A Grounded Theory of Father Involvement in Children's Education

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