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Research Notes: Fathers' Involvement in the Child's Early Education

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the willingness of fathers of preschoolers to be involved in the preschool activities of their child, their actual involvement, and the factors which facilitated/hindered their involvement. There were 36 father-respondents from the Child Development Laboratory (CDE) who were administered an interview schedule. They were residents of Los Baños, Laguna and nearby towns, and aged 23-54 years old.

The findings of the study showed that majority of the respondents (92%) were willing to be involved in some preschool activities designed for parent involvement. Of this group, some 28% reported they were highly willing to be involved with a level of willingness at 10, the highest level.

The nature of involvement most of them wanted was as a Teacher Daddy or resource person, game master, or storyteller to the class of their children. The respondents wanted to be involved because they felt that fathers should be involved in their child's schooling and that with the involvement, they will be able to strengthen the father-child relationship, share their knowledge about their occupation, develop in their child a sense of pride in their profession, and simply have an enjoyable time with their child and the whole class.

High ratings for willingness however, do not necessarily translate to behavior since there were intervening factors like conflicts in their work schedule or demands in their occupations. Thus, only eight percent became actually involved in their chosen nature of participation in the preschool within the school year. For father studies, it is recommended that a more diverse sample of fathers from public and private preschools programs be included.

Parent involvement, as defined by Reynolds (1992), is the direct participation in the child's school or any interactions between parents and children that may contribute to the child's development. There are preschools in the country that encourage parental involvement in the various activities of the school. Primarily, this is due to the teachers' and administrator's belief in the positive outcomes of parental involvement for the child's development and early education. Preschools like these offer information about parenting issues and techniques, and ways by which the school curriculum can be extended to the home. Some usual and regular activities that require or encourage parental involvement are parent-teacher conferences once or twice a year, a sports fest, a Family Day, parent-teacher meetings, field trips, and programs during Christmas, United Nations Day, or the closing/graduation ceremony. Parent-teacher contacts are done through meetings, emails, newsletters, phone calls, written notices, bulletin board announcements, or daily conversations with the parents.

However, parental involvement has very often meant maternal involvement. In still patriarchal societies like the Philippines, the expressive functions of caring for the home and the young may still remain with the mother despite their participation in the labor force. Females are socialized to care of their children in the home and take care of their child's education and related activities. Traditionally, as providers for their families, fathers were considered as the "hidden parent", uninvolved or unimportant to the children's rearing (Mwoma, 2009). In order to encourage paternal involvement, this mindset has to be challenged time and time again. It has to be emphasized that the father is part of his child's learning team and he has a unique contribution that he alone can make to his child's development and education.

Researches have shown that paternal involvement in early education is associated with higher academic scores (Flouri and Buchanan, 2004; Mwoma, 2009), higher levels of socio-emotional development (Flouri, 2005), greater self-confidence (Deutsch, Servis and Payne, 2001), lower levels of psychological distress, and more positive relationships in childhood and even, later in life (Amato, 1994). In the preschool years, play is a child's way of life. LeMonda et.al. (2004) found that fathers' engagement in their preschool child's play has a positive impact on later educational attainment but Snarey (in Fagan, 1999) differentiated between the impacts on sons and daughters. Daughters benefitted from paternal support in the areas of physical-athletic and socio-emotional development while sons benefitted from paternal support to their academic/cognitive achievements and emotional development.

There are characteristics or conditions, which can facilitate paternal involvement in early childhood education. Fagan (1999) determined that when the mother is involved in school, it facilitates father involvement. Fathers who have nurturing personalities were more involved also. Lastly, preschools that provided program support for father/male participation also predicted paternal involvement. In her study, Mwoma (2009) pointed out some factors that were found to influence paternal involvement. These were the fathers' level of educational attainment, the fathers' occupation, and the type of preschool (public or private) the child attended. Fathers who were more educated with post secondary education, who were educators themselves, and who enrolled their children in private preschools were more involved in their children's education. Fathers were found to be highly involved in the following activities- paying school fees for their children, selecting and purchasing uniform for their children, selecting and purchasing books, ensuring children's safety while at home, and buying a present for their children when they performed well in school.

The extent of paternal involvement is also influenced by the child's gender. Fathers were more involved when it is their sons who are going to the preschool, regardless of the child's age (Fagan, 1999; Marsiglio, 1991; Huston, 1983). This could be explained by the culture's socialization process that young boys require male role models so they can take on male gender roles in families and societies.

Thus, this study aims to determine: (1) the level of willingness of fathers to be involved in preschool activities beyond the usual attendance in meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and general school events; (2) the nature of their possible participation in the preschool's program for parental involvement; (3) the respondents' actual involvement in these activities and what were the facilitating factors for their involvement; and (4) the relationship of paternal age, part-time or full-time occupation, level of educational attainment, and number of children to the level of willingness of fathers to be involved and their actual level of involvement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized a cross-sectional research design in order to gain information from the fathers of the preschoolers enrolled during the school year 2009-2010.

Random sampling was used to select the respondents whose child was enrolled in the Child Development Laboratory (CDL), a preschool laboratory of the Department of Human and Family Development Studies of UP Los Baños College of Human Ecology. There were 60 father-respondents in the study. After considering the confidence level and estimated response rate, the sample size of 36 was determined using the following formulas:

$$ss = \frac{Z^2 * (p) * (1-p)}{c^2}$$

$$ss = \frac{1.96^2 * (0.5) * (0.5)}{0.105^2}$$

$$ss = 87.11$$

Where:

Z = *Z* value (e.g. 1.96 for 95% confidence level)

p = percentage picking a choice, expressed as decimal (.5 used for sample size needed)

c = confidence interval, expressed as decimal (e.g., .04 = ±4)

$$new\ ss = \frac{ss}{1 + \frac{ss-1}{Population}}$$

$$new\ ss = \frac{87.11}{1 + \frac{86.11}{60}}$$

$$new\ ss = 35.77\ or\ 36$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CDL, a preschool laboratory established in 1965, was the training ground for the students enrolled in the BS Home Technology program of the College of Agriculture. Later, it served as teaching laboratory of students enrolled in the BS Human Ecology program (major in Human and Family Development). It is also an extension program that serves the faculty and staff of the university and its allied institutions by providing educational experiences to 60 children aged 3-5 years old.

A short demographic questionnaire was prepared to get the basic information about the fathers, in particular, their age, years of education, occupation, and information on the family. Further, there was a questionnaire regarding their willingness to be involved in preschool activities, their choice(s) from among five kinds of parental involvement activities, and why they were or were not willing to be involved in these activities for parental involvement.

The questionnaire was given to the respondents directly or through the person fetching the child from the school a month after classes started. They were asked to return it within a week's period. The fathers were encouraged to be part of the Friday parent involvement activities through a parent-teacher meeting during the first semester. They were again reminded of this opportunity at the middle of the school year.

The data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Frequencies, percentages and means were used to describe the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and other pertinent data. Quantitative analyses included Pearson Correlation Coefficient to determine the relationship between paternal age, part-time or full-time occupation, level of educational attainment, and number of children to the level of willingness of the father to be involved and their actual level of involvement. The significance of the correlations between variables was also determined.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Thirty-six (36) fathers, with a mean age of 37 years old, from intact, two-parent families of Los Baños and nearby towns characterized the respondents. Table 1 shows that more than half of the respondents were aged 30-39 years.

Table 1. Age of father-respondents

Age	Freq (n=36)	Percentages
20-29 years	7	19.40
30-39 years	19	52.80
40-49 years	6	16.70
50-59 years	4	11.10
Total	36	100.00

The participants' socio-economic status was predominantly middle class. Half of the respondents worked as private employees in companies or schools (Table 2). More than a third were government employees while the remaining were self-employed.

Table 2. Occupation of respondents

Occupation	Freq (n=36)	Percentages
Private employees:		50.00
Physician	18	
Teacher/Instructor	1	
Private Consultant	2	
Research technician	1	
Electrical engineer	2	
Branch manager	1	
Computer work	1	
Field inspector	2	
Auditor	1	
Safety officer	2	
Production specialist	1	
Employee	1	
Government employees:		36.10
Researcher	13	
Driver	4	
Laborer	1	
Civil engineer	1	
Employee	1	
Self-employed:		13.90
Musician	5	
Photographer	1	
Businessman	1	

Data based on multiple responses

More than half of the fathers work within Los Baños while the remaining work in nearby towns or in Manila or had a job contract abroad (Table 3). The distance, for some fathers, was really a constraint but others looked at it as an obstacle they could overcome by filing a leave of absence for their child when necessary. Further, more than 90% were working full-time in their jobs.

Table 3. Location and form of employment of respondents

Work Characteristic	Freq (n=36)	Percentages
Location of job		
Same town as residence	20	55.50
In urban center/in next town	15	41.70
Abroad	1	2.80
Form of employment		
Part-time	3	8.30
Full-time	33	91.70

Nearly 67% of the respondents were college graduates and all were educated beyond their secondary education. The family size tended to be small with 42% of the respondents having two children and another 22% having one child. The average number of children for the respondents' families was 2.19.

Willingness of the respondents to be involved in preschool activities

Of the 36 respondents, 92% were willing to be involved in preschool activities, which needed parental involvement. The remaining were not willing to be involved due to their heavy work schedule during weekdays, the distance of the work place from their child's school or due to official trips they frequently make. One father had a job contract abroad which means his absence from the child's life for most of the school year.

Among the respondents who were willing to be involved in preschool activities, nearly 28% rated their willingness to be involved at the highest level of 10, 14% rated their level of willingness at 8, and another 14% at 7. More than half of the fathers had a high willingness of involvement index. The mean level of willingness of the fathers was 6.47 with an SD of 3.2. Table 4 shows the willingness index of the fathers to be involved in the preschool activities made for parents' participation.

Table 4. Willingness of involvement index of the respondents

Willingness index	Freq (n=33)	Percentages
High willingness	21	58.30
10	10	
9	1	
8	5	
7	5	
Moderate willingness	8	22.20
6	2	
5	4	
4	2	
Low willingness	4	11.11
3	2	
2	0	
1	2	
Total	33	100.00

For the fathers who had a low willingness of involvement index, their greatest concerns revolved around the time/schedule constraints and/or place constraints because of their occupations. All stated that they had busy schedules to attend to because of their work positions and their heavy work demands. One was working abroad, as stated earlier. A father stated that he is not sure if he can file a leave of absence on the very day he may be scheduled to be at school.

For fathers who had a moderate level on the willingness index, their concerns also centered on their busy schedules, more so when they have official trips or field work, and the distance factor since they were working in nearby towns. One father also stated that he is not comfortable with public speaking so he only stated that his level of willingness was a five.

For fathers whose ratings were high on the willingness index, these fathers were also concerned about their availability due to heavy schedules but they wanted to be involved given the opportunity to share. They felt that fathers should be involved in their child's schooling and development. Given the level of education they have and their age category, these fathers have been exposed to print and broadcast media about trends in parenting and the positive outcomes of being involved in their child's life during the formative years. These fathers also felt that with their involvement, they will be able to strengthen the father-child relationship, they will be able to share their knowledge/experiences about their occupation, they can develop in their child a sense of pride in their profession, and lastly, they simply want to have an enjoyable time with their child and the other children in class.

One father said, "I want to impart/share with children a different kind of occupation (software engineering) that they may get involved with in the future. Teaching new technologies to children is very relevant because technological innovations are continuously happening." Another father said, "It would be a wonderful chance to help instill values in their young minds."

Preferred nature of participation of the respondents in preschool activities

The fathers had five kinds of possible participation during the end of the week activities. The options included taking on the role of a Teacher Daddy where the father will be a resource person about his occupation/ hobby, as a storyteller of a story of his choice, as a facilitator for the children's singing, as an art activity guide, or as a game master for the children's outdoor play. When asked about the nature of their possible participation in the preschool, nearly 40% of the responses were to be a Teacher Daddy and another 30% were to be a game master (Table 5). These preferred roles that the fathers chose could be influenced by the occupations they have, which could also be influenced by the gender stereotypes and expectations in society for males. The other activities, storytelling, singing nursery songs, and doing art works, may be uncomfortable for them since these are activities more associated with what mothers or women do or are expected to do with and for children.

Table 5. Nature of possible participation

Nature of participation	Freq (n=33)	Percentages
As Teacher Daddy	13	39.40
Game master	10	30.30
As storyteller	6	18.20
Singer/teach new songs	2	6.00
Art activity guide	2	6.00
Total	39	100.00

Data based on multiple responses

Actual participation of the respondents in preschool activities

At the end of the school year, only 8% or three of the fathers actually became involved in the Friday activities for parents. Two of these fathers were in their early to mid-thirties and the other father was in his early fifties. All of them were full-time employed, one as a teacher in a private school, another was a photographer who has his photography studio, and the other was a university policeman. They were all working in town or in a nearby town. Two of them stated 10 as their level of willingness to be involved while the other one stated eight. The father who stated eight as his

level of willingness was concerned, at first, that his schedule may not allow him to participate. He took on the role of a Teacher Daddy as he recounted to the children his duties and experiences as a university policeman, and as he showed them the things he uses in doing his job. Much as he was quite shy about it, he was encouraged when the children's eyes all grew bigger as he showed them his handcuffs, night stick, whistle, walkie talkie, hand gun, and bullets. The remaining two fathers who gave a rating of 10 stated that *"This is the only way that I can try to play and work with my kid in a preschool setting"* and *"I want to be able to share the basic concept and importance of my work to my child and other children."* The former took on the role of Teacher Daddy as he explained his job of being a teacher of physical education and the importance of exercise to be healthy in body and mind. He asked the children to follow him in a set of stretching and warm-up exercises, which the children eagerly followed. The other father also took on the role of Teacher Daddy as he shared about his profession as a photographer, showed them his big camera, guided some children in handling and using it, and showed them places, events, and people he has taken photographs of. In a follow-up interview of these fathers, the general feelings were of relief that they were able to do it, of joy that they were able to give something to their child and the other children, and gratitude to the teachers and school that they went through this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

These three fathers all had sons enrolled in the preschool at the time they participated. Research on paternal involvement has supported the finding that fathers are more involved with their sons' education (Fagan, 1999; Marsiglio, 1991; Huston, 1983). This could also be due to the father's perceived expectation from society that fathers should be role models for their sons, especially for their son's gender role socialization into the masculine category.

Relationship of variables to the fathers' level of willingness to be involved and actual level of involvement

Pearson correlation coefficients were conducted to examine the relationships between the paternal involvement variables. Table 6 shows that there are no significant predictors of paternal involvement, however, weak positive relationships were found between the variables. One of these is between paternal age and actual involvement (0.12), indicating that as the fathers grow older, they may actually become involved with their child's early education. Another weak relationship was found between paternal level of education and level of willingness to be involved (0.27). The higher the father's level of education, the more likely he is to be willing to be involved in his child's education.

Prior research findings have shown that paternal education is positively associated with school involvement (Mwoma, 2009). More educated fathers may have higher aspirations for their children, especially their sons, and may feel that their involvement in their child's formative schooling can assist in the achievement of these aspirations. Further, exposure to various print and broadcast media emphasizing the importance of parenting may encourage fathers to feel that they need or have to be involved, though this may not necessarily translate to actual involvement.

Table 6. Correlations between paternal involvement and age, occupation, education, and number of children

Variables	Level of willingness	Actual involvement
Paternal age	0.00	0.12
Part or full-time occupation	-0.24	0.09
Level of education	0.27	-0.01
Number of children	-0.19	0.04

Note: $p < 0.01$

The father's part-time or full-time occupation also has a weak but inverse effect on willingness for involvement (-0.24). According to Becker (Fagan, 2003), the time availability hypothesis can offer an explanation in that fathers who have more free time, due to less time given to paid work, are more likely to be available for household chores and child-rearing tasks. In this study, more than 90% were working full-time and some 44% were working in Manila or abroad, thus lending credence to the hypothesis. The three fathers who did get involved in the preschool all had jobs in nearby locations only. There were many times they also brought their son to school and/or fetched their son from school.

The higher number of children a father has seems to be indicative of less paternal involvement in child activities (-0.19). Again, the time availability hypothesis may offer an explanation for this. Fathers may be more involved in their occupations in order to provide for the material needs of more children (Bulanda, 2001; Moore and Kotelchuck, 2004). Also, the fathers may be giving their time in attending to their other children to help in child-rearing tasks, especially if these are younger than the child attending the preschool,

While the correlation findings of this study suggest a low level of association between measures of paternal involvement, it still points out the need to reach out to fathers to be involved in early education. Preschools should take into consideration that fathers have many reasons, from their occupations and its demands to feelings of discomfort or fear in handling children, which may hinder their participation in preschool activities designed for parents. Thus, teachers and school staff should ensure that a father's involvement will be a meaningful experience by guiding them to participate in activities they would feel comfortable engaging in or would make use of their competencies, and by assuring the fathers that they will be there to lend support or assist when needed.

This vote of confidence can go a long way in making fathers feel they can contribute something to their child's education and development, whether the child is a son or daughter. Despite their inexperience in handling a group of children, they may learn to stand in front of this group and share something than just simply stand on the periphery of their child's classroom.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to determine the level of willingness of fathers to be involved in their child's preschool activities, their preferred nature of participation, their actual level of involvement, and the relationship of age, part-time or full-time occupation, level of education, and number of children to the fathers' willingness to be involved and actual involvement.

The findings demonstrate that fathers have a high desire to be involved in their child's education beyond the usual attendance in meetings and parent-teacher conferences. Preferably, this participation is as Teacher Daddy or resource speaker about their occupations and as game master in children's outdoor play activities. However, the desire may be blocked by obstacles like busy work schedules during weekdays, by having jobs in far places or overseas, or personal insecurities like fear of public speaking. Paternal age has a weak positive relationship to actual level of involvement and paternal level of education has a weak positive relationship to level of willingness to be involved.

This study has significant implications for our understanding of paternal involvement in education. They want to be involved but there are various factors in the social environment like work demands and societal beliefs on father's role that may hinder their participation. These may also influence how they view themselves in the roles they play as a father, husband, a school partner, and a professional. Preschool program

administration has to consider the support fathers need to further develop their skills in parenting and educating. More effective services and projects for fathers can be planned since these have the potential to increase father involvement in early education. Fathers tend to engage in more physically stimulating activities that promote assertiveness rather than politeness (Snarey in Fagan, 1999). They can assist in planning and implementing more of these physical activities appropriate for children with the teachers' guidance. This type of social interactions can lead to benefits for psychosocial development in children, whether female or male. Female teachers and mothers can also learn how to be a nurturing parent from a father's point of view.

Future research can address the need for a bigger sample of fathers that can come from public preschools and private preschools. This can widen the diversity of fathers in terms of age, socio-economic status, occupation and income, educational attainment, personality characteristics, and other family characteristics. Further, the measures of paternal involvement can include collection of data from secondary respondents like the mother and the teacher(s) for a more objective evaluation of paternal involvement.

Parents and teachers need to continuously challenge the concept of parental involvement as equal to maternal involvement only. Providing a father-friendly environment will encourage the father's membership in the family learning team. Father presence matters in the family and in early childhood education.

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