2009), 32% of fathers reported that they never visited their children's

classrooms while 54% never volunteered at school, 74% never had lunch with their children at school, and 39% never read to their children. A more recent report of the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012 (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013) included similar statistics for parent participation in general. The most frequent type of parent engagement was attendance at meetings such as parent/teacher association meetings.

In studying male parents' participation in children's education, researchers have identified several barriers to greater involvement. One barrier is that school personnel often are unaware of the importance of supporting male involvement and how to involve males in schools (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005). Efforts of school personnel to involve male parents are inhibited by societal perceptions that women are responsible for child rearing; thus, the female parent is often perceived as the designated contact parent. Also, parent-child involvement activities at school are geared to the participation of the female parent with little to no provision for involving the male parent. In one study, more than 50% of the fathers had no contact with their kindergarten children's teachers (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005).

Researchers have reported influences of male parents on their children's cognitive and emotional development; however, much of the research has focused on children enrolled in Head Start and on the influences of the male parent on a single dimension of child development. In this study I examined multiple dimensions of child development in a single study of children ages four and five enrolled in a multiple site early childhood center. The perceived involvement of fathers in children's school activities, the perceived

barriers to involvement, and the nature of the relationship between father participation in children's school activities and student academic performance were the multiple dimensions included in this study.

Several potential implications for positive social change may result from the design of the study. Changed perceptions of the inability of fathers to contribute to the education of their children would be among the social changes. Researchers studying social change and schooling (Donaldson, 2006; Hawley, 2007; Senge, 2006**)** support the need for creating an environment whereby an understanding and appreciation of male involvement are promoted. Input of fathers could contribute to this understanding and help to design efforts to dispel biases and stereotypes associated with their participation. In this regard, involving male parents in identifying activities that permit their involvement may increase their participation.

The creation of a community of practice would also represent a positive social change. The functions of a community of practice would include male parents and other stakeholders collaborating on curriculum modifications and center events. Through this collaboration, knowledge, skills, interests, and concerns of male parents can be identified and lead to enhanced investment of male parents in their children's academic activities.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation contains a description of the study, its rationale related to gaps in the current literature, and explanations of its linkage to social change in promoting male parent involvement and student achievement. Topics discussed in the section include the problem and purpose of the quantitative study. The research questions, hypotheses, theoretical framework, and nature of the study are described based

on the premise that changing child outcomes is best accomplished through collaborative efforts between the home and school. The variables associated with changing child outcomes are male parent engagement in school activities and student test scores. The remaining contents of Chapter 1 include definitions of terms related to the study, assumptions upon which the study was based, the scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

## Background

The degree of male parental involvement with their children is related to early learning in both positive and negative ways. Researchers support that more positive child outcomes are a result of frequent male parent-child engagement and the parent's supportive behavior (Schindlaler (2010). The results of studies indicate that children's language development and their behavior toward schooling are positively influenced by conversations between male parents and their children (Bretherton (2010). However, limited participation of male parents can have a negative influence on children's emotional development. Additionally, positive influences of male parent involvement have been found for both the child and the male parent.

Studies have shown a relationship between the emotional health of fathers and their engagement with their children. Schindlaler (2010) found that fathers' level of engagement in parenting predicted improvements in fathers' psychological wellbeing. Schindler also noted the financial contributions of residential biological fathers in two-parent homes were related to fathers' self-esteem but not necessarily related to increases in father engagement.

Other findings suggest that the absence of a male figure limits child-father attachment. Bretherton (2010) surmised that limited child-father attachments may have a negative impact on student outcomes. Regarding child-father attachment, Martin, Ryan, and Brooks-Gunn (2010) found that children's school readiness was strongly linked to fathers' supportiveness. The researchers examined supportive parenting behaviors of mothers and fathers based on videotaped sessions with their preschool children. School readiness was defined from the perspectives of academic and social readiness. The effects of father supportiveness on children's academic and social readiness were greater when levels of mothers' supportiveness were low.

The limited presence of fathers in their children's academic and social activities can negatively affect children's general development and their perceptions of the role of a father. Although fathers experience greater self-esteem from contributing to the financial welfare of their children (Schindler, 2010), limited engagement with their children may also reinforce the notion that the role of fathers is limited to providing financial support (Alegre, 2011; Schindler, 2010). Viewing fathers in this way may have a long-lasting and negative effect on children's emotional development (Alegre, 2011). Implicit in these views is that children can experience a void of the human interaction that a male parent can provide and may not learn the meaning of fathering.

The participation of fathers in the educational activities of young children is important for several reasons. Established in the literature are associations between father engagement and the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children (Pleck, 2010b; Rosenburg & Wilcox, 2006). According to several researchers, children

performed better academically and socially and exhibited increased positive behavior in the classroom when their fathers or father figures were involved in their educational activities (Cabrera, Fagan, Wight, & Schadler, 2011; Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Downer & Mendez, 2005). Similar to Martin et al.'s (2010) and Roopnarine et al.'s (2006) research on child-father interactions and father responsiveness, researchers' observations also revealed that students were more engaged when they reported the contributions of their fathers in helping with related activities and when fathers visited the classrooms. Finally, Roopnarine et al. (2006) observed that children made better progress and had better attitudes about their schoolwork when fathers were directly involved in their learning and showed an interest in the child's education.

Fathers' interest in their children's academic activities is associated with positive outcomes despite barriers that limit their participation. In multiple studies researchers supported that children who developed positive behaviors through fathers being engaged in their lives were less likely to become school dropouts (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007; Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, & Evans, 2006). However, commonly observed in school settings is that school personnel do not always view father participation as a welcoming experience Rimm-Kaufman and Zhang (2005) reported that school personnel often were unaware of the importance of supporting male involvement and how to involve males in the schools.

In much of the prior research on male parent involvement during early childhood, participants have been parents with children enrolled in Head Start and researchers have most often limited the investigation to influences of the parent on young children's social

and emotional development. In this study, I sought to learn more about the relationship between male parents' involvement in their children's education and student achievement for children ages four and five enrolled in a non-Head Start center. In addition to seeking the extent of the relationship between male parent engagement and student achievement, I also aimed to identify the nature of activities in which male parents tended to engage.

I acknowledge the importance of the participation of both parents in the lives of their children, but also through personal experiences, I recognize many children do not have the benefit of a father figure visiting their schools or supporting them with academic tasks. My study was based on the premise that changing child outcomes is best accomplished through a community of practice which involves collaborative efforts between the home and school. Because parents are their children's first and most important educators (Berger &Riojas-Cortez, 2011; Kernan, 2012), educators seeking to change student outcomes must include processes for building an awareness and appreciation of the parent's role in the teaching and learning process Therefore, in this study, I suggest the need for change that would include school personnel, parents, and other stakeholders recognizing how child development can be positively influenced by the presence of a male figure in children's lives. To that end, I concur with researchers studying social change and schooling (Donaldson, 2006; Hawley, 2007; Senge, 2006**)** whose views support the need for creating changes in environments that will encourage the involvement of all stakeholders. Related to my study, as stakeholders work collaboratively toward changing student outcomes, social change is promoted through

individuals developing an understanding and appreciation of the importance of male involvement in school activities.

## Problem Statement

Experts in the field of parenting have illustrated the influence of the father figure on child development. Researchers reported that limited father involvement has been found to have a negative impact on student performance and classroom behavior (Bretherton, 2010; Cabrera et al., 2007; Howard, Lefever, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2006). Other researchers studying student achievement and parent involvement have found that children made better progress and enacted more positive behaviors when fathers were highly engaged in their educational pursuits and in interactions with their teachers (Goldman, 2005; Roopnarine et al., 2006; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008). I investigated the problem that it was unknown whether the low or limited rate of father participation contributed to children's lack of performance on some assessment measures in an early childhood center. Center administrators' review of the end-of- year assessment reports revealed that, in general, students' performance scores on the Preschool Child Observation Record [COR] (High Scope, 2005), a copyrighted instrument used to assess developmental levels of early learners in six categories, were below those deemed to be *acceptable progress* in mathematics and other content areas.

Teachers scored the COR in six categories that ranged from 1 to 5 which represented the developmental level the child had achieved in each category; each category contained three to eight items. A score of 1 indicated the simplest function associated with the behavior and 5 indicated the most complex (High Scope, 2005).

Children's test items on the COR for the sub items of approaches to learning and numbers and operations were below the mean.

According to center attendance records from 2014- 2016, less than 20% of fathers participated in the activities of the center. Center personnel questioned whether this low or limited rate of father participation in children's academic preparation contributed to children's lack of performance on some assessment measures; they observed that students were more engaged when they reported the contributions of their fathers in helping with related activities and when fathers visited the classrooms. Personnel recognized that low participation could affect both early learners and their fathers in negative ways as had been reported in the literature (R..Harrell, personal communication, October, 28, 2014; Rimm-Kaufmann & Zang, 2005). Specifically, the limited participation of fathers in the center was similar to findings that Rimm-Kaufmann and Zang (2005) reported where more than 50% of the fathers had no contact with their kindergarten children's teachers. Thus, center personnel questioned the applicability of previous research to solving their problem of possible negative impact of limited father engagement in center activities on student performance.

## Purpose of the Study

One purpose of this study was to examine the fathers' perceptions of their involvement in, and barriers to, involvement. Another purpose was to explore the relationship between the frequency of father participation in children's school activities and student academic performance. The center I studied, had not studied its practices in the past. Rather, personnel identified objectives for meeting curriculum goals that

included increasing students' test scores in mathematics and other content areas as measured on their end-of-year assessment. The dependent variable of the study was achievement test scores and the independent variable was level of father participation in activities.

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions were explored in this study:

RQ1. What are the fathers' perceived level of educational involvement in their children's education?

RQ2. What are the fathers' perceived barriers to educational involvement?

RQ3. What is the relationship between level of father involvement and student achievement?

I also tested a hypothesis related to RQ3:

$H_0$3: There is no relationship between level of father involvement and student achievement.

$H_1$3: There is a relationship between level of father involvement and student achievement.

## Theoretical Framework

Contributions of theorists such as Erikson (1963), Vygotsky (1978), and Bronfenbrenner (1979) provided a foundation for understanding how children grow and develop; thus, how the involvement of males can contribute to that development. Ideas presented through their works demonstrated a connection between parental involvement and issues of social change. For example, the importance of parents and teachers

acquiring a comprehensive knowledge base to permit developmentally appropriate teaching and guidance in view of influences on the learner's cognitive, social, and emotional development is related to social change.

The context of these theories suggested that knowledge of how children learn would be beneficial for fathers. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) were among researchers who suggested the need to have a knowledge of theories of learning. This knowledge can help fathers to better understand how children learn and their role in assisting in the learning process. Further suggested from the theories was that knowledge of how children learn includes recognizing influences on cognitive and social development. Among influences is the integration of the cultural and moral values of the father and mother with those of the school. Erikson's (1963) contributions, through his influential theory of psychosocial development, maintained that cognitive development occurs congruently with social development.

Among explanations of the influences on children's cognitive and social development, found in Erikson's (1963) descriptions of developmental stages was his stage 3 – initiative vs. guilt. Knowledge of how children behave during the preschool years is especially helpful to fathers for recognizing what is expected of the child. According to this stage of development, "children begin to assert their power and control over the world through directing play and other social interaction" (Cherry, n.d., para. 1); leading a task with independence or unwanted assistance signals the beginning of their power and control. The theorist maintained that in this stage, children begin to function socially within their family. Children start to take the initiative of trying new activities.

When this initiative brings them into conflict with others, guilt can result. Implications for father involvement include understanding the child's desire to be involved in diverse activities that may require guidance.

According to Castillo (2015), in stage 3 “children who are successful at this stage feel capable and able to lead others” (Initiative vs guilt section, para. 6). They want to be in control of their own actions. In this respect, Erikson (1963) concluded that “children’s personalities and social skills grow and develop within the context of society and in response to society’s demands, expectations, values, a [and] social institutions such as families, schools, and child care programs” (Theories Applied to Teaching and Learning, n.d., para. 11). As cited in Morrison (2007, p. 99), “adults, especially parents and teachers, are principle components of these environments and therefore play a powerful role in helping or hindering in their personality and cognitive development. “Other researchers show implications of these elements of the theory for parents and caregivers (Berger & Riojas-Cortez, 2011; Epstein, 2001, 2005).

Similar to Erikson (1963), Vygotsky (1978) purported that how one thinks is a function of both social and cultural forces. In his theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky stressed nurturing and social play as vehicles for constructing meaning and guiding children to reach their potential level of development. Additionally, fathers' assistance could lead to children successfully performing tasks and solving problems which aids in their developing a positive self-concept. Based on conclusions Vygotsky presented in his theory, Snowman and Biehler (2006) explained that the cognitive development of children varies and depends upon the cultural experiences within the

environment. In essence, fathers can contribute to the cognitive development of their children through socializing with them and providing a culturally rich environment.

In reference to theoretical constructs of how children are affected by social and cultural forces, Snowman, McCown, and Biehler (2012) concluded that "children are first introduced to a culture's major psychological tools [beliefs, values, expectations] through social interactions with their parents and later through more formal interactions with classroom teachers" (p. 50).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) also illustrated the importance of the role of parents in children's cognitive and social development as children progress through various stages of development. Bronfenbrenner maintained that children are affected by their culture through communication of beliefs and customs that parents model and from the influence of other environmental structures. Reflecting on such theorists, now generally agreed is that parents are children's first and most important teachers (Berger & Riojas-Cortez, 2011).

A number of researchers have investigated the development of children related to the theories presented from the perspective of the involvement of the father figure. Research on child play supported that social play between the father figure and child is influential in the child's ability to construct meaning as Vygotsky (1978) suggested. According to Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans (2006), fathers interact with their children a great deal through play. In a longitudinal study of 62 families that investigated interactions of parents with their children from the age of 24 to 36 months, Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans (2006) found father interactions contributed to the construction of

children's vocabulary meaning. Through home visits and interviews, Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans (2006) found that when fathers used a variety of words in these interactions with their two year olds, the language skills of these children at age three were greater.

**Theoretical Frame and Father Practices**

A further illustration of similar research supporting the theoretical construct presented in this study is evident in findings that Cabrera et al. (2007) presented. Cabrera et al. examined the effects of father engagement on the cognitive, language, social, and emotional development of children ages 24 and 36 months and pre-kindergarten children. The studies explored three research questions: (a) how resident fathers engage with their young children at these age levels; (b) how fathers' human and financial resources, depressive symptoms, partner relationship quality and mother-child interactions, and children's characteristics (age groups) predict the quality of father engagement with their children; and (c) how fathers' engagements affect their young children's cognitive, language, social, and emotional outcomes.

Reported findings from the Cabrera and associates' study were that fathers who were educated and those whose partners had supportive relationships with the children were supportive of their children's education. Father support of their children's education was found to matter for their children's language and cognitive development across ages and influenced emotional development for children at 24 months and 64 months (pre-kindergarten). Cabrera et al. (2007) concluded that increasing the education of fathers and encouraging positive parenting would be beneficial aspects of programs

that address the needs of children and that promote the engagement of fathers with their children.

In contrast to earlier emphases seen in the parent involvement literature, attention has shifted to the advantages and disadvantages of the participation of father figures in the educational learning experiences of their children. It is now recognized that father involvement in children's education is related to the positive social, emotional, and cognitive development of their children (Formoso, Howard, Lefever, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2006; Formoso, Gonzales, Barrera, &Dumka, 2007). Early father involvement, beginning with infants and toddlers, has been associated with the development of cognitive competence (Allen & Daly, 2007). Downer and Mendez (2005) conducted a study of 85 African American fathers and father figures of preschool children enrolled in Head Start. The researchers found that greater involvement of fathers occurred when they lived in the home with the child, when fathers perceived that a strong parenting alliance existed, and when their children exhibited highly emotional behaviors.

Research revealed that children performed better academically and exhibited increased positive behavior in the classroom when their fathers or father figures were involved in their educational activities (Cabrera et al., 2007; Downer & Mendez, 2005). The literature reviewed suggested that the frequency of father or father figure participation in the child's education is among determining factors of children's successful academic performance. Inferential statistics were used in this study to test for the relationship between variables (father participation/student scores) to substantiate or

refute theories regarding the effects of father or father figure involvement on the academic performance of children.

## Nature of the Study

The study employed a quantitative design. According to Creswell (2013b), this research design is appropriate for making knowledge claims based primarily on participants' perspectives. Both Creswell and Groves, 2012) indicated that the quantitative approach is one in which the investigator employs strategies of inquiry such as surveys and seeks answers to research questions and hypotheses through statistical analysis. The research design used in this study was consistent with the purpose and nature of the study to determine the relationship between father participation and student performance. Data were collected through a modified version of the Parent Involvement Survey (White, 2008). White (2008) established the validity and reliability of the Parent Involvement Survey. Activity attendance and students' performance scores were also collected from a review of center documents. Documents included information related to types of activities offered by the centers, the frequency of father participation in both intervention activities and center activities, and student performance in the following content areas; initiative, social relations, creative representation, movement and music, language and literacy, mathematics and science. The data were used to identify (a) barriers to father/male participation in the education of early learners; (b) intervention strategies for enhancing father/male participation and student achievement; and (c) frequency of father/male participation.

## Definitions

*Barriers*: Situations or circumstances limiting father engagement in a child's educational activities (Graves & Wright, 2011;).

*Center activities*: Formal and informal events including visiting classrooms, assisting the child in the class, engaging in and taking leadership roles in center events, and other activities incorporated in the center's initiative (David & Warner, 2004).

*Father, father figure*: Male parent or a male with whom the child identifies and engenders feelings felt for a person's father (McKay et al., 2010).

*Intervention activities*: Orientation, parent teacher organization, and classroom committees designed to promote father participation (Epstein et al., 2009).

*Male involvement*: The extent to which a male engages in activities that encompass the schooling of that male's child (Epstein, 2005).

## Assumptions

I assumed that participants in the study would respond truthfully to survey items and that the study's instrument appropriately elicited information to address the research questions and hypotheses. It was also assumed that the records of involvement and student achievement were accurate.

## Scope and Delimitations

The study was limited to participants in one early childhood center with multiple campuses located in a rural area of a southern state. The study was limited to an investigation during one academic year of the center's operation. Information acquired

for the study was limited to surveys and a review of center documents. A limitation of the study design is that possible intervening variables were not examined.

This study was designed to determine the extent to which males were involved in an early childhood center, possible factors contributing to the level of involvement, and the relationship between involvement and achievement. The study sought to determine whether a relationship between father participation and student performance was significant and whether attendance at initiatives used to enhance father participation and minimize barriers were related to student performance.

The study involved the use of center documents, attendance reports, and performance scores as well as survey data from fathers or father figures. Through the application of descriptive and inferential statistics, data made available from surveys and performance scores were used to determine whether there were statistically significant relationships between student achievement scores of high versus low participating fathers. Further, implications of the benefits of father participation for the total development of children and the role of the center in facilitating participation were within the scope of the study as reflected in survey responses.

The results of the study may only be generalized to indicate possible relationships between male involvement and student performance in early childhood centers with similar characteristics as the sample in the study. The findings were not intended to be used to identify causation among the relationships studied.

Research questions and hypotheses tested were developed based on recurring questions in the parent involvement literature regarding the influence of fathers on child

development. Many theoretical perspectives of the types of father influence on child development appeared in the literature, including influence on a child's psychological, behavioral, and emotional development. Although these perspectives were important and perhaps interrelated, attention to the specific influences were not within the realm of this study. The basic interest of this investigation was focused on the relationship between fathers' participation in their child's schooling and the child's academic performance.

## Limitations

Participants in this study responded to a survey. Participants' responses in this self-report data collection tool may not have been completely accurate. The completeness of responses and validity of responses were not in my control as the researcher. I used center sign-in sheets to triangulate data from father participants to address this limitation. The survey did not explicitly question participants about best practices to encourage father participation. However, survey items that identified barriers and useful types of center participation activities provided information for future parent involvement efforts. Although I acknowledged that interviews can be useful in clarifying and expanding meaning from surveys, this method was not employed because of difficulties in scheduling working fathers for interviews.

## Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge needed to respond to questions about the relationship between father participation and a child's academic achievement. In addition, it is expected to identify inhibitors of and facilitators to father participation. The research findings are expected to equip school personnel with

information useful in planning the frequency and nature of parental involvement activities. Among intended results, the development of recommendations for implementing a model of father involvement, as it relates to student achievement, was expected to evolve.

There is a need for practitioners to be knowledgeable of language and cultural differences, biases, and stereotypes held regarding some ethnic groups (Sergiovanni, 2005). Thus, input of fathers could contribute to this understanding and help to design efforts to dispel biases and stereotypes associated with their participation. A study of the problem was intended to lead to the development of a collaboration model for continuous assessment and reflection of program objectives and services. A positive social change was anticipated to occur from the creation and implementation of collaborative practices for enhancing the involvement of males in the early training of children.

The problem was also applicable for other practitioners in education, especially administrators and leaders, as the effective school research has linked successful academic performance of students to the support of parents and culturally proficient schools (Hawley, 2007; Lindsey et al., 2005). Important to school leadership is the demonstration of understanding of cultural differences related to family beliefs (Sergiovanni, 2005). In attempts to create the kind of school that recognizes the value of parental involvement, particularly father involvement, administrative leaders must be aware of barriers that limit and undervalue father participation (Senge, 2006).

Researchers have reported that children who grow up with actively involved and nurturing fathers perform better in school (Howard et al., 2006), demonstrate better social

behaviors with peers (Flouri, 2005), and exhibit increased self-esteem (David & Warner, 2004; Downer & Mendez, 2005; Rimm-Kaufman &Zhang, 2005). This knowledge is important for the larger profession in school and curriculum planning to include the kinds of father involvement activities that would be attractive to them. Research supported that the type of involvement activities provided and behaviors of school personnel contribute to increasing father participation in school activities (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005). Therefore, changed perceptions of the contributions of fathers in the education of their children would be among social changes for the improvement of social conditions occurring through an inquiry of initiatives provided.. Curriculum modifications to include the participation of fathers on action committees for identifying strengths and areas in need of improvement, and for making informed decisions regarding actions to address school improvement issues would also address social change.

## Summary

I examined the extent to which males were involved in an early childhood center, possible factors that contributed to the level of involvement, and the relationship between father involvement and the academic achievement of students. The study was directed to the problem that the participation of fathers or father figures was limited. The absence of the father figure may have had a negative effect on student performance and behavior and may have projected an image to young children that the role of a father was limited to that of a provider. Further, this perception may have a long-lasting and negative effect on children's understanding of parenting.

The research was grounded in the parent involvement literature which acknowledged that children perform better academically and socially in the classroom, as well as exhibit increased positive behavior, when their fathers or father figures are involved in their educational activities. The study was guided by an exploration of research questions and hypotheses that sought information on the relationship between father participation and student performance, the identification of participation barriers, and measurement of overall participation levels. The study sought answers to the frequency of the involvement of males in educational activities, the barriers to participation, and the relationship between fathers' involvement and student achievement.

The outcomes of this quantitative research study involving fathers or father figures, administrators, and staff were expected to yield variable results. Anticipated results were the identification of barriers to father participation, information needed to suggest changes that could result in a culture supportive of a professional learning community of practice in an early childhood center and implications for the larger professional community. Data for the study were collected through surveys of fathers and center personnel, center documents of father involvement initiatives, and student scores. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature related to the problem of limited male participation in the academic activities of their early learners.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

Researchers have expounded upon a variety of views regarding the participation of fathers in their children's academic preparation. Among views of researchers studying parental involvement is that fathers and father figures participate in a limited manner in the education of their children (Noel et al., 2013; Palm & Fagan, 2008). Researchers have also established that key to the academic and overall wellbeing of early learners is the presence of parents in their activities (Hill &Tyson, 2009; Sanders, 2008). According to this research, the attention span of children increases, negative behaviors decrease, and performance increases when parents participate in academic settings (Hill &Tyson, 2009; Rosenburg & Wilcox, 2006). Researchers suggest that through conscious efforts to facilitate change in the perceptions of father involvement in schooling, increases in these positive benefits to early learners can result (Epstein, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Sanders, 2008). Increased opportunities for ensuring the wellbeing of early learners can be facilitated through a combined effort of school personnel and families to ensure the academic setting is inviting to fathers.

The school and home are social institution; however, school personnel recognize that values parents establish in the home are linked to the school success of students. Parents are their children’s first and most enduring educators (Berger & Riojas-Cortez, 2011; Kernan. 2012). The involvement of parents, particularly fathers, is related to the overall success of their male children in their use of language and in their behavior (Allen & Daly, 2007; Bertrand & Pan, 2011; Pleck, 2010b). Traditionally, mothers engage in

reading and writing with young children; teachers have relied on the involvement of mothers and have been accustomed to communicating with a female figure (Aram, 2010; Rimm-Kaufmann & Zang, 2005). Therefore, as school personnel plan processes for increasing male involvement, they need to consider how parents or fathers view their roles, and also how instructional leaders view the participation of males. In essence, school personnel may need to consider the background experiences that fathers can bring to the academic setting that are supportive of the success of their children.

In this study, I highlight the need for school personnel to identify roles for fathers in the schooling of their children I conducted this study in order to explore the extent that fathers participated in school activities and the nature of activities school personnel planned for father participation. The literature reviewed in this chapter relates to the problem that limited involvement of fathers or father figures in the academic activities of their children negatively influences children's performance and behavior (Noel et al., 2013). The literature review was also designed to include information related to the research questions in such topics as (a) the benefits of male participation, (b) perceptions of male participation, (c) the relationship between male participation and student performance, and (d) the relationship between school culture and male participation. I also discussed the literature search strategy and theoretical framework for the study.

The review of the literature begins with a broader discussion of parent involvement that focuses on early childhood and the relationship of child development to parental involvement. This discussion serves as an introduction to the specific problem

of the engagement of fathers. In the review I then address the male involvement literature with attention to the importance of involvement and barriers to involvement.

Next, I include a discussion of school culture and social change that demonstrates the connection of culture to theories appropriate for understanding the needs of stakeholders. I focus this discussion on creating an organizational culture appropriate for improving student learning through involving fathers. The review also contains discussions of leadership styles for guiding social change and barriers to participation. A review of selected studies based on the research method selected for the study is also included.

## Literature Search Strategy

Information reported in this review is synthesized from books, refereed (or peer-reviewed) journals, and other professional literature. Databases represented in the review include EBSCO, ERIC, and ProQuest. Key terms I entered in Google Yahoo, and other search engines included male or father involvement, parent involvement, early childhood development, and fatherhood initiatives.

Aspects of the review contain seminal works that form the theoretical base of the study. These reference sources span over a period of several years beginning in the 1950s through the 2000s. Reference sources directly related to the presence of fathers or father figures in the academic preparation of their young children are concentrated in the early to mid-2000s. However, a number of current peer-reviewed sources that expand upon earlier findings or present opposing views range from 2011 through 2015.

## Theoretical Framework

Psychologists and researchers have contributed to understandings regarding the roles of the school and home in child development and the value of both institutions to children's success. Child development researchers and theorists have identified various stages of growth for early learners and factors that influence their overall development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1952). Research findings indicate that developmental growth occurs in predictable sequences and changes, especially during a child's first 9 years (Berger, 2011; Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1952). According to Berger (2011), changes in the life span of an individual are multidimensional and can be described as multi-contextual and multi-disciplinary. Specific factors such as the family, school, and community influence these change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The family constitutes the first context or factor in the multi-contextual changes in one's life span (Berger, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is within the family that a child is first introduced to values and expected behaviors that are modeled through the actions of parents and significant others.

Parents and significant others influence the cognitive development of early learners through their interactions with them. Social and sensorimotor experiences are especially important for the development of the brain during the first three years of an early learner's life (Gutman & Feinstein, 2010). A child's capacity to learn is associated with his exposure to social and sensorimotor experiences (Berger, 2011). Additionally, the optimal development of verbal language also occurs during a child's first 3 years (Piaget, 1952). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

subscribed to characteristics of a child's developmental stages in their guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices (Follari, 2011). NAEYC adopted principles of child development and learning included in the publication of Bredekamp and Copple (1997, p. 10): and on their website. According to NAEYC (n.d.), child

- development occurs in a relatively orderly sequence, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired;
- early experiences have both cumulative and delayed effects on individual children's development; optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning;
- development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts; and
- children develop and learn best in the context of a community where they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel psychologically secure. (NAEYC, n .d., p. 1).

These principles are especially important for parents who typically provide the most frequent contact with a child during the first 3 years of a child's life. Parenting behavior or style is linked to the kind and amount of security, love, affection, and parental interaction a child receives (Berger, 2011). Some researchers assert that experiences and nurturing during the early years of a child's life provide the foundation for the growth and development of the whole child (Epstein, 2011). Therefore, parenting styles and family culture are crucial in helping to shape the development of an early learner.

Parenting styles and family cultures vary as well as their influence on child development. Some researchers acknowledge that although parents have the initial responsibility for nurturing their children, the quality and extent of nurturing are dependent upon parenting skills (Kerman, 2012). Kerman noted that this initial nurturing has an effect on children's learning as children's academic outcomes are specifically linked to parenting and the home environment. Home and parental factors associated with children's learning include "a literacy rich home environment, quantity and quality of cognitive stimulation, parental sensitivity and child-centered emotional support and emphasis on the value of learning" (Kerman, 2012, p. 6). Researchers and practitioners frequently refer to these factors for promoting a child's readiness for formal schooling and resulting academic success.

## Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

The major focus of this review is the involvement of fathers or father figures in the lives of their young children with emphases on academic involvement. A variety of reference sources and diverse perspectives are included in this review. Discussions of these sources are organized in the following topics of the literature review: parental involvement expectations, and behaviors; importance of father involvement; male involvement: barriers; school culture: communities of learning; leadership and social change; and research methodology. These discussions show similarities and trends from past and more current research.

**Parental Involvement, Expectations, and Behaviors**

Writers on the subject of parental involvement approach parental involvement differently; therefore, many of their explanations of why father engagement with their young children is limited and also differ. Authors of previous and current publications suggest that the meaning of parental involvement varies and is based on the audience of inquiry (Williams & Sanchez, 2012). In a study of preschool administrators, Hilado, Kallemeyn, and Phillips (2013) noted that administrators' definitions of parental involvement differed based upon the level of parent participation in their schools. For example, in schools with low levels of parent participation, administrators defined such participation as attending "parent-teacher conferences, parent education programs, and assisting in the classroom" (Hildo et al., 2013, Findings section, para.1). However, administrators whose parents showed high levels of participation described involvement from the perspective of time parents spent at home in support of the child's schooling, interactions, and networking with the school.

The concept of parent involvement is presented in various sources and different levels. The concept at the federal level appears in the following statement of the Family Engagement in Education Act of 2011 (Section 3) and in Hildoetal. (2013, Introduction section, para. 1): "positive benefits for children, youth, families, and schools are maximized through effective family engagement that . . . is continuous across a child's life from birth through young adulthood" (Family Engagement in Education Act of 2011, Section 3). Authors of the Act also suggested that family engagement is a shared responsibility aimed at providing services to enhance the development of children. In

this regard, Kindervater (2010) reported practices that involved parents learning how to reinforce their children's class activities by linking some phonemes to their physical motions.

Other views of parent involvement are associated with successful child outcomes. Similar to reasons for parent involvement in the early grades being associated with parent expectations of the instructional program (Noel et al., 2013), Hill and Tyson (2009) linked parent involvement with academic achievement. Hill and Tyson gave examples of strong relationships between specific conditions and parental involvement at the middle school level. These researchers concluded that parental involvement was more visible when parents received clear expectations about involvement and they understood the purposes, goals, and meaning of academic performance.

Apparent from the research reported is the existence of changes in the extent and type of parent involvement. Supportive of this view of parent involvement, researchers show that parents are increasingly aware of their influence on the development of their children (Calstate. Edu, n.d.) and their expectations of skills children need at kindergarten entry (Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012; Mohr, Zygmunt**,** & Clark, 2012; Noel et al., 2013). The results of the 2012 National Household Education Survey (NHES) (Noel et al., 2013), reveal that the nature of parental awareness reported in 1993 had changed in 2007. The expectations of parents in 1993 included that children have such cognitive skills as knowledge of letter names; this expectation extended to children being able to read storybooks at kindergarten entry in 2007. One can conclude from the findings that

parental awareness is evident in increases in the number of parents who read daily to their early learners and decreases in their children watching television.

Changes in parental involvement are also associated with specific early childhood programs. Gelber & Isen (2013) examined changes in families' engagement activities that supported child development for children who had enrolled in Head Start. Gelber & Isen found that the quantity of home activities designed to aid in child development increased as children's skills were enhanced through services in their Head Start program. Gelber & Isen suggested that parent engagement in such activities as the parent council did not affect the activities parents provided for their children at home. Gelber & Isen reported that parents were more involved in terms of time spent reading and socializing with their children. Both Gelber & Isen (2013) and Concannon (2007) referred to challenges of fathers who did not live with their children; Gelber & Isen noted that fathers spent an average of five days monthly with them. Based upon the changes in parent involvement noted in Gelber & Isen's study, the improvement in children's skills appeared to reinforce parent involvement in home activities.

Similar to prior references to the amount of time fathers spent with their children, some investigations of parental involvement focus on the relationship between time parents are involved with their children and their children's academic success. The amount of parental involvement has implications for children's personal and social development (Johnson, Li, Kendell, Strazdins, & Jacoby, 2013; Vandell et al.,2010). Findings of the NICHD (Noel et al., 2013) child care study included characteristics and behaviors of 15 year old teenagers who received child care services during early

childhood. Researchers found that the increasing amount of time children spent in child care outside the home was related to the likelihood that these children would engage in risky or impulsive behaviors at age 15. Several researchers show similar findings where children's behaviors are negatively influenced when parent involvement is limited (Alegre, 2011; Craig & Mullan, 2010; Gutman & Feinstein, 2010; Johnson et al., 2013). One can conclude from such findings that the amount and quality of time parents spend with their early age children help with molding and sustaining their positive behaviors.

Contributors to the parent involvement literature illustrate parents orchestrate increased academic, cultural, and other home related activities that support the total development of the child. For example, according to data from NHES, far over the majority (86%) of children "in kindergarten through grade 12 whose parents" participated in the study were provided a designated space to complete their homework (Noel et al., 2013, p. 7). Also, an adult in the home monitored the completion of the work for 67% of these children and parents engaged their children in various literacy building, civic, cultural, and entertainment activities that included visits to museums, bookstores, libraries, and historical sites (Noel et al., 2013). The highest percentages of parent participation Noel et al. cited were for their attending a community, religious, or ethnic event (54%), followed by attending an athletic event (42%), and visiting a library and bookstore (39 & 38% respectively). The lowest percentage for an engagement activity reported was visiting a zoo or aquarium with only 19% of the parents citing this type of parent-child engagement (Noel et al., 2013). Associations between types of involvement

activities and available resources can be implied based on the percentages given. A zoo or aquarium, for example, may not have been available to many families.

Although researchers previously cited indicate parent engagement in home activities has increased, parent participation in school activities has not always shown consistent increases as evident from the purpose of this study. Some researchers address the need for increasing parent involvement in schools and identify factors that may limit their participation (Douglass, 2011; Epstein, 2011). Douglass (2011) linked gaps in family participation to the inability of some early childhood teachers to form relationships with parents. According to Noel et al. (2013), the case of inconsistent parent participation has existed despite notifications from centers and schools of the early learner's progress or needs, and requests for parents' participation in various activities. Given this observation Noel et al. reported the following:

> The most common school-related activity that parents reported participating in during the school year was attending a general school or a parent-teacher organization or association (PTO/PTA) meeting (87 percent). Seventy-six percent of students had parents who reported attending a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference; 74 percent had parents who attended a school or class event; 42 percent had parents who volunteered or served on a school committee; 58 percent had parents who participated in school fundraising; and 33 percent had parents who met with a guidance counselor. (p. 2)

The level of parent engagement indicated in these percentages is consistent with researchers' assessments of the need for increased parent participation in the academic preparation of their children.

**Importance of Father Involvement**

Although the parental involvement research is more specific to parents in general, a growing body of research has focused on the participation of the father figure associated with the developmental needs of early learners. Pattnaik and Sriram (2010) noted that emphases on father involvement in empirical studies began in the 1960s, and concluded that father involvement has been researched in terms of fatherhood as an evolving sociocultural phenomenon from such perspectives as “policy framework, and programs related to male involvement in children's lives” (para. 1). Therefore, researchers have often discussed the role of the father within such topics as family structure.

Fatherhood and father involvement literature is visible internationally. Research on European and Australian fathers, similar to that in the United States, has addressed fathering roles through policies and procedures related to family issues (O'Brien & Moss, 2010; Parkinson, 2010). Common workplace policies supportive of father engagement in the U.S. and other countries include flexible work hours and paid parental leave (Claessens, 2012). Additionally, policies and procedures have been established that aid the fathering role for those who are adoptive fathers, divorced, incarcerated, or face other familial issues in a cultural context (Cabrera, 2010; O'Brien & Moss, 2010). Among fathering roles is participating in academic and other activities of their children. Some of

these policies and procedures permit fathers to have time to engage in young children's educational pursuits.

Within this sociocultural phenomenon of fatherhood, the role of father is described in various ways. In the context of parental involvement, researchers describe the role of father as that of a role model, a teacher, a breadwinner, and a nurturing father (Lamb, 2010). However, in a study of father involvement of communities in Africa, researchers revealed that father involvement is not important or a natural occurrence in some small communities (Hewlett & MacFarlane, 2010). Pattnaik and Sriram (2010) referred to a study that Hewlett and MacFarlane conducted who noted that in Aka and Kipsigis communities in Africa, for example, "children in these cultures are socially, emotionally, cognitively and morally competent regardless of whether fathers are intimate or distant" (Hewlett & MacFarlane, 2010, p. 429). Although the aforementioned roles appear important to the development of any child, cultural differences appear to dictate the importance of fathers to the development of children.

A number of contributors to the father involvement literature establish that fatherhood is important for positive outcomes in the development of children. Some researchers address this topic whether the focus is on co-parenting or single parent homes (Pleck, 2010a). In fact, Pleck (2010b) and Jeynes (2014) noted that father involvement is related to positive child outcomes and is independent of the positive influences of the mother. Other authors attribute the importance of father involvement to the benefits of father-son relationships and the observation of the underrepresentation of fathers in parenting and males in the teaching profession (Pattnaik & Sriram (2010). The literature

also contains extensive reports of male involvement and benefits derived for both children and the male figures. Howard, Lefever, Borkowski, and Whitman (2006) and Rimm-Kaufman and Zhang (2005) reported that among benefits to children who grow up with actively involved and nurturing fathers are that they perform better in school, exhibit enhanced socio-emotional skills, increased self-esteem, and literacy development. The benefits appear to be greater when the father resides in the home.

The benefits of father and parent involvement in general are linked to discussions of economic capital. Bertrand and Pan (2011) associated economic capital with decreases in dropout rates and increases in college entry that would promote the upward mobility of children and decrease dependency on assistance programs. Economic capital was also referenced to parents' investment in their children through greater engagement in their educational activities because of programs made possible through federal sources for low-income families (Gelber & Isen, 2013). According to Lin and McLanahan (2007), children have more access to social capital in a two-parent home and are less likely to drop out of high school, more likely to attend college and graduate from college. Despite the benefits of male involvement, reports show that achieving father figure/male involvement is challenging as noted in the chapter of the literature review that follows.

**Male Involvement: Barriers**

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**School Culture: Communities of Learning**

School culture is a composite of beliefs, symbols, values, attitudes, and behaviors that identify the school (Lindsey et al., 2005; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). Lindsey et al. (2005, p. 20) identified culture as a predominant force in people's lives and one of five principles of cultural proficiency. The culture of the school affects administrative processes inclusive of the nature of decision-making, communication, professional development, and change (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). Likewise, leadership also influences the culture of the school. Lindsey et al. illustrated that in a culturally proficient school the leadership is able to respond to its challenges, differences in its organization, and cultural differences among its stakeholders such as those seen in the multi concerns f involvement. Therefore, a culture where student achievement and participation of fathers is valued, the leader is likely to integrate these aspects in the leadership style and tasks. Suggested in the school climate literature was that such a

culture is reflective of systems thinking, a learning organization, and communities of practice (Sergiovanni, 2005).

Contributors to organizational literature have linked characteristics of learning organizations, systems thinking, and communities of practice to the successful operations of the organization (Lindsey et al., 2005; Wenger et al., 2002). These three entities are interrelated as they focus on building a knowledge base for operations through the involvement of individuals who share a common interest and commitment to identifying and implementing organizational goals. The characteristics of learning organizations, systems thinking, and communities of practices are summarized in the definition of communities of practice. Wenger et al. (2002) defined communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p.4).

The effective school research linked successful academic performance of students to the support of parents and culturally proficient schools operating as communities of practice (Hawley, 2007; Lindsey et al., 2005). The literature reviewed supported that change in an organization is facilitated through communities of practice. In such a community, individuals share a common vision and engage in continuous learning to bring about needed change. Communities of practice realize their value, the need for networking and continuous open and engaged communication, and recognize that knowledge, events, rules, and activities are needed to ensure building and maintaining relationships (Donaldson, 2006; Lindsey et al., 2005).

In culturally proficient schools an understanding of cultural differences related to family beliefs, for example, is recognized and appropriately addressed (Sergiovanni, 2005). The recognition of cultural differences was also illustrated in the framework Senge (2006) presented for involving individuals in developing a shared vision. Research supported that the type of involvement activities provided and behaviors of school personnel contributed to increasing father participation in school activities (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005). Drawing upon Senge's (2006) work, creating the kind of school that recognizes the value of parental involvement, particularly father involvement, would suggest that administrative leaders recognize barriers to father participation and ways to develop value-based partnerships.

Researched-based recommendations for creating and sustaining effective learning communities of practice have been presented in the works of researchers including Senge (2006), and Wenger et al. (2002). These researchers agreed that communities of practice are recognized as continually evolving and characterized by best practices aimed at enhancing the operations of the organization. Understood from the literature was that communities of practice require support in their evolving stages and throughout the lifetime in order to be effective. The following were among needs implied for effective communities of practice (a) establishing networks, (b) defining dimensions of issues, (c) providing avenues for knowledge acquisition and sharing, and (d) engaging all stakeholders **(**Wenger et al., 2002). Theories and practices associated with healthy organizational cultures and learning organizations suggested that a culture that accepts and promotes male participation would evolve as a result of establishing learning

communities. The works of Senge (2006) and Sergiovanni (2005) provided support that creating processes to encourage involvement and collaboration along with modeling and professional development were actions that would promote effective learning communities.

**Leadership and Social Change**

The leadership literature contains a multitude of leadership styles and behaviors that are often linked to a particular model or theory. Leadership styles and organizational culture have a direct impact on planning for social change in the school (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Lussier & Achua, 2010). Both task and people oriented leadership models were commonly described for school and organizational management. However, the consensus among researchers was that one set of leadership traits and behaviors for all situations does not exist (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). Implicit in the literature was that the individual responsible for implementing and guiding leadership tasks has specific qualities that promote effective leadership. Fullan (2007) stressed that among qualities of effective leaders were the abilities to understand change, build relations, and guide knowledge creation and sharing. Fullan linked these qualities to improving schools through educational reform.

A review of the literature revealed that a major leadership challenge is associated with achieving positive social change. Lindsey et al. (2005) identified a major challenge as influencing "others to make changes in their values, beliefs, and attitudes" (p. 21). Donaldson (2006) identified challenges as recognizing their cognitive, behavioral, and social learning needs; acknowledging the impact of the home environment in the teaching

and learning process; and recognizing the impact of changing economic and other features of the society on schooling. These and other challenges described in a scenario of Lindsey et al. (2005) show rapid changes in a community because of a population increase. This increase brought with it changes in socio-economic levels of the community, and changes in the community structure in terms of businesses, housing, and schools. According to the authors, challenging was for school leaders to create an authentic vision for the school that was reflective of meeting "the generative opportunities and needs of diverse communities" (Lindsey et al., 2005, p. 21). Associated with this major challenge are other challenges linked to the role of the educational agency in creating a mission that recognizes and makes provisions for the diverse needs of the clientele served.

These challenges are among those linked with education in the United States. Spring (2008) linked these challenges to the following five themes inherent in the development of the American school: (a) culture and religion, (b) ideological management, (c) racism, (d) economic goals, and (e) consumerism and environmental education. Challenging for schools as illustrated through the works of Chudgar and Luschei (2009) and Crosnoe and Cooper (2010) are economic conditions/income inequality, school contexts, and family processes. A school leader, addressing these challenges in the context of the historical perspective as Spring explained, would need to consider the type of leadership needed to bring about change. Therefore, following the concepts of Senge (2006) and the principles of cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2005), efforts of the school leader would encourage individuals to invest in the organization and

to construct common meanings as a community of learners in which they share a common goal. The leadership literature suggests that the style exhibited would determine the approach used to meet the challenges.

The contingency approach is frequently referenced in leadership practices Based on Fielder's contingency theory (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987), the approach involves leadership based on the situation, the leader's traits and behaviors, and recognizes that no one leadership style can be effective in all situations (Fitzsimons, James, & Denyer, 2011; Palestini, 2009). Leadership is influenced by the type of relationship the leader has with members of the organization, the nature of the task to be performed, and the ability or power of the leader to influence members supervised (Lussier & Achua, 2010). The description of the situational leadership style is associated with the contingency model.

Transformational leadership is reflective of such practices as the leader motivating followers to increase their expectations of themselves. Further, researchers suggest transformational leaders encourage followers to think about the value of the task, and inspire them to become leaders themselves (Balyer, 2013; Sergiovanni, 2005). In their investigation of the impact of leadership styles on employee satisfaction, Paracha, Qamar, Mirza, Hassan, and Waqas (2012) attributed transformational leaders as having the ability to create valuable and positive change in their followers. These changes result from "a leader [who] focuses on 'transforming' others to help each other, to look out for each other, to encourage and be harmonious, and to pay attention towards [the] organization as a whole" (Paracha et al., 2012, p. 57). In terms of leaders, Grint (2010) suggested that they function to displace the anxiety and resistance of their followers.

These descriptions of transformational leadership have implications for leaders facilitating change in educational settings to promote fathers developing positive expectations of themselves.

Implicit in transformation leadership is a shared or participative leadership style. Shared leadership practices encourage the power of authority to transfer to those who have acquired a level of commitment to achieve purposes of the organization (Fitzsimons et al., 2011). Contributors to the leadership literature have described change attributable to the ability of the leader to transform the culture and to engage personnel through a participative leadership style (Groves & LaRoccal, 2012; Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011). Similarly, other studies have found transformational leadership to factor in job satisfaction and as a predictor of employee performance (Franke & Felfe, 2011; Raja & Palanichamy, 2011). Despite the leadership style, challenging for leaders is facilitating the involvement of fathers in school settings as is noted throughout this review.

Also, despite the leadership style, effective leadership behaviors encourage good relations among personnel, the development of a culture of cooperative communication, intellectual stimulation, monitoring, and the provision of appropriate resources. Based on Marzano's (2006) review of "Research on Leadership," leadership tasks for an educational organization planning for change included considerations of the level of groups involved and the order of change decisions. Given his explanations, effective leadership behaviors encourage good relations among personnel, the development of a culture of cooperative communication, intellectual stimulation, monitoring, and the provision of appropriate resources. The works of such authors as Fullan (2007) Raelin

(2011), and Senge (2006) supported the conclusion that effective leadership entails the ability to guide individuals in an organization to construct common meanings as a community of learners. Wenger et al. (2002) referred to such groups as communities of practice in which knowledge is enhanced through ongoing interaction.

Authorities in leadership describe specific characteristics of leaders who are effective builders of such communities. Pitcher (as cited in Sergiovanni, 2005) labeled these leaders as archetypes; specifically, artists, craftsmen, and technocrats. The artist is an open minded, skilled visionary; the craftsman serves as a developer of human capital who recognizes the importance of empowering others; the technocrat, although not people oriented, is a task manager. The nature of the archetypes suggested that individuals able to apply these behaviors in a situation would be able to create a culture in which learners share a common goal and emerge as leaders themselves.

The leadership literature also contains descriptions of moral and ethical leaders. Senge (2006) was among authors who addressed the moral and ethical dimension of the effective leader. The morally or ethically conscious leader is able to recognize cultural change in an organization and to identify and align the subcultures created through organizational growth in order to promote an effective and efficient operation. Implicit in the discussion of moral and ethical leadership practices is the importance of the effective leader aiding in the development of core values and respect in order to ensure a healthy organization. A shared vision is central to forming communities of learners (Fullan, 2007; Senge, 2006). Therefore, effective leadership is important in promoting the involvement and acceptance of the father figure in the educational center. The leader's

efforts of encouraging father participation and student achievement can be linked to the literature for practicing reflection-in-action. This practice would permit the leader to respond to questions pertinent to encouraging individuals to adopt a shared vision of the teaching and learning process.

As noted in discussions of transformational and other leadership styles, effective leadership behaviors include encouraging good relations among personnel. In more current research related to leadership as practice and social change, Raelin (2011) noted that agency in change is a process of mobilizing social actions. This explanation is supportive of the task of effective leadership behaviors of encouraging good relations among personnel. However, Raelin suggested that social interactions among personnel in an organization are subject to discouragement or encouragement in their presentation of ideas through influences of those participating in leadership. A key idea in Raelin's discussion of mobilizing social actions was collaboration that enables the use of collective capabilities among those in an organization to transform the organization or bring about change. The organization of collective capabilities is an example of social change in that it represents a collective action among individuals to address a social issue or situation (Fund for Southern Communities, n.d.). Collective action in this review is synonymous to a community of learners or communities of practice as the end goal is to facilitate agreement among stakeholders regarding best practices for facilitating father involvement in the academic settings of their children.

## Research on Involvement

Investigators of father involvement often rely on quantitative research. Studies also include qualitative and a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Mohr, Zygmunt**,** and Clark (2012) used qualitative research in the form of a case study to identify understandings of children's developmental needs and parent expectations. Bronfenberrenn's (1979) theory of human development suggests that children develop in relation to influences of others where the home or family is the initial influence. Similarly, Mohr et al. (2012) interviewed four mothers or grandmothers from low-income families regarding their expectations of their children who were enrolled in an early childhood program. Results were similar to studies of more affluent families in that parents aspired that their children would enter college. Also important to the parent involvement literature, the findings revealed that participants "wanted to work with their children's teachers" (Mohr et al., 2012, Abstract, para. 1) because of their understanding of the importance of parent-teacher relationships in the development of their children. These studies included surveys, interviews, and reviews of documents as the basic data collection methods.

Parent involvement in children's development based on perceptions of preschool administrators in Illinois was investigated in a qualitative study. Hilado et al. (2013) conducted interviews with a sample of 10 participants from 893 individuals of state-funded preschool sites who had participated in an earlier survey study. The interviewers sought definitions of parental involvement, ways parents had engaged in their programs, and descriptions of successes and challenges related to parent participation. In interviews

included in the study, administrators defined parental involvement as parent attendance at school activities. According to Hilado et al., this type definition was given from administrators whose parents were less frequently involved at the school site. However, administrators who provided a broader definition saw involvement from the perspective of the willingness of parents to also provide support to their children in the home environment. Challenges to parent engagement included "low family income, limited resources, unemployment, and isolation" (Hilado et al., 2013, Correlation section, para. 2). Researchers frequently report these challenges as barriers to parent involvement.

Quantitative studies are also conducted to investigate the influence of fathers or father figures on the wellbeing of their children. Several researchers investigated children's wellbeing as well as the relationship between children's academic performance and male involvement (Bronte-Tinkew, Horowitz, & Scott, 2009; Goldberg &Carlson, 2014). Researchers have addressed the relationship between the wellbeing of children and the father or father figure from various perspectives including such conditions as single parent homes, incarcerated fathers, and fathers of children with multiple mothers. Through employing pathway analysis, Bronte-Tinkew, Horowitz, and Scott (2009) used a sample of 4,027 resident fathers and children to investigate whether at 36 months of age, a child's externalizing behaviors and physical health were associated with the father having children with multiple partners. The analysis resulted in significant direct and indirect effects; disruptions caused by fathers having multiple partnered children had implications for children's physical health and wellbeing. An implication of the finding was associated with the quality of time the parent (father) spends with the child.

Another more recent quantitative study investigated the relationship between parenting behaviors and children's wellbeing. Goldberg and Carlson (2014), using "data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study ($N = 773$)" (p. 762), employed latent growth curve and fixed effects models to determine whether parental support in co-resident families was associated with children's behavioral problems. The investigation included behaviors demonstrated over ages 3 through 9 (Goldberg & Carson, 2014). The results revealed that greater parental supportiveness of biological parents was associated with lower child behavioral problems.

More recent studies reported in this section of the literature review confirm findings of earlier studies that employed quantitative and qualitative research methodology. The results of Goldberg and Carlson (2014) were similar to those of a study that targeted gender differences and externalizing behavior. Bertrand and Pan (2011) reported that externalizing behavior and school suspension was smallest in families with two biological parents for children in the eighth grade. However, their findings showed that the "gender gap in eighth grade suspension" (p. 15) increased for boys of mother-only parent homes. Bertrand and Pan observed that "boys raised by single mothers" (p. 24) were at risk and contributed the risk to the possibility that "boys without a biological father [in the home] receive especially low levels of parental inputs, parental warmth and emotional supportiveness, or parental expectations, compared to girls raised in similar families" (p. 22). Earlier, Ceglowski (2006) published results of a perception study of father or father figure involvement in childcare. Participating fathers were found to engage in available childcare activities and participated in the decision-

making process with mothers regarding the choice of childcare. However, Graves (2011) questioned whether involvement differed based on gender. His study of school involvement of parents of African American males and females at the elementary level confirmed that the level of involvement differed based on gender. This finding supported earlier citations that indicated school personnel most often consult with the mother regarding school activities.

A number of federal publications contain reports on father involvement. The National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (n.d.) included studies that employed quantitative survey research and mixed methods. In one publication, *Fathers' Risk Factors* (2007), researchers used quantitative and qualitative data to determine risk factors that served as contributing barriers to father involvement. Among these factors were physical and substance abuse. Other studies (Epstein, 2011; Graves, 2011; Graves & Wright, 2011; Wherry, 2009) identified transportation, feeling of inadequacy, and familial issues among barriers that contributed to infrequent father involvement. Mixed methods studies are beneficial as the researcher is able to identify the nature of barriers and also acquire explanations from participants regarding how events became barriers and their impact.

Longitudinal survey data are also used in quantitative investigations of father involvement. Aquilino (2006), Carlson (2006), and King (2006) used longitudinal survey data to investigate child-father relationships among noncustodial father. Aquilino found a strong association between commitment or contact and involvement in childrearing decisions during adolescence and father-child relations during early adulthood. Also

using longitudinal data (i.e., the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health) for 9,148 participants, Goncy and van Dulmen (2010) investigated parental involvement with adolescents in terms of shared communication, shared activity participation, and emotional closeness. The results focused on the involvement of fathers revealed that shared communication and emotional closeness were found to have a positive impact on adolescent alcohol use and related problems. Carlson (2006) explored the relationship of biological fathers with their children and found that father involvement was more beneficial when the father lived with the child. However, King (2006) found benefits for children of nonresident fathers and stepfathers. Findings revealed that close ties between nonresident fathers or stepfathers and their adolescent children resulted in outcomes that were more positive for the adolescent.

## Summary

In this research study, I investigated the participation of fathers in the educational activities of young children in an early childhood center with multiple sites. The problem addressed was that the limited participation or absence of the father figure may have a negative impact on student performance. Further, this absence was thought to project an image to young children that the role of a father does not include being a part of their academic activities. The research reviewed in this section of the document revealed that the total development of children was positively influenced by the presence of the male figure in their lives.

The theoretical framework associated with bringing clarity to the question of the relationship between father participation and achievement was based on theories of how

children grow and develop through their social and cultural influences; mainly the male parent influence. The works of theorists including Brofenbrenner (1979, 1981), Erikson, (1963), and Vygotsky (1978) provided directions for understanding the role and importance of the father in the education of their children. Research reviewed supported that children performed better academically, socially, and exhibit increased positive behavior in the classroom when their fathers or father figures were involved in their educational activities (Cabrera et al., 2007; Downer & Mendez, 2005).

Additionally, the research literature has shown that the leadership in school centers was germane to establishing a culture where stakeholders existed as communities of learners. The importance of social change through knowledge acquisition and leadership actions was captured throughout the topics presented in the review. The relationship of the review to the research methods used will be further expounded in the chapter to follow.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

## Introduction

In this quantitative study, I examined the participation of fathers in the educational development of their children. The examination includes research on general parental involvement. However, the intent was not to focus on the participation of females or mothers who, historically, are regarded as being responsible for enhancing the academic preparation of their children (Aram, 2010; Berger & Riojas-Cortez, 2011). The focus of this study was on male parents who are often characterized as having limited participation in the academic preparation of their children, especially at the early childhood level.

In this chapter, I present an explanation of the research design and its appropriateness, as well as demographics of the setting and sample. In discussing my procedures, I describe the survey instrument and the other documents that I analyzed, as well as the processes for data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of my role in protecting participants' rights and threats to ensuring the validity of my findings.

## Research Design and Rationale

An important phase of planning a study is determining the research design. Educational researchers frequently use qualitative, descriptive, correlational, causal-comparative, and experimental designs in their studies. With the exception of the qualitative design, all of these research designs are classified as quantitative research (Creswell, 2013b). Descriptive designs are used to investigate the existence of

relationships, whereas correlational designs are used to identify relationships and to make predictions based on relationships (Creswell, 2013b). In causal-comparative research, the researcher determines the cause of differences in behavior (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2005).

According to Creswell (2013b) and Gay et al. (2005), in a quantitative descriptive research design, the researcher may use some form of survey for the collection of data. Many researchers conclude a form of survey strategy in self-report research is valuable to a researcher seeking to answer research questions and test hypotheses (Creswell, 2013b; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gall et al., 2005; Gay et al., 2005). A cross-sectional survey is an appropriate strategy for collecting data to numerically analyze and determine whether differences in responses are statistically significantly different (Creswell, 2013b). Gay et al. (2005) stated that a benefit of using a cross-sectional survey includes being able to collect data on a population at a single point in time (Gay et al., 2005). This information was helpful when deciding to include a cross-sectional survey as a data collection tool.

Researchers can also use a quantitative descriptive and comparative (inferential) design to seek answers to research questions and hypotheses (Creswell, 2013b). Researchers use quantitative research to test hypotheses, which may involve the manipulation of variables and establishing forms of experimental control (Creswell, 2013b). Researchers also use some form of mathematical expression to report findings of the relationship between quantifiable variables or to describe a condition. In quantitative descriptive research, the investigator seeks to identify the possible existence of relationships rather than to determine causes of relationships (Creswell, 2013b). After

reviewing descriptions of quantitative descriptive research and a cross-sectional survey, I determined that this approach was most appropriate for my study.

The research design I selected for the study was appropriate for seeking answers to the posited research questions. Through the first two research questions, I examined perceptions of father involvement and perceived barriers to involvement. With the third research question, I examined the relationship between the achievement score of students and the level of father participation in their children's center activities. Participation in the classroom was operationalized as a father volunteering in the classroom (e.g., assisting his child in completing in-school assignments or accompanying his child on field trips).

Researchers identify the survey approach as a common, but valuable, form of self-report research (Gay et al., 2005). Creswell (2013b) observed that the survey design can be costly, but indicated it is valuable for identifying necessary information to answer the research questions and hypotheses. Selecting a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional research design enabled me to collect data relevant to the present status at the site of the study related to father participation. A survey yields a numerical description of a sample representative of the population (Creswell, 2013b). Therefore, the parent survey (see Appendix A) used to collect data reflected the perceptions of fathers regarding the frequency of their involvement, barriers limiting their involvement, and the relationship between father involvement and student achievement. I selected the design for this study for its appropriateness and convenience for collecting data from a sample of fathers located in an urban, multisite early childhood center in one administration. The level of

father participation, as identified in the site's attendance records, served as the independent variable for the hypotheses associated with the relationship of involvement and academic performance. The dependent variable was students' scores from an end-of-year assessment.

## Methodology

### Population

The population for the study was 325 fathers and father figures of four to five-year-old students enrolled in a multi-site early childhood center. I conducted the study in a multi-site early childhood center located in Region 2, a locater designation for center agencies in the state of an urban southern city. The center's enrollment was 722 students who ranged in age from one to five years. The student population included African Americans (80.3%), Caucasians (12.7%), Hispanics (4.4%), Native Americans (1.9%), Asians (0.2%), multi-races (0.2%), and other races (1.9%). The enrollment was representative of 551 single parent and 171 two-parent homes.

### Sample and Sampling Procedures

Eligible participants were fathers or custodians with a four to five-year-old child who had completed a year in the center and had completed the end-of-year assessments. The sampling procedures involved acquiring a de-identified list of all eligible participants from the center administration. The initial potential sample was composed using purposive sampling to ensure potential participants met these eligibility requirements. I replaced names with numbers and deposited the numbers in a container, from which they were alternatively drawn until the appropriate sample size was reached. This study

involved a sample size of 175 fathers and custodians. This sample size was selected based on the guidelines proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The percentage of the sample is sufficient to represent the behavior and opinions of this population.

The ethnicity of the majority of fathers and custodians was African American, which was reflective of 80.3% of the student enrollment. Caucasians, Hispanics, and Native Americans composed the remaining ethic groups. Fathers or custodians ranged in age from 23 to 32 years, and their employment status was unemployed (40%) and worked as professionals or paraprofessionals in agencies (60%), such as hospitals and schools.

**Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I recruited participants through a cover letter that was made available to participants in the facilities of the Region 2 Early Childhood Center. I introduced myself in the letter and explained the purpose and procedures of the study. The letter also informed participants of their rights, including procedures for confidentiality, notification that the completion and return of the survey accompanying the letter indicated their willingness to participate, and instructions on how to return the survey. I acquired the written consent to use student scores from parents in parent-staff meetings organized at the center by the directors.

I collected data regarding participants' perceptions through the survey instrument and data regarding students' COR quantitative performance scores through student records located at the centers. Additionally, data from attendance records of father participation were available through the centers in the form of sign-in sheets. These sheets identified the activity, individuals attending, the date, and location.

The center directors were asked to identify individuals to serve as the gatekeepers, both individuals to be responsible for providing data, and individuals to facilitate schedules for the data collection process. I mailed surveys to the gatekeepers, who placed surveys in the section of each child's ($n$ = 175) personal closet designated for parent information. Participants were provided an envelope to return sealed surveys to a designated mailbox located in the centers' offices and asked to place them in the mailbox within 2 weeks after receiving them.

After 2 weeks, I counted the number of surveys that the gatekeepers returned to determine if an appropriate percentage (75% or higher) of the population had been achieved. My follow-up of data collection involved creating a reminder note and another copy of the survey that the gatekeepers placed in the children's closets. In the note, I expressed appreciation for the time taken to complete the survey and requested its return in one week if the participant had not completed it. I made random telephone calls to participants two weeks after the reminder note and asked them to complete the survey through the phone. Data collection procedures resulted in a final sample of 142 (82%) fathers from the targeted population.

Follow-up procedures for collecting performance data included communication with the gatekeepers to ensure a convenient time for collecting the data. The gatekeepers, administrative staff identified by the center directors, made performance scores available to me, on site, for those students whose parents provided consent. The gatekeepers de-identified students by substituting a letter or number for each student's name corresponding to the letter assigned for the participating father.

## Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

I administered a modification of the Parent Involvement Survey (White, 2008; see Appendix A) to fathers to elicit their opinions of the frequency of father participation, barriers limiting participation, types of involvement activities provided at the multi-site center, and types of activities that promote father participation. The instrument for this study was entitled Opinion Survey of Male Participation (see Appendix A). White's (2008) instrument contains 56 items, divided into three categories. I assessed pilots of the instruments for content validity and reliability. White reported that through peer reviews for content validity, the questions averaged a 4.8 rating on a 5-point scale, where 5 indicated an appropriate question. The value of Cronbach's Alpha was .736 on the test of reliability, an appropriate reliability value for the scaled instrument (Gay et al., 2005).

Questions modified for this study reflected the two categories of the Fathering Indicators Framework (Gadsden, Fagan, Ray, & Davis, 2001) established through the National Center on Fathers and Families. These categories were father presence, child social competence, and academic achievement. Father presence indicators identified the frequency of father engagement and communication with the child, availability, and responsibility in terms of assessing "the potential impact of fathers' behaviors on child development" (Gadsden et al., 2001, p. 5). Indicators for social competence and academic achievement addressed father interest in the child's schoolwork, attentiveness to the child through listening, and active engagement with the child and others for the purpose of developing and enhancing social competence and academic achievement.

Items on the modified instrument for this study associated with these categories reflected those Newton (2006) labeled as perceptions of father involvement and conceptions of father influence. Newton's items were also based on the fathering indicators. The items assessed the perceptions of adult children of father involvement (Newton, 2006). The reliability level for all items relating to influence on or involvement in academics ranged from .701 to .869 (Newton, 2006). Items similar to Newton's in the modified instrument omitted the words "my father," as the study's participants were not children of fathers. The core of similar items called for fathers to indicate their perceived level of agreement regarding their participation or influence in terms of the following: help with schoolwork, attend school functions, participate in activities with the child, attend sporting or other events in which the child engages, listen to the child, encourage the child, and influence academic performance (Newton, 2006).

I selected the study's instrument, Opinion Survey of Male Participation (see Appendix A), for its appropriateness in assessing father presence, barriers to involvement, and perceptions of father influence on the child's academic performance. The modified instrument contained a demographic profile section and 50 close-ended items organized into three categories. The survey items measured the perception of the level of agreement with father participation, with the activities provided at the center to enhance participation, and with barriers to participation. Participants checked boxes on the profile section that identified characteristics, such as age, gender, occupation, and education. Two parts of the instrument required responses to items arranged on a 4-point scale from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 4 (*Strongly Disagree*). These items determined barriers

to participation and types of father participation activities provided in the center. The scale for another part of the instrument ranges from 1 (*Always*) to 4 (*Never*). Items in this section of the survey assessed the perception of the level of father participation.

The materials I relied upon for the study's data also included documents of students' scores on end-of-year assessments. These scores resulted from an administration of the Preschool COR Assessment, a copyrighted instrument available from High Scope (2005), chosen by the center sites for its validity, reliability, and usefulness in assessing the performance of children at the early childhood level. Each student's score is associated with one father in the study (High Scope, 2005). The center sites made the results available to me upon request. The COR contained test items for areas including approaches to learning, and number and operations (High Scope, 2005). The assessment procedures required teachers to take notes of performance attempts that objectively described children's behavior. Children received scores that ranged from 1 to 5, which represented the developmental level the child had achieved in each of six categories; each category contained 3–8 items. A score of 1 indicated the simplest function associated with the behavior and 5 indicated the most complex (High Scope, 2005).

**Operationalization**

The end-of-year scores composed the data for the dependent variable (student achievement); the independent variable (level of father involvement) for the hypothesis tested was identified from sign-in sheets. Father participation level, which I recorded from sign-in logs, represented the independent variable for the hypotheses associated

with the relationship between involvement and academic performance (COR score). Participation level was based on the number of all 89 activities attended, where 1–11 represented low father participation and 12 and higher represented high father participation. Participation was cutoff at 12 because this was the median of the scores. The dependent variable was students' scores from an end-of-year assessment, which is a sum composite score created from the COR Assessment.

**Data Analysis Plan**

I used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software in the plan for data analysis for the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1. What are the fathers' perceived level of educational involvement in their children's education?

RQ2. What are the perceived barriers to the educational involvement of fathers? What are the fathers' perceived barriers to educational involvement?

RQ3. What is the relationship between level of father involvement and student achievement?

I also tested a hypothesis related to RQ3:

$H_0$3: There is no relationship between level of father involvement and student achievement.

$H_A$3: There is a relationship between level of father involvement and student achievement.

I addressed the first two research questions by using descriptive statistics. For the third question's research hypothesis, I used an independent-samples *t*-test to test for statistically significant relationships. The data collected through both the survey instrument and achievement scores represented data on an ordinal and interval scale, respectively. The research questions included the following variables: perceived father involvement, types of barriers perceived, actual father participation, and student achievement scores.

To address RQ1 and RQ2, I examined frequencies of responses and analyzed descriptive data using frequencies, means, and percentages. An independentsamples *t*-test was used to test the hypothesis associated with the third research question. The independent-samples *t*-test is an appropriate statistical analysis when the scope of a research question is to assess if differences exist on a continuous (interval/ratio) dependent variable (student achievement score) by a dichotomous grouping independent variable (level of father involvement (Pagano, 2009). The *t*-test was two tailed, with alpha levels set at $p < 0.05$. The *t*test allowed for a 95% confidence that differences did not occur by chance. Given an alpha set at 0.05, a significant finding is rendered when a calculated *t* value is larger than the critical *t* value after considering degrees of freedom (*df*) for independent samples ($N$ - 2).

## Threats to Validity

Participants in this study responded to a survey. As a self-report instrument, the survey was subject to a threat of internal validity. As the researcher, I could not control the validity of participants' responses. Participants may have provided incomplete and

inaccurate answers to questions. I addressed this potential threat through triangulating data from center sign-in sheets with respect to the level of participation of participants in center activities. I did not identify any other threats to validity of the study.

## Ethical Procedures

I followed ethical procedures for conducting research studies stipulated through the Walden University's Institutional Review Board and those outlined in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. I began data collection after obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board (Approval # 06-25-13-0149906). Measures to protect participants' rights included ensuring that names of students had been deleted from test score reports, and then linked to father participants by letters or numbers. Raw data collected remains secured at my residence and will be destroyed by shredding after 5 years. Additionally, no documents related to the study included the identities of the participating multi-site center.

My role as researcher in this study was that of a former employee in one of the multi-site centers included in the population of the study. The employment did not entail direct contact with parents or children, but did involve contact with students' records. The role of a researcher includes adhering to professional and ethical standards related to the conduct of research. Therefore, I exhibited the highest level of respect for the positions of individuals assisting in the data collection process.

Former relationships with any persons who may have been identified to assist me did not influence the procedures for collecting the data. In addition, the terms and expressions that I used in communications with the center directors and gatekeepers were

sensitive to any cultural or language characteristics that may have differed from those of my own. I consciously maintained objectivity in the collection and analysis of quantitative data for this study. I followed recommendations in the research literature for reducing researcher bias (Creswell, 2013a, 2013b) and was cognizant of possible personal biases and opinions that could influence the interpretations of data. I made a significant effort to set aside those biases.

## Summary

The procedures that I employed in this quantitative study involved the collection of data to address three research questions and to test one corresponding hypothesis regarding the relationship between father participation in the educational activities of their children and children's performance. I administered a survey to a purposive sample of 142 fathers and custodians of children aged four to five years. Additionally, data included year-end scores of children on the assessment instrument used in the early childhood center and attendance records of father or father figure engagement in their children's activities at the center. I uploaded the data into SPSS software for analyses. The analyses included the results of descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and means. Using an independent-samples *t*-test, I tested the hypothesis for significant relationships between independent and dependent variables. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis.

# Chapter 4: Results

## Introduction

In this research study, I examined fathers' perceptions of their involvement in the school activities of their young children and barriers that inhibited involvement. Additionally, I determined whether a significant relationship exists between father participation and student performance in a multi-site early education center. No study had been conducted at the local center to determine whether the involvement of fathers influenced their children's academic performance or to identify factors that may contribute to the limited participation of a male or father figure in school events. Researchers suggest that the presence of a father figure has a positive influence on the social and emotional development of children and on their academic performance (Johnson et al., 2013; Noel et al., 2013; Snowman et al., 2012). However, fathers are frequently absent from their children, or their engagement with them is limited for various reasons (Bertrand & Pan, 2011; Epstein, 2011; Leavell et al., 2011; Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011).

This chapter contains a summary of the study, which includes a description of the participants, instruments, and procedures followed in the collection and analysis of data. The results of the investigation are reported based on the research questions and hypothesis; the results appear in tabular form where appropriate. I conclude the chapter with a summary of findings.

## Data Collection

I used a cross-sectional survey design to collect data at a single point in time from fathers in a Region 2 multi-site early childhood center located in an urban southern city. I collected survey data to determine the perceptions of fathers regarding the frequency of their involvement. I also investigated the relationship between father involvement and student academic achievement. I identified the frequency that fathers attended center events through my review of attendance sign-in sheets at the center and students' end-of-year scores on the COR Assessment (High Scope, 2005), which represented their academic achievement. I completed the study during the 2013–2014 academic term.

Participants were 142 fathers whom I identified through random selection. I drew participants from a purposive sample of fathers and teaching staff of children between four and five years old, who met the sampling criteria. Participants were representative of a population of 325 fathers or father figures whose children were in that age group. Purposive sampling is used to identify participants who can best provide information needed to address a study's purpose and research questions. Eligibility for participating in the study included that the father had a four or five-year- old child enrolled at the site who had completed a year in the center, and had completed end-of-year assessments. There were 175 individuals eligible to be included in the study. Of the eligible fathers and father figures, 142 agreed to participate. Fathers ranged in age from 18 years (9.2%) to 32 years or older (63.4%). More than one third (42.3%) of fathers had completed high school or received a GED, 30.2% had completed college or graduate school, and 27.5%

had received some training in college. Fathers were most frequently employed as common laborers (21.1%), teachers (18.3%), and in other areas (32.4%).

## Results

This study included three research questions and one hypothesis. I studied the perceptions of male parents regarding the level of involvement in their children's education and barriers that limited participation. Further, I used the level of father involvement and students' test scores to determine whether the two were related. I organized the results of the study by research questions and the hypothesis. I used the SPSS software to analyze data through descriptive statistics—frequencies, medians and percentages—and an independent-samples *t*-test to respond to the hypothesis associated with RQ3. The level of father participation recorded from sign-in sheets represented the independent variable for the hypothesis posed to determine whether father participation was related to their children's academic performance (COR score). Participation level was based on the number of activities (89 total) that a father attended. I scored 1–11 activities as low father participation and 12 or more activities as high father participation. The median participation score was 12. The dependent variable represented the student's score from an end-of-year assessment, which was represented as a percentage increase from the beginning of the year score to the end of the year COR score.

RQ1. What are the fathers' perceived level of educational involvement in their children's education?

The survey included a series of 20 activity items that participants scored to indicate their frequency of participation. A Likert-type scale was used, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). Based on survey responses, participants viewed fathers as being involved at varying frequencies in different activities. The activity with the most involvement was helping children with homework, and the activity with the least involvement by fathers was participating in parent training. Table 1 presents the frequencies and percentages of responses for the perceived frequency of fathers' involvement.

Table 1

*Frequencies and Percentages for Fathers' Perceived Frequency of Involvement*

| Activities | 4(always) | 3(often) | 2(sometimes) | 1(never) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Accompanying child on field trips | 38(31%) | 23(19%) | 39(32%) | 21(17%) |
| Supporting teachers in matters of discipline | 47(38%) | 24(19%) | 27(30%) | 16(13%) |
| Reinforcing academic achievement | 54(44%) | 29(24%) | 24(20%) | 16(13%) |
| Assisting as a volunteer | 37(30%) | 20(16%) | 35(29%) | 31(25%) |
| Spending time on school site observing | 28(23%) | 20(16%) | 44(36%) | 32(26%) |
| Serving on committees and advisory bodies | 33(27%) | 20(16%) | 36(30%) | 33(27%) |
| Participating in school activities | 40(33%) | 32(26%) | 33(27%) | 17(14%) |
| Helping children with homework | 57(47%) | 11(9%) | 44(27%) | 21(17%) |
| Engaging in parent conferences | 52(43%) | 23(19%) | 34(28%) | 13(11%) |
| Attending special events | 53(43%) | 17(14%) | 43(35%) | 11(9%) |
| Participating in after school programs | 37(30%) | 14(12%) | 45(37%) | 26(21%) |
| Assisting with sports and recreation | 49(40%) | 22(18%) | 36(29%) | 16(13%) |
| Participating in school community services | 47(38%) | 12(10%) | 50(41%) | 14(11%) |
| Dropping off and picking up child | 52(43%) | 23(19%) | 32(26%) | 14(12%) |
| Making presentations and sharing talents | 27(22%) | 29(24%) | 43(35%) | 24(20%) |
| Helping with serving meals | 32(26%) | 24(20%) | 28(23%) | 37(31%) |
| Helping with facilities and grounds | 33(27%) | 25(21%) | 31(25%) | 33(27%) |
| Participating in parent training | 37(30%) | 18(15%) | 33(27%) | 36(29%) |
| Assisting child in class with projects | 45(37%) | 18(15%) | 37(30%) | 22(18%) |
| Attending family night/day events | 44(36%) | 13(11%) | 46(38%) | 18(15%) |

*Note*. Because of rounding error, percentages may not equal 100.

RQ2. What are the perceived barriers to the educational involvement of fathers?

The survey included a series of 20 participation barriers that participants scored to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each item using a Likert-type scale of 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). Based on survey responses from the participants, the perceptions of participants indicated that several barriers influenced the participation of fathers in their children's education. The barrier most strongly agreed with was work schedules and the barrier cited the least often by fathers was physical disabilities. Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentages of responses for the perceived participation barriers to fathers' involvement.

Table 1

*Frequencies and Percentages for Fathers' Perceived Barriers to Involvement*

| Barriers | 1 (strongly agree) | 2 (agree) | 3 (disagree) | 4 (strongly disagree) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work schedules | 86(61%) | 39(28%) | 0(0%) | 17 (12%) |
| Father's educational level or training | 61(43%) | 37(26%) | 9(6%) | 35(25%) |
| Staff's attitudes of fathers' abilities to assist | 58(41%) | 27(19%) | 9(6%) | 59(42%) |
| Kinds of school activities for father engagement | 70(49%) | 28(20%) | 14(10%) | 30(21%) |
| Fathers feeling inadequate | 55(39%) | 33(23%) | 14(10%) | 40(28%) |
| Attitudes of the child's mother about father participation | 42(30%) | 20(14%) | 21(15%) | 59(42%) |
| Fathers feeling alienated from the school | 39(28%) | 28(20%) | 17(12%) | 58(41%) |
| Social and economic issues | 60(42%) | 24(27%) | 3(2%) | 55(39%) |
| Community issues such as drugs and violence | 64(45%) | 27(19%) | 0(0%) | 51(36%) |
| Lack of child care | 33(23%) | 23(16%) | 21(15%) | 65(46%) |
| Lack of transportation | 44(31%) | 25(18%) | 8(6%) | 65(46%) |
| Physical disabilities | 33(23%) | 33(23%) | 0(0%) | 75(54%) |
| Structure of school day | 52(37%) | 16(11%) | 9(6%) | 63(44%) |
| Age of fathers | 51(36%) | 24(17%) | 30(21%) | 36(25%) |
| Times allocated for conferences | 42(30%) | 37(26%) | 34(24%) | 26(18%) |
| Commitment of fathers to the school | 48(34%) | 36(25%) | 17(12%) | 41(29%) |
| Prior involvement experiences and attempts | 38(27%) | 27(19%) | 34(24%) | 41(29%) |
| The time schedule for school events | 53(37%) | 44(31%) | 12(9%) | 33(23%) |
| Staff preparedness to offer services to fathers | 47(33%) | 28(20%) | 21(15%) | 46(32%) |
| No opportunities for participating in school decisions | 34(24%) | 32(23%) | 18(13%) | 58(41%) |

*Note*. Because of rounding error, percentages may not equal 100.

RQ3. What is the relationship between level of father involvement and student achievement?

$H_0$3: There is no relationship between level of father involvement and student achievement.

$H_1$3: There is a relationship between level of father involvement and student achievement.

The research question and associated hypotheses were posed to determine whether a relationship exists between the end-of-year achievement scores and father participation. Higher levels of participation were coded as 1; lower levels of participation received a code of 0. The data collected revealed that all fathers participated in one or more activities (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Percentage Distribution of Father Participation*

| Activity | Times Participated | High Participation | | Low Participation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Orientation | | | | | |
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 10.9 |
| | 1 | 32 | 100 | 98 | 89.1 |
| Parent Teacher Organization | | | | | |
| | 0 | 0 | .00 | 12 | 10.9 |
| | 1 | 0 | .00 | 16 | 14.5 |
| | 2 | 3 | 9.04 | 29 | 26.4 |
| | 3 | 2 | 6.03 | 20 | 18.2 |
| | 4 | 6 | 18.08 | 18 | 16.4 |
| | 5 | 1 | 3.01 | 7 | 6.4 |
| | 6 | 3 | 9.04 | 6 | 5.5 |
| | 7 | 7 | 21.09 | 1 | 0.9 |
| | 8 | 9 | 28.01 | 1 | 0.9 |
| | 9 | 1 | 3.01 | 0 | .0 |
| Classroom Committee | | | | | |
| | 0 | 1 | 3.1 | 42 | 38.2 |
| | 1 | .0 | .0 | 17 | 15.5 |
| | 2 | 5 | 15.6 | 31 | 28.2 |
| | 3 | 3 | 9.4 | 10 | 9.1 |
| | 4 | 4 | 12.5 | 5 | 4.5 |
| | 5 | 1 | 3.1 | 2 | 1.8 |
| | 6 | 14.0 | 43.8 | 2 | 1.8 |
| | 7 | 3 | 9.4 | 1 | 0.9 |
| | 8 | 1 | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| Birdhouse | | | | | |
| | 0 | 11 | 34.4 | 84 | 76.4 |
| | 1 | 21 | 65.6 | 26 | 23.6 |
| Classroom Volunteer | | | | | |
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 41 | 37.3 |
| | 1 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 11.8 |
| | 2 | 0 | 0 | 26 | 23.6 |
| | 3 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 7.3 |
| | 4 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 10.0 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 5 | 1 | 3.1 | 7 | 6.4 |
| | 6 | 2 | 6.3 | 3 | 2.7 |
| | 7 | 1 | 3.1 | 1 | 0.9 |
| | 8 | 3 | 9.4 | 0 | 0 |
| | 9 | 2 | 6.3 | 0 | 0 |
| | 10 | 7 | 21.9 | 0 | 0 |
| | 15 | 2 | 6.3 | 0 | 0 |
| | 18 | 1 | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| | 20 | 2 | 6.3 | 0 | 0 |
| | 21 | 1 | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| | 23 | 1 | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| | 25 | 1 | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| | 26 | 2 | 6.3 | 0 | 0 |
| | 28 | 1 | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| | 45 | 1 | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| | 51 | 1 | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| | 57 | 2 | 6.3 | 0 | 0 |
| | 61 | 1 | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| Football Game | | | | | |
| | 0 | 13 | 40.6 | 88 | 80.0 |
| | 1 | 19 | 59.4 | 22 | 20.0 |
| Fall Festival | | | | | |
| | 0 | 12 | 37.5 | 87 | 79.1 |
| | 1 | 20 | 62.5 | 23 | 20.9 |
| Pumpkin Carving | | | | | |
| | 0 | 14 | 43.8 | 95 | 86.4 |
| | 1 | 18 | 56.3 | 15 | 13.6 |
| Conference | | | | | |
| | 0 | 1 | 3.1 | 49 | 44.5 |
| | 1 | 4 | 12.5 | 27 | 24.5 |
| | 2 | 1 | 3.1 | 16 | 14.5 |
| | 3 | 26 | 81.3 | 17 | 15.5 |
| | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.9 |
| Field Trips | | | | | |
| | 0 | 7 | 21.9 | 81 | 73.6 |
| | 1 | 7 | 21.9 | 17 | 15.5 |
| | 2 | 17 | 53.1 | 11 | 10.0 |
| | 3 | 1 | 3.1 | 1 | 0.9 |
| | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Data for the question and hypothesis resulted from student scores on the COR and sign-in sheets. I used 7 activities from the sign-in sheets in the analysis, which

represented the center activities. These activities included classroom volunteer, conference, fall festival, pumpkin carving, birdhouse, football game, and field trips. Definitions for intervention and center activities can be found in the Definitions section of Chapter 1. One participant's response (ID = M111) was considered an outlier because it was more than 3.29 standard deviations from the mean. Due to this, the participant was removed from all analyses. A review of the frequency of participation found that activity engagement ranged from 1–84.

On average, fathers of students participated in about 15 (*SD* = 15.98) activities. Of those activities, about 12 (*SD* = 12.79) were center activities. For the total sample, the achievement scores averaged 72% (*SD* = 0.15), out of 100%. When fathers did not participate in center and intervention activities, average achievement scores were at 71% (*SD* = 0.14), out of 100%. When fathers did participate in center and intervention activities, average achievement scores were at 77% (*SD* = 0.15), out of 100%.

To test whether or not achievement scores were statistically different from each other when fathers had high or low participation, I conducted a *t* -test. The outcome variable for this hypothesis test was SCORE, which was a percentage, assumed as normally distributed. The analysis of data involved dividing the total number of center activities into two groups: high participation (value = 1 if more than or equal to 12 participations) and low participation (value = 0 if less than 12 participations). An independent sample *t* test at $\alpha = 0.05$ was used to determine if……. Table 4 presents overall values from the *t* -test. The analysis showed that the mean student test SCORE results were statistically significantly different by group, $t(139) = 2.24$, $p = .027$.

Table 4

*Independent-Samples t-test for Father Involvement and Student Achievement*

| | Participation in Center Activities | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | | | Yes | | | | | |
| | *n* | *M* | *SD* | *n* | *M* | *SD* | *t* | *df* | *p* |
| End of Year Achievement Score | 110 | .71 | .14 | 31 | .77 | .15 | 2.24 | 139 | .027 |

## Summary

This chapter contained findings for the three research questions and hypotheses explored regarding the participation of fathers or father figures in the academic preparation of their 4- to 5-year-old children. The analyses of data for RQ3 and Hypothesis 3 revealed a statistically significant difference between students' end-of-year achievement scores and level of father involvement. For RQ1 and RQ2, the results indicated that helping children with homework was the most common activity fathers perceived they participated in; participating in parent training was the least common activity. In addition, work schedules were the most agreed upon perceived barrier, while physical disabilities were the least agreed upon barrier.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

## Introduction

In this quantitative research study, I examined the relationship between father participation and student performance. The study was based on two premises: that participation of fathers in the educational activities of young children is important to children's positive cognitive, social, and emotional development (Rosenburg & Wilcox, 2006) and that changing child outcomes is best accomplished through collaborative efforts between home and school (Epstein et al., 2009). However, researchers studying parental involvement have noted that the participation of fathers or father figures in the academic preparation of their children is limited (Craig & Mullan, 2010; Wilson & Prior, 2010). Limited or lack of presence of fathers in their children's school activities is associated with negative academic performance (Rosenburg & Wilcox, 2006). Therefore, this study is an investigation of the problem of limited involvement in a multi-site early childhood center. Bronfenbrenner's (1979), Erikson's (1963), and Vygotsky's (1978) perspectives on child development served as the theoretical foundation for the study.

The study was conducted in a multi-site early childhood center located in an urban southern city. Participants were 142 fathers or father figures whom I identified through random selection from a purposive sample of fathers and teaching staff of children between the ages of four and five years. Center personnel identified various activities designed to increase students' scores in mathematics and other content areas, and to increase parental involvement, particularly male or father figure involvement.

However, center personnel had not engaged in a study to determine the effectiveness of their efforts for encouraging father participation or the impact of father participation on student performance. Specifically, I examined whether there was a significant relationship between father participation and student performance. Additionally, I studied perceptions of father participation and barriers that affected participation.

I used a cross-sectional survey design which was appropriate for collecting data from a sample of fathers located in an urban multi-site early childhood center. Additionally, the survey was useful for collecting data at a given point in time when multiple administrations were not feasible. Participants responded to the survey, a modified version of the Parent Involvement Survey (White, 2008), at the site. I also analyzed center documents to include attendance sign-in sheets and student assessment scores.

I uploaded data in the SPSS software and used descriptive statistics and an independent-samples *t*- test in the analysis of the data. Regarding the first research question, I found that the activity with the highest frequency of involvement was helping children with homework and the activity with the least frequency of involvement by fathers was participating in parent training. In the descriptive analysis for research question 2, fathers perceived work schedules to be the most significant barrier impacting their involvement. My analyses of data for the third research question and corresponding hypothesis revealed a statistically significant relationship between father involvement and students' end-of-year achievement scores. The results suggest there is a difference in

achievement scores between students whose fathers had higher participation and students whose fathers had lower participation.

## Interpretation of Findings

For RQ1 fathers identified their perceived level of participation in educational involvement. The survey included a series of 20 activity items that participants checked to indicate their frequency of participation using a Likert-type scale of 4 = (always), 3 = (often), 2 = (sometimes), 1 = (never). I found that fathers perceived that they would be involved with varying frequencies in different activities. The activities generating the highest frequencies of involvement were (a) helping with homework, (b) attending special events, (c) engaging in parent conferences, and (d) reinforcing academic performance. Researchers support that the nature of these activities suggest planners consider knowledge, skills, and interests of fathers among factors for encouraging father participation (Abel, 2012; Baxter, 2010; Epstein et al., 2009). Apparent in this recommendation is that father participation increases when fathers feel comfortable and proficient with engaging in specific activities.

According to Abel (2012), perceptions of father involvement in specific activities are also linked to ethnicity. Abel (2012) conducted a study of the involvement of African American fathers in the schooling of their elementary children; the researcher based the study on Epstein's parent involvement framework (Epstein et al., 2009) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 2005) model of parent involvement. Fathers' attitudes and behaviors regarding involvement predicted the type of school activity in which they participated (Abel, 2012). The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model is reflective of

parenting skills included in Epstein's framework and variables for motivating parent involvement: parent knowledge and skills, parent time and energy, and the culture of the family. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler referred to life variables such as parenting skills, learning at home, and communicating as motives for parent involvement. In particular, the researchers determined that significant motivations for father involvement were invitations they received to participate, school-based parent involvement, and life variables.

Abel's (2012) research and the findings of RQ 1 suggest that attitudes and behaviors of school personnel are important to consider when planning for asking fathers to participate in their children's schooling. Among deterrents to father participation are the lack of consideration regarding such motivators as knowledge and time available for father participation in the nature of activities offered. Findings of the current study are similar to those previously reported. For example, the Fatherhood Institute (2010) reported upward trends in father involvement in such areas as fathers taking their child to school; attending class events; visiting their child's classroom; volunteering at their child's school; and attending parent-teacher conferences, school meetings, and school-based parents' meetings (p. 2).

Only a little over half of the participating fathers in my study agreed that the site provided varying meeting times for them to attend conferences and that activities were designed to encourage father participation. Consistent with the Fatherhood Institute's (2010) data where father participation in classroom activities increased by 11% and attendance at meetings increased by only 7% over the last 10 years, the majority of

fathers in the study were less likely to participate in these forms of involvement. Also consistent with the Fatherhood Institute's report, the majority of fathers in my study were likely to participate in conferences and school events.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) conclusion that variables, especially related to time, should be considered in efforts to involve fathers has frequently been stated in the literature. Researchers have referred to this observation regarding the participation of fathers in the United States and in other countries. Baxter (2010), Craig and Mullan (2010), and Wilson and Prior (2010) are among researchers who noted full-time employment is a factors related to the amount of time fathers are involved in academic preparation. Wilson and Prior's study of fathers in the United States, Australia, Italy, France, and Denmark demonstrated employment poses limits on father participation in many countries.

In a report of national health statistics, Jones and Mosher (2013) reported that other specific variables account for the nature of some father involvement. Jones and Mosher examined the frequency that fathers engaged in reading to their children over a 4-week period according to the father's age, educational status, race, and marital or cohabitation status. Jones and Mosher found that a larger percentage of fathers who had some college education read to their children on a daily basis than fathers who only had a high school diploma or less.

These findings further suggested that planning for father involvement in classroom activities, including reading to them, must take into account the fathers' knowledge of the activities and the skills of fathers. Such findings supported the logic of

school personnel encouraging father participation through providing some intervention activities aimed at upgrading skills of fathers or tapping into the capabilities of fathers (Bretherton, 2010, Wherry (2009). These actions, as seen in the results of this study, can then predict the willingness of fathers to participate in other activities for which they feel prepared.

Similarly, in RQ 2, the perceived barriers to the educational involvement of fathers were explored. The survey included a series of 20 participation barriers that participants scored to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each item using a Likert-type scale of 1= (strongly agree), 2= (agree), 3= (disagree), 4= (strongly disagree). Based on survey responses from the participants, the perceptions of participants were that several barriers influenced the participation of fathers in their child's education. The barrier with the strongest agreement was work schedules and the barrier cited the least often by fathers was physical disabilities. In a study of Australian parents, Baxter (2011) found that fathers who worked longer hours had lower levels of involvement. However, working hours was not an apparent factor in the level of involvement with their 4 to 5-year-old children as involvement in activities had already declined for this age group.

The category for father characteristics included such potential barriers as level of education or training, age, feeling of inadequacy, and commitment to the school. The results of the study showed that participants disagreed with these as barriers. However, for potential barriers associated with time, such as work schedules, there was agreement among participants. Despite agreement or non-agreement with items, participants in this study most frequently always participated in (a) supporting teachers in matters of

discipline, (b) reinforcing academic achievement, (c) helping children with homework. (d) assisting with sports and recreation, and (e) dropping off and picking up the child. These frequent involvement activities are reflective of Epstein's (Epstein et al., 2009) types of family involvement that served as part of the theoretical framework for this study. Inherent in these five different activities are Type 3 – Volunteering, and Type 4-- Learning at Home. Epstein recommended these involvement types as guides for schools to encourage families in assisting with activities at home such as home work, and to provide avenues for developing partnerships between the home, school, and community.

Other involvement types Epstein (Epstein et al., 2009) identified were parenting, communicating, decision making, and collaboration. Participant engagement was also reflective of these types; however, some participation was limited. Participants most frequently either always or sometimes engaged in (a) accompanying child on field trips, (b) assisting as a volunteer, (c) participating in school activities, (d) attending parent conferences, (e) attending special events, (f) participating in after school programs, (g) participating in school community services, (h) spending time on school site observing, (i) assisting child in class with projects, and (j) attending family night/day events. Participants seldom helped with serving meals; seldom or never served on committees and advisory boards, or made presentations, and shared their talents; and always or never helped with the facilities and grounds, or participated in parent training.

Father participation was limited to none in activities involving decision making, participating on advisory boards, and participating in parent training. This finding was consistent with other studies of barriers to father involvement. In terms of participating

in training, Summers (2011) found that often fathers declined such participation out of fear that training would be associated with child protective services. Summers also referred to an Early Head Start Longitudinal Study conducted during the early 2000s in which fathers also were suspicious of structured parenting classes and viewed them as an invasion of family privacy. Summers concluded that although fathers participating in both studies did not physically attend parent training, they were receptive of information from such sessions in the form of handouts or shared from attending mothers.

Although unemployment was not among barriers cited in the current study, Summers (2011) did find it as a barrier. This barrier was associated with fathers' inability to provide adequate financial support; therefore, tied to not "being emotionally and physically available to their children" (p.2). Their presence in school and their participation in some of the types of involvement that Epstein (Epstein et al., 2009) identified for the home and community were, therefore, limited. Participants in the current study were more frequently involved in some types of activities than not despite any potential barriers. Implicit in the level of their involvement was that opportunities for decision making accompanied their leadership responsibilities in such activities as birdhouse making and assisting with sports and recreation.

The research supported that fathers desire to be engaged in the academic preparation of their children, but are often inhibited because of barriers including the perception that they do not fit in or are not prepared for the activity (Hansel, 2010). A number of initiatives have been published that provide models for early childhood sites to select the most appropriate procedures that may enhance father participation. Such

initiatives include those sponsored through the National Fatherhood Initiative (2014), and the Administration for Children and Families (Hansel, 2010) which includes the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families.

Researchers recognized barriers to father participation including those not addressed in this study. The South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families (TSCCFF) (2012), identified barriers that included low-education levels, intermittent employment**,** unreliable transportation, not having custody of their children, no access or visitation rights, incarceration, insecurity of their role, few father-friendly services, depression, alcohol and drugs, and growing up in a father absent home. The publication from the Center concluded the following regarding barriers:

> Some fathers only encounter a couple of these barriers while others experience each one. Without the benefits of fatherhood programs, father-friendly policies, and individuals willing to support dads, these fathers will continue to stumble and often fail in the fathering role. But, it's not because they do not love their children as many would choose to think. (TSCCFF, 2012, Barriers to Responsible Fatherhood section, p. 1)

Findings from the study have practical applications for the setting of the study, other early childhood educational sites, communities, and for fathers and families. Consistent with the views of Summers (2011), beneficial to fathers and families would be to establish community parenting programs that would afford opportunities for fathers to interact with their children in various types of activities. Incorporating a showcase for fathers and families in community parenting programs would also permit opportunities

for fathers to make presentations and share their talents; these were among activities that they did not engage in at the site of the study. Related to activities in which h there was limited father participation, the center may find it helpful to review and modify these activities to ensure that they are more father-friendly.

In RQ 3, the relationship between the level of father involvement and student achievement was examined. As all fathers were found to participate in one or more activities, the percentage of increase in end-of-year scores and the frequency of activities in which fathers engaged were used in testing the hypothesis. The results of an independent sample t- test confirmed statistically significant differences in academic scores for the two groups, suggesting that father participation was related to student performance on the end-of-year assessments.

The participation of fathers in the lives of their children has been found to be significant in fostering children's social-emotional, cognitive, language, and motor development (Scott & Hunt, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). According to Lamb (2010), fathers' communication with their children helps to promote children's language development. Children are likely to feel challenged to engage in communication exchanges with fathers. Further, the increased involvement of fathers along with their support and parental sensitivity was linked to positive child outcomes and better educational outcomes for their children (Fatherhood Institute, 2010; Jones & Mosher, 2013). As demonstrated from the findings of this study, among positive outcomes was children's enhanced performance on the Preschool Child Observation Record (COR) Assessment test. Gestwicki's (2010) research was also supportive of this

conclusion based on findings that six-month-olds scored higher on tests of motor development when their fathers were involved in their care.

Frequent activities in which fathers participating in this study engaged included attending the fall festival, assisting in pumpkin carving, building birdhouses, attending football games, and accompanying children on field trips. Consistent with research findings (Baxter, 2010), the nature of these activities allowed fathers to directly provide the personal care and supervision their young children needed while engaging in both academic and non-academic activities designed to address the total development of the child. Although the activities noted above were targeted for father participation, according to Baxter, fathers more frequently engaged in the personal care of children 4-5 years of age when their mothers worked full-time. Researchers concluded that father engagement in the personal care of their young children and their level of interest in their schooling were associated with children's enhanced performance on tests, in class, and in such content areas as mathematics (Fatherhood Institute, 2010).

## Limitations of the Study

Participants in this study responded to a survey. Participants' responses in this self-report data collection tool may not have been completely accurate. The completeness of responses and validity of responses were not in my control as the researcher. I used center sign-in sheets to triangulate data from father participants to address this limitation. The survey did not explicitly question participants about best practices to encourage father participation. However, survey items that identified barriers and useful types of center participation activities provided information for future parent

involvement efforts. Although I acknowledged that interviews can be useful in clarifying and expanding meaning from surveys, this method was not employed because of difficulties in scheduling working fathers for interviews. The results of the study may only be generalized to indicate possible relationships between male involvement and student performance in early childhood centers with similar characteristics as the sample in the study. The findings were not intended to be used to identify causation among the relationships studied.

## Recommendations

The current study used quantitative analysis to examine the extent to which males were involved in an early childhood center. The results revealed the frequency of involvement in activities and its relationship to student. However, additional meaning of these results ~~would result from~~ identifying what motivated fathers to select certain activities over others. Such meaning is best achieved through interviewing fathers and observing their engagement which could be achieved through some form of qualitative research. The qualitative researcher could replicate the current study to add participants' voices to the data. Program planners would then have more specific directions for creating the most viable engagement activities.

Additional research of father engagement in the academic preparation of their young children should be conducted in other settings. The multisite center used in the current study was located in the southern region of the United States. Studies conducted in other regions of the nation would yield information that may relate to cultural differences that further impact father participation.

Similarly, studies conducted to control for father characteristics would provide other dimensions of challenges and motives for participation. These characteristics could include specific ages, ethnicities, forms of employment, and educational levels. Although studies have been conducted on various categories of fathers, additional contributions to the literature would result from single studies focusing only on one specific participant type such as single fathers, absentee fathers, shared-custodial fathers, incarcerated fathers, and others. Researchers could then complete a comparative review of those studies that were conducted in different geographical locations. The results could provide additional understandings of barriers and incentives for father involvement, and perhaps generate new questions that should be explored to enhance positive social change related to responsible fatherhood.

## Implications

Various shades of meaning for social change appear in the literature that evolve from theories of social change. The term has been used to refer to the social order of society that improves the conditions of humans through moving from a process of theory to applicability of research related to the theory. It has also been described from the perspective of positive social change with reference to involvement in activities that improve the lives of individuals and communities locally and around the world. It includes a range of activities, such as volunteering or service; donating money, goods [*sic*] or services; and educating others about a particular issue or cause; etc. (Walden University, 2013, p. 2)

Findings from a survey for the 2013 Social Change Impact Report (Walden University, 2013) revealed the importance of education in social change engagement. Implications from the report included that opportunities for engagement in efforts that will lead to a positive social change should begin at a young age. Individuals having begun this engagement early would likely continue into their adult lives. Techniques for creating a positive social change in the form of father engagement in the lives of their children may include fathers reflecting on their experiences as a child and seeking alternatives to make a difference in the lives of their children.

According to Hansel (2010), President Obama provided such a reflection of his life with an absentee father that demonstrated the critical need for responsible fathers. Hansel reported that President Obama made the following statements on Father's Day in 2009:

> In many ways, I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence—both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill. We can do everything possible to provide good jobs and good schools and safe streets for our kids, but it will never be enough to fully make up the difference. That is why we need fathers to step up, to realize that their job does not end at conception; that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child but the courage to raise one. (Introduction section, para. 3)

President Obama's statements suggested that fatherhood programs may provide only part of the answer to change irresponsible fathers to responsible fathers.

In terms of social change, although many fatherhood programs have been implemented, not all have been successful in changing the conditions that result in effective parenting by fathers. Hansel (2010) provided an overview of several initiatives and evaluations of those programs. An evaluation of a multisite program designed to provide "relationship and marriage education, case management, and referrals to other services for low-income unmarried expectant and new parents" (Research section, para 2) revealed that only one of eight programs resulted in better outcomes than programs that did not feature these services. Among these outcomes was father involvement with their children. In fact, in one site there was an increase in violence against women and a decrease in father support.

Hansel (2010) suggested that initiatives must address domestic violence more effectively. However, in concert with the sentiment of President Obama, evaluation results also suggested that other avenues need to be explored that tap into the heart of the problem of responsible fatherhood which may well be related to such factors as self-concept, feelings of distrust, and emotional maturity. Based on the results of the current study, a positive social change would be seen in fathers being involved in activities that would first improve their lives; thus, the lives of their children and families.

This research provides the local setting with information useful in planning activities to expand the nature of activities in which fathers engaged and to encourage participation in less frequently engaged events. This study is significant in identifying the activities or events in which fathers most frequently engaged as well as those in which engagement was limited or non-existent. Further, the study is significant in

discovering that father engagement is related to the increased scores of their children on the end-of-year assessment. This finding was consistent with the intent of the meaning of positive social change.

The results showed that through applying best practices in the father involvement literature, father participation would make a difference in the academic performance of their children in areas where scores were low. Therefore, an implication for social change would be the creation of self-study techniques designed as a collaborative and concerted effort to enhance father participation and father-school relationships. Self-reflection along with the provision of any needed support for successful engagement would further enable fathers "to step up" and provide greater support in their children's academic tasks. The reflection would target those activities where fathers at the site of the study were not included for whatever reason (participation in decision making, on advisory boards, for example).

The most tangible improvements from the study's findings and implications for social change were that fathers did participate in diverse school activities and more instances of agreement between the staff and fathers existed on the frequency and nature of their involvement than disagreement. Therefore, these positive perceptions of the contributions of fathers in the education of their children are among social changes for improving conditions occurring in early childhood centers based on this study's inquiry of initiatives provided f involvement. Such recognition can be used to illustrate that the coinage "Dead Beat Dads" is not applicable to the site of the study. The results of the study are also applicable to practitioners in their attempts to design initiatives for father

involvement that are more responsive to the needs of males as evidenced in the literature. Additionally, as other early childhood educational centers mimic the provision of and respect for father engagement included in this study, a positive social change in the views of father participation in the education of young children will likely occur.

## Recommendations

Recommendations for actions included in this chapter are aimed at leaders, practitioners, fathers, families, and others concerned about the growth and development of children. These recommendations are presented in concert with conclusions from this research study. The dissemination of the results of this study and recommendations through training sessions with center personnel is recommended to facilitate discussions and the creation of additional recommendations for enhancing father participation.

The findings and the research presented supported that male involvement in the schooling of their children is enhanced when activities are planned that consider the needs and interests of fathers. In this regard, school personnel may benefit from conducting a needs assessment of fathers' interests, needs, and capabilities associated with assisting in the education of their young children. Personnel may also benefit from conducting a self-assessment of personal views regarding what and how fathers can contribute.

Given the results, through a collaborative father/school/family team effort, a template could be developed for fathers to select activities and events in which they would want to participate. The template would identify the nature of the activity, the roles of fathers and others who may be involved, the materials needed, and other

procedures. The template would serve as a guide aimed at providing the father with knowledge needed to make a decision on whether an activity was suitable to his interests and needs.

A supporting recommendation to engaging fathers on a collaborative planning team is for community agency leaders to establish community parenting programs that would afford fathers opportunities to learn parenting skills, discuss issues and strategies with other fathers, and interact with their children in various types of activities. A major intent of such programs would be to reduce the feelings of distrust fathers may have about parenting training programs and the perception of an invasion of their family's privacy. These programs could be established as a part of outreach services of churches, fitness centers, and other businesses. The incorporation of a father/family showcase feature would permit fathers and family members to share their talents and hobbies and to teach others the "how to" of a particular trade or skill.

Both the study's findings and the literature reviewed illustrate the importance of attitudes and behaviors of school personnel were important for targeting fathers to participate in their children's schooling. These attitudes were reflective of the types of activities planned to target the participation of fathers or the absence of any particular or other activities to encourage father participation, as well as consideration of the schedule that would best permit father engagement. Time, associated with fathers' work schedules, continues to be a barrier for participation as evidenced in the results of this study.

In addition to engaging fathers in team planning, school personnel may find it helpful to revisit Epstein's (Epstein et al., 2009) types of involvement and corresponding suggestions for each of the following types: parenting, communicating, decision making, and collaboration. Actions that celebrate the contributions of fathers or father figures would be especially supportive of the parenting and communicating types of involvement. The involvement of school leaders and directors of early childhood centers in inviting and marketing father contributions could have a positive influence in changing the perceptions of both school personnel and fathers regarding what fathers have to offer in the school setting.

## Conclusion

The engagement of fathers in the schooling of their young children is among the expectations of responsible fatherhood. Therefore, incumbent on society is to teach young men the importance of father involvement for the overall development of children. This involvement is crucial for developing a population of humans who recognize that a literate U.S. society is needed for not only upward mobility, but for survival in a competitive world. This study was designed to raise the awareness that responsible fathers or father figures are needed and desired to model the appropriate behaviors for their children. In so doing, despite the amount of income, type of job, or level of education of fathers, their children have a better chance of exhibiting appropriate behavior and for excelling.

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Appendix A: Opinion Survey of Male Participants

**Part I. Demographics**

**Directions: Please check the appropriate box**

**What is your connection to the school?**

□ Father or Father Figure □ Staff

**If you are a staff member, what is your gender?**

□ Male □ Female

**If you are a father or father figure of a student enrolled, what is your age range?**

□ 18 – 22 years □ 23 – 27 years □ 28 – 32 years □ 33 or older

**What is your line of work?**

□ Truck Driver □ Teacher □ Common Laborer □ Clergy
□ Administrator □ Self-employed □ Other _____

**What is your level of formal education?**

□ Less than high school □ High school graduate or GED
□ Completed some college school □ College degree and or graduate

**Survey Part II: Frequency of Involvement: Please place a check in the appropriate box to indicate the frequency of participation in the items listed using the following scale: 4 (*always*); 3 (*often*); 2 (*sometimes*); 1 (*never*)**

| **Statements** | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Accompanying child on field trips | | | | |
| 2. Supporting teachers in matters of discipline | | | | |
| 3. Reinforcing academic achievement | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. Assisting as a volunteer | | | | |
| 5. Spending time on school site observing | | | | |
| 6. Serving on committees and advisory bodies | | | | |
| 7. Participating in school activities | | | | |
| 8. Helping children with homework | | | | |
| 9. Engaging in parent conferences | | | | |
| 10. Attending special events | | | | |
| 11. Participating in after school programs | | | | |
| 12. Assisting with sports and recreation | | | | |
| 13. Participating in school community services | | | | |
| 14. Dropping off and picking up child | | | | |
| 15. Making presentations and sharing talents | | | | |
| 16. Helping with serving meals | | | | |
| 17. Helping with facilities and grounds | | | | |
| 18. Participating in parent training | | | | |
| 19. Assisting child in class with projects | | | | |
| 20. Attending family night/day events | | | | |

**Part III. Participation Barriers: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each item as hindering father involvement using the following scale: 1 (*strongly agree*); 2 (*agree*); 3 (*disagree*); 4 (*strongly disagree*)**

| **Barriers** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Work schedules | | | | |
| 2. Father's educational level or training | | | | |
| 3.Staff's attitudes of fathers' abilities to assist | | | | |
| 4. Kinds of school activities for father engagement | | | | |
| 5. Fathers feeling inadequate | | | | |
| 6. Attitudes of the child's mother about father participation | | | | |
| 7. Fathers feeling alienated from the school | | | | |
| 8. Social and economic issues | | | | |
| 9. Community issues such as drugs and violence | | | | |
| 10. Lack of child care | | | | |
| 11. Lack of transportation | | | | |
| 12. Physical disabilities | | | | |
| 13. Structure of school day | | | | |
| 14. Age of fathers | | | | |
| 15. Times allocated for conferences | | | | |
| 16. Commitment of fathers to the school | | | | |
| 17. Prior involvement experiences and attempts | | | | |
| 18. The time schedule for school events | | | | |
| 19. Staff preparedness to offer services to fathers | | | | |
| 20. No opportunities for participating in school decisions | | | | |

**Part IV. Involvement Activities Provided: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each item as an opportunity the school provides for father involvement using the following scale: 1 (*strongly agree*); 2 (*agree*); 3 (*disagree*); 4 (*strongly disagree*)**

| **Statements** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Fathers are asked to serve as volunteers | | | | |
| 2. Opportunities are provided for fathers to schedule observation visits of their child's class or the school. | | | | |
| 3. Training is provided in fathering based on needs and interest to support the child's learning and tips for helping their children academically are given | | | | |
| 4. Programs are implemented for family participation such as school-family picnics and awards and recognition programs for fathers' services. | | | | |
| 5. Opportunities are provided to seek fathers' ideas regarding a school project or curriculum change, and for engaging fathers in making school decisions through meetings, advisory boards, or other channels | | | | |
| 6. Regular scheduled communication with fathers includes notices, phone calls, newsletters and other types of communication | | | | |
| 7. Information on community services and activities is provided fathers | | | | |
| 8. The school has designed activities to encourage father/male participation in children's educational activities | | | | |
| 9. The school varies the meeting times for parent-teacher conferences | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. Dialogue programs are planned for fathers and teachers to identify problems with involvement and ways to address them. | | | | |

Appendix B: Permission to Use Instrument

October 11, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

With this letter, I grant Carla Barnes permission to utilize and adapt as appropriate for her dissertation both the Parent Involvement Survey and the protocol that was developed and used for interviewing teachers.

With Best Regards,

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