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**Regis University**  
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THE IMPORTANCE OF FATHERS IN THE PROMOTION OF  
CHILDREN'S LITERACY

by

Michael D. Barbera

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Education

REGIS UNIVERSITY

November, 2005

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CHILDREN'S LITERACY

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## ABSTRACT

### Read To Me!

The purpose of this research project is to provide absentee fathers of prekindergarten and first grade children with a familiar reading and writing tool, the postcard, to stay connected with one another regardless of the physical distance between them. This project's collection of postcards featuring authentic children's artwork and research based information for fathers, has been inspired by the research-based principles of *Best Practice* (Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Hyde, A., 1998). Each postcard includes valuable information for fathers, written in English and Spanish in order to address a demographically wide group (Green, 2002). Because gender bias, divorce, poverty, and separation can adversely affect the relationships between fathers and sons, questions in the Research Survey addressed issues pertaining to the participation among parents, teachers, and community members to foster and promote literacy skills for all children.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the roles of parents in society and in schools in the United States have undergone fundamental changes, many of which have affected the traditional roles of fathers and mothers at home and in school (Pollack, 1998). Extensive research exists on the importance of mothers in the fostering of their children's literacy and values. Recently, there have been attempts to assess the importance of male role models in young people's lives, particularly fathers. A major problem in many families today is the lack of support that divorced fathers extend to their children financially, emotionally, and educationally. There are many factors that can affect male participation in their children's lives, and poverty is one of the major factors.

In every culture, there are established gender specific roles for men and women, boys and girls (Pollack, 1998). The expectations of appropriate gender behaviors have been in existence for generations and can enhance or limit the opportunities for each member of the community. It is important to realize that many aspects of male and female behaviors are biologically based and can be validated through scientific inquiry (Joseph, 2000). Gender expectations can influence the ways in which the members of any given culture respond to the needs of their citizens through public policy. Social and fiscal policies that affect disadvantaged families and children not only reflect the cultural mores of a given society, but also are dependent upon the good will and financial largesse of its members.

According to Fletcher and Dally (2002), educational researchers have developed strategies for teachers, parents, and policy providers to use in order to facilitate learning opportunities for all students. Researchers, like Berger (1998), Onikama, Hammond, and Koki (1998), and Mannan and Blackwell (1992), in many countries including the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada have identified the factors that are essential to Best Practice teaching methods for children based upon the positive influence of fathers in the promotion of their children's literacy. In many communities nationwide, the establishment of partnerships among home, school, and community has empowered individuals to forge new opportunities for families and children based on responsible and pedagogically appropriate methods.

#### Statement of the Problem

Children who live in two parent families tend to do better in school, experience fewer behavioral problems, and have greater life opportunities than children whose fathers are absent from their homes and, in many cases, their lives (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). Approximately 25 % of children in the U.S. live with mothers who are their sole custodial parent. Nearly half of these children will experience poverty in their lifetimes. In a compassionate way, fathers must be shown that the most important role in their lives is that of being a responsible and engaged mentor and role model for their children.

#### Purpose of the Project

It is the purpose of this research project to provide absentee fathers and their children an inexpensive way to communicate with one another through the use of post



cards as a vehicle. The theme of each post card is, *favorite books I have read today*. It is vitally important that fathers cooperate in and take responsibility for the literacy education of their children.

### Chapter Summary

In review of the literature in Chapter 2, this author attempts to identify the role that gender plays in U.S. culture, particularly as it relates to the support or lack of support that fathers provide to their children. Also, educational funding and the importance of prekindergarten education for all children are topics for consideration. Communication between children and absent fathers is essential to an ongoing and healthy relationship. Divorced, incarcerated, and military parents stationed away from home, need to know that they are not forgotten.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The ability of fathers to positively interact with their children can be adversely affected by divorce and poverty. The purpose of this research project was to provide fathers of prekindergarten and first grade children with a familiar reading and writing tool, the postcard, to stay connected with one another regardless of the physical distance between them.

Family structure in the United States has undergone profound changes in the past 250 years (Berger, 2001). Guided by values provided by a largely agrarian society that was dominated by males, Colonial families were actively involved in the everyday operations of the family farm. As the U.S. was transformed into an industrial culture with the attendant highs and lows of an emerging world economy, the roles of fathers and mothers were altered in fundamentally different ways. The traditional extended family of the 18th C., whose members were collectively engaged in agriculture, was replaced by the 21st C. nuclear family, whose adult members are increasingly single and divorced. Nearly 7 million women are the heads of single parent households, and approximately 2 million fathers raise their children without a spouse (Reichert, 2000). Today, many young men are unemployed and are poorly educated fathers who do not correspond with nor support the children they have brought into the world. Of all U.S. children, 22% live in poverty. The provision of state and federal aid, while well intentioned, cannot replace the financial and emotional stability that fathers provide to their children.

Relatively few researchers have examined the role of fathers in the promotion of children's literacy. This author, through this review of the literature, attempts to show the relevance of male role models, particularly fathers, in the promotion of their children's literacy and the ways in which home, school, and community partnership can provide guidance and support. Gender identity theory and stereotypes are explored, because public policy is based upon culturally acceptable gender behaviors.

### Traditional Gender Roles in the U.S. Family

Until recently, educational research and legislation have been predicated upon the premise that family involvement in children's education is important in order to foster academic achievement (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). While extensive research exists on the importance of generic parental involvement in children's education, relatively few researchers have examined the individual contributions and responsibilities that mothers and fathers bring to their children's schooling. Fathers have been considered to be the chief financial providers in two parent families but were not thought to be particularly important providers of academic nurture and emotional leadership in their children's lives. Because of this bias in the research, the staff of many federal agencies and programs that deal with family issues have focused attention and funding on mothers and children. The problem with the use of gender neutral language in studies, whose purpose is to investigate parental involvement in children's literacy, is that important differences between genders may not be considered by researchers when they assess each parent's participation in their children's social, cognitive, and emotional development (Nord et al).

Demo (1987, as cited in Nord et al., 1997) reported that during Colonial times, agrarian fathers were the primary parent and had the ultimate say in matters that pertained

to the welfare of their children. Fathers were the primary providers, and it was their responsibility to teach morality. Educational opportunities for children were provided to males, or often times, not at all. Women raised the infants and small children, but relinquished these duties once the children were older. In the rare case of divorce, fathers were awarded custody of their children. Women were perceived to be too fragile and indulgent to be taken seriously as equal partners, even though women were major contributors in the raising of crops and the production of household goods, including clothing. However, the urbanization and industrialization of the 19th C. redefined the roles of mothers and fathers. Women became the primary care givers for children, were responsible for their children's moral and educational development, and the smooth operation of the household. Men became the sole financial providers; often, they worked away from the home.

In recent decades, the strict gender division of labor has undergone a profound transformation based upon changes in the economic and cultural shifts in U.S. society (Nord et al., 1997). Frustenberg (1988, as cited in Nord et al.) found that the entry of large numbers of women into the labor force contributed to a marked decline in the gender driven division of labor within a family and resulted in an overlap of traditional gender roles. Marsiglio (1993) and Lamb (1997, both cited in Nord et al.) reported that mothers and fathers shared multiple roles including: (a) provider, (b) nurturer, (c) protector, (d) companion, (e) disciplinarian, and (f) instiller of societal norms. Pleck and Pleck (1997, as cited in Nord et al.) noted that, in most families, parents do not divide household and child rearing responsibilities equally, but work out their own divisions of labor within the family. Furthermore, divisions of labor tend to follow traditional gender

roles; mothers assume the responsibility for raising children, and fathers provide for the economic well being of the family. Park (1995, as cited in Nord et al.) maintained that society, in many ways, dictates the roles that mothers play and has well defined expectations about the appropriate behavior of mothers. Societal expectations of fathers, other than being good providers, are less clear. Societal pressures on fathers to behave in specific ways are not as strong.

Divorce, and the choice of one or both parents to abandon traditional child rearing gender roles, has radically changed the structure of the modern U.S. family (Nord et al. 1997). Today, at least half of all children in the U.S. will live in a single parent household before they reach the age of 18. According to Gallagher and Zedlewski (1999, as cited in Reichert, 2000) nearly one-third of all children live in single parent households, and 44% of these children live in poverty. Children in low income families tend to: (a) do poorly in school; (b) be at risk for juvenile delinquency; (c) experiment with alcohol, marijuana, and controlled substances; and (d) be at risk of teenage pregnancy. However, these risk factors can be greatly ameliorated if children have strong family bonds and a family support system that includes caring fathers, even if the fathers do not reside in their children's homes.

Reichert (2000) found that many low income families were the recipients of welfare and that, routinely, state welfare agency staff overlooked the abilities of fathers to contribute to the financial and emotional needs of their children when they determined the aid eligibility of mothers with dependent children. While it is clearly the case that women are competent nurturers and providers, children benefit from the support of both parents. The stereotype of men as *deadbeat dads* has been revisited by some state

welfare agencies in an attempt to move families off welfare and out of poverty.

According to Reichert, the staff of state human services agencies, as a whole, have not effectively distinguished between those fathers who play by the rules and those who actively evade the system. Levine and Pitt (1995, as cited in Reichert) found that many low income fathers, whose children were born out of wedlock, were deeply caring individuals who suffered greatly if they were disconnected from their children. Often, the uncertainty of what was expected of them as fathers was compounded because of an absence of fathers in their own lives. Public policy has been slow to acknowledge the roles of fathers beyond their capacity to supply financial support. The challenge for policy makers will be to develop effective mechanisms to differentiate caring fathers, who cannot financially support their children, from fathers who will not provide support for their children. Public policy should provide for a suitable course of action for mothers, children, and fathers in order to guarantee that family members will benefit both individually and as a unit. Agency staff should help to provide: (a) child support, (b) job training, (c) relationship building, and (d) mediation and parenting skills for both parents. Through interviews with fathers in the welfare system, Reichert found that part of the answer for policy makers was “to assure that the system does more to encourage family formation and father’s involvement, than to inadvertently erect barriers that push families apart” (p. 2). By termination of the traditional myth that women raised and nurtured children, and men provided financial support, current service providers and policy makers are more likely to understand the problem in gender neutral ways in an attempt to provide assistance to families, rather than to perpetuate the traditional myths of gender. Reichert stated, “If used effectively, these procedures can eliminate current systemic

disincentives to low income fathers; at the same time, they can benefit mothers and children through increased financial and emotional support” (p. 5).

### *Gender and Child Rearing*

Chae (2001/2002) cited Karraker, Vogel, and Lake (1995), who suggested that parents view their children through the lens of gender schema. These perceptions can affect identity development in both males and females. Chae cited Marcia (1993) and asserted that, “being a biological male or female is less important in understanding adult relationships than are one’s beliefs and values about their male and femaleness” (p. 17) in Chae. Parental beliefs about gender orientation may be directly correlated to the degree to which parents adhere to gender schema.

Chae (2001) cited Hoffman and Kloska (1995) and claimed that, “Although all babies behave in similar fashion, adults tend to define their behaviors, often unconsciously, in terms of distinctly different gender stereotypes” (p. 18). Rubin, Provenzano, and Luria (1974 as cited in Chae) found that parents of newborn, 24 hour old babies reported that girls were “softer, more delicate, and finely featured” (p. 18). The parents of boys found them to be “stronger, larger, and more masculine” (p. 18). Chae noted that social or interpersonal relationships between males and females are closely linked to the conceptual framework of the appropriate culturally accepted norms of behaviors of males and females.

As young people approach adolescence, according to several researchers (Adams & Jones, 1983; Archer, 1989; Fannin, 1979; Grotevant & Thorbeck, 1982; all cited in Chae 2001), females are more likely to develop an identity status that revolves around her relationship to others in her immediate family and in society. Other authors (Archer,

1993; Skoe & Marcia 1991; both cited in Chae) found that male adolescents, in contrast to females, develop the capacity to “master and handle nonsocial realities, in which his talents and interests are directed toward achieving a sense of personal competence” (p. 18). Further, Archer (1993, as cited in Chae) suggested that many males are culturally socialized to develop those skills and talents that are needed in order to be competitive in the work place and, as such, do not develop interpersonal socialization skills, because they believe the world of work is not people oriented. Skoe and Marcia found that many adult males upheld a justice based morality that espoused principal oriented and nonpersonal views of right and wrong. Women demonstrated a care based credo that, according to Gilligan (1982, as cited in Chae) suggests that a woman’s conception of self and morality are complexly associated with the needs of the other.

As reported by Joseph (2000), men tend to interact with one another in terms of: (a) power, (b) status, (c) wealth, (d) physical and intellectual dominance, and (e) control. Women interact with one another through: (a) cooperation, (b) an interest in issues related to interdependence, and (c) social intimacy. A number of researchers including Croates (1986), deBeauvoir (1961), Joseph (1992), Stutman (1983), and Tanner (1990; all cited in Joseph) reported that, while these observed behaviors do not apply to all men and women, gender linked differences, in regard to how boys, girls, women, and men interact and speak with one another, appear to be biological in origin. Furthermore, sexual differences between males and females could be traced to the hunter vs. gatherer interpretation of biological history, characterized by the behavior of early humans and other primates such as chimpanzees.



Joseph (2000) found that human females excelled over males across a wide variety of language and articulatory tasks. “Conversely, it is well established that human males excel over females across a variety of visual-spatial problem solving and perceptual tasks” (p. 54). Joseph theorized that the cognitive differences between the sexes were neurologically based products of environment and evolution. He demonstrated this theory in a comparison of prior and current studies, (Rightmire, 1990; Reinisch and Sanders, 1992; Potts, 1996; all cited in Joseph, 2000), dedicated to observable physiological, biological, and behavioral similarities of chimpanzees with those of early and modern humans.

The common ancestry of chimpanzees and humans diverged nearly 5 million years ago (Joseph, 2000). During the latter stages of the evolution of *Homo Erectus*, brain development increased in both size and function. The physical body of the female *Homo Erectus* evolved to accommodate the delivery of an infant with a larger cranium. Joseph cited Day (1996) and stated, “This transformation of the female hips and pelvis, however, also limited her ability to run and maneuver about in space, at least compared to most males” (p. 56). Potts (1996) and Rightmire (1990, both cited in Joseph) suggested that a bigger and more complex brain provided *Homo Erectus* with increased cognitive and intellectual capabilities. Also, larger craniums required a longer period of time to grow and mature, which resulted in the prolonged immaturity and helplessness of young children. Because the demands of pregnancy, childbirth, and child nurturing, restricted females’ abilities to hunt, the duties of motherhood required the development of alternative skills including language. Among social animals and gathering groups, the production of sound became important in order to: (a) communicate distress and fear, (b)

enable members of the group to locate one another, and (c) to express emotional attachment with one another. Barnett (1995, as cited in Joseph) observed, that considerable vocalization occurs between mothers and infants, who are naturally emotionally oriented and have little or no understanding of nonemotional speech. Often, the infants of many primates will sing or mimic sounds made by their mothers. Vocal interactions reinforce and promote the bonds between individuals and contribute to group survival.

The right frontal and right temporal parietal areas of the brain generate emotional sound production in humans (Joseph, 2000). These emotional language areas appear to be more extensively developed in human females. “The denotative, and vocabulary-rich grammatical components of modern speech are mediated by the left frontal and temporal-parietal area; Broca’s and Wernicke’s speech areas and the inferior parietal lobule” (p. 58). Several authors (Brody, 1985; Burton & Levy, 1989; Gilbert, 1969; Tannen, 1990; all cited in Joseph) reported that the emotionally expressive vocalizations produced by human females appear to be influenced by sex differences in the oral laryngeal structures and are reflected in a greater capacity of the right hemisphere of the female brain to express and perceive emotional vocalizations. This superior sensitivity includes the ability to: (a) understand, (b) perceive, and (c) express empathy, and socialemotional nuances. Several researchers including, Brend (1975), Coleman (1971), and Edelsky (1979, all cited in Joseph) found that men tended to be more monotonic, and employed two to three variations, most of which hover around the lower registers. In contrast to males, human females: (a) vocalize more, (b) display superior linguistic skills, and (c) excel over males in word fluency tests.

Homo Erectus did not think or speak in complex temporal sequences or use grammar that is characteristic of present day humans (Joseph, 2000). The angular gyrus of the inferior parietal lobule (IPL) is unique in humans (Geschwind, 1965, as cited in Joseph), and is crucially evolved in the control of sequential hand movements, including the manipulation of external objects and internal impressions. According to Joseph, “The evolution of the angular gyrus enabled humans to engage in complex activities involving a series of related steps, to create and utilize tools, to produce and comprehend language, and to express and perceive grammatical relationships” (p. 60).

Presumably, because males spent much of their time hunting, male brain development took a different path than did females (Joseph, 2000). Guiard (1983), Haaland and Harrington (1990) and Joseph (1998a, all cited in Joseph) noted that aspects of hunting placed a premium on the use of the parietal temporal lobe and right cerebral cognitive development. Sequential tasks included: (a) tracking, (b) aiming, (c) throwing, (d) geometric analysis of spatial relationships, and (e) environmental sound analysis. The right parietal area of the brain is associated with visual perceptual functions, especially in males. These functions allow hunters, for example, to aim and throw a spear. It appears that language development for Homo Sapiens males was not as important, given that for nearly 500,000 years, male Homo Erectus and Homo Sapiens probably spent many days or even weeks stalking, hunting, and killing game where nonverbal abilities made the difference between success and failure. According to Joseph, human males: (a) possess a superior geometric awareness, (b) possess directional sense and geographic knowledge, (c) are better at the solution of tactical and visual mazes, (d) can manipulate spatial relationships on paper, and (e) can coordinate their

movements in relationship to a moving target. Harris (1978 as cited in Joseph) reported that, in general, only about 25% of females exceed the average performance of males on tests which assess these skills.

Joseph (2000) found that the sex differences in cognition and behavior may be reversed if stress is introduced to the developing brain through: (a) an alteration of steroid secretion, (b) a deprivation of sufficient masculinization (e.g., testicular, steroidal hormones); and/or (c) the female brain is exposed to testosterone or other steroids during the critical period of sexual differentiation. For example, Reinisch and Sanders (1992; as cited in Joseph) found that human and nonhuman females, who are exposed to high levels of masculinizing hormones and androgens during early brain development, were more likely to exhibit superior visual spatial skills and were more aggressive and competitive in comparison to normal females. Joseph continued, "The hunting and killing of prey is related to visual-spatial perceptual functioning and the tendency to behave in an aggressive fashion" (p. 65).

Also, Joseph (2000) reported that there appear to be gender linked differences between girls, women, boys, and men in the ways in which they interact and speak together, and that these differences appear to be biological in origin. Men and women tend to use language differently. For many women, language serves as a means to maintain intimacy and friendly interaction regardless of the topics being discussed. For many men, language serves as a means to achieve mastery over their environment or the establishment of status and position within the group. Men are more likely to focus on accomplishments and performance, instead of details about personal problems or emotions. Girls and women tend to focus on the social, supportive, familial, and

communal aspects of interaction. Dewaal (1989, as cited in Joseph) observed that the sex differences in humans are evident among other primates, including chimpanzees, and are directly related to sex differences in the division of labor and the differential male vs. female pattern of neurological thought. Throughout human evolution, females have been involved in tasks that promote and require rapid temporal sequential bilateral fine motor skills, skills that enabled them to: (a) develop a social emotional speech superiority, (b) to construct domestic tools, and (c) gather foods necessary for survival. While Joseph's findings tended to support the hunter vs. gatherer theory of gender differentiation, he emphasized the fact that many modern women are interested in the nonpersonal, political, and business informational aspects of communication, while many men gossip among themselves about sports, politics, and one another. In general, women have a greater language capacity in comparison to males, which is related to their role as mother and gatherer. Males pursued their own violent tendencies and became silent hunters of big game. Joseph postulated that men acquired language skills through maternal genetic inheritance. "Thus, like the proverbial Eve, woman the gatherer provided man the hunter with the fruit of linguistic knowledge and what would become grammatically complex, vocabulary-rich speech, language, and linguistic consciousness" (p. 66).

Sometimes, gender differences, that is, the culturally acceptable roles and behaviors of the two sexes and biological sex differences are difficult to differentiate, even among experts (Berger, 2001). True sex differences in small children are much less apparent than in later years, when physical differences become more apparent due to the anatomical changes necessary for procreation. The debate over the influences of heredity and environment in shaping one's personal traits and characteristics, nature vs. nurture, is

ongoing and at times contentious. The proponents of psychoanalytic theory and epigenetic systems theory (Dent–Read & Zukow-Goldring, 1997; Freud, 1938: both cited in Berger) believed in the power of biology and experience in regard to gender development. Gender attitudes and behavior roles are the results of genes and early experiences. In the case of the Epigenetic Systems Theory, Berger stated, “The idea that many gender differences are genetically based is supported by recent research in neurobiology, which finds biological differences between male and female brains” (p. 294).

The ways in which children gather and assimilate information is directly related to the experiential growth of the child (Berger, 2001). The basic tenet of cognitive theory is that a person’s thinking determines how the world is perceived and acted upon. Preschool children have many gender related experiences but, because they are not cognitively complex, they tend to see the world in intellectually simple terms. Also, they learn about appropriate behavior through observation, reward, and modeling by parents, peers, and teachers. Gender stereotypes tend to be clear and inflexible for both children and adults. In every society, there are values and standards for appropriate behaviors as well as punishments for deviant behaviors. On a worldwide basis, “Almost every study of preschool children finds that boys are encouraged by their culture to take on different roles than girls” (p. 293). According to Berger, gender differentiation appears to be a developmental progression that is more important to children than to adults, and it is not simply cultural or learned. “The biological foundation for gender differences is far more persuasive than the minor anatomical differences between boys and girls” (p. 295).

Families and the cultures in which they live can encourage gender choices and diversity for children or stifle them due to strict gender guidelines (Berger, 2001). It is important to remember that gender education and acceptable gender behaviors vary by region, socioeconomic status, and historical period. Every society has accepted norms and attitudes in regard to preferred behavior for men and women. “Children could become less gender-conscious, but only if their entire culture were to become so” (p. 293). The idea to challenge culture and break with a tradition of restrictive gender roles, while individuals are encouraged to define themselves as human beings rather than males and females, requires a balance within a person of what are commonly regarded as male and female psychological characteristics, and the belief that one can transcend definitions.

### *Gender and Classroom Expectations*

Bailey (2001) described the current problems about gender equity in U.S. schools,

There are critical aspects of social development that our culture has traditionally assigned to women that are equally important for men. Schools must help girls and boys acquire both the relational and the competitive skills needed for full participation in the workplace, family, and community. (p. 477)

According to Bailey, in much of the discussion about gender equity among professionals, the proposed remedies are simplistic and do not address the complex realities that confront this society. Twenty-four years after the passage of Title IX (1972, as cited in Bailey), which prohibits sexual discrimination in any educational program that receives federal funds, the needs of boys and girls are not represented equally in U.S. classrooms. According to Sing (1998), the notion of a balanced approach to education for both sexes has yet to be realized due to a number of discernable factors: (a) schools, as a part of this

society, reflect the value structure embodied by the individual members, including the views of sex, race, and social class; (b) individuals are biased based upon their own schema and scripts, (c) popular culture, media, religion, and contemporary literature continue to portray and evaluate individuals based on gender stereotypes. Pipher (1998, as cited in Pollack, 1998) reported that, “All children are growing up in a culture in which adults are teaching them to love the wrong things” (p.xix).

If the ways in which children gather and assimilate information are directly related to the experiential growth of the child, then it becomes critically important for adults to present the world to children with as few gender stereotypes as possible (Berger, 2001). Berger cited Piaget (1972) who used the term, *schema*, to refer to a mental unit, which represents a class of similar actions and thoughts. Also, Berger cited Anderson and Pearson (1984), Bartlett (1932), Dansereau (1995), Derry (1996), and Rumelhart and Ortony (1977) who defined *schema* in contemporary cognitive theory as, “an organized body of knowledge about a specific topic” (p. 255). *Scripts*, as described by Bower, Black, and Turner (1979, as cited in Ormrod) are event schemas that, often, are formed about events as well as objects. Bower et al. found that an individual’s mental script of an event will influence the information learned from that event. The findings of Cordua, McGraw, and Drabman (1979), Martin and Halverson (1981), and Signorella and Liben (1984, all cited in Ormrod) supported the hypothesis that how schema and scripts are used influence how learners process, store, and remember new information. Ormrod stated that, “many people (especially those with stereotypical schemas about how males and females behave) more accurately remember pictures and films that portray men and women behaving in a stereotypical manner” (p. 255). The use of schema theory affords



researchers ways to understand how individuals organize past experiences in order to predict and interpret future experiences. Therefore, the basic tenet of cognitive theory, that a person's thinking will determine how that person perceives the world and how perceptions are acted upon, can be influenced by gender related experiences (Berger).

If one were to agree with the hypothesis that the concept of literacy encompasses all of the communication and calculation skills needed to survive in society today, it must follow that teachers should establish an environment in which students can learn in a context that more realistically represents the world in which they live (Cooper & Kiger, 2003). Bailey (1996/2001) discussed the topic of gender equity in U.S. education and stated that "Reviews of curricular materials, data on achievement and persistence in science, and research on teacher-to-student and student-to-student interaction patterns all point to school experiences that create significant barriers to girls' education" (p. 477). Pollack (1998) reported that many of the adverse gender equity problems that affect young girls, similarly plague young boys.

Consider this, in the education system, boys are now twice as likely as girls to be labeled as "learning disabled," constitute up to sixty seven percent of our "special education" classes, and in some school systems are up to *ten* times more likely to be diagnosed with a serious emotional disorder, (for which many boys receive potent medications with potentially serious side effects). While the significant gaps in girl's science and math achievement are improving greatly, boy's scores are lagging behind significantly and continue to show little improvement. (p. xxiii)

In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion about the differences in academic performance between boys and girls in U.S. classrooms (Pollack, 1998). The research findings, in regard to the lack of opportunity for girls in schools and the failure to provide gender equity and fairness, have largely been substantiated but, often, the performance of boys in public coeducational schools, has been neglected and ignored.

According to a research report entitled, *The Condition of Education 1997*, conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (1997, as cited in Pollack), at all age levels, females continue to outscore males in reading proficiency, and for the last 13 years, girls have outsourced boys in writing proficiency. The findings from this report underscored the importance of reading and writing skills for all children and raised questions about the efficacy of coeducational education in U.S. public schools. Many school officials and teachers fail to realize that boys and girls have different academic and emotional needs and have been slow to respond to these needs in compassionate and proactive ways. Pollack cited the research of Hawley (1991), who posited that there are differential tempos in learning between genders, and “Gender based variations in tempo and pattern of learning can be identified from the pre-kindergarten through the high school years” (p. 245). According to Pollack, usually, in primary schools, girls demonstrate a higher reading and writing proficiency than boys, and gender based physiological differences are accompanied by distinctive psychological and social adjustments.

It is critical that school administrators make a serious effort to hire more male teachers, particularly at the elementary level, because it is during the early years of development that males first form ideas about gender appropriate behaviors (Pollock, 1998). Most of the role models in U.S. elementary schools are women (Meyers, 2002). In fact, approximately 75% of teachers, and 80% of librarians or media specialists, are women. Also, it is the case that men and women must learn to teach in less gender specific ways. In other words, women should teach more mathematics and science classes, and men should teach more literature classes. School administrators have made the effort to establish a comfortable environment in which girls can feel secure as learners

and express themselves in genuine ways. However, boys need to have a place where they can feel creative as well, a place where they can express themselves in nonthreatening or competitive ways.

Parents place a great deal of trust in schools and the people who run them (Pollack, 1998). Curricula, classroom management, and attitudes about how boys and girls learn can positively shape a child's behavioral development. A positive school environment can bolster a child's self-esteem. Difficult school experiences can cause children to act out, suffer depression, or become perpetrators or victims of violence. Often, because of lack of resources and training, school staff are unable to handle the specific challenges of teaching and supervising boys. For Pollock, U.S. educators fail to adequately address the needs of boys in much the same ways that society, at large, has failed them.

### The Role of Fathers in Children's Lives

Children acquire cultural competence in the course of interactions with others who are more skilled in the activities that are valued by that culture (Tudge, Hogan, & Etz, 1999). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1995) and Cole (1995, both cited in Tudge et al.,) theorized that parents' decisions to encourage their children to participate in certain activities and discourage them from others, stems in part from an individual's beliefs about how to bring one's values into reality. Cultural anthropologists would argue that the origin of values must be considered a cultural phenomenon, since members of various cultural groups have different values and beliefs. The expression of parents' values as they engage with their children is the "crucible in which culture and development occur" (p. 2).

Bronfenbrenner (1989, 1993; both cited in Tudge et al., 1999) believed that values, while important, were not the only factors one should consider in the discussion of the role of the individual. Bronfenbrenner included the: (a) developmentally instigative characteristics of individuals, (b) directive beliefs, (c) activity levels, (d) temperament, and (e) goals and motivations. A synthesis of all of these factors has an impact on the ways that characteristics are affected through context and experienced by the developing individual. One's opinions about gender roles influence the ways in which other people deal with the developing individual and the goals, values, and expectations for that individual. Parents can inculcate in their children a respect for others including gender equity values, or raise their children with the use of gender stereotypes. According to Pollock (1999), parents have a responsibility to be sensitive to the values of others including those of the opposite sex.

The involvement of fathers in the promotion of student achievement in the family and in U.S. schools has been a subject of much debate, particularly at the federal level, since 1995 (Nord et al., 1997). In 1995, President Clinton (as cited in Nord et al.) issued a memorandum to all executive departments and agencies and requested them to include fathers in programs, policies, and research programs where appropriate and feasible. Subsequent research from the *1996 National Household Education Survey* (NHES): 1996; as cited in Nord et al.) suggested that fathers' involvement in their children's schools does make a difference in their children's education. In the NHES: 96 survey, four types of school activities were identified that parents could participate in during the course of a typical school year: (a) attendance at general school meetings, (b) attendance at a regularly scheduled parent teacher conference, (c) attendance at a school or class

event, and (d) service as a classroom volunteer. According to Nord et al., a low involvement score was assigned to parents who participated in one event or less during the course of the school year. Moderate involvement scores were assigned to parents who participated in at least two of the available activities. A high involvement score was assigned to parents who participated in four or more activities and were deemed by researchers to be highly involved with their children's schools. The involvement of fathers in two parent and in father only families was compared and contrasted with the participation of mothers in two parent and mother only families. The analysis of the information that pertained to the link between father involvement and student performance was restricted to children who lived with biological, step, or adoptive fathers and did not include foster fathers who lived with children.

A variety of questions were posited for investigation in regard to the involvement of fathers in two parent households (Nord et al., 1997). Data were collected from 16,910 parents of children from kindergarten through twelfth grades in regard to their involvement in their child's school for the past academic school year. Inquiries included: (a) how do fathers compare with mothers in their level of involvement in their children's schools; (b) does the father's involvement increase or decrease as children grow older; (c) is the father's participation in school related to other parental behaviors at home that may enhance school success; (d) what factors are associated with the father's involvement after related child, family, and school influences are factored; (e) is the father's involvement in his children's schools linked to measures of children's school outcomes such as class standing, enjoyment of school, participation in extracurricular activities; (f)

whether a grade has been repeated; and (g) whether the child had ever been suspended or expelled.

According to Nord et al. (1997), nearly half of students from two parent households where fathers were highly involved in their children's schools, received As and enjoyed schools in comparison to one-third of students who received As when their father's involvement was low. Also, students were less likely to repeat a grade if their fathers were highly involved (7% vs. 15%) and were statistically less likely to have been suspended or expelled (10% vs. 18%) if their fathers were highly involved as opposed to fathers who spent little or no time in their children's school. Several factors were taken into account, such as: (a) mother's involvement, (b) education of both parents, (c) household income, and (d) children's race and ethnicity. Based on this analysis, the researchers found that children were still more likely to: (a) achieve As; (b) participate in extracurricular activities; and were less likely candidates for suspension or expulsion from school, if their fathers were highly involved in their schools. Further, the researchers found that the mother's high involvement in their children's school reduced the likelihood of expulsion or suspension for sixth through twelfth grade.

The intent of researchers to better understand the influences of fathers in their children's literacy development is not restricted to the U.S. (Fletcher & Dally, 2002). Fletcher and Dally conducted a research study that was based on data collected from Australia, the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom. In an earlier study, David (1993, as cited in Fletcher & Dally) found that the gender neutral term, parents, was misleading in the description of the benefits of parental involvement, because studies that targeted the involvement of fathers were rare. Further, the problem with gender neutral language

to describe parental involvement in their children's academic lives masked important gender differences between fathers and mothers in regard to attitudes and approaches to their children's literacy. Fletcher and Dally cited Nichols (1994) who reported that the bulk of available Australian and overseas evidence, in regard to the roles of parents in their children's education, had been criticized by educational researchers for the use of the gender neutral term, parents, to describe what was actually mother's participation in a diverse range of school parent programs in place in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the U.S. Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe, and Munsie (1995, as cited in Fletcher & Dally) concluded that not only were the majority of participants in parent programs, women, but that virtually all of the school personnel who participated in the programs were women as well. Fletcher and Dally cited Cairney et al. and stated, "The problem with the disproportionate number of women involved in school-parent literacy programmes is that initiatives may inadvertently reinforce an already strongly established perception of literacy and learning as feminized activities" (p. 4).

Nichols (2000, as cited in Fletcher & Daily, 2002) found that the ideal of shared parenting by mothers and fathers is not always shared in practice. In fact, it is typically mothers who assume primary responsibility for children's literacy development during the preschool years, and mothers were more likely than fathers to recognize the importance of shared reading and the early exposure of books to emergent readers. Fathers were more likely to read to children only at bedtime, if delegated and supervised by mothers. Fathers were more likely than mothers to report: (a) a history of school failures in literacy, (b) a dislike of reading aloud, and (c) the use of strategies to shorten the length of time spent in reading to children.

According to Park (1995, as cited in Nord et al., 1997), researchers have found that fathers interact with their children in ways different from those of mothers. Fathers spend more time playing with their children, and are more tactile with them, while mothers tend to be more verbal, didactic, and toy oriented in their play. Radin (1981, as quoted in Nord et al.) claimed:

There are many channels through which a father may influence his child's cognitive development, including through his genetic background, through his manifest behavior with his offspring, through the attitudes he holds about himself and his children, through the behavior he models, through the material resources he is able to supply for his children, through the influence he exerts on his wife's behavior, through his ethnic heritage, and through the vision he holds for his children (Nord et al. p. 28)."

Marsiglio (1991), Lamb (1986) and Radin (1981, all cited in Nord et al., 1997) found that, regardless of the child's age, fathers were more involved with their sons than with their daughters. Also, the nurturance of fathers appeared to be more closely associated with the cognitive development of boys, but less so for girls. The presence of father/son relationships appeared to encourage the development of analytic skills. Interestingly, Nichols (2000, as cited in Fletcher & Daily, 2002) found that the participation of Australian fathers in literacy activities involved men entering into, or being coerced to enter, practices that were valued and had already been established by mothers. There is a sense, according to Nichols, that, "men are being enjoined to participate in activities that are highly valued by women but which may not hold the same value for men" (p. 5).

Today, many mothers do not enforce gender stereotypes and have worked hard to embrace the ideal of equality of the sexes (Pollack, 1998). These mothers have successfully battled for the right to work, think, and compete as men do. They have



struggled for the right to raise their daughters to be strong and independent critical thinkers. Women have rewritten their intimate relationships with male companions to incorporate fairness and equity in relationships. Regardless of the progress made by women and men to ignore gender stereotypes, members of society can be quick to remind them that, when it comes to boys and masculinity and girls and femininity, gender stereotypes are still the coin of the realm.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, as cited in Berger, 2001) developed an ecological model to describe the many influences that affect an individual's responses to the world around them. According to Bronfenbrenner, each individual is notably affected by interactions among a number of concentric and interactive microsystems. The presence of microsystems intimately and immediately shape human development and practice. The primary microsystem for children, according to Bronfenbrenner, is termed the *mesosystem* and includes: (a) family, (b) peer groups, (c) classrooms, (d) neighborhoods, and (e) religious settings. The *exosystem* is comprised of: (a) community, (b) mass media, (c) school systems, and (d) medical institutions. The outermost ring is called the *macrosystem* and consists of: (a) cultural values, (b) national customs, (c) political philosophies, (d) economic patterns, and (e) social conditions. The *chronosystem* consists of one's history of time and completes the model. Intertwined, these systems determine the context of human development. If gender stereotypical behaviors are present in any element of the microsystem, the individual within it will probably emulate these behaviors and pass them on to his or her children. The importance of these developmental systems is integral to one's understanding of a life span perspective. Often, the cultural mores and conventions dictate how one interacts with the other.

Consciously or not, gender stereotypes can be introduced and reinforced through a variety of microsystems which means that stereotypes are pervasively difficult to dispel (Pollock, 1998).

According to Pollack (1998), small children, who have a primary relationship with a caregiver, are psychologically healthier and stronger. For many young children, women have been and remain their primary caregivers. Iglesias (1999, as cited in Green, 2003) found that fathers, who are included in their children's school activities and early childhood programs, are more likely to participate in the promotion of their children's literacy in the home. Fletcher and Dally (2002) reported that, although increased involvement by fathers in their children's education is desirable, it was essential that Australian childcare providers, administrators, and teachers understand the many barriers that could prohibit a father's participation in literacy activities at school and in the home. Often, when efforts were made by educators to include fathers in a partnership of shared responsibilities and respect for the perspectives and interests of fathers, there were positive results (Nord et al., 1997).

Berger (1998) identified a number of strategies that educators should implement to educate and inform fathers about the importance of involvement in their children's academic endeavors. They include: (a) recognize all kinds of fathers and encourage the participation of any male who serves as a friend or father substitute; (b) provide fathers with information on child development at different ages for boys and girls; (c) identify the abilities, interests, and needs of fathers by finding ways to incorporate or address these issues; (d) listen to, and learn from, fathers, let them know their opinions are valued; (e) offer classes in life skills training including relationships, anger management,

and leadership; (f) provide opportunities for leadership roles in the program; (g) promote tolerance by the encouragement of cultural diversity and acknowledgement of the roles of mothers; (h) have flexible schedules so that it is possible for working fathers to attend; (i) provide peer support and match fathers with current participants; (j) establish an atmosphere where men as well as women are expected to be involved; and (k) establish an environment in which the participation of men is acknowledged.

### *Socioeconomic and Ethnic Factors That Effect Involvement*

Often, fathers judge their worth by the financial contribution they provide to their children and to the mothers of their children (Reichert, 2000). During the decade of the 1990s, nearly 8 million young 18- 24 year old, less educated American men found their wages in the U.S. had dropped notably or had remained static (Richer, Frank, Greenberg, Savner, & Turetsky, 2003). During the same period, young, less educated women in the same age demographic saw their wages rise notably. The most likely indicators for the disparity in wages between genders, according to Richer et al. are: (a) the earned income tax credit (EITC), which makes work more attractive for low income custodial parents; and (b) welfare reform and child subsidies, which encourage more single mothers to enter the workplace. Because young men were less likely to be a custodial parent or to participate in welfare programs, young men were underrepresented in these programs. Additionally, job losses in the manufacturing sector of the U.S. economy and higher skilled training for nonmanufacturing employment have contributed to the loss of income by young, less educated male workers, particularly for those men who work in U.S. cities. Also, the movement of jobs away from cities had a disproportionate impact on resident African American males. Young, less educated 18-24 year old men without high

school diplomas, limited or nonexistent job training, who are not incarcerated, or members of the military, have a difficult time in the current economy.

The Richer et al. (2003) data were obtained from the *Current Population Survey* (CPS; 2002, as cited in Richer et al.). Employment data, taken from three peak business cycles, 1979, 1989, and 1999, were used because it was during these times that employment and wages should have been at their highest. Richer et al. utilized the same descriptors used by the CPS study in regard to the ethnic origins of the target group: (a) nonHispanic whites, (b) nonHispanic blacks, and (c) Hispanics. According to the U.S. Census (2000, as cited in Richer et al.), of the 7.6 million less educated young men: (a) 59% were nonHispanic whites, (b) 16% were nonHispanic blacks, and (c) 21% were Hispanic. The remainder were Asian Pacific American and Native American. These groups were too small to capture in the data broken out by subgroup. Also, Richer et al. did not include data for incarcerated men in the survey because “Adding these men to the population under consideration would only increase the share of those not employed” (p. 8). There were over 400,000 men between the ages of 16-24 years of age in state or federal penitentiaries, the majority of whom were less educated. Of the incarcerated 16-24 year old men, 63% had less than a high school diploma, while 33% had a high school diploma or GED.

Throughout the 1990s, the labor market was tight for less educated young men because, of the nearly 20 million jobs created, the vast majority were in high skill occupations (Richer et al., 2003). For workers without a bachelor or associate’s degree, the highest growing employment areas between 1986-1996 were: (a) bookkeeping, (b) medical assistant, (c) sales clerk, and (d) human service worker. In part, because of

employer preference, these jobs were predominantly filled by women. Over a 16 year period that began in 1973 and ended in 1999, real wages for all workers, in the lowest 10th percentile of wage earners, declined by 10%. The average wage for all three ethnic groups for men between 18-24 years of age, with no more than a high school diploma during the period from 1979-1989, fell precipitously and did not rebound in 1999. The average hourly wage of \$10.77, for nonHispanic white workers in 1979, dropped to \$8.90 per hour in 1999. NonHispanic black worker's hourly wage in 1999 was \$8.07, down from \$9.12 per hour in 1979. Hispanic workers' 1979 hourly wage was \$9.45, substantially more than the \$8.35 per hour received in 1999.

According to Richer et al. (2003), "Child support policies may make formal employment less attractive for less-educated young men who are non-custodial parents" (p. 13). National enforcement of child support orders against young noncustodial fathers became automated during the 1990s and resulted in more young fathers being cited for noncompliance. Since 1998, child support payment rates for low income children who participated in state sponsored support programs have doubled. At the same time, child support debt that is attributable to unpaid or partially paid support obligations has risen. Richer et al. cited Meyer and Cancian (2002) and Johnson, Levine, and Doolittle (1999) and stated that "there is considerable evidence that many less educated fathers enter the underground economy because of child support pressures and policies" (p. 13).

A sobering factor in the decline in employment of less educated young men, and African American young men in particular, is the high incarceration rates for this sector of the population (Richer et al., 2003). Data collected in the late 1990s suggested that 3 million African American males were in some form of correctional supervision, while

millions more were either ex-inmates or convicted felons who were currently or recently on probation. There are a number of reasons why these data are alarming: (a) time spent in prison is time disconnected from systems that lead to employment and career advancement; (b) work experience and professional networks vital to career advancement are missed; and (c) perhaps the most important factor, employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders. According to Holzer and Stoll (2002, as cited in Richer et al.), 60% of employers surveyed reported that they would probably not hire an applicant with a criminal record. Pager (2002, as cited in Richer et al.) found that, having a criminal record led to a 50% reduction in employment opportunities for young Anglo men, and a 64% reduction for young African American males. A review of the literature provided by Holzer (1996, as cited in Richer et al.) showed that discrimination against African American men, separate from the issues of potential ex-offender status, was prevalent in the 1990s, in spite of federal efforts to combat the problem. Holzer observed that the owners of certain types of businesses, particularly small firms, were less likely to hire African American males, at least partly because of discrimination. Also, according to Richer et al., it has been found that smaller suburban employers were less likely to hire African American males because: (a) They may feel less pressure to adhere to antidiscrimination policies; (b) they were less likely to have the same affirmative action policies in place in comparison to larger corporate firms; and (c) they may be likely to have less reliable information in regard to applicant abilities, which would cause them to be more likely to discriminate.

When one seeks to define ethnicity and race identity, one must be careful to differentiate one from the other (Berger, 2001). An ethnic group is a collection of people

who share attributes such as: (a) ancestry, (b) national origin, (c) religion, and (d) language. Racial identity is considered to be an element of ethnicity. According to Templeton (1998, as quoted in Berger),

It is not uncommon for some in our society to assume that people of the same racial background are from the same ethnic group, as well. Biological traits that distinguish one race from the other are much less significant to development than are the attitudes and experiences that may arise from ethnic or racial consciousness, especially those resulting from minority or minority status. (p. 14)

Culture, according to Erickson (1987, 1992, as cited in Banks & Banks, 2001) includes race identification as well as ethnicity, and it is the sedimentation of the collective historical experiences of persons and social groupings of various kinds. Every person in every social group possesses and uses culture as a tool for the conduct of human activity. Culture is the possession of the dominant and dominated alike. The U.S. population is not culturally identical but multiculturally diverse. The inability to recognize others' differences as being cultural, rather than personal, can degenerate into issues of discord and misunderstanding. The term, *cultural hegemony*, refers to the established view of things that serves the interests of those already in power, and would be, according to Erickson, an example of a cultural *border*. Cultural *boundaries* are natural differences between cultures and may or may not become border issues. When cultural awareness and identification are used as a political strategy to subliminate the other, borders are clearly drawn and negative cultural stereotyping occurs, often, violently. Richer et al. (2003) wrote that millions of less educated young men need employment, because their children and families are adversely affected by their inability to earn a steady living, and the communities in which they live are adversely affected by decreased productivity.

Erickson (1987, 1992, as quoted in Banks & Banks, 2001) eloquently described what the accommodations to the diversity of voices and cultures within a complex multicultural society might look like.

In every man there are the voices of women, and in every woman there are the voices of men. Are these voices alien and in conflict within the person, or have they been appropriated within the self: Can a woman come to terms with the male voices within without acquiescing to male hegemony and adopting an alienated self: In every White person in the United States, because of our historical experience, there are not only White voices but also Black ones. What do these voices sound more like—Amos and Andy or Frederick Douglas? Aunt Jemima or Alice Walker? How have those voices been appropriated within the person, and what role has the school played in facilitating the process? In every African American in the United States there are not only Black voices but also White ones. How can the African American come to terms with the White voices within, forgiving and making peace with them, coming to own them while at the same time affirming and owning the Black voices, holding a continuing sense of the injustice of continuing racism. (p. 53)

Gender and ethnicity are two important components of the human experience (Berger, 2000). Gender stereotypes and racial intolerance can detrimentally affect one's ability to work and to provide for the financial needs of the family, as well as engender a sense of self-loathing and the attendant destructive behavior that follows. In 2000, 91 of 1,000 young women in the U.S., aged 15-19 years, became pregnant; 91 of 1,000 young men in the U.S. were active participants.

#### *Divorce: NonCustodial vs. Custodial Fathers*

In January of 2004, the results of a comprehensive report, commissioned by the State of Iowa and developed by the Director of Iowa Department of Human Services (IDHS), was released with recommendations to the Iowa General Assembly and Governor Thomas J. Valsack, Director of Iowa Department of Social Services, in 2003. The IDHS task force titled, *The Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Supports Advisory*



*Group* was formed to determine the overall health of the family in Iowa and to make recommendations about how federal funding should be spent for existing programs once federal funds became available. The IDHS task force was comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds and represented: (a) state government, (b) education, (c) business, (d) domestic violence advocates, (e) adolescent pregnancy prevention, (f) parents, (g) current and past legislators, and (h) members of faith based communities. The IDHS task force refined a list of questions that were focused on better outcomes for children. The task force determined who to survey and where to hold focus groups. The members of 25 groups were canvassed. During the month of October 2003, the group facilitator drove more than 3,269 miles through 68 Iowa counties. More than 250 individuals answered the questionnaires. The guiding principles of the group, agreed upon prior to the development of the survey, included the following: (a) references to mothers, fathers, and or parents, mean both biological and adoptive; (b) the definition of responsible parenthood includes fulfillment of financial obligations; (c) there needs to be respect and sensitivity for the diverse populations and cultural values in Iowa, (d) joint counseling for troubled relationships while important, does not supercede the safety needs of individuals who are victims of domestic violence; (e) in order to secure better outcomes for children, family support services should exist for all family structures when children are in the home; and (f) if federal dollars become available in the areas of fatherhood, marriage, and family support, the State of Iowa should pursue those dollars to the extent that funding is consistent and respectful of the values and needs of Iowans. Regardless of race, age, or geography nearly every group emphasized the importance of personal accountability and responsibility for the health of the family.

Over the past 40 years, divorce, cohabitation, and single parenting have increased and altered family structure (IDHS, 2003). Over 50% of children in Iowa grow up with one parent in the home. Nearly 29% of all babies born in 2001 were born to unmarried mothers, and in that same year, 5,162 divorces left children in fragmented families. There were 769,684 families in Iowa in 2003, of those 376,433 included biological minor orphan children. Also, 74,457 (11%) of all Iowa children lived in poverty, and 39,728 (50%) of poor Iowa children lived with single mothers. The statistics gathered by the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1996, as cited in IDHS) showed that, nationally, children raised by divorced or single mothers are seven times more likely to be poor than children who lived in intact, married families. These children will spend 51% of their lives in poverty.

According to data from the Federal Reserve Board, Survey of Consumer Finance (2004, as cited in IDHS, 2003) the median national income in 1988, was: (a) \$41,000 for married parents; (b) \$19,000 for divorced or single parents; and (c) \$15,000 for never married, single parents. Children from families with incomes below \$15,000 were 22 times more likely to experience abuse than children in families with incomes above \$30,000. Staff of The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Indicator of Child Well-Being (2002, as cited in IDHS); found that children of single parents were at much greater risk of abuse or neglect than children who lived with both parents.

Meyer and Cancian (2002, as cited in Richer et al. 2003) found that many fathers report that unmanageable debt drives them underground, both to increase their ability to pay support or to avoid payments altogether. Frequently, the presence of child support

assignment and distribution policies can provide a strong disincentive to pay child support through the formal distribution systems. According to Richer et al., officials can now take immediate action, because of technology, against fathers who owe child support and work at a regular job based on new hire reports by: (a) employers, (b) quarterly wage records, and (c) payroll deductions. Under assignment and distribution policies that allow states to keep child support payments as recovered welfare costs, the money paid by fathers does not benefit the children. Richer et al. cited Meyer and Cancian (2001), who addressed the difficulties that Wisconsin fathers had in paying court ordered child support and stated: "A recent demonstration in Wisconsin, found that more fathers paid support (and paid more support), and had lower levels of informal employment when the support they were paying was passed through to their children and not kept by the state (p. 13). Richer et al. suggested that the positive effects of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) which helps primarily low income young women care for their children by an increase in employment and income, should be extended to low income noncustodial parents. Also, they suggested that all child support should be paid directly to the families and not the state. Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) was used as an example, and Richer et al., explained that, as a condition to receipt of assistance, families must sign over their rights to unpaid child support to the state. Currently, most of the money collected by TANF is kept by the state. Even after families no longer receive TANF assistance, the state continues to collect part of the support to repay the assistance. Further, when the support is collected, the state keeps the money to pay back the costs of supporting the family on assistance. It was the opinion of Richer et al. that any money collected for child support should go directly to the children. In this way, low income

fathers will be more likely to pay child support because they will know that whatever they pay will be sent to their children rather than go to the coffers of an unidentifiable bureaucracy.

Nord et al. (1997) identified the factors that were associated with nonresident fathers' continued contact with their children after the disruption of divorce. According to Nord et al., fathers who paid any child support were more likely to participate in their children's school than were fathers who paid no child support. Often, the distance between the father's home, and his children's home, is commensurate with the level of contact between them. Also, Nord et al. reported that once mothers remarried, children's contact with their fathers usually diminished. Fathers need to stay connected with their children. Fathers who do not make an effort to participate in their children's financial lives are often excluded by their ex spouses from any involvement with their children, whether it be financial or emotionally based support.

Most children (57.7%) in the U.S. live with two biological or two adoptive parents (Nord et al., 1997), and 9% of children live with a biological mother and step or adoptive father. Approximately 2% of children live with a biological father and step or adoptive mother. Nearly 25% of children live with only their mother, and 3% of children live with only their father. In addition, 4% of children live in foster care or with someone other than a biological, adoptive, step, or foster parents.

According to Nord et al. (1997), custodial fathers share many of the socioeconomic demographics of custodial mothers in regard to their responsibilities for, and to their children, and parental participation in children's schools. For example, Nord et al., reported that:

Fathers who head single parent families have school involvement patterns that are very similar to that of mothers who head single parent families. The pattern for participation for both fathers and mothers in single parent families is more similar to the participation of mothers in two parent families than it is to fathers in two parent families. The one activity that is substantially lower in single parent families is that of volunteering at the school. (p. 38)

Based on their findings, Nord et al. (1997) suggested that single fathers of children in Grades 1-5, with low school involvement in their children's schools, were highly involved with their children at home. The proportion of elementary children, who lived in single father homes and had been read to or helped with a school project in the last week, was virtually the same as that of single parent fathers with a high involvement in their children's schools, and single parent fathers who had a low involvement in their children's schools. According to Nord et al., single fathers were more likely to be highly involved in their children's schools if they did not receive public assistance, "But there is no significant difference in the proportion who are highly involved by whether their household incomes are above or below the poverty threshold" (p. 45). Overall, parental participation in schools is higher for children who live above the poverty line and do not receive public assistance compared to those who experience economic hardships.

A divorce in the family has far reaching affects (IDHS, 2003). In a focus group discussion among 22 female inmates at the Mitchellville Women's Prison, in Iowa, these affects were revealed in a number of ways. The female inmates participated in a prerelease course in which they learned how to understand and initiate proper life skills and appropriate life choices. Of the inmates, 21 were mothers of at least one child. When asked what the key to success in marriage and in life, might be, personal responsibility was identified by the members of the group, as well as the importance of the extended family, particularly among the African American participants. For these

African American women, the extended family was perceived as an integral part of their social schema, and when problems arise within the extended family, the extended family structure is disrupted. The participants had sympathy for young males, particularly disadvantaged, young, low income fathers. Comments about child support were not accusatory toward men, but somewhat sympathetic. They noted that many men simply could not afford to pay the entire child support payment each month and still adequately provide for themselves.

Pollock (1998) theorized that, just as members of society expect boys and girls to behave in certain ways, they expect families to do the same. "As prevalent as divorce is, and as politically correct as our schools and community organizations have become in talking about it, society is still structured in favor of two-parent intact families" (p. 377). According to Pollock, the two parent family may represent the stereotype of the typical U.S. family, but increased numbers of families today do not fit the stereotype. According to Pollack, relationships between ex spouses may be tainted by rancor, bitterness, and sorrow but research shows that children are better off if they have both parents participate in their lives than to have only one parent participate. Children in divorced families, where custody is shared by both parents, fare better both economically and emotionally, than do children from single parent only households, unless the relationship between parents offers more grief than support. One of the most important indicators of cooperation between ex spouses is based upon whether child support has been forthcoming.

## The Importance of School and Home Partnerships in Promotion of Children's Literacy

Epstein et al. (2002) described the relationship between home, school, and community as being one of overlapping spheres of influence. In order to produce a partnership, all members should have a good idea of what the benefits of such a collaboration will be, based upon the costs incurred. According to Epstein (1992, as cited in Epstein et al.),

The way school staff care about children is reflected in the way they care about the children's families. If school staff view children as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. If school staff look at students as children, they are likely to see family and the community as partners with the school in the children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students. (p. 7)

According to Epstein et al. (2002), for over 20 years, educators in the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University have worked diligently with parents, students, and community partners to develop a workable partnership model that can be used to promote cooperative and collaborative efforts to achieve children's academic success in the classroom. These educators worked with district and state education leaders in order to learn how education policies are formulated and written. This collaborative effort has yielded strategies that establish, strengthen, and sustain excellent partnership programs. Included are: (a) strategies to involve the community in school, family, and community partnerships; (b) ways to organize more effective Action Teams for partnerships; (c) how to strengthen partnership programs in middle school and high school; (d) how to implement interactive homework for students to show and share

their work with family partners; (e) effective strategies to organize a program for volunteers in the middle grades; and (f) how to conduct state and district leadership activities to assist schools with programs of partnership. In this model of school, family, and community partnerships, the student is placed at the center because students are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school and in life.

In this model of partnership developed by Epstein et al. (2002), teachers are required to create a more family like environment in schools. Teachers who work in this environment recognize each child's individuality and need for inclusion while they promote the work of the child as student. Family members reinforce the importance of school homework, activities that build skills, and the student's feeling of success. Communities, including parents, work together to create opportunities, events, and programs that recognize and reinforce students' efforts to make good progress while they contribute, creatively, to the group: (a) in school, (b) at home, and (c) in the community. Community minded families and students help their neighborhoods and other families. Communities create settings, services, and programs for students and parents and make programs and services available before, during, and after the regular school day. The findings from surveys and field work, that involved teachers, parents, and students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, provided interesting patterns related to partnerships: (a) partnerships tend to decline across the grades, unless schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level; (b) affluent communities tend to have more positive family involvement, unless schools and teachers in disadvantaged areas work to build positive relationships with their students' families; (c) at economically disadvantaged schools, the tendency is



to contact only parents and guardians when there is a problem with their students, unless they work to develop a balanced partnership that includes positive feedback for student accomplishment; and (d) single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far from the school, and fathers, are less involved at the school building unless the school staff organizes opportunities for families to volunteer at various times and places to support their children and the school. Epstein's framework of six types of involvement for comprehensive programs of partnership and sample practices include: (a) *parenting*, helping families establish a home environment that supports children as students including home visits by their teacher(s); (b) *communicating*, design effective and mutual communication between school and home about school programs and their children's development; (c) *volunteering*, recruit and organize parent help and support; (d) *learning at home*, help provide the tools necessary for parents to help their children with homework, projects, and other curricular related activities; (e) *decision making*, include parents in school decisions and develop parent leaders and representatives; and (f) *collaborating with the community*, identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs and aid student learning and development (Epstein et al., 2000).

In order to forge education partnerships, it is essential that the participants understand and proactively address the barriers to family involvement in education (Epstein et al., 2000). It is possible for school staff to have a strong academic program without the inclusion of families. Or, a school can be weak academically, and have a strong relationship with students' families. Either way, the students suffer because a synthesis of rich experiences cannot exist without balance.

*Factors That Effect Parental Involvement in Schools*

Onikama, Hammond, and Koki (1998) reported that the barriers to family involvement in education must be addressed in the development of school, family, and community partnerships. Many U.S. communities are culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse. Educators, unfamiliar with the differences among and between indigenous families, may require additional training and assistance in order to appropriately communicate with diverse populations. Onikama et al. stated that,

There was a time in the Pacific, not so long ago, when there was no such thing as “school.” Learning took place everywhere in the home, learning to transform pandanus into finely woven mats and baskets, in the fields, learning to cultivate taro and yams, on the sea, learning to navigate between islands. Family and community were inextricably interwoven, like strands of pandanus, into a coherent “school” of learning. (p. 1)

According to Onikama et al., often, U.S. schools today are disconnected from home and community, and families feel detached from their children’s learning process. Also, barriers to family participation in education cross all cultures and groups: (a) families may lack the means to help their children learn and become socialized (Mannan & Blackwell, 1992, as cited in Onikama et al.); (b) school staff may not know how to effectively encourage families to participate (Ortner, 1994, as cited in Onikama et al.); (c) the interest of school staff may vary in terms of commitment to family involvement and may generate mixed messages to parents (State of Iowa Department of Education, 1996, as cited in Onikama, et al.); (d) outreach procedures that are insensitive to community values can hinder participation (Ortner); and (e) changes in school system policies may result in instability in regard to solicitation of family involvement (Mannon & Blackwell, 1992, as cited in Onikama et al.).

Onikama et al. (1998) found that, increasingly, families in the Pacific region of the U.S., have become more linguistically diverse, although English may not be spoken nor understood in the homes of first generation immigrants. As a result, it may be difficult for some families to relate to the teachers and administrators in the schools that their children attend. The promotion of family participation among diverse populations is one of the biggest challenges that faces educators.

In the state of Colorado, the majority of immigrant students are from Mexico (Roybal & Garcia, 2000). Through the *Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition*, educators and family advocates have addressed cultural barrier issues in a handbook designed to help teachers who work with historically under represented English language learners and their families to understand the differences between the educational systems in Colorado and Mexico. By becoming more knowledgeable about the cultural strengths and weaknesses of Mexican families, Colorado teachers should be able to develop culturally sensitive strategies to effectively engage parents in their classrooms and improve the academic achievement of their students.

In Mexico, there is a standardized national curriculum based on the constructivist theory (Roybal & Garcia, 2000). In Mexican schools, children must master specific skills in order to be promoted to the next grade. The authors stated that “in Colorado schools, students are promoted from one grade to the next regardless of whether they master the skills for their grade level” (p. 2). In Mexico, at each grade level, students are assessed to determine their understanding of the academic material they will study at the grade level to which they will be promoted. Mexico has a two tiered high school system. In the first, general studies are offered, and the focus of the second is science, mathematics, and

technology. In both high schools, students are prepared for college. However, there is no standardized national curriculum in the U.S., and the current emphasis is on state standards. Teaching styles in both countries vary from region to region and teacher-to-teacher, although in Colorado, the staff of many school districts are moving toward research based, scientifically proven standardized teaching strategies. All Mexican students in elementary and middle schools wear traditional uniforms in order to: (a) lower clothing costs, (b) minimize social differences, (c) instill discipline, and (d) establish a school environment where all students feel they belong. In Colorado, the issue of school uniforms is left to the discretion of individual school districts. Despite a wide disparity in income between rural, urban, and suburban centers, in Mexico and in the state of Colorado, huge achievement gaps exist wherever culturally and economically diverse families live.

Sometimes, the presence of cultural differences can result in conflict between parents and teachers (Onikama et al., 1998). For example, Cockrell (1992, as cited in Onikama et al.) found that many family members might not attend meetings at public institutions and schools if, previously, a family member had experienced discrimination or disrespect while in a public institution or school. Native American families share a distrust of schools in the U.S. because of the ways in which, historically they were treated by a dominant culture. “Racial intolerance makes it difficult for families to want to become involved with institutions that they perceive are owned by a culture that discriminated against them in the past” (p. 3). Espinoza (1995, as quoted in Onikama et al.) reported that,

In the Hispanic culture, there is a belief (among the lower socio-economic class) in the authority of the school and its teachers. In a number of Latin American

countries it is considered rude for a parent to intrude into the domain of the school. As a result, family participation in a child's formal education is not a common practice. In addition, parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are frequently intimidated by school personnel and reluctant to raise concerns or make demands. (p. 3)

However, lack of participation does not necessarily mean a lack of interest. Inger (1992, as cited in Onikama et al.) noted that many school administrators and teachers misinterpret the hesitancy and noninvolvement of Hispanic American parents as caused by a lack of interest about their children's literacy. Such misconceptions can lead to mutual distrust and suspicion among parents and school personnel. For many ethnic groups, culture and community come first. If a community event takes place the same time as a school event, families will attend the community event. In many communities, religion plays a vital role, and families will attend the church activities that require the participation of parents.

Socioeconomic status and the attendant stress can adversely affect relationships between families and schools (Meier, 2000). Low income families face unique obstacles to participation in their children's education. Lareau (1993, as cited in Onikama et al., 1998) explored the variables in social class influences on parent involvement in schools; predominantly, the sample consisted of Anglo American parents of working class and upper middle class communities. Lareau found that teachers and administrators had different expectations of parents based on the parent's social standing. Upper middle class parents tend to think of themselves as partners in their child's educational development, and they are actively involved with teachers and administrators. In contrast, working class Anglo parents, much like Hispanic American parents, want their children to do well in school, but tend to give the educational responsibility to the

teacher. Many parents hold down two or more jobs in order to cope with economic reality. As a result, attendance at school programs and parent teacher conferences can be difficult for parents who have work schedules that conflict.

There are numerous obstacles to parent participation in Hawaiian schools because of the process of schooling in the islands (Onikama et al., 1998). In some island schools, the responsibility to involve parents is assigned only to the principal. If parents and principal share a positive rapport and relationship, there is likely to be strong participation in school activities. If the school administrator places a low priority on parent involvement or does not communicate well with parents, families may feel unwelcome and unwanted at the school. However, communication is vital to family involvement, and frequent communication between school and home encourages parents to take an active role in their children's education. Onikama et al. reported that cultural differences may preclude the island teachers from being able to effectively increase parental involvement. The problem lies with indigenous residents who may not have the life skills needed to communicate effectively with teachers and administrators. Also, it has been confirmed and documented, according to Onikama et al., that:

In general, teachers and school administrators do not know how to capitalize on their own cultural backgrounds in classrooms and their dealings with families. As a result, families may become isolated and distanced from the school. Pacific educators, like educators elsewhere, need training in order to learn and incorporate strategies that will involve families in their children's education. Unfortunately, this type of education is usually not included in teacher service training pre-service programs. (p. 5)

The factors of cultural influences, gender bias, and socioeconomic stereotyping should be counteracted by the development of skills in critical consciousness and culturally relevant pedagogy (Banks & Banks, 2001). Because teachers play such a

central role in the kinds of educational opportunities all students receive in the classroom, teachers' re-education and training are fundamental to the provision of educational equity. When students witness positive relationships between parents and teachers, they feel valued and, consequently, take more responsibility for working hard at school and home. The positive relationships between parents and teachers must come from an awareness of what each brings to the partnership, how much they understand each other's expectations and the sensitivity that both teacher and parent develop once they acquire this knowledge.

When partnerships are established between schools, home, and community, the participants recognize the importance of cooperation in a diverse world (Epstein et al., 2002). Teachers, parents, and students are introduced to and actively work with members of their community, who recognize the many benefits of education and citizenship, and who are willing to give of their time because they know in their hearts it is time well spent. In turn, the members of the community recognize the importance of mentoring and helping other adults, young people, and children in order to have a happy, working, and dynamic community where the education of children is a proud and noble undertaking in which responsible adults are engaged.

### *Effective Partnerships Between Fathers and Schools*

Roughly 20 million American children spend their waking hours in nonparental care arrangements (Green, 2003). Of children aged 3-5, who have not yet started kindergarten, 60% are enrolled in center based early childhood programs which include: (a) Head Start, (b) nursery and day care centers, and (c) various other preschool programs. Parents are faced with the challenge of how to allocate the limited time

available between work and home to creatively interact with and involve themselves in their children's lives.

A key component of curricular and instructional reform is access to a program of school, family, and community partnerships that is focused on children's learning and development (Salinas, Epstein, Sanders, Davis, & Douglas, 1997). The involvement of fathers and male role models in children's literacy has been shown to be particularly effective for prekindergarten and early childcare children (Green, 2003). There are many ways that educators can involve fathers in their children's school programs, classrooms, and at home. Between June 2001 and February 2002, Green, (2002), author of the Fathers Read Every Day (FRED) curriculum, conducted a study to examine the correlation between father's participation in early childcare and prekindergarten programs and the roles of teachers in the promotion of male participation. Based on Epstein's (2002) theories, Green developed a survey based upon two general research questions: (a) What efforts, if any, are being made by early childhood educators to involve fathers in programs? and (b) What are the specific efforts that lead to greater father involvement in early childhood programs? Successful involvement of fathers was measured by the use of a global item in which participants were asked, "How successful are you at involving fathers in your early childhood program?" (p. 11). Response categories ranged from 1, Very unsuccessful to 5, Very successful.

Green's (2003) sample was drawn from a series of early childhood educator regional training sessions in a large Southern state. The training sessions took place in three different regions, and the focus was on general themes that are important to early childhood educators: (a) child development, (b) nutrition, (c) health and safety issues,



and (d) discipline. Prior to the start of training sessions, the attendees were told that the surveys were strictly voluntary and confidential and 350 educators participated in the pencil and paper survey. Of the surveys, 213 were fully completed and useable. A variety of public and private early childhood programs were represented by the survey respondents. Nearly 90% of respondents surveyed worked in programs other than Head Start and Early Start, while 5.6% worked with Head Start and 5.2% with Early Start. Nearly 99% of the respondents were women. Anglo American women accounted for 51.6% of the respondents, while Hispanic and African American women accounted for 36.2% and 8.5 %, respectively, 2.3% were Native American, and Others represented approximately 1.4%. Approximately 97% of the early childhood educators surveyed held a high school or higher diploma, while only 20% had graduated from college with an undergraduate or graduate degree.

The responses for Green's (2003) survey question, "In my early childhood program, we..." were to:

1. include a space on our enrollment for fathers to fill their name, address, and telephone number;
2. make a special effort to talk to fathers as they drop off and pick-up their children;
3. invite fathers to participate in parent-teacher conferences and meetings;
4. send letters and written announcements to fathers, even if they don't live in the child's home;
5. ask fathers to participate in special events sponsored by our center (e.g., field trips, potluck suppers, parties);
6. invite fathers to the center to participate in educational activities with the children (e.g., read a book, talk about their jobs);
7. ask fathers to participate on advisory boards or other special committees; and
8. ask fathers to help maintain the facilities (e.g., paint, clean, build equipment, etc.)" (p. 11)

Response options to the eight question survey ranged from 1, Never to 5, Always. The survey had good internal reliability, and the alpha reliability was .82 for the eight item scale.

The response categories found for Item 1, “What efforts, if any, are being made by early childhood educators to involve fathers in their programs” (p. 11), were collapsed into three categories due to response percentages that fell below 1% (Green, 2003). The resulting three categories subsets of response categories were: (a) always or often, (b) sometimes, and (c) seldom or never. Green found that 50% of the educators often or always made efforts to involve fathers in their early childhood programs. Less than 20% of participants responded Seldom or Never to the same question.

To determine the findings for Item 2, “What are the specific staff efforts that lead to greater father involvement in early childhood programs?” (Green, 2003, p. 13), Green treated the eight item response options as separate independent variables and entered them into a multiple regression equation. The overall success of an educator’s attempts to involve fathers in their children’s early childhood programs was treated as the dependent variable. The regression analysis that followed yielded interesting results. Green found that certain independent variables were instrumental in determining the level of success that educators had in involving fathers in their early childhood programs. The results included: (a) sending written correspondence to fathers, even if they live apart from their children, including father’s name, address, and telephone number on the enrollment form; and (b) inviting fathers to the center to participate in educational activities with their children. Green concluded, “When specific practices were examined, the majority of those surveyed made a special effort to involve fathers in five of the eight

areas that were assessed” (p. 15). Green noted that, “Sending written correspondence to fathers even if they did not live with their children, was one of the strongest predictors of successful involvement as perceived by early childhood educators in the sample” (p. 15). Frieman (1998) and Levine, Murphy, and Wilson (1998, both cited in Green) found that special efforts needed to be made in order to keep fathers involved in their children’s literacy development, especially in the case of divorce. Suggestions were made to duplicate copies of important information so that both parent had equal access to it.

When fathers were invited into the classroom to participate in educational activities, children were better off because of their fathers’ involvement (Green, 2003). Green cited Freeman (1998), Frieman and Berkeley (2002), and Levine et al. (1998) and stated, “Activities in which fathers can participate, have been suggested and implemented in many schools throughout the country and include: (a) reading to children, (b) coming to centers to discuss and describe jobs and hobbies, (c) participating in field trips, and (d) leading educational demonstrations” (p. 16). As educators grow in their knowledge and understanding of children’s lives away from school, they can seek to involve fathers in more authentic ways. Green found that, because teachers had made concerted efforts to involve fathers in their classrooms, both teachers and fathers developed a mutual understanding of the workings of school and home, two of the three components in Epstein’s (2002, as cited in Green) theory of overlapping spheres of influence.

Fagan and Iglesias (1999, as cited in Green, 2003) reported that regular attempts to bridge the home and school spheres enhanced the likelihood that fathers would participate in their children’s early childhood centers. According to Horn and Sylvester (2002, as cited in Green), the demographic data indicated that many children live apart

from their fathers. Fagan, Newash, and Schloesser (2000, as cited in Green), found that despite living apart from their fathers, children had some kind of contact with their father or another male role model.

Green (2003) found that fathers contributed to their children's development in valuable ways when they were involved creatively and actively in their lives. Teachers and administrators, who understand the interrelatedness of home, school, and community, can foster participation in early childhood programs with fathers and male role models. Green's sample did not represent a randomly chosen group of educators from which information was gathered, but it did provide a believable set of strategies that any educator could employ to increase participation by fathers in their children's lives. Male and father involvement in childhood programs could directly and proactively affect the developmental progress of every child if teachers and administrators made an effort to include them in their programs and classrooms.

Also, Green (2002), an Associate Professor and Extension Child Development Specialist, for the Texas Cooperative Extension, through Texas A&M University, developed a pilot reading program for fathers and their preschool age children. The program was tested in over 45 counties in the state of Texas. The FRED is a 4 week reading program to encourage fathers to read to their children on a daily basis.

According to Green, educators know that reading and story telling: (a) stimulates the imagination; (b) enhances children's vocabulary; (c) introduces them to components of stories (e.g. characters, plot, action and sequence); and (d) provides them with information about the world that surrounds them.

In an attempt to maximize children's learning opportunities through meaningful home, school, and community partnerships, Green (2002) structured the program to utilize community support and infrastructure in order to support and complement the efforts of fathers and prekindergarten educators to promote children's literacy. The FRED program was conducted at: (a) public and school libraries, (b) Head Start centers, (c) Early Head Start centers, (d) elementary schools, (e) child care centers, (f) churches, and (g) extension centers throughout Texas. During the 4 week period, fathers read to their children a maximum of 15 minutes a day for the first 2 weeks, and 30 minutes a day for the remaining 2 weeks. Upon introduction to the program, the fathers were provided with a participant packet that contained: (a) reading logs, (b) tips for reading to children, and (c) a list of recommended age appropriate books. Each day, the fathers recorded the number of books and the amount of time they spent reading to their children on the reading log that was provided. At the end of the program, the fathers tallied the number of books and time spent reading to their children over the course of the program and completed an exit survey. Also, the fathers and their children were invited to attend a party to celebrate their participation in the FRED program.

Because, often, fathers work hours that do not coincide with their children's school hours, the public library is a worthwhile alternate meeting site (Green, 2002). Conducting the program at public libraries encourages fathers to sign up for library cards, computer instruction, and familiarizes them with the library while, also, both fathers and children are provided access to books without having to pay for them. Also, often, libraries have children's books in languages other than English for fathers who prefer to read in nonEnglish languages. The emphasis of the FRED program is to encourage

collaborative reading between fathers and their children. In addition, fathers who are physically absent from their children's lives, including those employed by the military or who are incarcerated, have the option to participate with the use of audio/visual cassettes of readings. In instances where children do not have contact with fathers, male role models are encouraged to take their place. The outcomes were measured by use of pre and postsurveys in which the fathers were asked to respond to a variety of topics: (a) reading efforts with their children, (b) level of involvement in their children's education, (c) quality of time they spend with their children, and (d) the quality of the father/child relationship. With the use of the data derived from the surveys, teachers and prekindergarten program administrators can improve strategies for home, school, and community partnerships.

For the first time in the history of the U.S., there are over 2 million individuals incarcerated in local jails and State and Federal prisons (McNeil Island Correctional Center [MICC], 2003). According to research provided in an August, 2000 report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics on Incarcerated Parents and Their Children and cited by MICC (2003), one contributing factor for increased incarceration is the breakdown of the family and its resulting effects. Based on findings that showed the importance of fathers and school, home, and community partnerships, the staff of the MICC and the Washington State Department of Corrections partnered with community representatives from: (a) government, (b) faith based groups, (c) Head Start, (d) Boys' and Girls' Club, (e) Steilacoom Historical School District, (f) Safe Streets, (g) MICC, (h) Pierce County Library, (i) business leaders and (j) interested citizens. The purpose was to provide services that would benefit incarcerated fathers and their families. The staff of MICC has

developed a comprehensive program to address family and fatherhood issues based upon the following six components: (a) offender accountability, (b) education, (c) child and family focused activities, (d) family support, (e) advocacy, and (f) partnerships.

It was the opinion of the partnership representatives of MICC (2003) that accountability and responsibility for one's actions are integral to the success of the program and to the long term success of the fathers enrolled in the program. Before an offender can attend a special child or family focused activity, each must demonstrate responsible behavior by being free of a *serious infraction* for a period of 120 days prior to enrollment in the program.

Long Distance Dads, a character based educational support program, used in over 90 correctional facilities in the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain was designed to help incarcerated men develop skills to become involved and supportive fathers (MICC, 2003). Trained offender peer leaders, educated by a variety of national and local non profit organizations, meet with inmates in 12 small group sessions to discuss how to deal with family members in a positive manner. Trained community volunteers, from the Families Matter organization, demonstrate by example and leadership how to be well adjusted and proactively positive individuals. The local Emanuel Lutheran Church sets aside a portion of their annual budget in support of Long Distance Dads. The staff of the National Fatherhood Initiative provides valuable information and motivation to community partnerships and individuals on the importance of fathers in their children's lives. Members of the Read to Me Daddy Program donates age and language appropriate books and materials to the program so that fathers can read to their children via audiocassettes on a regular basis. In this portion of the Long Distance Dads curriculum,

father/child relationships are encouraged as well as the promotion of literacy for fathers and their children. In an effort to encourage literacy, children's books are provided on the ferry for the children, who visit their fathers, to read during the 20 minute ride to and from the prison. Upon completion of the Long Distance Dads program, fathers transition into supervised homework sessions with their children. Fathers are allowed to work directly with their child to complete homework in an effort to involve incarcerated fathers in their children's education. Approved fathers may participate in parent/teacher conferences with their children's teachers over the telephone. Teachers are encouraged to design special projects for fathers and children to complete during supervised visits with one another. Because an estimated 721,500 state and federal prisoners are parents, and on average, parents in state prisons are incarcerated for 80 months, while parents in federal prisons serve 103 months, programs like those implemented through MICC are vitally important.

Partnerships between home, school, and community must address the many cultural and ethnic issues present in the community (Onikama et al., 1998). Project Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educado (FLAME) is a multicultural literacy program for parents and children whose first language is other than English. Project FLAME began in 1989 as a 3 year partnership with the Chicago Public Schools and the residents of a largely Mexican American, low income Chicago neighborhood. The designers of FLAME, Professors Rodriguez-Brown and Shanahan (1989) of the University of Illinois College of Education sought to support parents of preschool and primary grade students by providing and sharing information and knowledge about ways to enrich the home literacy environment, in order to provide learning opportunities for



children through home, school, and community partnerships. The core components of the FLAME program, Family Literacy Sessions and English as a second language classes, are taught in a 12 topic curriculum: (a) book sharing; (b) book selection; (c) book fairs and use the library; (d) teaching the ABCs; (e) development of home literacy centers; (f) mathematics at home; (g) children's writing; (h) homework help; (i) classroom observations; (j) parent/teacher get togethers; (k) community literacy that includes field trips museum visits, zoo trips, and the like; and (l) songs, games, and language.

Supportive parents provide young readers with adequate amounts and types of reading materials for children, and they must strive to be notable influences in their children's acquisition of literacy (Project FLAME, 2003). Parents, with the support of educators, community volunteers, and other parents, learn appropriate strategies for engaged literacy interaction with their children for the enhancement of children's literacy knowledge. Strategies may include direct instruction, reading and writing skills, as well as activities in which children read, play, and write together. Home/school connections involve all interactions between parents and the school. Also, the presence of good home and school connections increases continuity by recognition of the cultural and social concerns and aspirations of the participants. The FLAME advocates use a theory based sociocultural framework that acknowledges multiple cultural ways of learning, literacies, and discussions in the planning and implementation of each activity.

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Education awarded Project FLAME (2003) a 5 year Academic Excellence Grant to share the FLAME family model with other communities and school districts throughout the United States. Over 50 sites nationwide

have used the FLAME model as their primary source for literacy outreach for Spanish speaking families. Through gifts from private foundations and corporations, the FLAME model is currently being translated into Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese; also, it is used in many African American communities throughout the U.S.

According to Epstein et al. (2002), policy developers at the state and district levels are beginning to address specific goals for school, family, and community partnerships. Often, state and district mission statements, laws, and guidelines are specifically written to assist all schools in the development of partnership programs to benefit all students. Many larger school districts have established offices with directors and facilitators who help elementary, middle, and high school educators plan and put into action programs of partnership. According to Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997), mothers and fathers are more likely to participate in school activities if school staff welcome parental involvement and make it easy for parents to become involved.

### Chapter Summary

In order to understand the roles of fathers in their children's lives, the factors of gender roles, biases, and stereotypes must be addressed (Pollack, 1998). Girls with caring and engaged fathers are less likely to enter into abusive relationships as adults and less likely to become pregnant during the teen years. Children whose fathers are absent do not fare as well. Impoverished families without equal access to programs and services do not thrive (Richer et al., 2003).

Factors that can adversely effect father's participation in and responsibility for their spouses and children are diverse (Nord et al., 1997). For divorced fathers, nonpayment of child support is the main reason that ex-spouses deny or restrict visitation

and participation. Pollock (1998) theorized that, just as society expects boys and girls to behave in certain ways, it expects families to do the same. “As prevalent as divorce is, and as politically correct as our schools and community organizations have become in talking about it, society is still structured in favor of two-parent intact families” (p. 377). The presence of home, school, and community partnerships benefit children, because involved and committed adults work together, to develop pedagogically appropriate strategies for learning and for the delivery of educational services to children (Epstein et al., 2002). Without strong home, school, and community partnerships, children suffer (Epstein, et al.). Fathers have a direct and unequivocal responsibility to proactively engage themselves in the young lives that they, fathers, have helped to create (Nord et al., 1997). The research project is discussed in Chapter 3 and is constructed to address the importance of fathers’ and male role models’ participation in children’s literacy and in children’s lives.

## Chapter 3

### METHOD

The purpose of this research project was to provide a vehicle for children to stay connected with absentee fathers in age appropriate and nonthreatening ways. Because early childhood literacy is best realized when both parents are involved and many children do not have contact with their fathers, this author developed an inexpensive model to foster communication between fathers and their children. It is intended that teachers will utilize this product in conjunction with classroom reading and writing to include fathers in the process.

### Target Population

The target population for this project is fathers and their pre kindergarten through first grade children. Often, non-custodial fathers lose contact with their children especially if child support is not forthcoming, or both parents do not make an effort to stay involved in their children's lives. Parents who are separated from family due to employment, military obligations, or incarceration cannot know the joy of observing their child's first steps or first attempts at talking. Children's literacy development occurs in school, at home, and through the many experiences that shape their lives. Children benefit when both parents are actively involved in teaching and reinforcing literacy skills. Fathers are important contributors to their children's literacy.

## Procedures

The elements of this project and procedures used were chosen based upon Best Practice principles used by educators and parents to introduce and reinforce beginning literacy skills to children (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). The project exit survey questionnaire reflects Epstein's Six Types of Involvement-Six Types of Caring, needed for successful home, school, and community partnerships (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002). Reading aloud to young children promotes literacy and oral language development. Conversing with children promotes important listening skills and a way to constructively engage with others through a shared love of language. Children's creativity is enhanced through play, drawing, and painting. Adults play a fundamental role in the development of these skills. The project is intended to facilitate conversation and communication between absentee fathers and their children, in age appropriate, and nonthreatening ways.

## Goals of the Applied Project

Because parents are their children's first teachers and reading aloud to young children is vital to the creative process, the project is presented as a book entitled *Read to Me*. The book is designed as a series of useable perforated postcards that feature authentic children's art from the Shaftsbury School in Vermont. Children love to create art. It is intended that the original art on the front of the card will stimulate kids' imaginations and desires to draw. Relevant facts that address the importance of fathers in the promotion of young children's reading and writing are concisely and succinctly stated, in English and Spanish, on the front and back of each of the 12 postcards,

contained in the book. Space is provided for the sender of the post card to recount his or her favorite book by title, main character, and a brief comment about what was read today. It is intended that this mailer will spark the interest of fathers to take the responsibility and joy for their own children's education by conversing with and paying attention to their children in ways that are authentic for both participants. Fathers are reminded to speak with their children's teachers and to make an effort to visit their children's classroom, often. A shared love of reading will provide a good start. The final page contains an inexpensive recipe for monkey bread because shared activities between fathers and their children are so important.

The format of the project is a CDROM, created on an Apple computer, readable by an Apple or personal computer operating system. This project has practical applications for schools, religious and civic groups, prison outreach programs, and military communities. The booklet could be printed and distributed in its entirety or by the page on card stock. The design of the project was determined by the relative cost of reproduction through commercial print sources.

### Assessment

In order to evaluate the efficacy of the project for young fathers, six young fathers known by the author were given a copy of the completed book and an informal survey. The six questions contained in the survey, are extensions of Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership and Sample Practices found on pages 14-15, of *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002).

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of the following: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating with the community. Respondents were then asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the project to introduce and reinforce the six elements presented.

### Chapter Summary

By reading to and conversing with their children, fathers promote important life skills. Life long learning begins in the home and is reinforced through the collaborative efforts of parents, teachers, and others who share the ideals that all children deserve a quality education. This simply stated interactive, and inexpensive project is intended to provide fathers, particularly absentee fathers, with some basic tools to aid them in promoting literacy development in young children. If, after receiving a postcard from his child, a divorced father decides to pick up the phone and call home, or e-mail his child's teacher to request a meeting, this project will have been worthwhile.

## Chapter 4

### INTRODUCTION

The positive interaction between fathers and their children can be adversely affected by divorce and poverty (Nord et al. 1997). As a first grade teacher, this author has witnessed some of the damage resulting from the separation of fathers and their children because of divorce and military service. It is vitally important for absentee parents to stay positively and proactively engaged with their children. It is critically important for all children to be able to read with confidence and to decode and encode text (Caulkins, 2001). Parents provide and model the most important elements for their children's literacy through unequivocal and loving participation.

This project's collection of postcards featuring authentic children's artwork and research based information for fathers, has been inspired by the research-based principles of *Best Practice* (Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Hyde, A., 1998). Each postcard includes valuable information for fathers, written in English and Spanish in order to address a demographically wide group (Green, 2002). Each postcard frame has been presented as a stand-alone piece, to be printed one up or as a collection, at the discretion of the teacher or administrator. This author is hopeful that the content of this project will provide children with an inexpensive means to communicate with their absentee fathers in nonjudgemental ways, while fostering the shared joys of reading between parent and child.





Pg.1

## ELAINE'S MONKEY BREAD

NEED: 4 Tubes of refrigerated Buttermilk Biscuits.

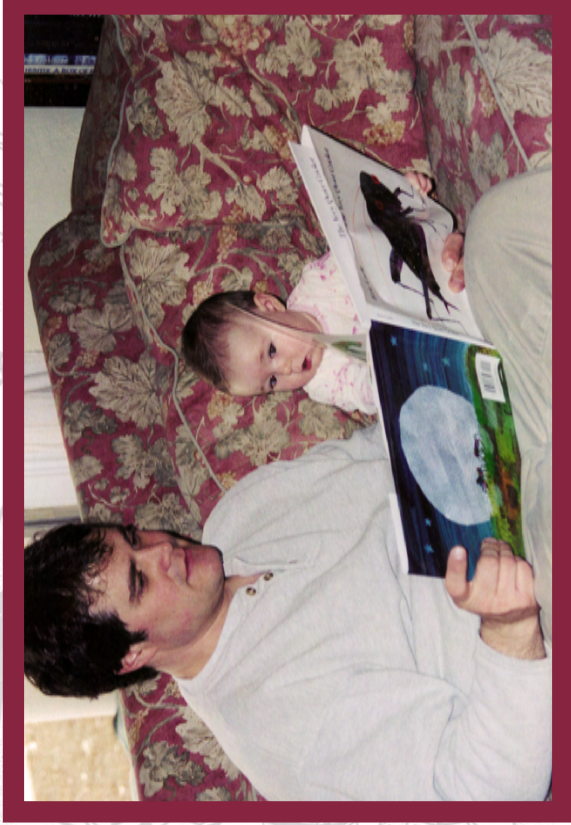
3/4 cup sugar and another 1 cup sugar

1 tablespoon cinnamon and another 1 1/2

tablespoons of cinnamon

3/4 cup margarine

Directions: Remove Biscuits and cut into fourths. Mix first tablespoon of cinnamon and the 3/4 cup of sugar together. Roll each piece of dough in the cinnamon and sugar. Place in greased tube pan, stacking evenly. Mix 1/2 tablespoon cinnamon, the remaining cup of sugar and the margarine. In a sauce pan and cook over medium heat to a rolling boil. Pour mixture over Biscuits and Bake at 350 degrees. Check at 20 minutes and lower temperature to 325 degrees. (Total cooking time is about 40-45 minutes). Let stand for 5 minutes and invert onto a plate.



! Lea a mi!

Pg.14

By reading to and conversing with their children, fathers promote important life skills. Life long learning begins in the home and is reinforced through the collaborative efforts of parents, teachers, and others who share the ideals that all children deserve a quality education. This simply stated interactive, and inexpensive project is intended to provide fathers, particularly absentee fathers, with some basic tools to aid them in promoting literacy development in young children. If, after receiving a postcard from his child, a divorced father decides to pick up the phone and call home, or e-mail his child's teacher to request a meeting, this project will have been worthwhile.



Fathers, read to your children!  
The single most important  
activity for building the  
knowledge  
required for  
everyday success is reading  
aloud to your children.

"Dad is going to Mexico  
to see his parents"



Children learn to read and  
write by observing more  
capable individuals using print  
in functional ways by copy-  
ing these activities and by  
engaging in joint, print re-  
lated interactions with  
adults.

"He will be gone for six  
more days"



The knowledge and skills  
that children acquire can  
be thought of as "funds  
of knowledge" and include  
literacy skills (talking,  
reading, and writing).  
Fathers are important  
role models and mentors.

"Me and my Mom are  
dropping off Dad at the  
Airport"



Fathers are important role  
models. Listen to your chil-  
dren and help your child learn  
to read and write.

"I have a Fish!"

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

YOU:

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

¡Los padres, leen a sus niños!

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

YOU:

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

¡Los padres, juegan con sus niños!

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

YOU:

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

¡Los padres, cree el arte con sus niños!

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

YOU:

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

¡Los padres, preséntelo a los maestros de  
sus niños!





Education and life skills begin in the home. Play with your children! Social skills, rules and game playing, and friendship are learned through play.

"My fish is a Beta, his name is Dennis"



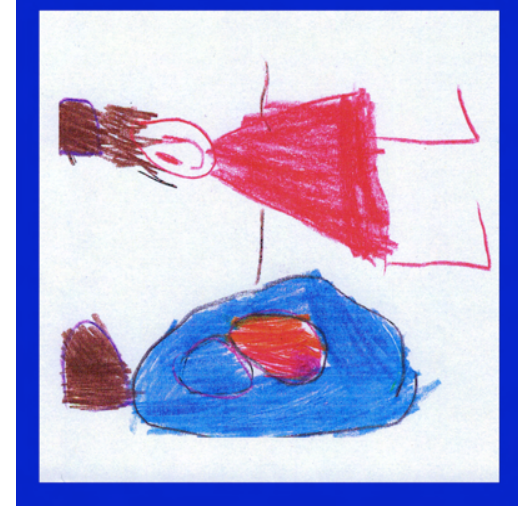
Meet your child's teacher. Attend school meetings and classroom events. Your child will enjoy higher grades, greater school enjoyment, and fewer behavioral problems. .

"He likes to play in his tank"



Participate in your child's school. Meet the teacher. Ask questions about your child's learning. Your child will enjoy better grades and will be a happier student.

"He is blue and red"



Fathers, find a special place for your child to read and create art. Your child will look forward to sharing time with you in their special place.

"My father calls him Dennis the Menace"

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

YOU:

YOU:

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

¡Los padres, leen a sus niños!

¡Los padres, juegan con sus niños!

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

YOU:

YOU:

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

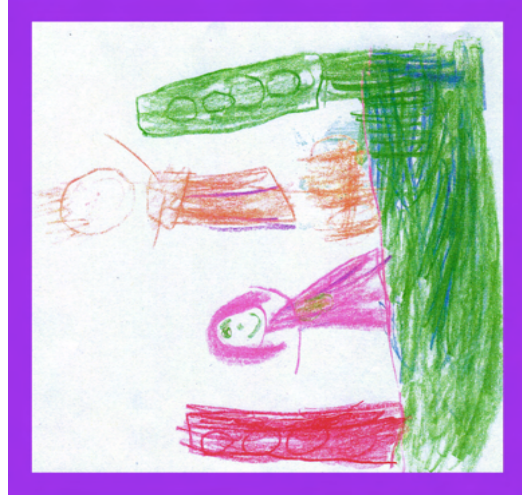
My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

¡Los padres, cree el arte con sus niños!

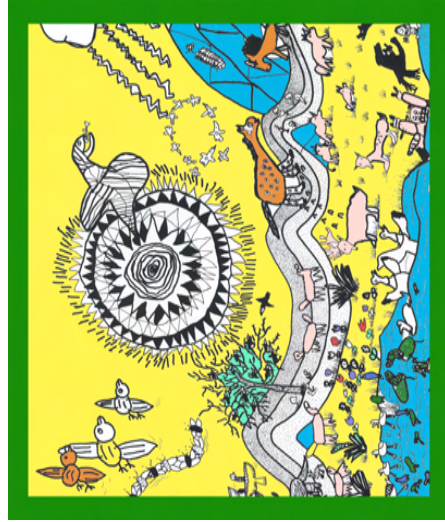
¡Los padres, preséntelo a los maestros de  
sus niños!



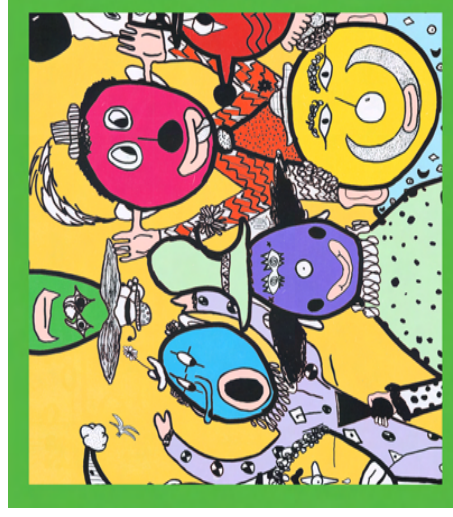
Fathers provide acceptance, love, and discipline. These are the best things that dads can do for their children. Girls who live in father-present homes are much more likely to achieve career success. Boys in father-present homes are better able to communicate verbally and control their aggression.



Special Thanks To:  
All of the children in Diane Van Sciver's Kindergarten class in Denver and the children in Kathy Link's Art classes at the Shaftsbury School. Diane Van Sciver for her guidance, instruction, and ideas for this project. Randal Barbera for graciously providing computer design and educational support...



If you live apart from your child, e-mail, write and call them. Stay involved. If your child is enrolled in school, e-mail, write, or call their teacher. Open lines of communication will help to facilitate your involvement, even over vast distances.



Acknowledgements:  
Author Lucy Calkins and the International Reading Association,  
...and Megan, Greg and Addie

READ TO  
ME!

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

YOU:

YOU:

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

¡Los padres, leen a sus niños!

¡Los padres, juegan con sus niños!

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

ME:

PUT  
STAMP  
HERE

YOU:

YOU:

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Book: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

My Favorite Character: \_\_\_\_\_

¡Los padres, cree el arte con sus niños!

¡Los padres, preséntelo a los maestros de  
sus niños!

## Chapter Summary

According to Pollack (1998), small children who have a primary relationship with a caregiver, are psychologically healthier and stronger than those who do not. For many young children, women have been, and remain their primary caregivers. Iglesias (1999, as cited in Green, 2003) found that fathers, who are included in their children's school activities and early childhood programs, are more likely to participate in the promotion of their children's literacy in the home. Fathers have a direct and unequivocal responsibility to proactively engage themselves in the young lives that they, fathers, have helped to create (Nord et al., 1997).



## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

The Research Project was designed to provide absentee fathers an inexpensive way to remain involved in their children's lives. Because the ability to read is so important for young children, the involvement of both parents toward that end is critical (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997)

Sometimes, parents are unable to fulfill their obligations to, or their responsibility for their children (Richer et al., 2003). If, as this author believes, all children require the committed and proactive participation of both parents in order to become healthy and educationally inquisitive adults, then it must follow that without financial, educational, and spiritual guidance from both parents, many children will suffer (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). If a postcard sent, can engender a phone call made, or an e-mail written between a father and his child, this project will have been worthwhile.

In the Research Project Survey conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the research project, the six respondents were: (a) two fathers who were separated from their child because of divorce or military service, (b) two grandfathers who, with their wives, were the primary caregivers for their children's children, and (c) two married fathers of children too young to be enrolled in public school. The children whose fathers are separated from them because of divorce or military service, and those whose grandparents are primary care givers are among this author's 24 first grade students. All

respondents were kind enough to complete the questionnaires and to discuss the overall project with this author.

Based upon the responses of the participants, a few generalizations may be made: (1) mothers and fathers are important promoters of literacy. (2) the participation of both parents in their child's education in the home and at school is important, and (3) school administrators, teachers, and other responsible community members should try to include absentee fathers in their child's academic progress (Berger, 1998). Also, (a) based upon the literature, (b) the limited results of the questionnaire, and (c) subsequent discussions with respondents, gender roles and expectations affect the ways in which fathers interact with their children's education both inside and outside of the home. Two respondents stated that children benefit more from a mother's involvement in reading and volunteering at school because mothers are more attune to the educational needs of their children. Four respondents noted that it was difficult to find time to volunteer or help in the classroom due to employment and military obligations.

Berger cited Anderson and Pearson (1984), Bartlett (1932), Dansereau (1995), Derry (1996), and Rumelhart and Ortony 1977) who defined *schema* in contemporary cognitive theory as, "an organized body of knowledge about a specific topic" (p. 255). An individual's schema, cultural values, and expectations for appropriate conduct between males and females; both affect gender roles. Because many parents are divorced, or have obligations that preclude them from being available during regular school hours, children miss out on an important contribution in their educational lives, namely, their fathers.

All of the respondents spoke to this author about the importance of open communication between divorced spouses and their children. The payment of child support and, efforts to communicate regularly with one's children, are widely seen as essential behavior for absentee fathers who wish to remain proactively incorporated in their children's lives (Reichert, 2000). All of the respondents appreciated the intent of the research project. Three respondents to the survey, directly effected by the lack of responsibility of absentee divorced fathers toward their children, said that it was unlikely that a postcard would make much of a positive difference in their daughters ex husbands' behavior.

#### Limitations to This Project

While this project has been fulfilling to design and complete, the target audience is limited in its focus to absentee English and Spanish speaking fathers. The Research Survey was administered to 6 respondents, so the results were not representative of a larger demographic group. Schools and organizations that might be interested in the philosophy and concept of the project would undoubtedly change elements of the postcards to fit their particular mission statements and goals. Children's art is as diverse and wonderful as the children who create it (Calkins, 1997). Classroom teachers would probably wish to include examples of their children's artwork on a postcard. The technical skills and software needed to execute this project require the expertise of someone who is comfortable as a graphic artist.

### Suggestions For Additional Research

Public, prison, and military librarians are a logical group of compassionate individuals to promote this project (Epstein et al., 2000). Librarians provide valuable resources for children and their parents. Public Libraries have an established relationship with government, schools, places of worship, and other community based organizations. Libraries have large databases that include demographic and mailing information for large and diverse populations. Librarians are often familiar with local and national not for profit groups that promote children's literacy.

Because many young men are either incarcerated or are in military service, prison and military outreach programs increasingly provide services to enable absentee fathers to stay in touch with their children (MICC, 2003). The Research Project's post card format would be ideal for incarcerated fathers. E-mail versions of the same post cards could be sent to military fathers who are able to access the Internet. Open lines of communication between fathers and their children are imperative in order for all children to feel loved and supported.

### Project Summary

The Research Project was intended to foster love between absentee fathers and their children. Young children learn to read from dedicated and compassionate adults (Green, 2003). Parents should provide an environment of safety, love, and unwavering support for young readers. Teachers scaffold love and support in the classroom. When families are separated due to divorce, incarceration, or military service, young children can feel vulnerable and lose interest in learning. Because the ability to read is essential to

further educational success, every adult who is entrusted with the responsibility to teach young readers, beginning with parents, must take the time and the responsibility for sharing this gift with children (Green, 2003).

This author has had the amazing opportunity to work with committed parents, Special Education and Title 1 professionals, and teachers throughout our school to teach young first grade children the wonders of reading and learning. It can be done. According to Epstein (1992, as cited in Epstein et al.), when home, school, and community partnerships flourish, children read. Often, they exceed Average Yearly Progress (AYP), goals. If children can read, they can solve word problems, write poetry, and create codes using the alphabet in ways that adults cannot easily decode. When first grade children learn to read, they might try out for the school play and decide to read a chapter book for the first time.

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APPENDIX

PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

## RESPONDENT SURVEY: EFFICACY OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Thank you for taking a few moments to fill out this survey. My name is Michael Barbera. I am completing a Master's degree in Elementary Education through Regis University. In recent decades, the roles of parents in society and in schools in the United States have undergone fundamental changes, many of which have affected the traditional roles of fathers and mothers at home and in school (Pollack, 1998). Many of these changes can be traced to poverty, divorce, and a lack of educational opportunities for impoverished young people. The purpose of this project is to provide absentee fathers a vehicle, a postcard illustrated with authentic children's artwork, which fosters communication by sharing one another's favorite books and stories. Through the involvement of classroom teachers, community members and family volunteers, it is hoped by this author, that absentee fathers will become more proactively engaged in their children's lives. Questions contained in this survey are based upon the educational research of Joyce Epstein (Epstein et al. 2002), and Stephen Green (Green, 2003).

Please Shade the Appropriate Circle.

1. Are fathers as important to their children's educations as their mothers?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Don't know
2. How important are fathers' participation in their children's classrooms?  
☐ Very important  
☐ Somewhat important  
☐ Not important as long as mothers are actively involved  
☐ Don't know
3. Should school administrators, teachers, and other responsible community members try to include absentee fathers in their children's educational lives and academic progress?  
☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Some of the time  
☐ Never  
☐ Don't know
4. Does this project promote children's literacy and the importance of fathers' participation in age appropriate ways?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Don't know

5. If you were a teacher of early primary grade students, would you consider this project as a means to foster communication between children and parents who are separated due to divorce, incarceration, or, jobs away from home including military service?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Don't know
6. 6. Can this project be improved?

Please comment briefly: