



Engaging Fathers:

Issues and Considerations for Early Childhood Educators

Carlos is a married father of three, in his 20s, who emigrated from Costa Rica. For two years, he has attended a male involvement program focused on fathering and young children's development.

His eyes light up as he talks about his visions, his goal to move his wife and children out of public housing into a "good neighborhood," and his desire to be a good father—to talk to his children, read to them, ensure that they receive a good education, and "be there" for them.

— Participant in the Bay Area Male Involvement Network

Vivian Gadsden and Aisha Ray

Parker is a 20-year-old African American single father who participated in a fathers program for four years because he wanted to strengthen his relationship with his son, file for custody, and increase the opportunities available to them both. Parker provides for the daily care of his child, with some assistance from Parker's mother. He is active in his child's life despite the absence of his own father during his childhood. His high school diploma has enabled him to get several low-level jobs. In addition to work and child care, Parker recently completed a specialized two-year course that required him to travel more than 100 miles daily.

— Participant in the Philadelphia Children's Network Responsive Fathers Program

Carlos and Parker represent fathers who are involved in their children's early development. They provide for their children and are engaged in caregiving on a regular basis. Carlos and his wife as well as Parker and his mother have a workable plan for sharing parenting responsibilities. They have great hopes for their children and want to support their learning. This article focuses on the roles and responsibilities that fathers such as Carlos and Parker assume as caregivers and the goals and hopes they have for their children's academic and literacy development.

In our work at the National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF), located in the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, and at the Erikson Institute in Chicago, we have learned from Carlos and Parker, both of whom reside with their children in households with low incomes. We have learned too from middle-class fathers who reside with their children and from fathers who do not reside with their children or the mothers of their children but who are equally vested

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Aisha Ray, Ph.D., is director of the Bilingual/Multicultural Teacher Training Program at the Erikson Institute. She is a developmental psychologist whose interests are in the role of culture in childrearing, parenting in high-risk communities, and antibias and multicultural teacher training.

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- Almost one out of five children
- ages birth to five years have
- their fathers as their primary
- caregivers while their mothers
- are working, attending school,
- or looking for work

— *Child Trends*

in ensuring their children's well-being and positive outcomes. We have learned how these fathers navigate their way through the social, cultural, financial, and personal responsibilities of

fatherhood as well as, for some, the chronic problems that accompany poor education and employment. Despite differences in education, class, race, and access to opportunity, these men share the experience of being biologically connected to a young child and of sensing an urgency to define their roles as fathers.

We also have learned from practitioners who work with fathers, children, and families, and we have watched while a literature base on fathers and families has grown (although it focuses insufficiently on early childhood). The authors of these works have attempted to provide useful information on fatherhood, the diversity of men, as well as parental and family relationships that affect young children's cognitive, social, and emotional health and well-being (see the NCOFF FatherLit Database online at www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu).

We are also keenly aware that federally funded early childhood programs such as Head Start and other child-family programs in many cases have been mandated to become "father friendly"—that is, to create an atmosphere in which fathers feel welcomed and are invited to participate actively in the learning experiences of their children. As researchers in early childhood education and literacy, we are interested in how early childhood educators interpret, understand, and navigate the effort to engage fathers.

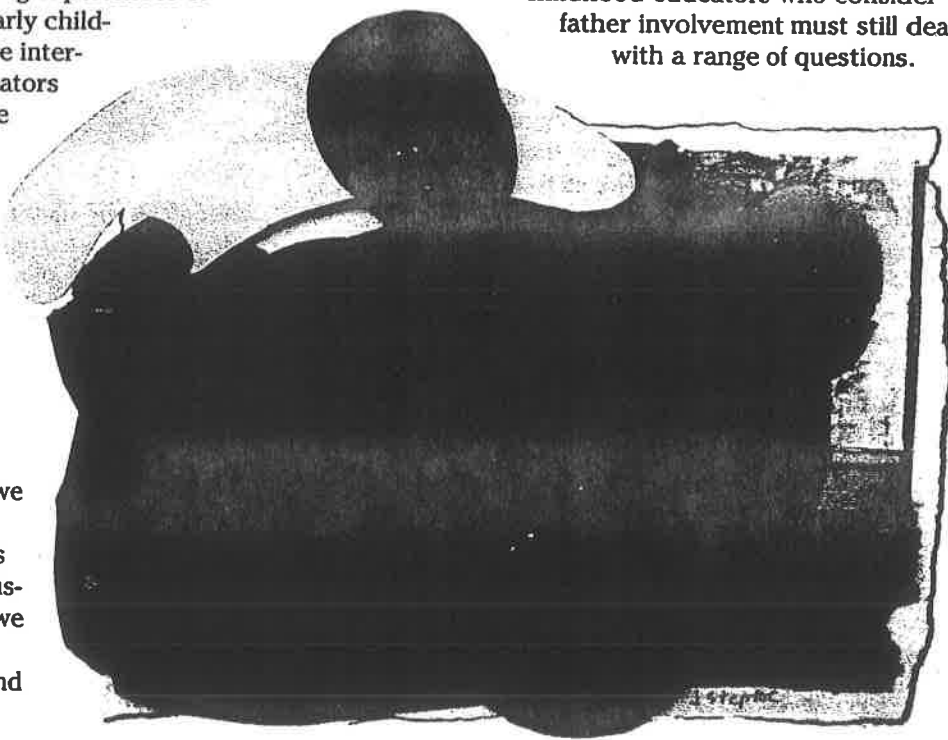
In this article, we consider current and emerging efforts in early childhood education as well as issues faced by fathers, by early childhood and fathering programs, and by practitioners in these programs. First, we focus on the relationship between father involvement and early childhood education's long-standing commitment to family involvement. Next, we describe three areas of father involvement and identify possibilities for integrating the issues into discussions and program planning. Last, we comment on the intersections between early childhood education and fathering practice.

Family involvement as a context for father engagement

Family involvement has been a key theme in early childhood education for more than three decades (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs 2000). In addition, both NAEYC's accreditation criteria (NAEYC 1998) and Head Start's Performance Standards (U.S. DHHS 1997) make explicit the need to partner with families. Empirical research (e.g., Epstein 1985, 1990) supports the value of practices in early childhood education that engage parents and families and, in turn, minimize discontinuity between home and school. This work has led to concepts of family involvement as partnership, implying more than the traditional images of teachers providing a service or parents marginally connecting to learning and teaching processes. Rather, the concepts are built on the premise that staff and parents, acting on behalf of children, can construct relationships of equality, mutual respect, and shared decision making. Parents, then, are critical components of the family microsystem that nurtures children. Within this microsystem, fathers especially warrant and need attention.

Given early childhood education's focus on families and parents, one might assume that fathers are automatically included. However, like others who work in child, family, and education programs, early childhood educators tend to engage more with mothers than with fathers, largely because mothers and maternal grandmothers typically have been the primary providers of childrearing, caregiving, and socialization, and thus are most likely to follow children's development and learning. Although this tendency is changing, early

childhood educators who consider father involvement must still deal with a range of questions.



How does an early childhood program invite and welcome both custodial and noncustodial fathers to support children? What kind of preparation do staff members need to work with these fathers? Must programs change to sustain fathers' participation? What constitutes father participation? What types of curricular materials will complement the effort?

These questions are relevant for all programs serving young children and their families regardless of fathers' custody arrangements or income levels. No one factor, such as social class, marital status, or race, shapes fathers' roles. Some people, including knowledgeable professionals, tend to associate issues of father involvement most directly with noncustodial fathers with low incomes who are often viewed as unwilling or unable to perform the paternal role adequately. However, this preoccupation particularly with low-income fathers of color as the primary perpetrators of uninvolved fathering ignores the reality of American families, which are characterized by high rates of divorce, separation, nonmarriage, and cohabitation. For example, experts contend that one-half of all U.S. children will experience the marital breakup of their parents; of those children, nearly one-half will experience the dissolution of their parents' second marriages (Furstenberg et al. 1983, 76). Further, of American children living with a single parent in 1997, 38 percent lived with a divorced parent, 35 percent with a never-married parent, and 19 percent with a separated parent (U.S. divorce statistics 2002). These statistics strongly suggest that most early childhood practitioners are likely to have considerable diversity in their programs with respect to fathers' marital status as well as fathers' engagement and residence with children.

In addition, it is estimated that one-quarter of all children three to nine years old have parents who were born outside the United States, and more than one-third of three-to nine-year-old children are of color (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). Consequently, early childhood practitioners must find ways to serve families coming from childrearing traditions in which parental roles may be shaped by cultural values and

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beliefs different from those of the program staff. Our ability to incorporate the cultural strengths and the distinctive ways that families, specifically fathers, contribute to outcomes of their preschool children (e.g., school preparation and psychological adjustment) is severely constrained by major gaps and inadequacy in our research literature. Before early childhood programs can tap these fathers' or families' potential to enhance children's development, research needs to more precisely define father and family involvement and examine the culturally rich dimensions of children's early care and education experiences.

We know considerably more now than a decade ago about the ways that fathers negotiate their identities—as fathers; as caregivers who cooperate with and support mothers and other caregivers; and as teachers, socializers, and advocates for their children. The next section discusses what the literature tells us about how fathers can be integrated successfully into early childhood education.

Research on fathers: Three domains and their implications for practice

As work with fathers and families continues to develop, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers continue to grapple with the concept of fatherhood. Some fathers have children who rely on public assistance; others have children with teenage mothers whose families do not want the fathers' involvement. These fathers are often prevented from living with their children and providing their financial support. Nevertheless, these absent fathers may provide

child care and material support such as toys or diapers and may show commitment to maintaining strong, nurturing relationships with their children. In contrast, some fathers who meet the traditional definition of fatherhood by living in the home and providing for the family's material needs have children who feel unwanted. These examples, which indicate the wide range of father care, raise important questions for research, practice, and policy.

This section focuses on three areas of father involvement: (1) paternal caregiving, (2) cooperative parenting,



and (3) children's academic achievement and literacy development. These areas capture important issues about varying degrees of fatherhood efforts and respond to the following three questions that have implications for early childhood specialists. What might practitioners expect that fathers can contribute to their children's care and well-being? How do programs assist both fathers and mothers to ensure the best interests of the child? What is the potential for fathers to promote their children's literacy and school achievement?



1. Paternal caregiving: How do fathers care for their children?

How do fathers demonstrate their caring? Caregiving, engaged in by both mothers and fathers, is a critical and universal aspect of childrearing. It encompasses all of those nurturing and life-sustaining acts that foster optimal child outcomes, especially physical, emotional, and psychological development (NCOFF 2001). Caregiving requires that the caregiver understand children's developmental needs, be able to respond effectively to those needs, and work with other caregivers to further the child's development. Mothers have been, and are still assumed to be, the primary caregivers in most homes in the United States, both when fathers are physically present and when they are absent. In addition, while mothers—including mothers in two-earner families—continue to perform the majority of caregiving (Barnett & Shen 1997), fathers are assuming a share of these responsibilities. The more hours mothers work and the more children in the household, the greater the

likelihood that fathers will provide caregiving (Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane 1992). As Lewis (1996) has suggested, father involvement is influenced by a father's willingness to engage as

- Twenty-four percent of fathers of preschool children (3 to 5 years)
- reported being highly involved in school activities, as did 33 percent of fathers of school-age children (6 to 11 years).

— *Child Trends*

an equal partner in family life, child care, and child socialization, which we believe is influenced by cultural norms and expectations, and by psychological factors such as motivation.

Why should early childhood educators focus on fathers' caregiving? Consider this hypothetical case (created from experiences with actual practitioners) involving Ms. Mace, the early childhood director, and Mr. Jones, the father of young Lyle who has had difficulty adjusting to his new care setting. Ms. Mace's program engages a few involved fathers who generally have preferred to work on tasks (for example, building a playhouse) that might be defined as stereotypically male rather than participate in classroom activities. Mr. Jones visits the class and asks several questions about Lyle's behavior. He then asks to participate in a meaningful way—"How can I help in Lyle's classroom?"

Ms. Mace suggests that he "just find a spot and help out for the time being in any way that you can." Other fathers have preferred manual tasks such as moving materials and painting, so she assumes that this father may want to do similar tasks rather than engage in learning activities. After she asks him to move some boxes, he shares that he had hoped to be directly involved in these activities. "After all," he says, "I have read to Lyle, bathed him, and in general taken care of him since he was born. I would like to be a more active part of his world here." Apologizing, Ms. Mace asks what he would like to do. He offers to read during story time and to organize the children in a play activity.

Ms. Mace does not want to make a second mistake by assuming what play activities Mr. Jones would prefer to lead. She knows that developmental psychologists such as Ross Parke (1996) have noted that fathers and mothers differ in the nature of play, with fathers typically



MEN IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

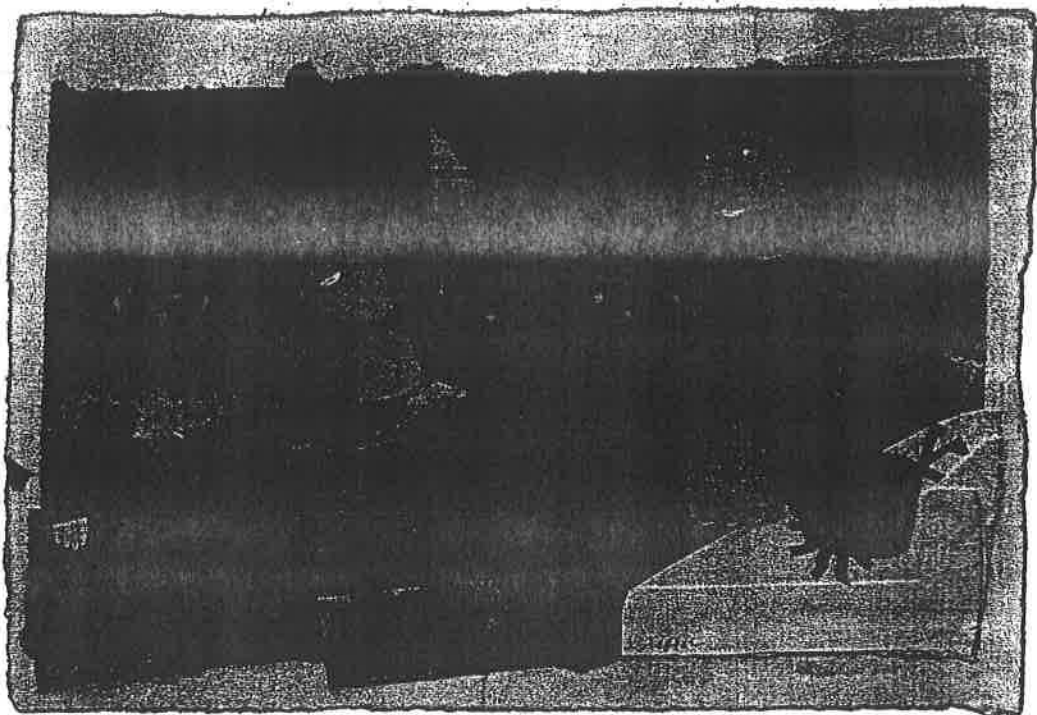
engaging in more physical activities. Both kinds of play are appropriate because all play provides critical developmental experiences for young children and helps to shape a range of other behaviors. She talks to Mr. Jones about his interests and integrates what she discovers as she considers future activities with parents.

The cautionary note, of course, is that Ms. Mace cannot generalize this experience to all other fathers who have different interests and cultural practices (Gadsden 1998). She recognizes that she cannot draw conclusions about which activities might interest a particular parent solely based on previous experiences with other parents, but she must also listen and ask questions to identify appropriate engagement that builds on the individual's strengths. How typical is Ms. Mace's initial response and willingness to listen to Mr. Jones? No systematic studies have been done to shed light on this question; however, our work suggests that Ms. Mace's interaction is typical of practitioners who have had limited experience in involving fathers.

In reading the literature, Ms. Mace may discover a range of findings that not only offer important insights but also demonstrate the evolutionary state of our knowledge on paternal caregiving. Research tends to describe the frequency of fathers' care and the tasks performed but does not focus on the quality of father care or its relationship to child outcomes (Davis & Perkins 1995). In addition, the bulk of this research focuses on fathers and children who reside together.

Much of the work in the early 1990s suggested that divorced fathers who do not live with their children are at risk of becoming less involved with their children's care over time (Seltzer 1991). More recent analyses of longitudinal data suggest that unmarried fathers are likely to be as involved with their children at the end of the child's third year as they were at the end of the first (McLanahan & Teitler 1998).

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However, in general, researchers have not investigated the degree to which unmarried fathers are able to sustain a consistent caregiving role over the first 18 years of a child's life.

In less economically advantaged families, fathers reportedly play a critical role in caring for young children. For example, low-income, unmarried African American mothers in a study by Hans and colleagues (1995) stated that, after themselves, fathers were the most frequent providers of care to young children. These mothers' reports show that 33 percent or more fathers performed eight of twelve caregiving tasks (e.g., feeding and bathing). A majority of mothers (53 percent) indicated that fathers provided solo care to toddlers at least one or two days per week. Similarly, Cohen (1998) found that 43 percent of fathers with low incomes, compared to 24 percent of more economically advantaged fathers, care for their young children while their wives work. In addition, 42 percent of fathers in blue-collar and service occupations, compared to 18 percent of fathers in managerial and professional jobs, look after their children while their wives work (Casper 1997).

In responding to Mr. Jones, Ms. Mace relies on experience with and assumptions about fathers and what their roles are or should be. Like other practitioners (both men and women), her assumptions and interactions are informed by her training, her daily experiences as a family member and possibly as a mother, and her relationships with other fathers in her program, some of whom may appear to avoid involvement. Nevertheless, to incorporate activities for fathers and children, early childhood educators need knowl-

edge about how fathers care for and involve themselves in their children's lives. The transition to include fathers and engage them in their children's early childhood learning experiences should be set within the context of including family members in general. This shift requires us to develop new understandings through thoughtful and ongoing discussions that explore how father's care and parental engagement can be incorporated into the content, structure, and outreach of the programs.

2. Cooperative parenting: Relating to the work of early childhood programs

The idea of father presence involves a father's capacity to form and maintain significant supportive attachments to a child and that child's caregivers over the course of the child's life. It includes the ability to adapt to maturational changes in the child, in other caregivers, and in oneself. The likelihood that a father's presence will result in a positive interaction with his child increases if he can accept and work with other caregivers for the child's welfare, even when the nature of these relationships and residence with the child have changed. Consider Pedro:

Pedro attends the same fathering program as Carlos (see p. 32) and is about the same age. He is separated from the mother of his son and usually sees his son once a week. He is experiencing difficulty gaining access to his son, now a first-grader, who is having problems with school work. Speaking almost entirely in Spanish, Pedro describes his son and his son's problems in school, and he asks the interviewers how he can help his son while facing opposition to his involvement as a father and his limited knowledge of English and schools.

Stories like Pedro's are frequently recounted in fathering programs. Pedro's son has never experienced peace at home nor successful learning at school; Pedro's limited English hinders his ability to ask questions and advocate on behalf of his son, and he and his son's mother have a bitter and divided relationship. The director of Pedro's fathering program wants to try cooperative parenting activities to help ameliorate these problems and enable Pedro and his child's mother to work together to ensure better chances for their son.

Cooperative parenting programs, sometimes called co-parenting programs, provide a series of activities in which both parents must engage. For example, in the Philadelphia Children's Network Responsive Fathers Program, young African American parents—including those who were married, unmarried but romantically involved, and unmarried and not romantically involved—formed parent teams and met on alternate weeks for two-hour cooperative parenting or counseling-mediation sessions during which they focused on the attributes of a team, parenting expectations,

extended family contexts, communication, parents as coworkers, feelings, values, fair fighting, conflict resolution, and creating family rules.

The parents form a co-parenting compact that in several fathering programs is a very useful way to encourage parents, whether they live together or apart, to put aside their differences to support their children's education (McBride & Ranes 1998). Early childhood educators can also help parents come to a less formal agreement than an actual cooperative parenting compact but one that is equally effective. Such an agreement could clarify the elements, conditions, circumstances, and support that are needed to ensure the healthy development, learning, and teaching of the child. Parents who have little in common in their daily lives can often be convinced to suspend their conflicts to work on behalf of their children.

In these cases early childhood educators need to consider what information both parents need access to, who should be called when emergencies occur or program activities change, and whether the parents can agree that both will participate. Early childhood educators must request mutual respect to ensure the integrity of the learning environment and foster the child's social competence. Gadsden asks young parents to imagine their children's life path and to identify what knowledge, educational experiences, and parent resources they can provide to help their children reach adulthood with the best possible experiences. This exercise allows parents to determine what feelings toward the other parent they are willing to change, what they are willing to invest individually and in combination with the other parent and other caregivers, and what contributions they can make to their children's daily learning.

It may be necessary for early childhood programs to provide additional staff training and networking with other professional services as they develop the capacity to help fathers and mothers negotiate their roles as cooperative parents. We recognize that early childhood teachers cannot and should not act as marital or couples counselors. But directors, family support

The first issue of *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice About Men as Fathers* will appear in February 2003. Under the leadership of the editor, Jay Fagan, D.S.W., of Temple University, the journal will be published three times a year. Each issue will include empirical, theoretical, and practice-oriented articles about men as fathers. For more information about the journal, see www.mensstudies.com.

workers, and early childhood teachers can work together and with counseling professionals to help parents focus on the developmental and educational interests of their children and on their role in securing what is best for them. In addition, programs can develop or update information and referral resources for families and provide an atmosphere that communicates a sincere willingness to listen to the concerns of parents who are struggling with complicated and contradictory goals and to help them find resources to resolve their differences.

3. Children's academic achievement and early literacy: How do fathers participate?

Fathers play an important role in their children's school achievement. The earlier they become involved with their children's learning and socialization, the better. For example, research shows that paternal stimulation of infants seems to affect the development of boys' mastery motivation (Yarrow et al. 1984). Clarke-Stewart (1978) found that the intellectual skills of 15- to 30-month-olds were significantly related to the fathers' engagement in play, positive ratings of children, the amount fathers and children interacted, and fathers' aspirations for children's independence.

In areas such as children's early reading, Gadsden and Bowman (1999) suggest that fathers' participation in literacy activities, the barriers parents face as a result of low literacy, and their perceptions of the role they can play in their children's literacy development may affect children's preparedness for school. These factors also may influence the direct and subtle messages that fathers send to their children about the value, achievability, and power associated with literacy, schooling, and knowledge.

Although mothers' education historically has been used as the primary predictor of children's achievement, educational research increasingly is examining the effect of father-child interaction on children's early learning, particularly among fathers with low incomes (Edwards 1995; Gadsden, Brooks, & Jackson 1997). These and other studies suggest that a father's ability to support his child's learning affects the child's engagement with books and schooling. Fathers (and mothers) who have limited schooling as well as low reading and writing abilities have difficulty participating in school-related activities requiring high levels of literacy. However, these parents have high hopes for their

children and depend on programs to ensure that their children will become *somebody*. Consider Stan:

Stan is a 23-year-old father, married to the mother of his children. He dropped out of school in 10th grade and returned a year later, leaving permanently at age 20. At the time of the interviews, he had begun to participate in a fathers program and was earning his GED. Stan's daughter is now five years old and enrolled in child care. He has taken great interest in her literacy development: he reads to her and buys many educational materials for her and his son. Although he is engaged in positive experiences with his children, his life circumstances are tenuous. He fears that his children's schooling will not prepare them for the world, but he feels ill-prepared to question the quality of his children's schooling. He says, "I don't want them just going through the system, with people thinking that they can't be somebody."

Although we cannot say what Stan's children will achieve in the future, research suggests that, even when fathers have limited schooling, their involvement in children's schools and school lives is a powerful factor in children's academic achievement. Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997) found that, when fathers in two-parent families and nonresidential fathers are moderately or highly involved in their children's school, their children are significantly more likely to receive mostly high

marks, enjoy school, and never repeat a grade. A father's involvement in intellectual and cultural activities at home was also related to children's perceived academic competence (Grolnick & Slowiaczek 1994). In a recent study of Head Start children, Fagan and Iglesias (1999) also found a positive association between high-level participation in a father involvement project and change in children's mathematics readiness scores.

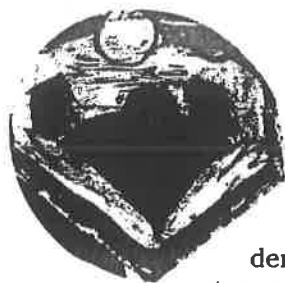
Research that examines the extent to which fathers are involved with their children's schools (e.g., Nord, Brimhall, & West 1997) has generally shown that fathers are less involved than mothers in all types of school activities. In particular, fathers with less than a high school education were much less likely to be involved in their children's schools than fathers with higher levels of education (Nord, Brimhall, & West 1997). Although nonresidential fathers were found to be substantially less involved with the child's school than residential fathers, Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997) indicated that the involvement of nonresidential fathers was in no way trivial.

Early literacy development is a significant part of preparing children to achieve. Children's early literacy is one of the areas to show the most promise in engag-

- Higher levels of father involvement in children's typical routines and activities are associated with fewer behavior problems, higher levels of sociability, and a high level of performance among children and adolescents.

— Child Trends





ing fathers. Although empirical studies in this area are few, the applied activities reported in *Young Children* (e.g., Ortiz, Stile, & Brown 1999) and other publications demonstrate how fathers can be invited to engage in basic literacy activities. Literacy researchers have identified a range of

early literacy behaviors that are associated with children's engagement with texts and success in reading: (1) oral language development, which includes book reading; (2) phonemic awareness activities; (3) exposure to the alphabet; and (4) ongoing assessment (Snow, Burns, & Griffin 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan 1998; Dickinson & Tabors 2001; Wasik & Bond 2001).

In more expansive definitions of literacy, a parent's engagement is not limited specifically to reading and writing but encompasses a range of cognitive and social learning. As we know, young children learn phonemic awareness through nursery rhymes, jingles, poetry, and books that contain words with rhymes and alliteration. Book reading, one of the most important activities in providing a context for language development, is an essential component of an effective pre-school curriculum (Sénéchal et al. 1998). It is intimately tied to language development, helps children to develop phonemic awareness and mastery of the concepts of print, and can be used to engage fathers within the program and at home.

Children's development of early literacy begins at birth and relies on a range of environmental stimuli. Fathers can ensure that their children are exposed to the best environmental stimuli by participating at home and in early childhood education settings. In this way, fathers can be supported as they foster optimal early childhood experiences through which their children can develop cognitive abilities. For example, they can read and se-

lect books with their children as well as learn how to use appropriate visual and cognitive cues. Early childhood educators can introduce fathers to approaches that provide opportunities for children to scribble and write, learn new vocabulary, and identify letters and important words such as their names. They can encourage fathers to talk with their children, an often under-rated parent-child activity.

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This type of support could be integrated within the context of a program's family involvement practices or presented as a workshop that is followed up with activities involving both mothers and fathers. Parents might be asked to maintain a portfolio for their children, that is, a folder of the child's best work, which both child and parent choose. This activity requires that parents follow through on helping their children with literacy tasks as well as acknowledge their role in their children's learning and their relationship with the program. Fathers who do not live in the same household with their children can also use this activity as a tangible way to connect with them and demonstrate that they value literacy.

Parents who have low levels of English language and literacy skills can read aloud, recite rhymes, and sing songs to children in their home language. In these cases early childhood educators can clarify how children's early literacy experiences in the home language support them as English language learners. A father can describe what he is doing while engaging in household tasks and ask the child to predict what he might do next. Fathers might also create games that require reading, writing, and problem solving.

Although parents' gender differences may influence their choice of materials and interactional styles, we do not know whether and how these choices and styles affect children's willingness to engage in the task or achievement. How fathers and mothers interpret their roles and abilities in relation to the tasks may differ. However, fathers can be encouraged to craft their own individual approach, based on their skills, levels of confidence in literacy, resources, and desires to be close to their children.

Enhancing early childhood education efforts through fatherhood efforts

There is no single portrait of a father of young children. Similarly, we cannot predict the type of father who will have children enrolled in an early childhood program. Just as children do not get an opportunity to choose their parents, neither do early childhood programs. However, these programs have accepted responsibility to address the diversity of children and families with noteworthy commitment. Fathering programs, though less systematic in their approaches than early childhood programs, also

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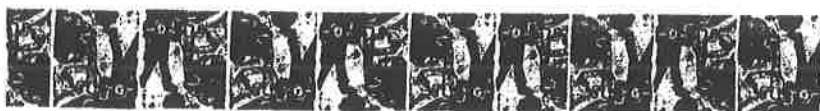


address this diversity. Each of these two fields is attempting to be more mindful of the other's work and to foster a relationship. Interaction between these two areas shows considerable potential and will be important in understanding the effects of father engagement and participation along different dimensions of parenting.

However, the fathering and early childhood fields still operate as parallel strands of service. Fathering programs often define their purpose as helping fathers improve children's early development; some also help young fathers develop knowledge of children's development. These activities may include classes or units on child development, parenting, or a related topic. Many if not most of these activities focus on helping the father work through emotional issues and problems associated with father absence that has occurred over multiple generations. Fathering practitioners often note that fathers who do not resolve these issues or their own failures likely will not engage positively with their children.

These fathering programs are also aware that, realistically, programmatic efforts are short-term and participant attendance may be inconsistent. In addition, many of the men do not have custody of their children and may have unstable visitation practices; thus, these programs hesitate to plan activities in which young children will be involved, recognizing that the father may not have access to the child. Instead, fathering programs have focused on getting men to connect with their children by supporting fathers in developing the personal tools and abilities to take on an active role in their children's development. In this way, these programs prepare men to work with other systems and settings, including schools and early childhood programs, on which children depend.

The fields of early childhood education and father involvement need to find ways to collaborate to foster children's early development and prepare them as future responsible and responsive parents. The degree to which early childhood education embeds father involvement within its mission will depend on the field's ability to define father involvement with young children and to articulate the role of programs in creating and promoting a learning atmosphere in which father involvement is considered a critical benefit to the children and families they serve.



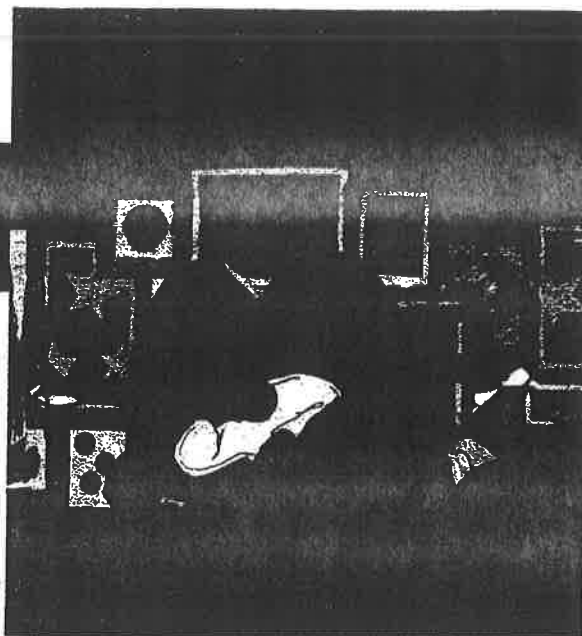
When you follow in the path of your father,
you learn to walk like him.

— Ashanti proverb

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(cont'd on p. 42)



in daddy's arms

in daddy's arms I am tall
& close to the sun & warm
in daddy's arms

in daddy's arms
I can see over the fence out back
I can touch the bottom leaves of the big magnolia tree
in Cousin Sukie's yard
in daddy's arms

in my daddy's arms the moon is close
closer at night time when I can almost touch it
when it grins back at me from the wide twinkling skies

in daddy's arms I am tall
taller than Benny & my friends Ade & George
taller than Uncle Billy
& best of all
I am eye-ball-even-steven with my big brother Jamal

in my daddy's arms
I am strong & dark like him & laughing
happier than the circus clowns
with red painted grins
when daddy spins me round & round
& the whole world is crazy upside down
I am big and strong & proud like him
in daddy's arms
my daddy

— Folami Abiade

From *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall, African Americans Celebrating Fathers*. Text copyright © 1997 by individual poets; illustrations copyright © 1997 by Javaka Steptoe. Permission arranged with Lee & Low Books Inc., New York, New York.



Victory!

I just wanted to share an accomplishment I had at school today:

We were asked to check addresses before a final version of the school directory got printed out for all the parents. I wrote in the names and addresses, with permission, for both sets of parents for three children. I was informed that the database only allows one address per child, and we usually use the mother's "because we don't always know how involved the dads will be" (in cases of divorce). YIKES!

I was pretty insistent that these dads *all* wanted to be included and if it meant cutting and pasting, literally, I would be happy to do it. Lo and behold we figured out a way to include two addresses for those children! Nothing like getting our databases brought into the real world!

— Pam Heaphy, lead teacher,

Leila Day Nursery Inc., New Haven, Connecticut, as shared on ECEOL-Listserve, September 19, 2002

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