

## A Grounded Theory of Father Involvement in Children's Education

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**ABSTRACT** Parent involvement in education is predominantly understood in terms of mother involvement. Responding to the under-researched area of father involvement in education, a grounded theory inquiry was conducted to explore the main concern of fathers regarding their child's education with the aim of generating a substantive theory. Unstructured interviews were conducted with eight married fathers of school-going children selected by theoretical sampling. Data were analysed by grounded theory coding and the emerging theory was examined against the substantive literature on fathering. The core category, *Improvised leading*, describes how fathers adapt leadership in educational matters to meet a child's needs and to suit family context. Sub-categories were expressed as interrelated processes inside and outside the family: *Coaching* children in valued knowledge and skills and character traits; *Correcting* children's behaviour by upholding rules through rewards and penalties; *Cultivating* father-child relationships, which lubricates the more rigorous processes of coaching and correcting, through communication and play; and *Circumscribing* formal school involvement through selective participation in school structures and programmes and in problem-focused interaction with teachers. The emerging grounded theory suggests a perspective on fathers' involvement in children's education which can inform teachers and contribute about how to develop appropriate practices to support father involvement in school and family settings.

### INTRODUCTION

The considerable body of research on parent involvement practices in education is predominantly matricentric (Ho and Hiatt-Michael 2012). Schools frequently fail to distinguish between father involvement and mother involvement and pass over the ways in which greater father involvement can be promoted (Marsiglio and Roy 2012). Teachers assume mothers are the primary caregivers in the family and that they take the major responsibility for instruction and care of children (Marsiglio and Hendricks 2012). This observation is borne out by certain practices: mothers attend school meetings and parent-teacher conferences, volunteer for school activities and serve on class and fund-raising committees more frequently than fathers (Burgess 2010); and mothers assume primary responsibility for the child's learning at home, such as reading, homework supervision and participation in out-of-school activities (Bennetti and Roopnarine 2006). Consequently, teachers frequently make mothers the standard for parent involvement activities (Ball and Daly 2012) and most organised school-based support to parents in assisting the child's learning is focused on creating suitable opportunities for mother involvement (Burgess 2010). School initiatives

to promote and develop father-friendly and father-focused policies and programmes to foster father involvement in children's education are infrequent (Hiatt-Michael 2012). In South Africa, where this paper is located, research on father involvement is in short supply (Beardshaw 2006) and there is no focused attention on the father's role in the child's education (Morrell and Richter 2006).

However, fathers are undeniably major contributors to child development through their provision of human capital (skills and traits that encourage achievement), financial capital (resources and experiences purchased with income) and social capital (family and community relations that enhance development) (Day et al. 2003). Father involvement in the child's development produces overwhelmingly positive results (Lamb 2004). Children's socio-emotional, cognitive and linguistic development is encouraged by fathers who talk to, teach and encourage their children to learn (Cabrera et al. 2007a). Children whose fathers are actively involved in their school activities do better academically; remain in school longer and have higher educational and occupational mobility relative to the parent in adulthood (Flouri 2005; Goldman 2005; Sarkadi et al. 2008). These positive outcomes apply to involvement by resident and non-resi-

dent fathers (Cabrera et al. 2007b). Further, the involvement of residential fathers in the child's schooling creates an 'additive' effect, whereby the positive effects of mother involvement are enhanced and risk factors associated with low income status are reduced (McBride et al. 2005). Conversely, poor father involvement increases the likelihood of problems at school, social difficulties and delinquent behaviour and reduces the chances of scholastic achievement (Welch et al. 2004).

### Objectives

The objective of the study reported on in this paper was to investigate practices of father's involvement in their children's education and development through a qualitative inquiry in order to develop grounded theory of father involvement with a view to making recommendations for schools and school practitioners to play a more meaningful role in supporting fathers through suitable school policies and programmes.

### METHODOLOGY

A broad research topic was identified: the engagement of fathers in their children's education in the context of the home and the school. This was investigated by a grounded theory inquiry based primarily on a Glaserian approach (Martin and Gynnild 2011). Glaser (2005) defines grounded theory as a systematic research procedure that is used to 'discover' a theory from the data to explain a process, an action or an interaction in cases where extant theories are insufficient, particularly in areas of professional practice. The hiatus in the literature was identified as a result of my ongoing interest in parent involvement in education; thus, entry into the field was not devoid of prior knowledge. However, to maintain an inductive stance, a review of the substantive literature on fatherhood as such was withheld until a later stage, that is after theory generation, characteristic of the Glaserian school of thought. The researcher followed this strategy in an endeavour to be free from the claims of the related literature and its findings and in order to discover a theory grounded firmly in the data as opposed to developing findings pre-determined by existing theory. The sample comprised eight married fa-

thers of school-going children. The first suitable participant was recruited through professional contact with a local community organisation. Subsequent participants were selected by theoretical sampling (Martin and Gynnild 2011). Participants were men aged between 30 and 50 years with post-school qualifications and employed in diverse occupations with an almost equal representation of black and white men. This description is given to situate the participants and should not be confused by criteria intended to define sampling. Data was gathered by in-depth, individual interviews held with participants at venues chosen according to their own preference and recorded on digital recorder. Prior consent for the interviews was obtained and transcriptions were made of recordings and the latter served as raw data. Data analysis was done by grounded theory coding and constant comparative analysis accompanied by memo writing. As the substantive theory emerged, The researcher tested 'fit' and suitability of the grounded theory to various similar contexts whereby fathers are involved in children's academic development and through opportunistic conversations with other groups (for example, fathers of adult children, mothers, principals and teachers) and eventually through consultation of the substantive literature.

### RESULTS

The main concern of all fathers, irrespective of individual difference, was how to lead the family effectively in important matters arising from children's education and development in the context of the home, school and community. The kind of headship that fathers adopted is conceptualised in the core category, *Improvised leading*. Through this label developed from an *in vivo* code, the researcher attempted to capture a flexible, adaptive process which allowed fathers to improvise leadership according to the family context, the child's needs and the contributions of other actors in the family and the school. *Improvised leading* embraced an open-ended continuum of leadership behaviours marked by the contrasting but not conflicting properties of *inclusivity* or *autonomy*. *Improvised leading* was expressed through complex and interrelated processes which emerged as subcategories of the core category: *coaching*; *correcting*; *cultivating*; and *circumscribing*.

The first three processes were enacted within the family; the fourth process occurred in relationship with the school as formal educational structure. *Coaching* children had two main foci: developing valued knowledge and skills and moulding character. *Correcting* children's behaviour was distinguished from *coaching* through its property: maintaining family rules by implementing rewards or penalties for behaviour. Fathers found *correcting* and *coaching* children taxing. Consequently, they sought to reduce accompanying stress and familial conflict by *cultivating* warm, caring relationships with children through open communication and play. Sound father-child relationships formed a safety net for the rigors of leading through *coaching* and *correcting*. *Circumscribing* school involvement described the narrowly defined process whereby fathers managed their formal engagement with the school. Properties of this subcategory were selective participation in the school's formal structures and programmes and problem-focused negotiations with teachers necessitated by a child's performance.

### The Core Category: Improvised Leading

The core category had its origin in an *in vivo* code, that is, a code which emanated directly from a participant's own words: "A lot of my leadership in the home is improvised so it is not always really structured or thought through. It just happens as you go along." This captured an accommodating leadership position embedded in an open-ended and ever-changing range of family situations and paternal responsibilities shaped by factors, such as the child's temperament, the father's relationship with his spouse and the requirements of schooling. Improvised leading was marked by the properties of *inclusivity* or *autonomy*. These properties were not polarized extremes but interchangeable and complementary behaviours functioning on a continuum on which the fathers chose to position themselves in a given situation. Thus, fathers balanced different leadership behaviours instead of demonstrating a fossilized, monolithic parenting style.

Inclusivity marked most of the fathers' leading, whereby room was created for all other participants present in the educational process to make inputs into the decision making and direction provided by fathers. Inclusivity bent to-

wards an egalitarian family structure in which participation was sought and welcomed in all relationships. The most consistent demonstration of inclusive leading was demonstrated by the fathers' understanding and practice of parenting as a joint endeavour exercised with his wife. Fathers functioned as co-parents in close partnership with their wives and their comments illustrated decisions and actions which were cooperative undertakings. Consequently, children witnessed parents acting as a team and this enhanced their sense of security.

*[My wife] defines herself as an equal partner within marriage and it has allowed me an opportunity to play a role as a man in the family without being undermined and emasculated by my wife. So this is what has caused the harmony: the power relationship between my wife and myself. This has had a huge impact on my children. They feel safe, they feel emotionally secure.*

Fathers' continually referred to their relationship with their wives in relation to the responsibilities of raising and educating children; they predominantly narrated their experiences in a plural voice. *We* or *X and I* or *my wife and I*, dominated the discourse. In all cases, it emerged that the prime decision concerning a child's formal education, the choice of a suitable school, was the result of a joint decision.

*The most important decision, in conjunction with my wife, was identifying the appropriate school that our kids could go to, the school we want both our kids in. That is the most important decision we took and both myself and my wife.*

Inclusivity may be prompted or invited by several 'initiators': the child, teachers and, most importantly, the mother. At times children alerted the father to and requested his particular advice or engagement in a decision, task or concern judged to be of high value to the child, such as help with an important school project, improvement of a skill in order to perform well in a special event, advice with a significant decision affecting a child's future or guidance to resolve a quandary in the child's life. The child regarded these instances as prime issues and preferred the father's intervention, support or guidance above the mother's. The child and the father thus became partners in the course of action guided by the father. At times these specific requests for the father's support and leading

ran counter to a mother's views and a consensus decision between parents had to be reached.

*My daughter came to me and just opened up and said, 'I think I want to go to a residential university. I think I am coping [in distance education] but I would be more comfortable at a residential university'. And the Mom was not for that idea especially going to the University of X. And my wife and I had to talk about it and say, 'Maybe let's give her the chance. Let's give her that opportunity to go there.'*

On the other hand, *improvised leading* also meant that fathers did not hesitate to assume autonomy as family head if they considered it necessary.

*But I have got the liberty to overrule [my wife's decision]. It is very seldom used, but there are times that I do it. But I don't think my wife has ever done that. I don't think she has ever, if I have said 'No', gone and did the contrary. But there have been times when my wife has said 'No' and I felt it is in the child's interest and in the family's interest to say 'Yes'. So leading is not totally equitable in the family, to be honest.*

Assuming autonomy emanated from situations which demanded a final decision to be taken in the face of several options; situations where a child's poor academic performance or behavioural problems required firm and immediate correction; where negotiations with the school principal (rather than just grade teachers) was required; or where fathers felt their wives were feeling the strain of parenting. The shift from inclusivity to autonomy could be intuitive and spontaneous or as a result of a specific request from another person to take over. In the former, fathers simply rose to the occasion and 'put their foot down', taking a decisive action that could sometimes be unpopular with other such as with the extended family. When a father made an autonomous decision regarding a child's behaviour independent of the sanction or approval of his wife, *strong* personal resolve was required to carry out the decision.

*I spoke to my son and I sat him down and was very firm. I just said 'Your behaviour is unacceptable. From now on every day I am getting a report-back from your teacher. If the report-back is bad, then you get an hour less of computer time and if there are two bad comments, then it is two hours' less of your computer every day. It will be shut down.' Well, it had the desired effect so I think you've also got to*

*be very firm as a father. My wife got very emotional about my decision but I would just say 'No, this is what we are doing and we are sticking to it'.*

But an autonomous position was often in response to a request by the mother to assume the prime responsibility. In these cases fathers followed a wife's 'nudging' and took control of a stressful situation; fathers trusted mothers' assessment as they judged them more adept at 'picking up' children's needs because they spent more time with them.

*Obviously my wife knows what is going on and says, 'You know, press a little on this thing or that' and that is what I do at the evening meal around the table. I ask the children to share a little bit, 'How was your day?' kind of thing. And then some of these things would come out.*

Thus, *improvised leading* covered a multi-faceted approach to father involvement which gave fathers scope to function appropriately in multi-age families (preschoolers to university students), in marriages to stay-at-home wives or those who were busy professionals and in families that espoused more authoritarian belief systems or more egalitarian parenting approaches. Leading was never static; it was "*choreographed*" as one father put it, to fit and this made paternal leading flexible, not unbending. Yet, in the midst of responsibilities shared by husband and wife, the father's assumption of a weightier leading role was implicit in many situations: "*We do it together* [referring to family routine]. *We do the thing together. But I would normally lead that kind of a process.*"

The subcategory, *coaching*, was a clearly defined process which emerged in all the fathers' accounts. Coaching had two main properties: instructing the child in important knowledge and skills and moulding character.

Fathers made an effort to coach children in very specific school content, primarily maths and science in older children, and to encourage literacy skills in younger children. Fathers focused on this specific school content because they perceived its importance to school success and to access to high status courses at university and thus, to achievement in adulthood. Coaching in maths and science was always mentioned in conjunction with its relevance to higher education and employment; similarly, literacy was referred to for its instrumental value in terms of a

bridge to general knowledge or in terms of the advantages of bilingualism in a multilingual society. Other school subjects and routine homework assignments were invariably regarded as a mother's duty. Fathers went to lengths to find time in very busy schedules to tutor maths and/or science, time which was not found for many other activities. Coaching sessions were not always appreciated by the child nor met with his/her cooperation and fathers went to further lengths to make arrangements, such as inviting buddies to extra 'home' lessons to make the sessions more palatable. Interwoven in a father's tutoring was coaching in *ad hoc* study skills, such as time management, organization of study material and ways to approach tests and projects. Coaching for school content and skills was characteristically didactic; fathers assumed a 'teacher-like' stance in the interview and used subject jargon.

*I tutor my son once a week some science, him and some friends would come. I firmly believe he needs to have a structure, every week of a dedicated additional lesson in which I focus on him, so academically with his science and he does extremely well. 80s plus. I also focus on how to create study mind maps or notes that he can study from them.*

Where relationships with the child became strained during coaching school contents, fathers sometimes reshaped their efforts by arranging extra lessons with a paid tutor. Even in the event of extra tuition, fathers did not easily relinquish their monitoring role. Another father, who had followed a similar route with a tutor for his son's maths, explained his continued engagement in this subject area. "So next week he will have his first extra maths lesson with someone else, However, being a father etc., I have, however, not stopped it [coaching]."

Coaching had a strong moral dimension. Fathers were convinced that it was their moral responsibility to encourage the development of certain character traits in children which they felt would contribute to their success in adulthood. The process was shaped significantly by fathers' values and their conceptualisation of fatherhood and its responsibilities. Fathers identified traits which typified their notion of a responsible and humane person as embedded in their worldview.

*We haven't allowed our children to be prejudiced on race or class or sexual identity. We*

*have opened our home up to all people coming in and the children can interact with them. I teach the kids the language is love, it is respect. It is appreciation and value. So you value another because of God's love for that person.*

Values were often mentioned in connection with fathers' interpretation of gender roles. They insisted on respect shown in brother-sister relationships, mother-child relationships and in heterosexual social relationships.

*My son and I have talked about this girlfriend. I said you have to always respect the girl in your life and she must be treated with respect and her honour is very important. You need to always put her first. Not your selfish needs or your hormones.*

The sub-category, correcting comprised directing the behaviour of children through rewards for compliance with household rules and penalties for non-compliance was a process which fathers acknowledged as a prime responsibility. This function "rests on my shoulders" was how one father described it. Correcting was also the process fathers most openly associated with the affirmation of their headship in the family.

*My presence [in correcting children] makes it much more settling for the kids, not just settling but because my discipline is so much firmer, it brings not just the stability for the kids, but also for my wife. It makes her role as the mom easier.*

Fathers understood that their wives expected them to undertake the correction of serious misdemeanours, also those which occurred in the day-to-day run of things during the father's absence. They interpreted their wives' expectations as direct or tacit. The wife's role, as in other areas of children's need, was the 'pickup' of problems; the father's role was to shoulder the responsibility of leading through correcting.

*My wife and myself establish what we would agree with in terms of the rules, what is allowed and what is not allowed. She probably does a lot more of the general rules, because she is with the kids much more. But I would handle the stronger, clearer boundaries.*

But correcting children requires consistency and resolve and fathers are aware that this critical role is accompanied by the risk of father-child conflict. A father remarked: "The relation-

*ship with my son took a bit of a hammering, a bit of strain.*" Insisting on compliance to rules could also create conflict with the mother if she did not fully support the action taken. If a mother regarded correction as too rigid, the father either had to negotiate a compromise or carry out his resolve to implement correction without full maternal support.

*Correction brings emotional tension...it creates animosity between me and the wife and her saying, 'You shouldn't push him that hard. Leave him now.' And me arguing with her, saying 'Wait a minute!'*

The sub-category, cultivating relationships facilitated the tricky process of improvised leading. Fathers did not always find correcting and coaching children easy. A father's confession of ambivalent feelings sums up the dilemma felt by the others: "*On reflection I would probably say that I have a mixed feeling of failure, my first instinct is that I probably feel I have failed, and then I also have a sense of pride that I had been successful.*" Enforcing tough decisions and weathering inevitable interpersonal tensions were facilitated by cultivating close relationships with their children. Thus, the challenges of leading were brokered in the warm circle of family relationships. The properties of cultivating relationships were open communication and play. Unstructured everyday communication took place mainly during sit-down meals, 'car' time if fathers ferried children to school or activities and during bedtime rituals. The ideal of regular and transparent communication with children was qualified by time constraints and the demands imposed by the father's job.

*When you move out of your office, sometimes you are done physically. You don't want to do anything, you just want to go home, watch TV and if you interact with them, you don't want to do any serious stuff.*

Communication was also facilitated or complicated by the personality, age and gender of the individual child. A particular child may be more reserved or less open to the father's overtures for communication.

*My daughter is different to my son. She is much more open, much more talkative, sharing. Oh, she can talk a lot! So it is a bit easier to know what is going on when I am with her.*

Fathers generally found younger children easier to communicate; as children entered prepuberty or adolescence, they had to go to great

lengths to find appropriate opportunities for open communication. Organized events, like Father-Son weekends and outdoor camps to which parents were invited, provided opportunities for close communication with less forthcoming children. Some fathers regularly took a child on a 'date' during which the child chose a favourite activity for the purpose of improved communication.

*I will make time to take the girls separately and do things for them separately as well. So I call them 'dates', a 'date' with Dad. And the idea is that we can do whatever they want to do during that time. That is what they want to do and that is what I do with them.*

Another property of cultivating relationships was play during which there was no explicit educational agenda. Fathers referred to play with pleasure and these times were equally seen as opportunities for fathers to unwind. Recreation usually involved the whole family: mother, children, pets and grandparents and included exercise, shared sports, watching DVD's, shared reading, rough-housing, weekend mealtimes and longer vacations.

*Once a week we try and do a family bed. We will all try and sleep in a massive makeshift bed on the floor. Somewhere in the house. Those have been precious times together.*

The primary goal of these times is relaxation and fun for all family members. The offshoot of play is closer relationships between father and child, which eventually made the 'harder' processes of coaching and correction more palatable as they occurred within a loving trusting father-child relationship.

The sub-category, circumscribing school involvement, describes the fathers' engagement with the school which was limited according to two properties: participation in formal structures and programmes; and problem-focused negotiations with teachers necessitated by a child's worrying performance. Fathers admitted forthrightly that interaction with the school were strictly circumscribed by a sense of duty. Participation in institutional rituals, such as attendance of parent-teacher conferences, was perfunctory and performed with wives, if at all. Some fathers simply skipped these functions which they regarded as unnecessary if the child was making progress. A father remarked: "*PTA meetings is not really necessary, I mean we have teacher conferences, I mean teacher parent evenings.*

*We do go to a few but generally Jason does well so there is no real issues to speak about.*” Father participation in volunteering at school was minimal; fund-raising events aimed at fathers, such as golf days, were occasionally attended. Sports events were better attended provided fathers had a personal interest in the particular sport. Relationships with teachers rarely went beyond a polite greeting when a young child was dropped off at school. However, contact with teachers as a result of the father’s social or professional networks was mentioned. Here fathers became acquainted with teachers in an *ad hoc*, out-of-school capacity and considered this kind of acquaintance useful in case of a contingency involving the school.

Father involvement in formal structures, such as the school governing body or budgeting committee, was by virtue of an invitation from the school based on a father’s professional expertise which benefitted the school as an organisation.

*Due to the work that I do, I met the principal and he invited me if I would like to serve on the school council, so I have accepted that offer and it has been a few years now, probably two years, that I have been on the council,*

Such commitments were performed diligently, but fathers regarded these functions as an extension of their professional job rather than a demonstration of support of their children’s schooling. A request from the school to the home to deal with a serious issue – a behavioural problem or an academic weakness – was regarded by fathers as important. Requests to see the principal, not just a grade teacher, presented an occasion in which fathers assumed prime responsibility as family head. In such cases fathers contacted the school and often consulted with authorities alone, but subsequent problem-solving and remedial action was not a sole activity. It included the cooperation of teachers, the child and the mother in a primarily inclusive endeavour.

## DISCUSSION

Understandings of fatherhood are extremely diverse and there is no universally accepted definition of fatherhood (La Rossa 2004); fatherhood should always be contextualised in terms of social, cultural, economic and historical patterns (Marsiglio and Roy 2012). However, in line

with the tenets of Glaserian grounded theory, this study does not attempt to explain father involvement in education according to context, such as individual participant characteristics, cultural or social background and historical embeddedness. Rather it has attempted to ‘let the data speak’ (Martin and Gynnild 2011). This has produced a substantive theory grounded in the data alone and its usefulness must be measured in its potential to raise issues and encourage future research questions in that light. The most influential theories dealing with fathers cover the role of fathering in child development as a broad parenting function and order disparate paternal functions according to components or categories, but without the cohering function of a core category typical of a grounded theory. In his seminal work written (Lamb 2010) distinguished between three critical components of fathering: i) interaction through direct contact with the child, mainly defined in terms of time spent with the child ii) availability to the child; and iii) responsibility for the care of the child. This tripartite model continues to remain dominant in the research on fatherhood. Further research building refined the third component of the model to include indirect and process responsibility. Indirect responsibility implies accessing all goods and services required by the child, such as healthcare and schooling (Deutsch et al. 2001). In the grounded theory, indirect responsibility was evidence of fathers’ (together with mothers) responsibility for school choice; however, fathers alone arranged for extra tuition in their pet subject areas – maths and science. Process responsibility, a function more frequently carried out by mothers than fathers, implies detecting the child’s need for resources rather than only meeting the need (Doucet 2006). Similarly, in the grounded theory, fathers were far less inclined to demonstrate process responsibility; they readily admitted that they relied on mothers to ‘pick up’ a child’s need in order to trigger paternal intervention. Pleck (2010) proposed a revised conceptualisation of the Lamb-Pleck model, which comprises five components in place of three: i) interaction with the child, which promotes development; ii) warmth and responsiveness in the relationship; iii) control, including monitoring of and decision making about the child; iv) indirect care of the child, which does not include interaction with the child; and v) process responsibility, which Pleck inter-

prets as the extent to which the father discerns if the first four components have been adequately addressed. Pleck's model is comprehensive but does not specifically address father involvement with the school as the most important social structure outside of the home in which the child is involved; interaction with the school is only implied. Thus, this model's (Pleck 2010) importance for educational practitioners is limited to a more general introduction to fathering functions. In contrast, the distinguishing focus of the grounded theory was very particular: fathers' concerned with children's education in the home and at school. Remaining true to an inductive approach to data gathering ruled out limiting, directing or redirecting interviews to formal aspects of schooling or the child's cognitive development. Notwithstanding, by allowing fathers to speak freely of their concerns, it was discovered that they understood involvement in education in its broadest sense: the holistic development of children into adults equipped with useful knowledge and strong character. Direct interaction with the school was referred to almost dismissively, hence the subcategory *circumscribing school involvement* which stressed its limited nature. In contrast, the disclosure of father-led, home-based educational endeavours, such as the strong emphasis on coaching school content, emerged unexpectedly from the data. Further, the core category of *improvised leading* embraced a continuum of leadership from more inclusive to more autonomous actions within a single family according to situational need. In this, the theory differs from frameworks which use paternal control to categorise fathering and consequently, lock fathering into a type of parenting style, such as permissive or authoritarian (Carlson 2006). *Improvised leading* does not tie fathering down to a theoretical tradition, philosophy or style. On the other hand, inclusivity, in particular with regard to a high level of mother participation, resonates strongly with research that stresses the way in which the father-mother relationship informs and moderates the father's role and shapes his involvement with his children (Lamb 2010). A sound relationship between spouses enhances the quality of child-raising by both partners.

Other research into the engagement component of the Lamb-Pleck model was time (Day and Lamb 2004) or activity-based. Typically used time spent with the child by the father was used

as a measure of the construct of fathering (Pleck 2010; Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004). Any objective measure of time spent with children did not form part of the grounded theory; however, re-examination of the data at this point in the study showed that time is an implicit property of all subcategories. All processes of improvised leading are time-rich and fathers were aware that time devoted to was constrained by heavy work schedules and fatigue, in other words, by the demands of the role of father as provider. Regarding type of father-child activity, Palkovitz (2002) proposed fifteen activities whereby fathers can be involved with their children. This includes play, instruction and guidance. Instruction and guidance correlate with the properties of the coaching process (content instruction and moral guidance) and play correlates with the property of cultivating relationships as featured in the grounded theory. Other studies (Palm and Fagin 2008; Fogarty and Evans 2009) have also singled out play as a distinctive feature of father engagement. The grounded theory placed play within the ambit of relationship cultivation which undergirded and lubricated the more emotionally strenuous processes of coaching and correcting. The grounded theory also suggested the cathartic benefits of play and its diversionary quality away from the pressures of work for the father himself. Play had reciprocal benefits for father and child. Further, many family studies recognise the expansion of the contemporary father's primary role from breadwinner to include many childcare responsibilities (Aldous and Mulligan 2002; Burgess 2004). This expansion was seen in the grounded theory by the multifaceted roles performed by fathers in the interfamilial processes of *coaching*, *correcting* and *cultivating*. Fathers' filled these responsibilities according to deeply held convictions and sensitivity to possible emotional and relational outcomes for themselves, their spouses and the child. Father involvement therefore displayed a strong affective and nurturing dimension. Although they constantly and generously recognised the mother's role in picking up children's needs, they displayed an intimate knowledge of each child in their family, his/her temperament, interests, abilities, likes and dislikes and problems. Fathers as parents in the grounded theory were neither distant nor aloof. Albeit drawing from the stereotype of mother as nurturer, fathers 'sounded' like mothers as they spoke about

their children with passion and intimate knowledge, a finding corroborated by Doucet (2006).

### CONCLUSION

Children's academic achievement and general development depends partly on the unique contribution of the father within the context of the family and the school. This paper describes an inquiry into father involvement in their children's education. The emerging substantive theory suggests that fathers' improvise leadership according to the child's particular context and this leadership is expressed within the family by coaching, correcting and cultivating relationships and within the school by circumscribed activities. If teachers are to draw the spheres of home and school together, they require theoretical knowledge about the role of the father and should develop practical skills to affirm and strengthen father involvement in the school. To this end, both the grounded theory and the set of recommendations are proposed as a step in guiding the improvement of family and school practice. In particular, parent involvement programmes which endeavour to include fathers will produce considerable benefits for children.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Given its limitations as a substantive theory that accounts only for the research situation described in this paper, this theory highlights aspects of father involvement that may be used to inform school practice in the following ways. Firstly, inservice and preservice teacher training in parent involvement should widen the lens to include fatherhood research. Practitioners should be made aware of fathers' intense concern about their children's academic progress and behaviour, although fathers may choose to participate in on-site school activities far more infrequently than mothers. Intermittent father presence at school functions does not equal poor father involvement. Secondly, within the ambit of co-parenting and inclusive leadership styles, fathers still shoulder prime responsibilities and assume a decisive role in domestic decision making often at a wife's or child's instigation. Action initiated by the school to address a child's needs should always seek and incorporate paternal support to be optimally effective. Thirdly, teachers responsible for organising an-

nual family-school programmes should consider ways to accommodate fathers' preferences, such as activities aimed at strengthening father-child interactions. Finally, teachers should be aware of father participation in the acquisition of knowledge and skills which fathers see as strategic to the child's access to higher education and a high-status occupation. This interest can be supported by providing fathers with information about enjoyable at-home projects and by providing guidelines so that they can fill the coaching role in a more positive emotional environment.

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