

Strategies Used by Pre-school Teachers to Improve Father Involvement in Early Childhood Education in South Africa

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ABSTRACT Non-involvement of fathers in early education is highly prevalent in South Africa. The paper has two aims, firstly, to explore the strategies used by South African pre-school teachers to improve father involvement in early education, and secondly, to make recommendations on what can be done to improve father involvement in early education. The main study finding is that literature does not share much about the strategies that pre-school teachers are currently using to improve father involvement in early education. Therefore, the following recommendations are made, that is, to conduct research to explore strategies used by teachers, train teachers on fatherhood and working with fathers, review policies to ensure father inclusion, create platforms of engagement by different teachers from different contexts, benchmark with other countries, conduct continuous monitoring and evaluation of the strategies implementation process, conduct impact assessment of the implemented strategies, conduct workshops to motivate fathers, and encourage fathers to motivate one another.

INTRODUCTION

Makusha and Richter (2015) reported that in terms of father absence in Africa, South Africa occupies the second position after Namibia. Cronje (2015) and Mzimakhwe (2015) shared that father absence is mainly prevalent amongst African and Colored homes. The Mbalo Brief Strategy (2015-2019) outlined that only thirty five percent of South African children live with both parents, thirty nine percent live with mothers only, three percent live with fathers only, and twenty three percent live with neither of the parents. The problem of absent fathers has, to a certain extent, resulted in limited father involvement in early education, as many South African children enter child care centers and pre-schools from families that are mainly constituted of separated parents, single parents, step parents, extended families and child-headed homes (Makofane 2015; Makusha and Richter 2015).

The following were identified as factors that cause father absence including cultural values, migration, substance abuse, unemployment, poverty, suspicion of paternity fraud, fathers emotional problems, plain heartlessness by fathers towards the child, parental influence to young men to deny paternity, poor relationship between the child's parents and disrespect for the law (Makusha and Richter 2015; Swartz et al. 2013; Ramphela 2002). With specific reference to

father absence in early childhood, researchers (Shannon et al. 2002) revealed that childcare centers and educational institutions have a history of excluding fathers in pre-schools and they only include them in gender-typed ways. Burgess (2005) defined gender-typed roles as helping in building construction or making of equipment and toys, therefore their participation is limited to support services not in teaching and learning. Studies revealed (Colpin et al. 2004; Zaroni et al. 2013) that fathers believe that they are perceived as unskilled with relation to parenting, as a result they are discouraged from being involved in early education. Petersen (2014) also confirmed that in South Africa there is a belief that men lack childrearing skills and the prevalence of sexual abuse and molestation by men is also worsening the situation. The reports above confirm what Okeke (2014) shared that teachers have the greatest influence on whether parents become welcomed or involved in schools. The issue of father exclusion in early schooling is not only a South African phenomenon, as the Responsive Parenting Strategy to Prevent Violence for 2014 reported that in response to the father exclusion concerns, countries like Peru, South Australia and Turkey have initiated programs to encourage and support men in their fatherhood responsibilities (Matters 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to establish what South Africa is doing to address the abovementioned

tioned problem, that is, the exclusion of fathers in early education.

Rationale

In the light of what is revealed in this paper's introduction, it is clear that South African fathers are not pleasingly involved in pre-school education. Non-involvement of fathers in early education is a cause for concern because, firstly, it is a legal prescript or expectation in South Africa that parents, including fathers, need to be actively involved in pre-school education (Draft Early Education Policy No. 204 13 March 2015). Secondly, education leaders in South Africa always emphasize that issues related to early education must be given overriding priority, and to confirm that a representative from the Department of Basic Education National Office (Early Childhood Development component) once noted,

There has been a strong push in South Africa to expand early childhood education, it's a universal mandate as everyone is interested in early childhood and we're trying to reach our country's communities (San Antonio Express News 4 April 2014).

Thirdly, the White Paper on Families (2013) also recommended the 'encouragement of fathers' as one of the strategies to involve fathers in their children's rearing, and therefore, it becomes critical to treat issues related to early education as equally important. Fourthly, Modisaotsile (2012) shared that it is critical and important for parents to be involved in early education because it is at that stage where a child develops emotional intelligence, communication and social skills. Researchers (Daily Maverick 2015; Harris 2015; Hodgskiss 2015) also indicated that young children with active fathers have high levels of school readiness, high cognitive competence and can handle stressful situations. In addition, Holborn and Eddy (2011) mentioned the following benefits from active father involvement, including less depression for boys, less engagement in dangerous behaviors in adolescence, improved social and intimate relationships, well-regulated self-control, acquisition of empathy, and healthy self-esteem. Flouri and Buchanan (2004) also noted that the father's closeness to his children during an early age is positively linked to good educational outcomes. In retrospect, children with uninvolved

fathers are more likely to be involved in substance abuse, drop out of school, experience health and psychological problems, be prone to crime, and girls are prone to teenage pregnancy (Palkovitz 2002; Shannon et al. 2002). In the light of the above, it is therefore important to sensitize pre-school teachers towards the importance of equally treating fathers as important caregivers (Swartz et al. 2013; Beardshaw 2006). Green (2003) also advised that there is a greater need to give programmatic support to fathers as that can increase a father's participation in early education programs. Furthermore, Green (2003) advised that pre-school teachers and administrators need to take steps to reach out to fathers and father figures. Against this background, it is significant to explore the different strategies that South African pre-school teachers use to ascertain that fathers are involved in early education.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the strategies used by South African pre-school teachers to improve father involvement in early education. Secondary, depending on the findings of this study, recommendations will be made on what can be done by pre-school teachers to improve father involvement in early education.

Self Determination Theory

The Self Determination Theory was deemed the most appropriate to review this paper. Bouchard et al. (2007) explained that according to the Self Determination Theory to understand behavior one needs to examine the origins of what regulates that behavior, that is, is it regulated by self or regulated by external forces or pressures? Deci and Ryan (2000) noted that it is important to understand that these behavior regulators work independently and are linked to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In other words, Bouchard et al. (2007) clarified that the different behavior regulators occur along a range of self-determination, that is, from self-determined behavior to non-self-determined behavior.

Intrinsic motivation displays one's innate propensity to experiment with life, one who is innovative and who controls his/her surroundings independent of external things like rewards

or challenges (Bouchard et al. 2007). Bouchard et al. (2007) further advised that intrinsic motivation entails making personal choices and being committed to one's choices. Palkowitz (2002) explained that a father who is intrinsically motivated interacts with his children spontaneously purely for the satisfaction it gives and the willingness to be connected to his children. Furthermore, Bouchard et al. (2007) believed that intrinsic motivation is value or goal driven.

Pasley et al. (2002) explained that extrinsic motivated behaviors are usually driven by "a means to an end" intention. Deci and Ryan (2000) explained that extrinsic motivation is controlled by external sources from one's surroundings. A father may choose to be involved in a child's life because of the mother's unavailability or because it's his duty to share family responsibilities, therefore in that case a father can be motivated by "not having a choice" or guilt (Silverstein 2002).

In retrospect, intrinsic motivation can also be influenced by extrinsic factors, for example, due to the mother's absence a father can be changed to value his presence in a child's life (Bouchard et al. 2007; Rane and McBride 2000). To explain the abovementioned father's reaction, Bouchard et al. (2007) noted that the internalization of certain behaviors is motivated by people's normal inclinations to adopt activities that will enable them to coexist with others even if they are not necessarily interested in them.

Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2005) noted that the Self Determination Theory identifies three common human needs, namely, the need for proficiency/competence, affiliation/relatedness, and independence/autonomy. There are two levels of self-determination, that is, a higher and lower level (Bouchard et al. 2007). A higher level of self-determined motivation is associated with constructive consequences, for example, improved education, better interest, more perseverance, greater determination, better presentation, advanced self-esteem, improved life contentment, and improved wellbeing (Bouchard et al. 2007). Niemiec et al. (2006) advised that higher levels of self-determined motivation are supposed to result in an individual experiencing satisfaction of the common human needs. A lower level of self-determined motivation is negatively related to the outcomes mentioned above (Bouchard et al. 2007). Deci and Moller (2005)

cautioned that one's background (relations with others and the context) is believed to play a significant role for positive or negative self-determination, supporting behaviors promote self-determination whilst controlling behaviors stifles self-determination.

FINDINGS

Literature in South Africa does not say much about what pre-school teachers are doing to improve father involvement in early education. What is highly documented in literature are different programs developed by different institutions (universities, councils, non-governmental organizations) to ensure that fathers are encouraged and capacitated to be involved in education, including early education. Some of these programs have reported success stories with regard to motivating fathers to be involved in education. The following are the programs mentioned in literature.

Programs Initiated by Academic Institutions and Independent Groups

Center for Social Development Based at Rhodes University

The Center for Social Development is based at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa (Hodgkiss 2015). This center is involved in conducting fathers' workshops aimed at involving fathers in education, exploring the fathers' feelings with regard to their expected roles in childcare and schooling, and it also teaches fathers to make toys (Hodgkiss 2015). Hodgkiss (2015) reported that the program is very successful as one male participant even shared that the program has made him, "*have a new description of a man*".

The Fatherhood Project

The Fatherhood Project was initiated by the Human Sciences Research Council in 2003 and it later became a fully-fledged research program that led to the publication of the first South African book on fathers (Richter 2004). The projects objectives are the following, that is, influence social expectations and opinions about men with relation to childcare, inculcate collective responsibility in children's development by both par-

ents, promote long-term commitment by men, and coordinate peer and professional support for men (Richter and Morrell 2006).

A NappiDaddi Application

A NappiDaddi application was designed by a group of South African fathers (Daily Maverick 2015). The NappiDaddi is an advisory platform that is involved in the following, that is, it assists fathers to be actively involved in their young children's lives, engages with fathers to share fatherhood ideas, challenges and opportunities, assists fathers to acquire skills to be able to stimulate the children's emotive and cognitive development, and it also provides support for mothers (Daily Maverick 2015).

Programs Initiated by Civil Society Organizations

Fathers Speak Out, Men as Partners, Sonke Gender Justice, Men Engage South Africa, African Fathers Initiative, Men Care, Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training, and Brothers for Life

A number of support programs have been initiated by civil organizations in South Africa and they are mainly centered on improving relations between men and their families, and to ensure that young children develop adequately (Peacock and Botha 2006). *The key focus areas of the programs are* promotion of gender equality, eradication of domestic violence, teaching and advocacy on public health (including maternal health and Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) and giving assistance on policy formulation and reviews (Lindegger 2006; Peacock and Botha 2006; Makusha and Richter 2015).

The Shine Trust

The Shine Trust is a non-government organization that initiated a seven strategy approach meant to capacitate workshop trainers/facilitators on how to effectively conduct parent workshops, that is, with specific focus on fathers (Byaruhanga and Dladla 2015). To attract fathers, trainers/facilitators are advised to do the following, that is, design and conduct workshops that are interactive and dynamic, create father-friend-

ly environments, use dad-friendly "hooks" like sports activities, schedule workshops at times convenient for fathers, maintain ongoing communication, offer incentives for workshop attendance (for example, gift bags), promote fatherhood in the community (for example, nominate fathers to be "Ambassador Dads"), profile caring fathers in the media, and organize the "buddy/pairing system" (for example, pairing of experienced fathers with newer fathers) (Byaruhanga and Dladla 2015; Richter et al. 2012; The Shine Trust 2015; Reading Rockets 2015; Ilifa Labantwana 2015; Thembalitsha Foundation 2015).

Although some of the above mentioned programs are reported to have made general positive impact on fathers in terms of how they relate to their families (women and children), very little is said about the impact of these programs on father involvement, especially in pre-schools.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the abovementioned findings that some fathers do get information on how to engage with their families and children. The findings also note that some teachers are also trained on how to engage fathers both in workshops and inside the school premises. However, as aforementioned, the findings do not report much about the organizations' engagements with pre-school teachers, therefore, the strategies that South African teachers are using to improve father involvement in pre-schools are still vague. Due to the latter findings about South Africa, it becomes critical to then explore what scholars (locally and internationally) are sharing with regard to the strategies that pre-school teachers can use to improve father involvement in early education.

According to the Self Determination Theory, the involvement of pre-school teachers in motivating fathers to play an active role in pre-school education can be seen as an external stimulation/motivation. By being extrinsic motivators pre-school teachers can hope that fathers will ultimately acquire intrinsic motivation that can result in them being more committed to their children's pre-school education. Nonetheless, it must be noted with caution that there are South African fathers who are intrinsically motivated to play an active role in their children's lives, as Richter and Morrell (2006) have also confirmed that in South Africa there are fathers who are

keen to be active parents. The Human Sciences Research Council also confirmed that there are fathers who strive to be actively involved in their children's upbringing. However, it is reported that they encounter a number of challenges (Daily Maverick 2015). Daily Maverick (2015) linked these challenges to finances, culture and relational issues, for example, a poor relation between the child's parents. Okeke (2014) also identified two external barriers for fathers who are intrinsically motivated to participate in their children's schooling, that is, absence of role clarification (father's role in school), as well as the intimidating structures of operation within the schools.

Fagan and Palm (2004) advised that engaging fathers in early education is not as difficult as it is always reported as there are pre-school teachers who have successfully improved father involvement by simply applying strategies like smiling, knowing the fathers' names and through organization of activities that fathers enjoy. Evans (2005) also advised that there are three scopes of wellbeing for men, that is, to have adequate information, to grasp how the information can be applied by men and to be in a welcoming environment to practice the newly acquired information, therefore, it is important for pre-school teachers to understand that background. Burgess (2005) cautioned that in pursuit of motivating fathers, pre-school teachers must not aim to change pre-schools overnight. However, they must review their personal practices to ensure that they are more welcoming to fathers. Burgess (2005) advised that fathers are different from mothers and as a result their experiences, circumstances and anticipations are different, therefore dealing with fathers demands time, reliability and innovativeness.

With specific reference to communication, courtesy and accessibility, the way a teacher communicates with a father can make or break relationships, and therefore, when dealing with fathers, pre-school teachers need to take note of the timing of the conversations as well as their voice tones (Burgess and Bartlett 2004). Teachers need to communicate with fathers when they are bringing or collecting their child, and the voice tone used when communicating must not be condescending (Macours and Vakis 2010). Problems raised by fathers must be quickly dealt with and a personal feedback must be given by telephone or direct exchange (Nielsen

2007). Staff members must be known, trustworthy and easily accessible (Burgess and Bartlett 2004). To reach inaccessible fathers teachers must communicate through mothers and children, but this may not be the case with non-resident fathers (Macours and Vakis 2010). Although the most ethical approach is to stick to working hours, in special cases, teachers can make arrangements for evenings or weekends (Richter et al. 2012).

Issues related to governance, administration and policy also need to be given serious consideration where fathers are involved (Hodgkiss 2015). Active father involvement in early education is a policy priority, and therefore policies used in pre-schools need to be father-friendly and must also sketch out strategies for male involvement (Makusha and Richter 2015). The White Paper on Families (2013) also recommended that all current laws and social policies that hinder father involvement must be revised and replaced with policies that promote caring and supportive fatherhood. During policy reviews, issues related to finances and culture must form part of the agenda (Makusha and Richter 2015). Hiring or inclusion of males to the pre-school teaching staff also needs to be given urgent attention (Makusha and Richter 2015). Both residential and non-residential fathers must be invited to participate in pre-school committees and extramural activities (Macours and Vakis 2010). Fathers with special skills, for example, in finance, bookkeeping, medicine, arts or sport must be motivated to offer mentoring services to the pre-school staff and children (Macours and Vakis 2010).

Pre-school teachers need to involve fathers in teaching and learning, for example, they can invite them to participate in educational activities at the pre-school, for example, reading, assisting with homework and on career days (Martin et al. 2005). Teachers need to be careful when choosing learning activities for fathers, fathers seek to impart excellence and good relationships with their children, therefore, activities chosen must be beneficial. In involving fathers, pre-school teachers must also take note of the father's level of education (Allen and Daly 2007).

By sharing their skills involved fathers can assist in making the school environment conducive to learning, however, in order to excel in that, fathers also need to be supported (Yoleri 2014). The support given to fathers can include

creating and availing networking opportunities with other fathers, create partnerships with agencies/male community leaders in order to exchange ideas, organize discussion groups to talk about men's psychological and physical spaces, motivate fathers to be innovative and to identify ways in which they can make a positive contribution to their pre-schools, establish forums or support groups for male pre-school practitioners and fathers, design training material that addresses issues of men caring for children, offer support to couples to develop positive co-parental relations, invite and involve young fathers (those still at school) to take part in the support programs, share with fathers child development videotapes to strengthen their understanding of the process, link fathers with specialists that can assist with identified problems, organize fathers to facilitate programs to mentor boys to grow to be good citizens, organize workshops to assist fathers to deal with their girl children, organize ways in which fathers can assist in maintaining the pre-school facilities, for example, painting or making sandpits, and display photos of fathers interacting with children (Allen and Daly 2007; Yoleri 2014; Martin et al. 2005; Nielsen 2007; Makofane 2015; Hodgkiss 2015; Richter et al. 2012).

In summary, this study has unearthed the following things. Firstly, the non-involvement of fathers in their children's early education is still prevalent in South Africa. Secondly, as much as there is vast literature about fatherhood in South Africa and institutions/organizations promoting active/responsible fatherhood, there is not much literature written on strategies used specifically by South African pre-school teachers to improve father involvement in early education. This knowledge gap was confirmed by Van der Berg et al. (2011) when they noted that,

One of the difficulties in making recommendations for the Early Childhood Development sector is that little concrete information exists about the needs of the sector and about best practices...

Furthermore, Van der Berg et al. (2011) advised that there is a need to undertake more research in the Early Childhood Development sector in order to establish its needs, benefits and impact. Thirdly, pre-school teachers are cautioned that compared to mothers, dealing with fathers may be a different experience as men have

different views and aspirations, and therefore strategies used to motivate men need to be appropriate to a man's life world.

CONCLUSION

This study has established that in South Africa, father non-involvement in early education is prevalent. It was also reported that despite the high prevalence, there are fathers who are intrinsically motivated to actively participate in their children's lives. However, it was noted that in addition to their individual problems, for example, illiteracy, pre-schools are also not welcoming fathers as they should be. It is also clear from the identified literature gap that South Africa has not yet made good strides in terms of addressing issues of father non-involvement in early education. In addition, there is also a gap of little or non-availability of support programs that are meant to improve father involvement in early education and the following possibilities were identified.

1. Pre-school teachers may not be aware that fathers need to play an active role in their children's education
2. If pre-school teachers know that fathers are supposed to play an active role in early education, there is a possibility that they do not know how to involve them.
3. Even if pre-school teachers may know the role that fathers are supposed to play in early education, there is a possibility that teachers do not have the capacity to implement the information they have.
4. As noted in literature, gender based prejudices may be preventing fathers from welcoming or involving fathers.

In order to realize the objective of the White Paper on Families (2013) and other policies related to parental care, especially by fathers, there is an urgent need to address the problem of non-involvement of fathers in early education by identifying the reasons for non-availability of the strategies, if available, the reasons why they are not implemented. By initiating and implementing context relevant father involvement strategies pre-school teachers can act as external motivators with an ultimate aim of realizing the envisaged vision, which is, an active involvement of fathers in early education. In order to effectively implement the strategies, it must also be noted that the very people expected to imple-

ment the strategies (pre-school teachers) may be in need of intrinsic motivation as well, therefore, it is imperative not to look at this issue only from the side of the fathers, but the pre-school teachers' dynamics need to be studied as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the problem of non-involvement of fathers in early education as well as the unavailability of the strategies to motivate them, the following recommendations are made.

- (i) Further research needs to be conducted in the area of father involvement in early education, especially the strategies used by pre-school teachers to improve father involvement.
- (ii) There is a need to initiate programs that are focused on promoting and improving father involvement specifically in early education. What is stipulated in policies must be put in action by practical programs.
- (iii) There is a need to train pre-school teachers on the importance of father participation in early education as well as father appropriate strategies to improve father involvement in early education. Programs from other countries can be used as a benchmark. However, relevance of those programs to the South African context must be considered.
- (iv) Pre-schools must be assessed on progress made since the implementation of policy prescripts related to parental care, especially those directed to involved fatherhood. This assessment may highlight the need to review the policy or check if it can be implemented.
- (v) There is a need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of these support programs so that problems can be addressed as soon as they arise.
- (vi) After the initiation and implementation of strategies meant to improve father involvement in early education, within a reasonable period an impact assessment must be conducted.
- (vii) Workshops and seminars that would motivate fathers to appreciate the role they are supposed to play in education need to be conducted. Fathers who are actively involved in the education of their

children should be given platforms to share their experiences with other parents in order to motivate non-involved fathers.

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