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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Robert Michael Denn, Sr. entitled "Kindergarten Dads: Paternal Participation in Early Childhood Education." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

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KINDERGARTEN DADS:

PATERNAL PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Robert Michael Denn, Sr.

May 1999

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For Michael, Lauren, and Sean

"Here, take my hand! Come, I shall show you the world.
The way into the world, my world, and yours."
--Max van Manen

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn about 1) the perceptions that fathers have regarding their role in their kindergartners' early childhood education, 2) how those perceptions manifest themselves in pedagogical interactions with their children and in other educationally-related activities, and 3) how their involvement/ interaction with their children in this capacity makes them feel.

Data collection methods included participant journal writing, interviews, observations, document analyses, and a focus group discussion. The participants included 7 fathers, 5 mothers, and the classroom teacher who were selected from one kindergarten class in an elementary school located in the Southeast United States.

The data revealed the following: 1) The fathers in this study believe that they play an important and unique role in the education of their young children, 2) They are engaged in many interactive learning events with their kindergartners including reading, talking, playing, and teaching, and 3) Involvement in their children's early childhood education provides many emotional rewards for these 'kindergarten dads.'

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"It is a wise father that knows his own child."
--William Shakespeare

The Renaissance

Historical Context

For many years research on children's development focused on the relationship between mothers and their children. Fathers were usually omitted from the research and this bias was a reflection of prevailing parental roles. They were assumed to be peripheral in their children's lives and therefore had little direct importance to their children's development (Lamb, 1997; Cooksey & Fondell, 1996). Bowlby (The Invisible Pact, 1958) emphatically stated that "the primary psychological bond within parent/child dyads is the mother-child bond" (cited in Day & Mackey, 1986).

Nonetheless, sociological shifts are transforming the roles of fathers in the United States (U.S. DOE, 1997). Radin (1982) cites research (Glick, 1978; Pleck, 1979; Smith & Reid, 1980) which shows that fathers are becoming more involved in childrearing. Beginning in the 1970's, researchers began to give much more attention to the role of the father in the family. This attention was a reflection of the social changes of the time. Fathers were being included in interviews about the parenting experience, were observed in the laboratory, and at home and interacting with their infants and preschoolers

(Bronstein, 1988). Congruent with this sociological change, fathers themselves are taking on new responsibilities and new roles. Fathers in modern times assume multiple roles including that of provider, protector, nurturer, companion, disciplinarian, teacher and instiller of societal norms (Lamb, 1997; Marsiglio, 1993).

Michael Lamb (1986, 1987) summarizes the four stages through which fatherhood has evolved beginning with Puritan times when the father's role was perceived primarily as that of moral teacher. From this era through the colonial period, fathers were responsible for seeing that their children grew up with the appropriate values according to their religious and societal doctrines. Fathers assumed responsibility for the education of children but not for learning and literacy in and of themselves; they did so mainly to insure that their children could read the Bible. During the industrialization era, the conceptualization of the father's role shifted to that of breadwinner. The ability to provide financially became the criterion by which fathers were judged to be "good." Economic responsibility continues to this day as one of the most important roles of fathers in the United States.

The end of WWII brought about another reconceptualization. During this time, the father functioned as a sex-role model, especially for his sons. The literature on this topic blamed fathers for their inadequacy in this area. During the 1970's, yet another redefinition of fatherhood took place. Good fathers were identified as active, caring, fathers, or the 'new emergent nurturant fathers,' the concept upon which this research project is built. This researcher proposes that the "new and improved dad" is involved in

every facet of his children's lives including their education, which is a holistic and inextricable part of a child's development.

The New Father

Lamb (1986) reminds us that in a pluralistic society, different conceptions of fatherhood exist. Fathers fill many roles and one must view active fathering in different contexts in which they are engaged with their children. Lewis and O'Brien (1987) note that many authors assumed that men are becoming more involved in family (e.g. Dorn and Ryan, 1979; Entwisle and Doering, 1981; Fein, 1978; Lewis, 1986). They remind us that such interpretations are difficult to justify. It may be that "respondents today are under greater pressure to appear to be more involved than those a few years ago" (p. 2). We must also understand the "nature of paternal involvement within the context of other social and technological changes (e.g. Duvall, 1967)" (p. 2). Dwybad (1952) comments, "As one reviews recent books and articles in the field of family life which make specific reference to the father's role, one finds that while some authors see today's father as less active and further removed from the family, others quite to the contrary observe that he has found his way back to the family and shares actively and creatively many activities with wife and children. Apparently it depends on the author's vantage point whether and in what areas he discerns progress" (cited in Lewis and O'Brien, p. 4).

Sagi (1983) cites several studies (Frodi, Lamb, Leavitt, & Donovan, 1978; Parke & Swain, 1980) that demonstrate that even if fathers do not actually realize their potential, they can be as sensitive and responsive to their children as mothers. "The *active*

father, according to Seel (1987), "...wants to take genuine responsibility for the care of his children and gives his home life a higher priority than his work. He does not see his role as one of 'helping out'; rather that childcare tasks and decisions should be shared equally by parents. He sees no reason why men shouldn't parent just as well as women..." (p. 10).

Mackey (1996) asserts the inherent need to father when he writes "that there is an adult male-to-child bond that is independent of the man-to-woman bond and the adult female-to-child bond. That is, fathering is an inherent facet of the male's developmental track...Fathering for men is viewed as a behavioral imperative and is as biocultural as is language acquisition or interpreting facial expressions or falling in love" (p. x-xi).

Parents as Teachers

Newman (1993) suggests that lifelong learning begins at birth and that parents are the first teachers. A parent is a child's first tutor in solving the fascinating puzzle of written language. A child's faith that sooner or later he will become a good reader comes from his parents. Parents should perceive themselves as teachers of their children. Successful parents use everyday occurrences for exposing their children to new experiences. Newman further writes that children should be exposed to a large and interesting environment; they should be encouraged to pursue their natural curiosity and follow wherever that leads them. Colin Greer (1987) suggests that parents should read to their child, talk to their child, and do things together. For preschoolers, the research supports reading aloud to children, exploring the concrete world, and allowing them to

experience the world through trips and home activities. If the father chooses to be involved in the educational lives of his children, the opportunities are endless.

While institutional schooling has existed for hundreds of years, schooling in the home has been in existence far longer. Many parents put their children on the school bus in the morning and believe that any learning the child encounters will occur between the hours of 8 and 3, Monday through Friday when in fact learning can and does occur serendipitously throughout the child's day. Van Manen (1991) writes that parents teach children about culture, family structure, relationships with others, and about the community and one's place in it. "We show children...what we make of the world, how we live in this world, and what this world means to us. In this sense we are all teachers even if some of us have no desire to be educators. We are all teachers to the extent that we offer children and young people through us, through our cultural life forms, and through our individual personal lives images of how life is to be lived" (p. 186). Richards (1982) believes that because a father has traditionally been the one who goes out into the world to work, he represents the world outside the home and brings that knowledge back to his children.

The relationship between parent and child is the cornerstone upon which pedagogy exists. This relationship is diadic and learning is embedded in it. Understanding the child's learning and development requires understanding the context of the larger biography of the child. "To live is always to live under the influence of the world...But the parent and the teacher are unlike the other influences in that he or she is oriented to the child in a special manner...[This] pedagogical orientation...can make the parent or

teacher more influential than the conglomerate of influences impinging on the child from the larger culture" (Van Manen, 1991,p. 80).

Through participation in his children's early childhood development, each father "brings his own individuality" to his role and develops his own fathering style (Benson, p. 37).

Need for the Study

Until the 1970's, research on American fathers was almost non-existent. According to Day and Mackey (1986), most of the literature inferred or stated that the father's influence on the socio-emotional growth of young children was minimally important. Cohen (1993) states that we have "assumed that men identified themselves with and derived their self-esteem from performance at work (Goetting, 1982; Rubin, 1979), and acted as if the most meaningful male activity took place outside of the family...(Parsons, 1942, Zelditch, 1974)" (p. 1). Working from such traditional assumptions, researchers have implied that men's work lives were a more important element of their daily reality than their family life. Social scientists studying families have paid little attention to fathers and husbands. The studies of marriage or parenthood that did emerge relied on data from wives and mothers (Cohen, 1993). Basically, there has been "little interest in the social institution of fatherhood" (Richards, 1982).

Leichter (1974) suggests that studies of fathers have been conducted on the ways in which the father's absence from the home influences educational outcomes, "but there

has been little direct study of fathers as educators" (p. 9). Pleck writes that researchers have been influenced by cultural messages about men's roles in the family and this has guided them into asking questions that fit the role of traditional division of family responsibility (cited by Cohen, 1993).

Parke (1996) says that the contribution of fathers to children's development is not well documented. The differences in how fathers are involved with their children's lives vary over time and across cultures (Lamb, 1997), and parents' behaviors "change as a result of involvement with their children's learning experiences" (Sattes, 1989, p. 37). The attention that has been given to fathers' involvement with their children has overlooked the contributions that fathers make beyond that of the traditional financial provider (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996). One of these contributions is the role that fathers play in the education of their children. Whether education occurs at home or in the form of parental involvement in the schools, fathers have an opportunity to be a part of their children's educational life.

The Fatherhood Project (Levine, et al, 1983) was a large scale effort to examine policies that encourage fathers to take a more active role in child care. The researchers became aware that the literature about fathers was beginning to find its way into popular consciousness. Popular novels like Kramer versus Kramer (Corman, 1977), and Mother's day (Miner, 1978), sociological studies like Bittman and Salk's Expectant fathers (1978), and writing of the 'men's liberation' movement, such as Herb Goldberg's The new male (1979) —"...calls for fathers to be more involved with their children because of the enriching effects such involvement will have on men's own lives" (p. 102).

Lamb and Oppenheim (1989) suggest that much of the evidence concerning fatherhood is journalistic in nature, not really taking into account how these men are actually involved. More specifically, Bradley (1985) writes that although we are beginning to understand the involvement that fathers have with their infants, there has not been significant attention paid to the feelings, behavior, and attitudes of fathers of school-age children. Ishii-Kuntz (1994) warns that American men may be less active in child care than the popular culture would have us believe, creating a 'gap between culture and conduct' of fathers (p. 31). This study attempts to close this gap by gaining an understanding of fathers' realities from the fathers' perspective.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn about fathers' perceptions regarding their role in the education of their young children, and how these perceptions manifest themselves in their participation in their children's kindergarten education. The proposed study will build upon the minimal research on fathers' participation in their children's education.

The benefits of exploring how and why fathers are involved with their kindergartners' education are numerous. Families, schools, and communities all have a vested interest in the development of the educational interaction between fathers and their children. Through a greater understanding, families and educators will have information needed to create an atmosphere conducive to paternal involvement in their children's education.

One of the most important elements of this study is the effect that paternal involvement has on the **father**. Dienhart (1998) asks similar questions such as "What do men experience as the joys and challenges of taking active and full participatory presence in family life? What can men tell us about the benefits to themselves and their families when they are involved and active in the emotional, as well as instrumental, aspects of family life?" (p. ix). My purpose, although more specific to the educational environment, grows from the same curiosity. Like Carolyn Lareau (1996), my "concerns do *not* center on the relationship between parent involvement and children's achievement noted by so many" (p. 57). Lewis and O'Brien (1987, p. 1) note several studies that have suggested the recent shift from the influence the father has on his children's development to the "personal experience of fatherhood itself" (Beail and McGuire, 1982; Hanson and Bozett, 1985; Jackson, 1984; Lamb, 1986a; Lewis, C., 1986a; Lewis and Salt, 1986; McKee and O'Brien, 1982). Most studies in this area have focused on the social, cognitive, and emotional effects that fathers have on their children. These studies attempted to measure the relationship between the amount of father involvement and some variable of academic achievement or social adjustment. Earlier research on fathers focused mostly on absent fathers or the 'deficit factor' – what happens when fathers are unavailable, inaccessible, etc... (Holland, 1995). This body of research has utilized quantitative methodologies which have not been able to capture the feelings and perceptions that fathers experience in regards to their pedagogical role. However, I agree with Hawkins and Dollahoite that we must move beyond these models and acknowledge the fact that fathers have the "desire, ability, and sense of obligation to care effectively for the next generation" (cited

in Dienhart, p. 4). Marsiglio (1995) suggests that qualitative studies are needed in order to understand the socioemotional aspects of fathers' experiences and processes that affect fathers' roles within the context of their identity.

Holland (1995) cites research that shows that a father's style and his degree of involvement in child rearing is largely determined by the individual father's perception of his role as well as encouragement from outside influences (Barnett & Baruch, 1988; Palm & Palkovitz, 1988; Cowan & Cowan, 1988). For example, a father's perception about the 'masculine male role' may affect their fatherhood experiences if they are responsive to society's expectations of them as men.

This study will seek to identify the meanings that the participating men assign to their interaction and participation in their children's educational lives. The initial research questions that will guide this study include:

1. How do fathers perceive their role in the education of their kindergarten children?
2. What accounts for these perceptions?
3. Where do fathers participate with their kindergarten children?
4. What kinds of teaching and learning activities characterize this participation?
5. What similarities and/or differences exist between fathers' in their involvement in their children's education?
6. How do pedagogical interactions with their children affect fathers?

Maxwell (1996) advises that the research questions should remain "sensitive and adaptable" to the context of the research in order to do justice to the "interactive and inductive nature of qualitative research" (p. 49). These initial questions will guide the study but it is anticipated that other questions will emerge as the research is conducted.

Organization of and Timetable for the Study

This paper is organized into six chapters. Chapter One is an introduction to the study which includes some historical background on the changing roles of fathers as well as the research questions which guided the study. This chapter also outlines the purpose of and need for the study. Chapter Two provides some relative theoretical and research background which supports this project. Chapter Three contains an explanation of the methodological paradigm used and includes processes for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. This chapter also provides some background on qualitative family research in general. Chapter Four is a description of the environment in which the research takes place and the biographical data of the participants whose stories are told. In qualitative research, the presentation of data and discussion are often presented simultaneously. I do this in chapter Five, which is the longest chapter. Chapter Six is comprised of some thematic summaries, my reflections, and possible implications.

Request for authorization to conduct this study began in June of 1998 with application to the Institutional Review Board for approval to use human subjects. Approval was granted in August of 1998. During the IRB review process, I obtained

permission from the requisite superintendent, principal, and teacher to conduct the study using their facilities. At the end of August, 1998, I was engaged in contacting possible participants for the study. When approval was granted by both the IRB and the prospectus was approved by my doctoral committee in early September of 1998, I began collecting data. The data collection process lasted from September 1st through December 18th, 1998. During this time I scheduled and conducted interviews and observed participants engaged in school events. Writing of the dissertation lasted from January until April 30th, 1999.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

"Children share with genius an open, inquiring uninhibited quality of mind."
--Chauncey Guy Suits

The Father's Role in Child Development

An emerging theme in recent research is the attempt to "capture new images that connote the multifaceted, complex, and diverse images of men in families" (Dienhart, 1998, p. 23). Researchers, theorists, and professionals from many disciplines have become interested in fathers. The fields of nursing, medicine, social work, sociology, psychology, anthropology, education, and family sciences have all contributed to the literature on this topic (Hanson & Bozett, 1987). Because of my holistic view of the father-child relationship, I believe that studies from many disciplines can inform this research. Although this study will focus on fathers' pedagogical experiences with their children and the fathers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding these experiences, research from the aforementioned collateral fields provides a strong foundation.

Theoretical Constructs

Several theoretical constructs provide support for this study. These perspectives provide a starting point for understanding men and their perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding fatherhood.

A social constructionist perspective provides a framework for studying the historical development of the perceptions and ideals of fatherhood. The images of fatherhood vary according to socio-historical context, culture, and social background (i.e., race, class) (Marsiglio, 1993). Social factors shape the cultural meanings of fatherhood. LaRossa (1988) suggests that current cultural expectations of the "good father" are not consistent with fathers' actual behaviors. Furstenberg (1988) writes that the "good dad—bad dad" dichotomy has been precipitated by the change in family labor roles. The public has been inundated by the competing images of fatherhood—the involved, nurturing father versus the uninvolved father who ignores his paternal obligations. Furstenburg's hypothesis of fatherhood images raises an important point. Depending on which norms, values, and beliefs a father adopts as the ideal model for fatherhood, e.g., the nurturing father, these factors will affect his evaluation of himself as a father.

Identity theory maintains that the individual's sense of self consists of self-perceptions which have been formed through interactions with others in role relationships. This is relevant to fathers and their involvement with their children in that the level of such involvement will be determined by the role with which father identifies himself (Marsiglio, 1993).

Hawkins et al. (1993) conceptualize fatherhood in a context of adult development and social learning theory. According to Cowan and Cowan (1987), a developmental transition involves a qualitative shift in how one perceives the world and oneself and these perceptions become observable to others. Bronfenbrenner suggests that fathers' participation in child care consists of a dyadic interaction between fathers and children

and this creates a developmental force. Much attention has been given to how the child develops but when one part of the dyad develops, so does the other (cited in Hawkins, 1993). Erikson's theory of human development posits that fathers develop a sense of "generativity"— that fathers develop a skill of caring for younger generations. This occurs when parents widen their commitment beyond the self to nurture one's own children and their environment. Snarey (1993) has conducted multigenerational research which examines father-child interaction through the Eriksonian perspective. Cited by Dienhart (1998), Snarey concludes that playing games, going on outings, providing enrichment lessons, teaching athletic skills, make significant contributions to children's development. Mackey (1996, p. 130) writes that "When men abandon the upbringing of their children to their wives, a loss is suffered by everyone, but perhaps most of all by themselves for what they lose is the possibility of growth in themselves for being human which the stimulation of bringing up one's children gives" (citing Montagu).

Markus and Nurius explain, in their concept of 'possible selves,' that people have an idea of themselves as they would like to become. If a father's ideal is to be involved with his children, he may engage in behaviors that coincide with this perception (Hawkins et al., 1993). LaRossa (1988) adds that fathers have an intrinsic ideal of being involved in their children's lives, or are by the changing culture of fatherhood that stresses greater paternal involvement, may embrace the role that is consistent with their perception of the ideal father. Ishii-Kuntz (1994) conducted a cross-cultural study on fathers' roles which found that fathers who interact with their children, such as talking and eating meals see themselves as understanding and emotionally close.

According to social learning theory, children's cognitive development is facilitated by fathers who are available and nurturant (Bandura, 1986). Children learn by observing their fathers and modeling their problem-solving strategies, vocabulary, and other behaviors. Parke (1996) cites Biller and Hetherington who write that from social learning theory comes a modeling hypothesis which suggests that men model themselves after their fathers. Men are thought to learn their fathering skills and attitudes from their own fathers. A number of studies suggest that positive relationships with fathers in childhood are related to higher levels of involvement as fathers later on. A compensatory or reworking hypothesis argues that fathers for deficiencies in their childhood relationships with their own fathers by becoming better and more involved when they become fathers. Support for this hypothesis is also evident in both classic studies and more recent reports. Baruch and Barnett (1986) found that men who reported negative relationships with their fathers tended to be more involved with their 5 and 9-year-old children (cited in Parke, 1996.)

Krampe and Fairweather (1993) have developed the concept of "father presence" which is defined as an awareness that fathers have of the importance of "father" for themselves as individuals and for their children. The expression of father presence is formed by their "inner sense of father." This conceptualization is based on the assumption that biological fatherhood cannot be replaced. This theory is different from most involving fatherhood in that it emphasizes the importance of biology, as opposed to environmentally-based theories.

Parent-Child Interaction

Most researchers agree that fathers, in general, interact with their children differently than do mothers. Men are not inherently deficient in their ability to parent; in fact, their qualities as a parent are far more important than their gender in influencing child development (Lamb, 1987; Russell, 1986). Much research has sought to find the factors that account for fathers' level of involvement with their children in different things like reading, doing projects, and engaging in conversations.

Marsiglio (1993) comments that paternal involvement is sometimes seen from an enabling as well as a constraining perspective and that paternal involvement is both socially patterned and individually created. Social processes affect the opportunities and constraints that fathers face as they interact in context. Although the social processes are powerful, they are not determinant. Individual fathers can and do challenge the social patterns that are acting upon them. The relationship a father has with his partner may also influence his perception of his role as father. A spouse's expectations and beliefs can affect the level of involvement a father takes with his children (Marsiglio, 1993).

Pleck et al. (1986) have categorized paternal involvement into three forms. Engagement is defined as one-on-one interaction with the child; accessibility requires that the parent be available if the child needs him; and responsibility which refers to the management or accountability of the day-to-day welfare of the child. I believe that involvement in a child's education is a cross-section of all three of these categories.

Lamb (1986) theorizes that there are four factors which influence the father's involvement with his children. The first of these is personal motivation which is the

extent to which a father wants to be involved with his children. Survey data by Quinn and Staines (as cited by Lamb et al., 1987) show that 40% of fathers would like to spend more time with their children if more time was available which implies that many men want to be involved. Thirdly, self-confidence and skills are often barriers for increased involvement, even with motivated fathers. "The goal should be to develop a sense of self-confidence so that fathers come to enjoy being with their children and come to feel increasingly self-confident. Once fathers realize that their children really are fun, absolutely adore them, and do not generate an endless succession of embarrassing crises, they will be willing to expand the range of activities and contests in which fathers and children successfully function together" (Lamb, 1986, p.19). Social support is the third factor that influences paternal involvement, especially family support. The Quinn and Staines survey (cited above) showed that between 60% and 80% of the women **did not** want their husbands to become more involved. Lamb theorizes that the mother does not want to give up one of the areas in which she has control. Even with women playing a greater role in the work place outside the home, women's views on paternal involvement have not changed much over the years. The fourth influence on paternal involvement is institutional policies and practices. "The needs of families for economic support and the barriers imposed by the workplace rank among the most important reason given by fathers to explain low levels of paternal involvement" (citing Yankelovitch, 1974).

Clearly, this is an important issue for many men, and it will remain important as long as males are expected to assume the primary breadwinning role. It is also true, however, that men do not trade off work time for family time in a one-to-one fashion.

Lamb (1986) cites Pleck's survey data which shows that women translate each extra hour of non-work time into an extra 40 to 45 minutes of family work, whereas for men, each hour not spent in paid work translates into less than 20 minutes of family work. Thus, while the pressures of work have a significant effect on parental involvement, the effects on men and women are somewhat different. Being at work does reduce the amount of time that fathers can spend with their children; even when they have time available, they spend only a small portion of it with their children (Lamb, 1986).

Marsiglio (1991) writes that some possible factors related to fathers' levels of involvement are their gender role attitudes, educational background and employment situations. Fathers who have internalized parenting norms that support a high level of participation in their children's lives will be more likely to play an active role. Fathers with high levels of education will be more motivated to engage in educational activities with their children like reading and homework.

The Mother

One element of the proposed research project is the dynamic that the wife/mother introduces into the father's role. Haas (1988) argues that women can serve as 'gatekeepers' in terms of allowing fathers access to the children. Fathers' type and level of interaction is explicitly and implicitly negotiated between partners. Interestingly, research indicates that the mother's characteristics are more strongly correlated with fathers' involvement than those characteristics of the father (citing Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Haas, 1988; Radin, 1988)! In Marsiglio's study (1991) on paternal engagement

activities, he concluded that fathers will follow the leads of their spouses in involvement with their children. This may, in fact, extend into the educational environment such as participation in school activities. Marsiglio brings an interesting interpretation to the results of his study. He theorizes that fathers' involvement can be broken down into two basic types—responsibility and engagement. He suggests that some fathers may be so busy with the responsibility aspects of childrearing that it may inhibit them from participating in engagement activities with their children.

Fathers' Feelings

One of the purposes of the proposed study is to understand how the fathers are affected by their participation in their child's educational lives. Mackey (1996) asks some interesting questions. "Why are the men with their children at all? What do they get out of their efforts? What is the trade-off of their expenditure of time, energy, and resources? What incentives pull them to fathering? What disincentives push them in the opposite direction?" (pp. ix-x).

Holland (1995) found several words used by the fathers to describe fatherhood: sensational, fantastic, wonderful , emotionally and socially rewarding, frustrating discouraging. He writes that men describe fatherhood as giving them deep commitment and satisfaction in being a parent as well as uncertainty and varying degrees of confusion. Holland also cites La Rossa who suggests an 'asynchrony' between the culture and a father's attempt to realize his full potential in a shared parenting relationship.

Lamb, et al. (1985) suggest a very interesting theory about why children with highly involved fathers display increased cognitive competence, increased empathy, less sex-stereotyped beliefs, and a better internal locus of control. He proposes three factors responsible for these effects. Because the parents assume less sex-stereotyped roles, their children adopt less sex-stereotyped attitudes about male and female roles. Children may benefit from having two highly involved parents rather than just one which offers them the diversity of stimulation that comes from interacting with parents with different behavioral styles. A third important issue has to do with the family context in which these children are raised. High paternal involvement makes it possible for both parents to do what is subjectively important to them. It allows fathers to satisfy a desire to become close to their children while allowing mothers to have close relationships with their children while also being involved in the pursuit of important career goals. The studies reviewed by Lamb showed increased paternal involvement in the families may have made both parents feel much more fulfilled. Consequently, it is likely that the relationships were much warmer and much richer between parent and child. They conclude that "...the positive outcomes obtained by children with highly involved fathers are largely attributable to the fact that the fathers' involvement created a family context in which parents felt good about their marriages and the arrangements they had been able to work out" (Lamb, 1986, p. 16).

Parke (as cited in Russell, 1982) has argued that parental behavior is mediated by their beliefs. These beliefs might affect the way parents perceive their role toward their children. "It may be that parents' decisions to adopt a nontraditional life-style are linked

to their *beliefs* about the underlying bases of the differences in parental roles, and that it is this cognitive component that mediates the change" (p. 148). Parke (1996) writes that "the role of the father is multiply determined, and many factors need to be considered in order to make sense of variations in fathers' involvement. Fathers do not simply decide to be involved or uninvolved; rather, their participation in family routines evolves out of a system of influences" (p. 77).

In a study by Russell (1982), 93% of the parents in non-traditional families (where fathers shared child care-giving) said that the major benefit for fathers and children was improved father-child relationship. Fathers thought they had personally gained and that through their increased understanding of the role of care-giver, their involvement had an impact on their personal development. Aldous (as cited in Sagi, 1982) suggests that when a person takes on a family role that deviates from the norm, he or she needs to "maintain a high level of self-esteem, independence, and ability to control his or her situation..." (p. 215). "It has been shown previously that the highly involved father is pleased with his situation, and it is of interest to see to what extent this paternal satisfaction affects his development and that of the child" (Sagi, 1982, p. 218). Sagi (1982) cites a study conducted by Heath that found that "fatherhood may enhance a man's maturity, his self-awareness, his familial relationships, and the acceptance and integration of his emotional needs." He argues that the "...positive contributions to the father himself forms the basis for tolerance with his children, for self-control, and for communication of emotions" (p. 218).

Russell (1980) showed that fathers who were involved with their child added another dimension to their lives. Lamb's (1982) analysis shows that satisfaction with parenthood may help the father to be more responsive and sensitive to his children. They increase their identification with them. The potentially broad influence comes from an intrinsic integrative capacity that non-traditional fathers have less stereotypic paternal behavior. Hoffman (cited in Sagi, 1982) found that more involved fathers cause a higher level of moral maturity and Lamb (1981) concluded that sensitive and warm fathers help the child develop social competence and interpersonal relationships. Russell and Radin (1983) cite findings from several studies (Gronseth, 1978; Hood & Golden, 1979; Kelley, 1981; Radin, 1982; Russell, 1982a) that suggest increased participation brings fathers closer to their children and has a positive effect on the fathers themselves as well as mothers. Louv (1994) writes that "As men work toward redefining what fatherhood means, they need to call upon all their talents and capacities and hopes...Although these instincts are common to virtually all fathers, men are only beginning to find the words to describe what fatherhood makes them feel" (Mackey 1996, p. 128).

Social Constraints

An issue for increased paternal participation is the father's male identity. Griswold (1993) writes that the image of the 'new father' is shaped by men who believe that caring for their children is "...less the sign of a wimp than a public symbol of their commitment to a more refined, progressive set of values than those held by working-class men still imprisoned by outdated ideas of masculinity" (p. 254). Another barrier for

fathers' involvement is that cultural stereotypes of masculinity do not include nurturant or care-giving behavior (citing Levine, 1976; Pleck & Sawyer, 1974; Russell, 1978). It could be that men feel this role is a threat to their masculinity. Russell and Radin (1983) state that "the way in which fathers define their roles, together with the beliefs that are held and socially sanctioned...[and] are likely to be critical factors in the process of role adoption" (p. 156). They continue that the attitude of our culture concerning roles for males and females accounts for many differences in levels of involvement in caregiving between mothers and fathers (Parke, 1996).

Mackey's research (1996) was an anthropological look at many cultures and how dads fit in with regards to raising their children. What they found, among other things, was that "When social constraints were lifted, men systematically increased their levels of association with their children..." (p. 83). Pruett (1987) believes that men do not have the social support network for fathering as do women for mothering. Fathers "have had neither the socialization nor the practice—much less the role models..." to help them learn how to nurture children. "...most back away silently and compliantly, though often longingly, seeking comfort and praise instead for doing what they are *supposed* to do: working, making money, providing, protecting, being responsible, toughening up, and, in general, adhering to the established canons of masculinity" (p. 16). Unless shifts occur in cultural messages to men regarding the appropriateness of their involvement with their children, meaningful increases in such activities are unlikely to take place.

Research was not found that supports the belief that fathers do not have the same sensitivity that mothers have, nor that fathers do not have the capacity to assume the daily

responsibility for raising his children. "On the contrary, studies show that fathers can be just as sensitive and competent as mothers" (Russell & Radin, 1983, p. 156). Parke (1996) has defended the sociological importance of fathers against anthropologists like Margaret Mead.

> Fathers are no longer, if they ever were, merely a biological necessity—a social accident. They are an important influence on children's development. And a close relationship between father an child benefits the father as well as the child. Children need their fathers, but fathers need their children, too (p. 257)

Rotundo (1985) describes a good father: " 'an active participant in the details of day-to-day child care. He involves himself in a more expressive and intimate way with this children and he plays a larger part in the socialization process that his male forebears had long since abandoned to their wives" (as cited in Parke, p. 115).

The involvement of fathers in the lives of their children is a complex matter with no single factor accounting for differences in individual fathers. The individual characteristics of the children and fathers themselves, along with families, institutions, and culture all play a role in helping us understand why some dads are more involved with their children than others. (Parke, 1996).

In 1913, there was a man in Council Bluffs, Iowa who persuaded thirty of his male friends to come by the local school to discuss their involvement in their children's education. "[H]ow much do you know about your own children, much less other people's children?' he inquired of the men. '[A]nd how much do you know or care about the schools where those children's whole future lives are being shaped?" (LaRossa, 1997, p. 91). These questions are still relevant today.

Effects of Involvement

Blanchard and Biller (1971) conducted a study to assess father availability and its effect on children's achievement in school. They controlled for intelligence, birth order, socioeconomic status and maternal employment. Children whose father's had a high level of presence received superior grades, did better on achievement tests, and were more likely to actualize their intellectual potential. The findings suggested that involved fathers can help their children's academic performance. The researchers concluded that highly available fathers provide a "model of perseverance and achievement motivation" (p. 304).

Parke (1996) asks, "How do fathers, as one of the environmental factors influence children's intelligence, contribute to their children's intellectual growth? Fathers can affect how well their children progress in school, which subjects they prefer, and even the kinds of occupations they choose. Whether a child prefers reading and hates math or aspires to be a physicist or an engineer rather than a book critic or a historian is affected

by the father's attitudes, encouragement, and other behavior" (p. 156). Amundson (1988) notes that parents with high educational aspirations for their children are more likely to provide learning experiences before the children ever start their formal education.

One element of this study is to understand the affect that involvement has on the father. Amundson (1988) writes that parents who become more involved in their children's education become more active in community events. They increased their own self confidence, had a more positive self-image, appeared more satisfied, had a greater sense of internal locus of control. Urie Bronfenbrenner, who research helped start the Head Start program found that not only do parents become more effective as parents, but they become more effective as people because they develop higher self-esteem.

A U.S. Department of Education report (1994) describes the salience of fathers in their children's lives at home and at school. The evidence is now overwhelming that parents' active participation in their children's education improves student achievement and increases public support for schools (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Amundson, 1988). Epstein (1990) cites numerous research studies on family environment that shows that children have advantages when their parents encourage and support school activities (Coleman et al., 1966; Clausen, 1966; Epstein and McPartland, 1979; Epstein, 1983; Heyns, 1978; Leichter, 1974; Marjoribanks, 1979; Mayeske, 1973; McDill and Rigsby, 1973). The research suggests that students do better in academic work and have more positive attitudes about school if their parents are involved in their school lives. NIE (National Institute of Education) funded a study by Becher (1984) who found that children with higher scores in achievement, competence, intelligence had parents who

held higher educational expectations and aspirations for their children than did the lower scoring children. These same parents provided more academic guidance, and exhibited a higher level of general interest in their children. Gigliotti and Brookover conducted studies which factored out socio-economic status, size, and geographic locale and found that parent participation was critical in determining the success of schools regardless of the income level of the parents (Amundson, 1988).

There is a body of work (cited in U.S. DOE, 1994) suggesting that fathers have significant influence, particularly for sons, on cognitive and socioemotional development (Williams, et al, 1996, Gottfried et al., 1988; Hoffman, 1989; Austin & Braeger, 1990; Kromelow, Harding, & Touris, 1990; Parke & Swain, 1975; Radin, 1981,1986; Lamb, 1976, 1981; Biller, 1971, 1974; Parke, 1979; Pedersen, 1980; and Staples, 1978). A study by Nietfeldt (1984) showed that 4-year old boys from homes with a high degree of father participation in child care were better socially adjusted than those from homes with low degree of father participation.

Biller and Kimpton (1997) assert the importance of fathers participation in their children's education:

> At the age when a child starts kindergarten, "The child is acquiring a tremendous amount of experience in dealing with different and progressively more challenging social situations. The support of a positively involved father can contribute much to the child's emotional security, confidence, and adaptability in meeting more complex intellectual, physical, and social challenges. Children with active, nurturant, and committed fathers are generally much more successful in their academic, athletic, and social pursuits and have higher self-esteem than do those who have been paternally deprived (Biller, 1993; Biller & Trotter, 1994; Warshak, 1993) (p. 144).

Parent-School Connection

The most likely points of ongoing institutional contact for fathers and their children are child care centers, kindergartens, preschools, and schools and it is important that they become aware of the desire and capacity of fathers to be involved and competent parents (Holland, 1995). Several studies (Baker & Davidson, 1986; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Dauber & Epstein, 1989; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Rich, 1985) show that parents want to be more involved with their children's education and desire help from the schools to become more actively involved (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

Giveans and Robinson (1985) paint a picture of the superficial recognition that fathers get in regards to the early childhood learning environment. Most letters home from school start 'Dear Mother,' father is often left off of bulletin boards and curriculum materials (except for Father's day), he is sometimes seen at evening parents meetings or transporting his children to and from school. The school environment contributes to the participatory fathers' isolation, resentment, and sometimes ostracism by female teachers and mothers. "A father's presence is often met with stereotypic... suspicions such as, 'Why isn't he working?' or 'What is a man doing here with those children?' [or my favorite,] 'Do you think he could help us move all the chairs?'" (p. 131).

Giveans and Robinson (1985) retell Clay's depiction of the father in the school:

> Since fathers do not usually see other men participating in a preschool classroom, they might feel there is no place for them with the children. There are very few models of men interacting with children who are not their own. Fathers may also feel uncomfortable surrounded by teachers who

> are women. One father in our school showed discomfort even when walking through the room at lunch to pick up his son (p. 131).

Schools are increasingly changing their practices concerning family involvement by conducting programs that help families become 'knowledgeable partners' in their children's education (Epstein, 1990). For most fathers, presence in the school building occurs less frequently than other types of involvement. Pruett (1987) states that the education of children begins with "getting fathers into the learning places, and getting them there early... In addition, fathers and fathering have to become part of the curriculum and daily context of the classroom itself. Fathers must be present in the classroom as educators, especially in the critical primary and elementary grades where male teachers are often found only in the gym or principal's office" (p. 291). Klinman (1986) suggests that efforts by schools to get fathers into the school are not always effective. Although strategies such as scheduling special father's visitation events on evenings or weekends and including them in activities that are assumed to be of special interest to men get them into the classroom once or twice a year, they do little to "change the ongoing learning context" (p. 20).

Biller (1993) notes that mothers are usually the parents that deal with the school. They are the ones who communicate concerns they may have and mothers are the ones who are contacted by the teacher if there is a problem. The school is oriented toward dealing with mothers. Parents communicate values about school and learning to their children and these attitudes in turn help determine and shape children's attitudes (Sattes,

1989). It is important for fathers to show consistent support, interest, and encouragement for their children's day-to-day school related activities.

A 1987 Metropolitan Life Survey that focused on strengthening home-school links showed that many parents (63%) felt that "Our school only contacts parents when there is a problem with their child" (Amundson, 1988). Others (22%) agreed that "Our school does not give parents the opportunity for any meaningful roles."

American parents are not as involved as parents in some other countries. One study reported in Working Mother the results of questions asked of mothers in both the United States and in Japan. The mothers were asked to rank the importance of luck, ability, effort, and task difficulty as determiners of their child's success. Mothers in the United States said ability was the key whereas mothers in Japan said effort was the main ingredient. Marc Tucker of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy believes that if a parent thinks natural ability is the principal source of their child's achievement, he doesn't have to do much—like paying attention to curriculum content, or how much TV the children watch, or what demands you make on them, or how much support you give (Amundson, 1988). Epstein notes that in one survey in the Encyclopedia of School Administration and Supervision, over one-third of the parents reported they had no conference with the teacher during the year. Almost two-thirds never talked with a teacher by phone. Although most teachers (over 95 percent) reported that they communicate with parents of their students, most parents said they were not involved in deep, detailed, or frequent communications with teachers about their child's program or progress (Amundson, 1988).

Models for Analysis

Epstein (1990) suggests a typology of five major types of parental involvement when thinking about school and family relationships. Type 1 is the basic obligations of parents which refers to health and safety, supervision, discipline, and providing positive home conditions. Type 2 is the basic obligations of the school which refers mainly to communications from school to home informing parents of their children's progress. Type 3 of Epstein's typology is parent involvement at school which includes classroom assistance and attendance at performances or athletic events. Type 4 is the parent involvement in learning activities at home which of course includes help with homework. Type 5 is parent involvement in governance and advocacy. This kind of involvement would include any decision-making roles played by parents such as PTO memberships and committees.

Sattes (1989) writes that parent involvement can come in the form of teacher, supporter, or reinforcer of learning activities, all of which can affect student achievement. As teacher, the parent can provide direct instruction to the child as a primary source of learning which can supplement school-based learning as well as work parallel with it. An example of a reinforcement system is home-based contingency where parents use incentives and discipline measures to reinforce behaviors at school.

Eccles and Harold (1996) have developed a model that provides a framework for analyzing the dynamic processes that affect parents' involvement in their children's education. They believe that several parent/family characteristics play an important part in a parent's involvement in his or her child's education.

Social and psychological resources available to the parent (e.g., social networks, social demands on one's time, parents' general mental and physical health, neighborhood resources, and parents' general coping strategies).

Parents' efficacy beliefs (e.g., parents' confidence that they can help their child with schoolwork, parents' view of how their competence to help their children with schoolwork changes as the children enter high school grades and encounter more specialized subject areas, and parents' confidence that they can have an impact on the school by participating in school governance).

Parents' perceptions of their child (e.g., parents' confidence in their child's academic abilities, parents' perceptions of the child's receptivity to help from their parents, parents' educational and occupational expectations and aspirations for the child, and parents' view of the options actually available for their child in the present and the future).

Parents' assumptions about both their role in their children's education and the role of educational achievement of their child (e.g., what role the parents would like to play in their children's education, how they think this role should change as the children get older, how important they believe participation in school governance is, and what they believe are the benefits to their children doing well in school and having parents who are highly involved at their children's school).

Parents' attitude toward the school (e.g., what role they believe the school wants them to play, how receptive they think the school is to their involvement both at home and at school, the extent to which they think the school is sympathetic to their child and to their situation, their previous history of negative and positive experiences at school, their belief that teachers only call them in to give them bad news about their child or to blame them for problems their children are having at school versus a belief that the teachers and other school personnel want to work with them to help their child).

Parents' ethnic, religious, and/or cultural identities (e.g., the extent to which ethnicity, religious, and/or cultural heritage are critical aspects of the parents' identity and socialization goals, the relationship between the parents conceptualization of their ethnic, religious, and/or cultural identities and their attitudes toward parent involvement and school achievement, and the extent to which they think the school supports them in helping their children learn about their ethnic, religious, and/or cultural heritage).

> Parents' general socialization practices (e.g., how does the parent usually handle discipline and issues of control versus autonomy, and how does the parent usually manage the experiences of their children).
>
> Parents' history of involvement in their children's education (e.g., parents begin accumulating experiences with the school as soon as their children begin their formal education. Parents have also had their own experiences with schools as they grow up. These experiences undoubtedly affect parents' attitudes toward and interest in involvement with their children's schools and teachers), (p. 7).

Kellaghan, et al. (1993) suggest a 3-tier model of parental involvement similar to the more elaborative one above. They characterize participation as either proximal, intermediate, or distal. Proximal describes direct interaction with the child such as helping with school learning or helping in the classroom. Intermediate participation is characterized by communication with the school or teacher, assistance with non-instructional activities such as field trips and library work. Distal involvement concerns a more indirect participation in the education of the child such as the basic provision for health and general well-being of the child, participation in a parent education class, or attendance at a parent-teacher organizational meeting.

Lareau (1996), a detractor of the Eccles and Harold model, analyzes parental involvement from a sociological point of view and makes three arguments. The first is that social class differences can determine what a parent means when he reports that he wants to be helpful. Secondly, Lareau suggests that there are severe conflicts over childrearing practices such as how to solve social conflict. And thirdly, class differences in social networks impact family-school relationships. She conducted an ethnographic

study in which the researchers observed the children in their classrooms, held 2-hour interviews with a parent, and observed the families at home for a total of 60 hours over a period of a month. One of her conclusions is that social class helps to shape the role that parents take when participating in the home-school connection. The story of one participant from Lareau's study illustrates the point, that of a White working-class mother of a fifth-grader who is having difficulty in reading:

> Her mother is aware of her school difficulties. She sees herself as a concerned parent. She went to school for back-to-school night and complained to me that there were only two parents there out of the 13 children in the class. She sees herself as a helpful and involved parent. She says, 'They know they can always call me.' Yet her notion of involvement involves carefully watching educator activities but not criticizing, initiating, or intervening. In short, she does not and, I believe, will not comply with the standard of 'collaborating' with the school (p. 59).

Lareau states that there is a disparity in the definitions of what parents mean by being involved. The mother already believes she is more involved than are other parents in the class. Thus, Lareau concluded that social class has a profound effect on what parents believe is their responsibility when it comes to helping their children in school.

Most parents help their children with homework but they do not know if they are doing the right things (Epstein, 1990). Sattes (1989) draws a logical conclusion from the research that if parents have access to information they need (e.g., spelling list) and know how they can help (e.g., read the words and have the child write them), they can participate at a more meaningful level. Epstein (1990) also cites research supporting the

fact that most parents do not participate in their children's school activities in the school building (Bauch, 1988; Comer, 1980; Dauber and Epstein, 1989; Dornbusch and Ritter, 198; Epstein, 1986; Leitch and Tangri, 1988). In one study, only 4% of the parents were active in the building 25 days or more each year and over 70% never volunteered (Epstein, 1986). Most working parents cannot come to the school during regular hours but are able to be involved in other ways. For example, single mothers and working mothers are less likely to volunteer at the school than other parents, but are more likely to be involved with school activities at home.

In a poll by Instructor magazine, the one thing teachers answered most frequently about what could improve learning was 'more parental involvement.' More important than smaller classes, increased control for teachers, promoting student responsibility, and decreasing television viewing time for students (Amundson, 1988). In Henderson's (1987) summary of nearly 50 studies of parental involvement she writes that children whose parents who are in touch with school and help them at home do better than those children with the same aptitude whose parents are uninvolved. Finn (1998) emphasizes that the empirical data shows us that school achievement is related to specific parenting practices like helping with homework, discussing school matters with the child, and reading with the child. Comer adds that by involving themselves in the educational environments of their children such as school, they serve as important role models. The children view their parents as active learners when they participate in school events, and the children internalize these attitudes and values (cited in Haynes & Ben-Avie, 1996).

Some Stories

Fathers are engaged with their children in many different ways. Some of these reflect a pro-active attitude toward learning and development.

Ortiz (1994) writes of a father who tells this story:

> When driving to her grandma's house, my daughter will ask what street she (grandmother) lives on. I tell her to look for Pioneer Street and then ask her what letter does the word start with. I also ask that she try and spell the word. She will spell the word so that when we come to the street she recognizes the sign and lets me know we're there. I do this with other signs or places we go to.

About another father-child interaction:

> On a recent trip to the beach, this father and daughter pair spent much of the time spelling words in the sand and repeating their meanings. 'I do these things with her so she can understand what she's asking about.'

Other fathers told about times when their children helped them take measurements and jotting down notes during home repairs and playing video games that required reading directions. "As parents, we must take every opportunity to instill in our children the belief that learning can and does occur beyond classroom walls" (Ortiz, p. 134). Some fathers took children to work, read magazines and job-related materials, helped them write letters to friends, encouraged them to read Bible passages during church. Some unplanned events arose from questions by children. One father said that he and his

daughter read and discussed billboards while they were driving. "The responses to the interview showed that fathers participated with their children in a myriad of early literacy activities embedded in daily life in and out of the home" (Ortiz, p. 131). Events were nightly storybook readings, homework assistance, library visits. One father thought that his participation in reading to his child was important for his academic and social development. Holland (1995) found that some fathers created ways to maximize time spent with their children such as transporting children to and from school. A father had this to say in a study by Dienhart (1998, p. 92):

> I think they learn a lot from play, and we always sort of are telling them about exercise being good for them and playing is good exercise, it makes you grow, it makes you strong and all that. So it's a really good thing to play...So I think aside from fun, I think they get, if we're with them, they sort of get a sense we're into what we're doing and they learn, they learn stuff, play is good. I guess everything for them is a learning experience. That's one thing we've noticed. We're not trying to teach them anything particularly, but just going around looking at stuff and saying, "Oh there's this or that" and you know the next time we drive by and Greg (child) will, 3 weeks later he goes—like we were driving to work one day and they go what's that thing on top of the church? I said it's a weather cock, and so we're driving by about 3 weeks later and Greg points at it and goes "There's a weather cock" and stuff like that. So they really seem to sponge everything in. So whether we're trying to or not, they're always sort of sucking it up. Absorbing.

Dienhart (1998) comments, "Hearing men talk about hanging out with their children, including their children in their daily comings and goings, I began to appreciate what they were saying about the myriad 'teachable moments' involved fathers have with their children. Charles described his appreciation for how children can learn in any

moment, especially moments when adults are available to share their experiences" (p. 92).

Efforts to include fathers in school-related activities "would have a substantive as well a symbolic value to the extent that they implicitly recognize that many children do have two parents and that both may be eager to participate in the child's education if given the opportunity" (Lamb, et al, 1983, p. 253).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

"You can do anything with children if you only play with them."
--Prince Otto von Bismarck

Paradigm Selection

Through this naturalistic study, I am attempting to learn about: 1) the perceptions that fathers have regarding their role in their kindergartners' early childhood education, 2) how those perceptions manifest themselves in pedagogical interactions with their kindergarten children and in other educationally-related activities, and 3) how their involvement/interaction with their children in this capacity makes them feel.

When deciding which methodology to adopt for this study, it became clear that the best way to understand these perceptions and interactions was through a qualitative paradigm. Thus, I allowed the research question to dictate the methodology instead of allowing the limitations and presuppositions of the positivist research tradition to constrain the study. Backett (1987) summarizes my general approach to the qualitative design by writing that the methodology should be guided by the data gathered from respondents' accounts and that emerging issues provide framework for subsequent interviews. Berg (1998) writes, "Qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and

their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth" (p. 7).

This study relies heavily upon the qualitative tradition of family research. Daly (1992) writes that "The family is a specialized area of study. Family phenomena are complex, subjective, and private. The study of families requires methods and perspectives tailored to this complexity and subjectivity" (p. vii). Daly (1992) explains the fit between the nature of qualitative methods and the need for holistic nature of family research:

> Qualitative methods are particularly amenable to the study of this unique social group. In keeping with Weber's (1947) *verstehen* tradition, qualitative methods are suited to understanding the meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences of family members. Consistent with the movement in family sociology challenging monolithic presentations of family structure and reality (Eichler, 1988), the versatility of qualitative methods is a good match for examining the diversity of family forms and experiences. With qualitative methods, the focus is not on identifying structural or demographic trends in families, but rather on the processes by which families create, sustain, and discuss their own family realities...Qualitative methods facilitate holistic studies of families (p. 4).

Participant Selection

The group of fathers that I studied was selected non-randomly and fits into the category that Patton calls 'purposeful sampling' or LeCompte and Preissle call 'criterion-based' sampling as noted in Maxwell (1996). This strategy suggests deliberately or

strategically selecting particular sources that can provide necessary information. Maxwell states that "Selecting those times, settings, and individuals that can provide you with the information that you need in order to answer your research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative sampling decisions" (p. 70). Safilios-Rothschild underscores the importance of selecting men as direct participants in studies of this nature by writing that, "Too often the behaviour and views of men as husbands and fathers have been ignored, inferred, or developed from women's accounts" (cited in Backett, 1987, p. 74). Richards et al., support this by saying:

> "Within the world of fatherhood research, other constraints and tensions have been apparent. In most studies in the 1970s and early 1980s there was an underlying rejection of the so-called mother-focused paradigm embedded in social scientific enquiry into familial relationships. It was noted that many conventional research practices tended to be centred on the mother. For instance, data about fathers were more than likely collected from mothers, who in turn were more often seen by investigators—fathers, like the investigators, were out at work" (cited in Lewis and O'Brien, p. 4)

Initially, I contacted the superintendent of the school district by telephone to introduce myself and request permission to conduct research in one of his schools. He showed interest and we met at his office during which time I explained in greater detail the purposes and parameters of the study. During this meeting I obtained his signature on the requisite human subjects consent form as designated by the Institutional Review Board of the university. Because an openness and cooperative atmosphere is important for the qualitative study, I asked if he could recommend an elementary school in his

district which would provide such a supportive environment. The superintendent agreed to work on it, and in a two week period had arranged not only the school, but had talked with the principal about a kindergarten teacher who might be open to participation.

The superintendent provided me with the principal's home telephone number, since it was early August, and I called him at home soon thereafter. We met in his office at the school which was out for the Summer so there were few personnel in the building except for some teachers who wanted to get a jump on the new school year. After I explained what I wanted to learn about, the principal seemed eager to help with the study and told me that the participating kindergarten teacher was very enthusiastic and would be a pleasure to work with. He provided me with a tour of the school facilities and introduced me to the participating kindergarten teacher who was working in her room with some children involved in a special Summer program. I also obtained the principal's signature on the required forms.

That same day, I talked briefly with the participating teacher and her assistant who was also involved in the program and I explained the study to her and asked if she would be interested in helping me with the project. She was very enthusiastic and agreed to participate. Because I knew that she would be a major source of data and that I would want to interview her, I requested that she sign both a form for permission to conduct research in her room and an informed consent form outlining the parameters of the interview, how the data would be used, and her rights as a participant.

I contacted the prospective participants only after permission to conduct this study had been granted by the superintendent, the principal, and the classroom teacher. As well

as participating in the study, the teacher acted as an informant, a participant who could inform me of the inner workings of the culture, for the duration of the study. Her insight provided invaluable data which might not have been available otherwise. At my request, Linda provided a parent list of her students at the beginning of the school year which included contact information. This was available before school started since most students had pre-registered and had been assigned to their classrooms by that time. From this list, I sent out letters inviting parents to participate in the study (See Appendix H).

I mailed letters only to families where it was apparent from registration forms that there was a mother and a father living at home. The logistical reasons for this are evident. With a father in the home, scheduling interviews and meeting with both parents was made much easier. One assumption from which I was operating was that if the father was living with his wife and child, he would have more opportunity to interact with his child and thus create more opportunity for observation. From the original list of twenty kindergartners in Linda's room, three children were living with or were in the guardianship of grandparents. One child was living with just her mother and another student had recently transferred to another school. These five were eliminated as possible participants.

My first contact with the potential participants was through the mail. In August, before the school year started, I sent the invitation to participate letter out to the fifteen families that met the selection criteria. Great care was taken in crafting the letter so that the families felt comfortable in knowing that participation was entirely voluntary. First

contact through the mail allowed the individuals to think about the invitation without feeling pressured to participate.

A particular challenge faced by many qualitative researchers in the family setting is enlisting the help of men (Daly, 1992). I found this to be the case. After two weeks had elapsed, I had received only two replies which confirmed much of the literature that it was indeed difficult to recruit men for these kinds of studies. I followed up with a duplicate letter. On the day before school started, the kindergarten held a registration day. I attended and Linda introduced me to the parents as they entered and allowed me to explain the study and talk to small groups of parents as they arrived to register their children for school. I talked to many mothers who 'volunteered' their husbands in their absence. I asked these mothers if they would talk to their husbands about the study and that I would call them at home later that week. I made it a point to mention that participation was completely voluntary and explained exactly what would be going on. I explained that the study had been approved by the university, the superintendent, the principal, and that I would be working closely with the classroom teacher. It was important to me that the parents felt comfortable and at-ease with talking to me so that they could make an informed decision to participate or not. I made sure that that my presence was unobtrusive and tried to fit in with parents—even in the clothes that I wore. Although disappointed that some declined to participate, I was pleased that the parents knew that they could indeed choose to decline with no bad feelings.

After numerous follow-up phone calls, two waves of letters, and talking to some parents face-to-face at the school, of the fifteen possible participants, the breakdown was as follows:

2 declined to participate (unknown reasons)

2 seemed willing but could not due to time constraints

1 mother did not want her daughter involved

1 child had leukemia and was in and out of school

7 agreed to participate

2 never responded to any contact attempts

Of the seven pairs of parents, both the fathers and the mothers originally agreed to participate. However, one mother would never commit to an interview date and after several conversations with her on the telephone, it is my conclusion that she no longer wanted to participate. Another mother was only available one day a week—a day which presented a conflict for me. Due to time constraints for this study, these two mothers were not interviewed. I interviewed all seven fathers, five of their wives, and the classroom teacher.

From these responses, I contacted the participants by phone and arranged a time to meet with each set of parents individually in order to explain the study and obtain informed consent. I structured the study so that I would have a chance to meet with each participant several times before their interviews so they would get to know me as well.

During initial meetings, I told participants that I, too, was a 'kindergarten dad' and that was why I was interested in this topic.

The qualitative researcher depends on the openness and sharing of the lived experiences of the participants. From the writing of the invitation letter to the final 'thank you' for their participation, I was in a continuous state of what I call 'comfort awareness' to ensure the participants' trust in me and the process itself. I feel confident that I built a trusting relationship with the participants in the study which enabled them to speak freely about themselves, their beliefs, and their experiences as they perceived them.

Data Collection

To form a more complete picture of the fathers' experiences, perceptions, and feelings, I used several data collection techniques: observations, interviews, a focus group discussion, journal reviews, and document analysis. Daly (1992) supports the use of these data collection techniques.

> "A challenge for qualitative researchers is to enter the relatively closed and highly protected boundaries of families' experiences. Qualitative research, in comparison with more remote methods of data collection, allows for the construction of relationships with participants that gradually can build trust and rapport, and in turn, result in increasing accessibility to "backstage" family meanings. For example, unstructured interviews, observations, and diaries and letters allow participants to discuss their experiences in their own language, in their own natural setting, and according to their own comfort in disclosing. By offering to enter participants' life worlds, rather than imposing the formality of a survey or an experiment, qualitative researchers are in a good position to access the private meanings of families." p. 5

Observations

Observation enables the researcher to draw inferences about someone's perspective that could not be obtained from interview data alone (Maxwell, 1996). Observations conducted for this study took place during school events that allowed for parental (or specifically father) participation. These events included the back-to-school night, phase-in period for kindergarten (e.g., many kindergarten classes use the first two weeks of school to make kindergartners feel comfortable by having only a few come to school each day), parent/teacher conferences, PTO (parent-teacher organization) meetings, open houses, field trips, classroom learning, volunteer projects and other learning-related events.

For this study, I have defined 'learning events' very broadly in keeping with a holistic philosophy of teaching and learning—from reading with the kindergartner to attending a parent-teacher conference to spontaneous discussions about how the world works. Biller and Kimpton (1997, p. 54) suggest that a child can learn from his/her father in ways that might not be outwardly evident. They suggest that "by actively choosing to be involved, the father presents his child with an especially salient model of responsible behavior. (citing Radin & Russell, 1983). They continue:

> It is important to emphasize that children can learn from their fathers in many different contexts. Important lessons, for example, are garnered in situations focusing on social relationships and athletic endeavors as well as in the help a father may provide in more structured school-related pursuits. It is clear that interactions between different aspects of a child's development need to be viewed holistically. The father's involvement with his son or daughter in a variety of activities can be at least as significant in

> the child's cognitive development as classroom experiences (Biller, 1993; Biller & Trotter, 1994)" (p. 158).

From an anthropological perspective, Katz and Konner (1981) tell of the !Kung San (Bushmen) in Northwestern Botswana. The boys go on hunts with their fathers before they are allowed to conduct a hunt themselves. Information transfer on the hunts is observational learning instead of teaching.

As a qualitative researcher, my role was that of observer, however, there were occasions in which I acted as a participant-observer. I recorded the parent/teacher conferences, which of course allowed me to sit in close proximity to the parents and teacher during their discussion. Sometimes, the parents or teacher would ask a question or speak in my direction at which time I became part of the conference.

Journals

I asked the participating fathers to keep journals of their educational experiences with their children during the Fall of the school year. I encouraged them to write as much as possible about their thoughts, feelings, and interactions concerning their kindergarten child. Time diary methodology was introduced in the 1920's by home economists and adopted by sociologists in the late 1960's (Pleck, 1997). Journal writing is an excellent way to capture the participants' feelings during times in which interviews or observations are not possible. Throughout the data collection period, I collected the journals in order to read, make notes, and ask questions of the participants regarding their content. I was

aware that some fathers would feel more comfortable writing than others—not about content, but about the actual writing process. The education level of these participants varied greatly and my assumption was that the more formal education the father had, the more he would **write—not that he would have any more to say.** This proved true. In addition to providing a record of the pedagogical interaction that the fathers had with their children, the primary purpose of the journal-writing was to encourage the fathers to consciously think about their participation. One of my assumptions going into the study was that most fathers have not spent a great deal of time thinking about the activities in which they engage with their children and how they feel about such interaction. I found this to be true. I did ask each of the fathers if they had ever really thought about, much less talked about, their participation in their children's education. Most said they never had. And they most certainly had never written about it!

Interviews

Interviewing can be a valuable technique for eliciting additional information that was missed or was not available during observations and it is the best method for learning about beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. Maxwell (1996) suggests that the employment of observations and interviews can provide a more complete and accurate account than either could alone. I interviewed participant fathers at a mutually agreed upon time and place, in their homes, work places, and at the school depending upon where each participant felt most comfortable. The interviews lasted from thirty minutes to ninety

minutes depending on the interaction between researcher and participant as well as the comfort level of the interviewee.

The journal entries, mentioned above, provided a starting point for some of the interviews. Often questions were developed in reference to some of the comments made in the participant's journal. Their entries consisted of reflections on their educational participation, provided a departure point for elaboration. Due to the uncertainty of the fathers journal notations, the exact direction of the interviews could not be projected. Although some interview questions stemmed from the writings the fathers provided, general open-ended questions were designed to elicit conversation about their participation on the whole and to allow the participants the greatest amount of latitude for elaboration (see Appendix A).

I scheduled the interviews two or three months after the first contact with the participants in order to get to know the participants better and build a trusting relationship which are important elements in qualitative methodology. This afforded the opportunity to meet with the participants several times to ask 'how is the writing going?' and answer any other questions about the study. I could tell that their comfort level was increasing because during these pre-interview meetings and phone calls, they would inevitably start talking about their children!

Daly (1993) cites Cicourel noting that the non-directional interview format decreases the chance of 'passive-compliance' dialogue that comes from a highly structured format. I structured each interview so that the participant would feel comfortable opening up to me and sharing personal stories about themselves and their

children. Each interview was conducted face-to-face so that as much information as possible could be gathered about the participant's feelings and attitudes through gestures and expressions. Prior to turning on the tape recorder for each session, I explained the interview format to each participant. This was based on an assumption that these participants had not been involved in anything like this before. This assumption proved to be correct. I explained to each participant that my goal was to get them to talk as much as possible, and that the 'perfect' interview (and that it almost never happens) was one where I asked one question at the beginning, they talk for an hour, and then I say "Thank you!" In an attempt to initiate the conversation, I first asked about the types of learning activities in which they had been engaged with their children and moved into the more difficult topic of thoughts and feelings about their roles. So as not to interrupt the participants as they were narrating, I took brief notes about the topics that each participant touched on and returned to them after the interviewee had exhausted an idea. I then asked for elaboration on the topics that seemed to have more room expansion. The interviews were tape recorded so that the participants' exact words could be captured; this is of the utmost importance since a participant's feelings are often embedded in the text (see Appendix L for an example of the participant interview).

In addition to interviewing the participant fathers, I conducted separate interviews with their wives (with the exception of the two noted earlier), the mothers of the kindergartners in order to provide a more complete picture of the fathers' behaviors and attitudes towards their children's education (see Appendix B). Lupton and Barclay (1997) write that even though researchers attempt to gain access to the lived experiences of the

participants, inevitably they will only partial versions of the truth. They explain that "the use of language to convey meaning is always mediated through acculturated norms, conventions, and rules about 'ways of talking' and 'what might be said'" (p. 94). The mother will often have insight into how the father's role is played out and the kindergartner's feeling and reactions towards these behaviors. Parke (1996) addresses the wife's part in father-child interactions. "The husband-wife relationship has a profound impact on fathers' involvement with their children as well. The quality of the marital relationship is a major determinant of fathers' involvement and the quality of the fathers' relationship with his children. Do mothers encourage and support fathers' involvement or do they function as gatekeepers and limit fathers' access to their children?" (p. 78).

I also interviewed the classroom teacher. In addition to her first-hand interaction with the parents in the classroom, she was able to talk about fathers' participation in general over a long period of time. She kept a journal of her observations of and interactions with parents, especially fathers, which provided a starting point for our interview.

Focus Group Discussion

Morgan (1998) believes that focus groups create concentrated conversations that we might never capture in the real world. "...focus groups produce large amounts of concentrated data in a short period of time" (p. 32). Interaction among the participants in focus groups reflects their efforts to understand each other. They are curious to know how other people handle the same situations that they encounter. The conversations in focus

groups can be very valuable in that they elicit information about the ways that people behave and the motivations that underlie these behaviors. Understanding complex behavior requires more than one way of investigating that behavior, and focus groups can be combined with other methods in order to get a more complete picture of what is going on (Morgan, 1998).

Near the end of the data collection period, I conducted a focus group session with the participant fathers (see Appendix C). The focus group discussion was scheduled near the end of the data collection period in order to allow the participant fathers to write in their journals and avail themselves of any opportunities to interact with their children during the Fall of the school year.

The focus group consisted of the same group of fathers who volunteered to be a part of the interviews and observations. Focus groups are a good way to facilitate idea exchange among the participants and sometimes serve to elicit reactions to different experiences. They also function as a way to collect a great deal of information in a concentrated period of time. Although the focus group session was planned to last one hour, the conversation was stimulating and, after a ten minute 'intermission,' we continued for another hour. I conducted the session in the fellowship hall of a local church where one of the participating fathers was pastor; at the beginning of the study, he had offered space for such a purpose. Knowing that some people might feel uncomfortable in a church environment, or in that particular church environment, I had asked all the participants during their individual interviews if the church was an acceptable place for the group meeting. All participants agreed. We sat around an 8-foot

rectangular table which provided a comfortable, roundtable setting. The focus group discussion was recorded using a portable tape recorder which was placed in the center of the table. I recorded the session so that nuances and subtleties of intonation and interaction could be captured as well as the exact words of the participants.

Document Examination

I examined documents as source of data which provided another context in which to interpret participants stories and actions. The first body of documents that I utilized was the literature that the school produced for dissemination of information to parents, teachers, students, and the community. Examples of these kinds of documents included newsletters, handbooks, form letters home to parents, and other formally published materials published by the school board and the school. Other more informal documents which I examined as part of the data gathering process included communications between parents and teacher which came mostly in the form of notes, registration forms, permission slips, report cards, student work, and other classroom or teacher generated papers.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the participant interviews and focus group session using a transcribing machine and computer. All field notes and other text-based documents were also transcribed using a word processing program and data was stored on a computer hard

drive. In order to facilitate organization and coding of data, I used a computer software program -- QSR NUD*IST 4 (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching Theorizing) which was developed to analyze qualitative data.

The purposes of this study were to understand how fathers are involved in the education of their young children, the perceptions that the fathers have of their role in such education, and the effects that this involvement has on the fathers. Using interview transcripts, journals, field notes from observations, school documents, and analytical notes, I searched for themes and patterns that emerged from the stories the fathers told and the behaviors they exhibited regarding their children's education. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study and each set of data influenced which direction I took regarding subsequent questions and observations. In keeping with the qualitative research paradigm, the design of the study evolved as the study progressed. Through reading and re-reading the transcripts, I was searching for patterns or themes that presented themselves throughout the data. I generated and coded these inductively and used them to construct a picture or theory of how these fathers feel about their roles in their kindergartners' education and their actual involvement in such education.

I used a substantive grounded theory approach for this study which was facilitated through a qualitative research design. Gilgun (1992) writes that when researchers 'do' grounded theory, they "systematically develop theory through interweaving observation of phenomena of interest, abstractions from these observations, and previous research and theory....continually [modifying] their theory to find new findings" (p. 29). Gilgun suggests that researchers sometimes use theory to 'sensitize' them at the beginning of the

study and then as themes and patterns emerge, previous research and hypotheses developed through analysis and interpretation are used to code and categorize.

The social constructionist perspective is described by Dienhart (1998, p. xi) who writes that "Each person constructs her or his meanings against the intricately woven meaning space of her or his personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural experience." She also cites Gergen who suggests that "we negotiate our individual meanings in social context." My purpose is to understand the meanings that these fathers' have assigned to their participation in the young children's education. I adopted the guidelines that Dienhart (1998) used in her study of fathers' participation in parenting. I developed no hypotheses for testing, but instead used the narratives that the participants shared about their experiences and thoughts to construct a framework of meaning.

Establishing Trustworthiness

The purpose of this qualitative study is to find out: What is really going on here? To answer this question, it was important to minimize the chance that my interpretations might be wrong. Positivist researchers often talk of reliability when assessing the 'truth value' of their findings. However, in the naturalistic research tradition, 'trustworthiness' is a more popular term to describe whether the researcher's interpretations of the data are correct. Denzin explains the concept of 'triangulation' as collecting data from a diverse range of sources using a variety of methods (cited in Maxwell, 1996). Campbell and Fiske note that triangulation was first used as a metaphor describing multiple operationalism or convergent validation (Berg, 1998). Thus, my using individual

interviews of fathers, mothers, the teacher, a focus group discussion, observation, and document examination reduces the risk that my conclusions will reflect biases or limitations of using just one specific method. Multiple data sources, or 'triangulation,' strengthens the trustworthiness of my explanations and conclusions.

Pleck (1997) asserts that "...there has been a long-standing concern with the validity of assessments of paternal involvement, particularly when reported by fathers themselves. Several studies using father-mother pairs, however, have found high agreement between fathers' reports of their involvement and wives' assessments (Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine, 1992; Levant, Slattery, & Loiselle, 1987; Roopnarine & Ahmeduzzaman, 1993; Smith & Morgan, 1994; Tulanada et al., 1994)." p. 69

Geertz (retold in Maxwell, 1996) tells the story of a man who had heard that the world rested on the back of four elephants who in turn stood on the back of a giant turtle. He asked a wise man what the turtle stood on. 'Another turtle,' replied the sage. Again the man asked, 'And that turtle?' With that, the wise man answered, 'Ah, after that it is turtles all the way down.' This illustrates the point that there is no 'bottom turtle' in qualitative interpretation. Maxwell concludes that you do not need to get to a bottom turtle to form a valid conclusion. "You only have to get to a turtle you can stand on securely" (p. 87).

It must be noted that the fathers, simply by participating in the study, may have changed their attitudes or behaviors regarding their pedagogical relationship with their kindergartners as they would as part of an 'intervention' exercise. However, it is unlikely that the participants could construct meaningful and complex life-stories as were told by

these mothers and fathers and even more unlikely that they would change their relationship with their children in response to a study which is as open-ended and value-free as this one.

It is axiomatic that the researcher does affect the environment by being a part of it. Because of this, it is important for the researcher to establish a trusting and comfortable relationship with the participants in order for them to talk openly and act naturally in the socially-constructed and highly contextual environment which is being investigated.

Member checking is often used to verify that what was heard is what was said. I provided all participants with a copy of their interview transcriptions and, for the fathers, the focus group transcriptions. Sometimes, especially during the focus group session where discussants often talked over one another and because of the various accents, I was unable to understand some words. I asked that they read through the interview and let me know if there was anything they wanted to add, change, or delete. No one requested revisions.

Although the sample methodology limits generalizability, "the goal of qualitative research is not to discover how many or what kind of people share a...characteristic but, rather to capture the complex assumptions, meanings, and contradictions that enter into the process of experiencing" (Daly, 1993). Lincoln and Guba have reconceptualized the idea of generalizability (cited in Donmoyer, 1990). They use the term *transferability* suggesting that research findings will always be working hypothesis. They assert that the investigator does not make the judgment of transferability. The final judgment lies with the person seeking to make the transfer.

Another term used in qualitative research is 'saturation.' This occurs when, during the data collection and analysis phase, which are simultaneous, the researcher begins to notice that no new themes are emerging and that the data seems to be saturated with similar stories. In other words, nothing new is being learned. After 13 interviews and other data collection techniques, I did notice a point of saturation occurring in the data. This, along with the other techniques mentioned above, has given me the confidence that my explanations of what was going on are trustworthy.

Bias Statement

Part of the qualitative research paradigm involves 'putting your cards on the table.' Instead of trying to control all extraneous variables that might contaminate the results, it is important to recognize that the researcher is the instrument and that his or her subjectivity is part of the study.

An awareness of my biases and life experiences is an important part of this process. Peshkin (1988) states that it is not enough to be aware of one's subjectivity, but that the researcher must seek it out throughout the entire study, not as a retrospective exercise. He quotes A. P. Cheater (p. 17): "We cannot rid ourselves of this subjectivity, nor should we wish to; but we ought, perhaps, to pay it very much more attention...(1987, p. 172)." The following are some thoughts and experiences which have helped shape my beliefs and behaviors regarding my participation in my children's education. I have tried to be constantly aware of how they might creep into the data and therefore I must 'lay them on the table.'

Whenever I read biographies or feature stories about famous public personalities, from athletes to movie stars, I am amazed at the number of them who say "I knew I wanted to be an actress (or fill in applicable profession here) since I was 3." I must admit, I was the child who wanted to be a cowboy one day and a fireman the next (My wife says I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up). Whether I end my professional career as a teacher, lawyer, doctor, or race car driver, I knew I wanted to be a **father** since I was 12.

I have studied the pedagogical relationship between fathers and their kindergarten children. I am a father of a kindergarten-age child and I am very close to him. My responsibility for the education of my children stems from my feeling of responsibility for each of them as a whole child. Learning with our children is a natural part of my wife's and my daily lives; we want each child to feel that learning is not something separate from other parts of our lives. As an educator as well as a parent, I know the value of education and the opportunities it can afford. I am aware of the benefits, to me as well as to my children, of being involved in my children's lives including their education in the home, in the community, and in the school. Nancy Dienhart (1998) conducted a qualitative study in which she interviewed fathers to understand their feelings about shared parenting. One of her participants had this to say about the education of his children, which closely parallels my own feelings:

> We encourage them to do stuff...our number one priority...is to educate our kids. It's the number one thing, and what we lumped into education is not just academia, providing for university and whatnot,...but we lump into education experiential stuff...swimming lessons, T-ball, music, what

else do they do—they're skating...That's one thing we're trying to do, is give them a full experience (p. 90).

I have firm beliefs about fatherhood and the role that fathers should play in the development of their children. Kewley and Lewis (1993) conducted some interviews of Australian fathers and recorded their thoughts on fatherhood. I was dismayed at the general lack of responsibility and commitment that almost all these fathers displayed toward fatherhood; most had a somewhat cavalier attitude toward their part in the raising of their children.

One father described his relationship with his children:

> "I really feel that the children should be outsiders to the main relationship. They are there to be supported and encouraged, but the main relationship should be a closed one." It is difficult for me to understand fathers whose priorities do not include his children.

During my studies at the university, I worked at home and cared for our three children (now ages 6, 4, and 2) while my wife taught at the local elementary school. One day, the children and I made an excursion to the grocery store. I was pushing one cart which carried my two sons, and pulled another which carried my daughter and the groceries (there is a logistical reason for this arrangement that took many years to perfect). As I was browsing in the bread aisle, a woman whom I did not know approached me and asked if I watched the children all day (it happened to be mid-morning). I told her, 'yes, I do.' It was her response that typifies the American stereotype of the father's

role—she said, "Well, I guess that saves on baby-sitting." Underlying her comment was the belief that a father would never be caring for his children (much less be engaged in such a domestic chore as shopping) unless it was necessitated by financial constraints. Perhaps she did not notice that throughout the store my children and I were learning about measuring with the produce scale, talking about colors, and where each food comes from, how much things cost, reading signs and labels, and other exciting things. She did not observe that I was caring for our children and participating in their education because of my commitment to and responsibility for their development. A similar story is told by David, a 35 year-old father of three in Pruett (1987, p. 20). "While I'm carrying my son around with me on errands, someone may pause to admire, asking if I'm babysitting today. That automatically triggers a kind of slow, smoldering sizzle in my gut...It makes me just boil. I'm *not* a babysitter. I'm a father!"

James Levine, while director of the Fatherhood Project described a time when he was teaching preschool in New York. It was Halloween in 1968 and he was dressed as the 'Great Pumpkin.' "The children's parents found it hard to accept his profession: 'What do you *really* do?' they wanted to know" (p. 5). This moment opened his eyes to the stereotyping that men undergo.

My daughter is three years old now and I recently accompanied her to the registration for dance and gymnastics classes. I was a proud daddy helping her pick out ballet shoes and tights, and filling out the registration forms. I was the only father in a room full of mothers and little girls. While reading the class information sheet, I noticed a clause that is indicative of the still prevailing perceptions of our society. It read, "Unless

you hear from me or a designated Mother, when school is out for bad weather there is (sic) no dance classes." I mentioned to the dance teacher that her form didn't include 'designated fathers' and she said that in seven years no one had ever noticed that nor had any father ever volunteered to be designated.

When my son, Michael, was in preschool, I often visited the class to read to them, help with projects, field days, and other volunteer activities. From the minute I walked into the class, I was always surrounded by children who, it seemed to me from their behavior, were starving for a nurturing male figure in their lives. Girls and boys whom I never met before would climb into my lap and want me to hold them and want to tell me things; it seemed as though they never got this at home.

My son is now in kindergarten and I have volunteered to coordinate some of the parties for his teacher. She provided me with the food and favors she would need for the party and list of parents of children in my son's class along with phone numbers and helpful asterisks next to the parents that, from her experience, would be most helpful. Knowing that traditionally, mothers got together to plan these things, not only did I call the 'unasterisked' parents, I asked to talk to Mr. So-and-So at each number. After explaining to them who I was and what I was doing, I asked the father on the other end of the line what he would like to do to help. I still am not quite sure if the long silences were because they hadn't ever been called to be involved or because they were wondering why I didn't want to talk to their wives.

Another experience which might have socio-cultural undertones occurred when I was tutoring two children of an Indian family. The father was a gastroenterologist and

let's just say that my 1977 Ford was out of place parked in the neighborhood where they lived! I was hired by the mother over the phone and met with only her at their home on the first visit. She paid me. She was the one who asked about the children's progress. I worked with the boys twice weekly at the kitchen table for several months. During most sessions, I heard their father come in the front door, but I never saw him until I was leaving (the front room adjoined the kitchen and I had to pass through it to leave). He was always sitting on the couch with a bunch of papers and would nod to me as I left. He never asked me about how his sons were doing, he wasn't involved in checking my references, and, based on conversations with his wife and his sons, he played no part in their education.

I am sure that my cultural background and socioeconomic status have helped to shape my views on fatherhood. I come from an upper middle-class, white, suburban upbringing. I have an advanced degree in education which, according to most of the research, makes me more than likely to be involved in my children's education. Because I am aware of my strong convictions, I was highly conscious of not being judgmental of the fathers in my study. I am aware that my relationship with my children, my desire to be involved in their education, and my profession as an educator could threaten the trustworthiness of the conclusions and interpretations that I made, even the questions that I asked and how I asked them. However, subjectivity is an element of qualitative research that can be kept in check, albeit not eliminated, by utilizing the procedures set forth earlier in this chapter. This same subjectivity provided the motivation and inspiration for this study.

I do hope that more fathers, myself included, avoid what happened to Alan, 34, father of two:

> The other evening I was actually home in time to read Luke a story and we went to the shelf beside the bed to get a book for him to read and there was a complete range of books that I had never seen before. I suddenly realized that in the last two years, while I've been working so hard, Beth had been out there buying these books and I had absolutely no part. I...was a bit [upset] that somewhere along the line I must have missed out (in a study by Burgess, 1997).

These personal events confirm for me the need for fathers to become more involved in their children's education and society's need to promote and accept this involvement. These experiences have compelled me to undertake this research.

CHAPTER 4

THE PLACES, THE PEOPLE, THE PARTNERSHIP

"One parent is worth a thousand teachers."
--Chinese Proverb

The Places

The Community

I conducted this study in a partly rural, partly suburban community in the Southeastern region of the United States. The county is 679 square miles of rolling valleys, forests, and mountains. It boasts several parks and natural areas which provide natives and tourists alike with the beauty of colors and scenery that Autumn brings. *South City has a population of approximately 7,000 and is served by several newspapers, radio stations, shopping centers, a regional hospital, public library, and a municipal airport. The personal per capita income is $16,200 with businesses in the county employing more than 13,000 workers. Homes in the town range from a modest $40,000 to sprawling estates in excess of $300,000. The moderate climate, numerous recreational areas, and resort facilities make it a popular place for vacationers and retirees.

*The names of all people and places in this study are pseudonyms which are used in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants and their families.

The School

The county's public school system consists of eight elementary schools and one high school with 6,700 students enrolled in the school system. The school system offers a comprehensive instructional program for students enrolled in grades K-12. The county-wide staff includes 700 teachers, supervisors, administrators, and support personnel. The school system budget for the previous year was $28,000,000. There are also several small private parochial schools in the area, a satellite campus for one of the area community colleges, and a vocational technology center.

I conducted this study at Rocky Top Elementary School which is one of eight elementary schools in the county with an enrollment of 754 students in grades kindergarten through eight. There are two full-day kindergarten classes in the school, each having twenty students. The student population is almost 100% Caucasian and reflects the demography of the community.

The school can be seen from the main road that passes right in front. The buses turn into a U-shaped disembarkation area where the children walk across a large concrete entry way that is colorfully painted with a big globe and a 'Children Across The World" theme. As they walk through the panel of glass doors in the front of the building, the children find themselves in the commons area which also serves as the cafeteria. The front office is immediately to the right and three long corridors present themselves. The one to the right houses teacher preparation rooms and other offices while the one straight ahead leads to other wings of the school which contain the upper grades. The hallway on the left is taken by kindergartners and 1st graders.

The Classroom

To get from the main entrance of the school to Linda's kindergarten classroom, the children must walk down a long hallway in the south wing, which is still lined with the lockers remaining from when it was a junior high school, to the last room on the left. As they walk into the carpeted classroom, they notice the wall at the front of the classroom which has a large bulletin board sporting a Curious George motif and some colorful nursery rhyme posters. The walls are decorated with classroom learning materials—Big Bird pictures, calendars, Tigger cut-outs, and, of course, the classroom rules. In one corner of the room there are books and toys which rest on a kaleidoscopic playtime area rug. On the left side of the room along the wall there are 3 computers and a printer situated on desks about 24 inches from the floor.

At the front and center part of the room stands a crescent-shaped table with 6 small chairs around the outside curved edge and a larger teacher's chair on the inside edge. This is where Linda, the kindergarten teacher, does most of her one-to-one instruction.. The teacher's desk is in the right front corner by the window as the children face the front of the classroom. There are also some bookshelves, cabinets and small tables near the front. The children sit at several small tables which are arranged in two double rows extending from the back wall and have unattached chairs. There seems to plenty of room for the children to learn and move around. Linda feels she is lucky to have a bathroom **in** the room.

The People

As mentioned in Chapter 3, all of the participating fathers are married and at the time of the interview were living with their wives and children in a 'traditional' family household. All of the participants are Caucasian which reflects the demographics of the community in which they reside as well as the school where their children attend. In order to more fully understand the socio-cultural context in which these participants create their pedagogical roles, I have included a short biographical sketch of each. The essence of qualitative research lies in understanding the environment or context in which the participants create their own meaning. These participant biographies and 'community' descriptions help to tell the story of each of the fathers in the context in which they live.

Phillip

Phillip and Sondra, both 44, have two children—their son, Samuel, is 5 years old and in kindergarten and Cindy, their eight-year-old daughter, is in the third grade. Both children attend Rocky Top Elementary School. Phillip and Sondra are the children's adoptive parents. During the data collection phase of this study, Phillip was promoted from Technical Director to Vice President of a large industrial facility in the community where he lives. His job takes him out of town and abroad as much as six weeks at a time, "...on a thirty day basis, I might be home let's say six or seven nights." His homeland is France where he was raised and educated. His diploma from a university in France hangs on his office wall at work. Sondra grew up and attended school in Georgia. Phillip speaks

with a heavy French accent and sometimes it is difficult for me to understand him. Most times that I have met with him, he has worn a sweater and dress slacks which fits well with his hands-on, people-oriented management style. His telephone answering machine at home has outgoing messages in both English and French. Sondra owns and manages a small antique boutique in the middle of town. She does not have a college education.

Joe

Joe, 36, and Ellen, 40, have three children. Andy, 5, is in kindergarten and the two older children, Leslie and Mike, 18 and 17 respectively, attend the only high school in the county. Joe speaks with a noticeable southern/country accent which reflects his easy-going personality, wide smile and cherub-like face. He looks most comfortable in jeans and a t-shirt. Joe makes his living as a warehouse specialist at a large technology-based corporation in his community. Ellen also works in a manufacturing environment at a large corporation. Neither Joe nor Ellen has attended college and both grew up in the community in which they now live and attended school where their children are now attending. They live in a small house in a suburban-like subdivision on the edge of town. A chain link fence cordons off the backyard where there is a basketball hoop, a large pen with dogs, and an outbuilding that Joe has turned into a 'den' with a TV, stereo, couch, and shelves for his extensive cookie jar collection.

Bob

Bob, 37, and Sharon, 39, have two children. Their daughter, Sarah, who is 5, is in kindergarten this year and their 10-year-old son, Will, both attend Rocky Top Elementary School. Bob has a high-school education and is employed by the state as a parole officer. He is fair-skinned, with red hair and a dry, sarcastic wit. Sharon is a degreed, certified special-education teacher in the school system where their children attend. She teaches pre-schoolers. Bob and his family live in a house in a semi-rural part of town. During one of our meetings, Bob took me down the road just a short distance from his house to show me the new satellite campus that a regional community college had recently built. Both Bob and Sharon grew up in different counties in the state and moved to this area after they were out of school.

Max

Max, 31 is married to his second wife, Lisa, who is 30. They have two children. Their son, Eric, is a 5-year-old kindergartner and his daughter, Elizabeth, is 3 and not yet in school. Max has an older daughter from a previous marriage who also attends school in the district. Max is a firefighter employed by the county and also does some private construction work. His work schedule as a firefighter is 24 hours on, 48 hours off for 365 days out of the year. He showed me a commercially printed calendar that is used by many fire departments that color-codes every three days—red, green, yellow, etc…--so he knows his schedule a whole year in advance! He is unassuming, soft-spoken, 6'2", 250 pounds, moustached, and looks like a prototype firefighter. He is certainly at home in his

denim overalls and boots. Lisa is the manager of a retail store at a local outlet mall in town. Max attended high school in the county where he now lives. He and his family live several miles outside the city limits in a rural, sparsely populated area in a house that he recently built. Max, his brother, his uncle, and his father are in the cattle business and own a substantial tract of land on which they live and work.

David

David and Nancy, both 37, have a son, Thomas, who is now in kindergarten and at our first meeting was 4 years old. David received his bachelor's degree from a Bible college in the Midwest and has a Master's Degree in pastoral counseling. He is the pastor at a local church. His speech does not give away his southern upbringing. David and Nancy were married ten years before having Thomas and David told me that due to medical reasons, Thomas would probably be an only child. Nancy has a degree in English/Journalism and is taking some classes at a nearby community college to upgrade her teaching certification so she can return to teaching. She originally taught science at the secondary level but wishes to teach at the elementary level. Nancy directs the music at the church where David is pastor. David is a gentle, articulate man with small features and warm eyes. They moved here from Memphis where David was an assistant pastor at a larger church. They now live in a community close to the county's high school.

Richard

Richard, 29, is an engineer with a large industrial mineral company located in a nearby town. A diploma from a regional state college where he earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering hangs in his office. He is married to Carolyn, 31, an emergency room registered nurse at the regional medical center in town. They have two children—their son Jonathan, 5, is in kindergarten, and their daughter, Jade, is 3. Richard is out of town on business occasionally, maybe one week out of the month. He is tall, clean-cut, save the neatly trimmed goatee. He has a youthful appearance which accompanies a slight uneasiness in interpersonal demeanor--at least during our interview and other informal meetings that I had with him. Carolyn was never able to commit to an interview schedule. After several attempts, I concluded that she was no longer interested in participating.

Al

Al, 40, and Brenda, 41, have two children. Their daughter Abby, 5, is in kindergarten and their son, Jarred, is now 12 and in the fifth grade. Al owns and operates an automotive repair shop in town and Brenda is an award-winning real estate agent for the biggest realty company in the county. Al is a down-to-earth conversationalist. Of all the participants, I thought that he would be the most difficult with which to establish rapport because of the extreme differences in our cultural backgrounds. Ironically, we communicated quite well. He is small in stature and wiry with dark hair, dark eyes, and a mustache. Of course, his hands and blue mechanic's attire were almost always covered

with grease. One meeting I had scheduled with Al after his shop hours was delayed because as he was closing up for the evening right at 5:00, a woman drove up with car problems. It was already dark but Al worked for an hour to help get her on her way home. No charge. Al is the boy scout leader for his son's troop and he is very involved in those activities. During informal 'checking-in' meetings, Al told me stories of white-water rafting trips with the scouts and how much fun they were.

The Partnership

Because the purpose of this study is to learn about fathers' involvement in education, it is important to provide a picture of the school's openness to parents and community members in general. An indication of the importance a school or system places on parental involvement sometimes may be found in the materials it distributes to teachers, parents, and the community. Volume 1, issue 1 of the school system newsletter, released in the Fall of 1998, included a section explaining the purpose of the newsletter. It starts, "Seeking to improve community relations and public image of our School System has been a Board of Education focus for some time...we are putting that goal to the test." The newsletter is an attempt to strengthen the bond between the community and the schools. The newsletter also included school board meeting schedules, contact numbers for school board members, school activities, and sports schedules for the system.

Rocky Top Elementary School published a parent-student handbook with general information on topics from attendance to zero-tolerance. Included in the handbook were

some references to parental involvement. It begins, "Our staff believes teachers, parent, students, and the community share the responsibility for meeting the school's goals." A specific parent involvement goal is stated, "A link will be established between home and school which will provide experiences for parents to help their children become more successful in school. Contact with at least 75% of the parents will occur each six weeks by phone, note, progress report, or conference." Also included was a poem called the "ABC's of Parenthood."

Always find some time exclusively for your children each day.
Broaden their horizons through varied experiences.
Challenge them to set and achieve high goals in life.
Delight in their efforts in school and at home.
Examine your approach so as to keep it loving.
Find something good to say about your children each day.
Guide them in their decisions.
Have a listening ear for their problems and concerns.
Insure that you pay attention to their fears.
Joyfully forgive their shortcomings.
Keep their confidence.
Live a life that serves as a positive model.
Manage your time as to make them your best friend.
Never say "no" when you might be able to say "yes."
Open your home to their friends.
Protect them from their own inexperience.
Quickly show interest in their endeavors.
Remember that they have needs to be met.
Show them love.
Teach them to treat others as they want to be treated.
Understand they are young and learning to adjust.
Very carefully, mean what you say.
Watch them grow and appreciate each stage.
Expect them to follow rules.
Yield to your children's preferences, if it isn't against a principle.
Zealously help your children to enjoy life.

(author unknown)

In 1975 the county decided to build a junior high school that included grades seven through nine. Students were moved from a neighboring elementary school and the high school into the new junior high school in order to relieve the overcrowding. The new school opened in 1977 with an enrollment of 1,000. In 1994, the school board made Rocky Top a K-8th grade elementary school. It is now the only accredited elementary school in the county.

The participating school takes pride in its volunteer program. During the 1995-96 school year, a parent organized the Parent Volunteer Program. In 1996-97, over 4,000 volunteer hours were logged. Staff and volunteers recently completed installation of a new playground which was a two year project and there are plans to paint a large US map on part of the asphalt. Volunteers have cleaned debris and brush from the woods by the school to create a nature trail. Wildflowers, ferns, trees, and other flora are planted and cared for by science classes.

During my visits to the school, I noticed flyers posted on the office entrance way offering workshops and classes sponsored by the Parent Resource Center on such topics as school discipline, state legislative issues, and keeping the county clean. A school secretary informed me that the Parent Resource Center is a place that provides certain services for parents in the area. I visited the Center which is located in a small house across the street from one of the other elementary schools in the system. I talked with the director who showed me some pamphlets that they provide for parents referencing some of the services available. The purpose of the Parent Resource Center is to build a partnership of schools, family, and children to ensure that every child experiences

educational success. On a calendar, some of the upcoming events planned were computer training, superintendent's update, divorce support group, solving family problems, domestic violence and children, special education evaluations, parenting teenagers, TV as a learning tool, and families and schools together.

The Parent Resource Center has a program where parents can earn reconditioned computers for their home by participating in some of the workshops or lessons offered by the center. The PRC offers take-home lessons for working parents. The six titles in this series are: About Parenting, About Getting Along at Home, Disciplining Your Child, Stress, Encouraging Your Child to Do Well in School, and Understanding Adolescence. The center is operated and funded by a larger regional service provider.

CHAPTER 5

WHAT I HEARD, WHAT I SAW

"It is my hope that my son, when I am gone,
will remember me not from the battle but in the
home repeating with him our simple daily prayer."
--Douglas MacArthur

Making the Familiar Strange

One of the challenges of conducting this qualitative study was trying to learn something new about certain attitudes, behaviors, and environments with which I am familiar. George Spindler talks about the purpose of ethnography as 'making the strange familiar and the familiar strange.' This study provides such a challenge for me because I am both a father and a teacher and my wife is a teacher. For many years I have observed parents being involved or uninvolved in their children's education, and I have challenged myself to be an active participant in my own children's education.

Several of the fathers expressed their confusion as to why I was doing a study like this and even more incredulous that they would have anything interesting to offer! Some said that they just do the 'normal stuff' or 'the things that all moms and dads do.' At the beginning of some interviews, the participant would preface their discussion (before the recorder was turned on) that they didn't really know of anything they could tell me. Even during the interview, one father expressed his ignorance of what he could teach me:

> But, I don't know, it just seems to me like when you said you were gonna do this and I said I'd help, it just doesn't sound like there's that much going on...

They soon learned though, that they did **indeed** have something to say! One dad who warned me that he didn't know what he could add to what he already wrote in his journal talked for 70 minutes.

In keeping with the qualitative paradigm, the categories used below to describe the attitudes and behaviors of the participants were not predetermined. After reading and rereading the interview transcripts, field notes, focus group discussion transcript, and other supporting documents, these categories seemed to emerge from the data. I grouped them loosely for efficiency sake, but of course in the lives of people, attitudes, ideas, beliefs, and behaviors overlap into what we call life.

The Transition

Starting kindergarten is big step for the parents as well as for the children. Sometimes the parents cry more than the children do when leaving their son or daughter in the classroom the very first day of school! Prior to this first year of 'official schooling,' most children have been in daycare, pre-school, with a non-parent caregiver or at home with mom and/or dad.

Linda, the kindergarten teacher talked about the importance of the kindergarten year not only for the child, but for the parent. She thinks that because this is also the parents' first year 'in school,' that it sets the tone for their participation throughout the students school career.

> Of course I think kindergarten is an exceptionally important step for a child not only because they are breaking away from their home ties but...and becoming an individual but I think it kind of sets the pace for how active the parents will participate as they go through school. Probably their first dealings with school and teachers and parents and the school will be a reflection of their image of what school is, so to speak. If they have a successful year, I'm hoping they'll have a good start to be active all through school.

Several times fathers talked about their role in helping their child make the transition from pre-school, daycare, or homecare to kindergarten. This was an important part of the kindergarten experience and many fathers wanted to make sure that their children had the emotional support to make the transition anxiety-free.

Max's wife, Lisa, told me about how Max made the transition less scary for his kindergartner, Eric. They learned something from another parent and adopted it for themselves.

> Because there's a lot of kids think that their parents are not coming back. And I don't know why or whatever, but I talked to this one guy and he told me that his daughter cried everyday. Until he finally give her a little old thing that he'd carried on his key rings, you know. And promised her that he was coming back to get her, you know. And so, here it is for the first week at school. I had took one of my key rings off and it was just a little old loop that you hook keys to. And I'd give it to him everyday to let him know that he's not there because it's bad. That you know everybody has to go to school.
>
> And see he [Eric] don't think...kids don't understand why they have to go to school. They really don't. For the first 5 years of their life they've been with Mama the whole time and daddies and babysitters. Why all of the sudden do they have to go to a place that they have to really, you know, sit down all day long and do...you know pay attention and interact with 20 or 30 other kids?

> He [Max]...I mean, he helped with that, too. I mean, just like with him he had to give like a little pin that's off of his uniform at work. He would give it to him and...when he'd let him off. And then that evening, Eric would have it to give it back to him.

Richard, engineer and father of two, talked about Jonathan's transition from preschool and the importance he placed on preparing his son for the new experience. Richard really seemed to know what was going on in his son's pre-school and the kinds of things that were beneficial for him to know as well as for Jonathan to know for his transition to kindergarten.

> And of course before he started kindergarten, we had him in a preschool and they also did a lot of...you know, they...which was really good for Jonathan, they had more discipline that just a daycare. They had an activity everyday, not as much as they have in kindergarten or will have in school but they have some kind of activity...structured activity... playing on the playground or whatever. They always sat down at a table with everybody each day and you know...when he started his preschool, that's when we really started seeing, you know, what we need to do in order to get him used to going to school.

David, pastor and father of one, wanted to make sure that the transition went smoothly so that he would have a good experience. Prior to the kindergarten year, Thomas had been attending a part-time program at a local church. He knew his son's feelings very well which reflected his pro-active approach in Thomas' education. David's comments show that he is listening to his son and is showing sympathy. When Thomas started school, he was having anxieties about the cafeteria, a common source of fear for

the new kindergartner! David felt that he had a part in preparing Thomas for the change to the large community of children we call kindergarten.

> Part of it is that, you know, his mom always at mother's day out, had always fixed his meal, and he didn't have choices and options and there was going through the cafeteria line was just so totally new that the entire Summer he says 'I think I like school if I can get by the cafeteria.' We didn't know how that was gonna work.

In his journal, David wrote that he thought Thomas was ready for kindergarten even though he started as a 4-year-old. David was worried that because his son was starting young, due to a birthday late in the year, that Thomas would be the smallest child and might not be ready developmentally or emotionally. I asked him why he thought Thomas was ready. His awareness of his son's preferences is evidence of his desire to be involved in this big transition.

> But, I think another way that we can tell that he's prepared is just his desires to do things that most kids his age have no desire to do. And he would rather sit down and tell you a story or sit down and draw something and...rather than going outside and play...

David also talked about the series of orientation meetings that he and his wife attended. He felt that these meetings were beneficial in that it helped both parents and children make the transition go more smoothly. The text is taken 'as is' right from

David's journal. He is not only attending these meetings, but is evaluating their effect on his learning about this new environment.

> In May they had about 5 parents meetings with both of the kindergarten teachers and the children. We didn't know about it for the first two but we did, were able to attend the last three. And what they would do was they had some videos they would show that were about 30 minutes...and each one Mrs. Landers would like teach the parents and answer the questions and Miss Rosemont would play with the kids outside and then they would swap off. It was about an hour each time and it got us involved in the school, knowing what they needed to do and helped us to get going in understanding the way the kindergarten program ran. And that to me was probably more beneficial than this one night session [a back to school night in the Fall] because there you had several people that were very interested in their children. Now, I would guess 8-10 parents being there out of, you know, 40 students or somewhere in that range. And it helped Thomas to be able to meet both of the teachers before school began.

The first day of school is an exciting and/or traumatic experience for most kindergartners. Accompanying one's child to school on the first day of kindergarten has been a milestone or a 'rite of passage' for parents and children alike. David told me about an important decision that he made to go with Thomas on his first day. His decision allowed him to connect with Thomas during this time.

> Up to that time Nancy had planned to go with Thomas to take him to school, and I was interested in going and at the last moment I changed my plans and said I'll just be a little late for church, going to work, cause I feel that this is a very important day in his life, this is the first day he goes. And he had his mom to drive, we were in a van and his mom was driving, so I sat by him and I put my arm around him. And I think I mentioned some things about, you know, are you a little nervous, are you a little scared? And I told him how it's OK to be a little nervous and a little scared, that that's OK. And to me, it was a very special day. I don't know if it was special to

> Thomas, but it was special to me. And I remember that as we were walking out, usually if we're walking together as a family he wants to hold mom's hand. And this day, because I was here with him, and was close to him, he chose to... it's a corridor, a long corridor at the school, I don't know how long it is but...it seems to be a mile, but it's not quite that long, Thomas just slipped his hand up in mine and says, you know, he wanted me to hold his hand. I think that gave him some comfort of doing that.

For Richard, this was his first child to enter kindergarten so it was a new experience for all. He had really thought about the transition that Jonathan had to go through when he entered kindergarten. Richard believes that getting used to the structure or the schedule of the daily activities is a major change for his child. He talked about learning about Jonathan's school day after the transition and also what he thinks about all the new subjects.

> I know it was a trans...it's a, I thought preschool...I know preschool helped him a lot instead of just being in a daycare until kindergarten. It helped him because of the structure and schedule and stuff like that. But they still had...they still weren't used to and Jonathan wasn't used to sitting and having that kind of defined structure all day. You know they gotta sit and do their work all day and certain things and they just can't get up and go when they want to. So, I think he's adjusted to that as well. And I think he's still got some adjusting to do.
>
> That a lot of times they don't have time for rest period or whatever. You know they gotta get...and they try to get so many things in that day. And I didn't really realize that they went to all these different extra classes like art and music, p.e., computer lab, science lab, you know all those things. I think it's great that they're doing that.

Bob, however, said that his daughter had no problem with the transition which made his work less difficult. During the interview and throughout conversations I had with Bob, he talked about how different it was this time around. This is because it was Bob's second child to enter kindergarten. His oldest child, Will, started four years ago so Bob has been 'in the system' for at least that long. He also attributes the smooth transition to the care history of Sarah.

> Well, there wasn't that big a transition going from daycare to kindergarten like there was for Will. Will stayed with my mom and my sister a lot, where Sarah stayed at this daycare except, you know, during the Summer with Sharon. So she was used to getting up and going to school every day and you know they did things with them. And I think that has a lot to do with it. That we knew she knew these things going in. Like I say, I didn't even teach...you know I helped teach Will how to tie his shoes, but I didn't have to do that with Sarah cause she already knew how to do it cause they taught her at daycare how to do it.

Many school districts have iron-clad zoning regulations that dictate where the children will attend school. However, in this district, if parents want to drive their children to school, they can enroll them wherever they please...if there is room. A couple of times fathers talked about their involvement in the decision-making process in which school their kindergartner would attend.

Richard talked about the process he went through to make this important decision. For him and his wife, it started long before the first of the school year and there were many factors that went into making the decision. Richard really knew a lot about

the schools and the people involved. He made it his business to learn about the differences between the schools and what each could offer his child.

> One decision was 'Where's he gonna go to school?' He could have went to either Rocky Top or Walnut Grove elementary. So we researched that together, you know, which one is better, well what about this?
>
> The first input we had, you know, maybe about a year ago, we start thinking well, Jonathan's starting kindergarten here pretty soon, what are we going to do? ...where is he gonna go to school at? We don't even...so we said that...you know I talked to people and I think I actually, you know my wife is more talk to people and find out what's going on and I just...I would find exactly. I called the school, you know (laughing). I can't remember who I called, but heck I actually patched me through to...the bus people, the bus garage, you know, who does the routes. Where is he zoned for? Which school does he go to? Cause people would say well I think he can go here, I think he can go there. So I find out it is either Rocky Top or Walnut Grove Elementary.
>
> And...talked about, had several discussions about what we're gonna do with him before or after school...So we had a lot of decisions to make. But as far as the school...I don't know really what our main decision was but early on we were wanting him to go to Walnut Grove Elementary. People say they got better teachers...they do this and they do that. And I know the principal there is Martha Weston. And she's just retiring and I thought if she was still there, I think I would favor that...I...she was principal when I went to school there. I went to Walnut Grove...first, second, and third grade, I guess. So she was principal when I was in school. You know, I mean a lot people say well, it's an old facility, you know, it's about to fall down and that kind of stuff, so it...I guess we decided we would sign him up for Rocky Top and my wife went and signed him up and still after we had him signed up like in May, we're still up in the air, you know, whether we were gonna get in Rocky Top, it only had so many slots, 40 slots. And (laughing) it was pretty nerve-racking there for a while, you know, we don't know what you're going to do, where he's gonna go.

Even after their decision had been made and Jonathan was ready to start the school year, Richard and Carolyn were still thinking about their decision.

> And I've been very delighted with Rocky Top. After we started meeting the people and the teachers and principal and everything...talking to them about what's going on. And we really didn't do that until right up, you know, when he's getting ready to start. But we still had doubts in our minds, you know, whether this was the right decision or whatever. I know now both of us feel comfortable that it was the right decision to send him there.

David and Nancy also talked about where Thomas would or should go to school for his first year. One of the assumptions that I had going into the study was that I could find out about the kinds of things that were important to the dads by asking the moms what kinds of conversations they had had with their husbands regarding their participation in their kindergartners' education. Nancy told me about their 'transition' concerns.

> When we were in Memphis, we saw a Home Schooling Association. We saw benefits and disadvantages of the home schooling situation. We were able to...it was a very large association. As a matter of fact, they participated in activities in our gymnasium at our church in Memphis. And there were about 60 or 70 of those children. There was a lot of social activity. We taught some of the children in our Sunday school classes who had been home-schooled as opposed to public education, private education. So we had had conversations since moving here about what was right for our family. Should we send Thomas to a public institution or should we teach him at home? Should we try to find a private school where he would be happy? We had talked about that a lot. Thomas has had a lot of experiences before starting school that I think will make his education a little simpler because he's been a lot of places and done a lot of things that most children don't get to do.

During one of our first conversations at the firehouse, I asked Max how Eric was doing in school. He told me that Eric was having a hard time adjusting, that he was crying in the morning when they took him to school. Eric has been staying with a babysitter since birth but it was a relative. Max said that Eric did OK during the phase-in period when there were just 4 children in the room, but when there got to be 20, it was more difficult.

Many fathers were involved in helping their child make the transition to kindergarten. Underlying this effort to help is the fathers' sensitivity that the child would be feeling nervous or frightened by the environmental change. The fathers participated in many of the decisions that accompanied their child's first year in school.

Awareness

The open-ended interview format allowed latitude for the fathers to talk about their general involvement in their kindergartners' education. Many times, the fathers spent great portions of the interview and journal recording talking not about their active participation in their children's education but about their children! They told stories about their children's learning activities, developmental stages, or achievements--what or how they were doing in school. I call this a 'general awareness.' In order for fathers to know what's going on with their children's educational lives, they must be observing and listening to the child and the other people involved in their children's lives. This awareness, I feel, is a foundational element in the overall involvement of fathers in their

children's early childhood education and is indicative of their interest and pride in their child's achievements.

From my conversations with Al, father of two, I can tell he is very proud of his daughter and her academic ability. He knows a great deal about her achievements in and out of school. His knowledge of her development even starting before kindergarten shows his continuous awareness of her learning. He talked about his daughter, Abby.

> And she can call you right up on the phone and she knows the numbers and she knows her ABC's and she can count to 100.
>
> And she really does...she's really a little ahead of her class. Of course she's knowed all this ABC's and all before she ever started. She knowed them in daycare. And in her daycare class, I mean, that...they read to her a lot. You know they do a lot of reading and watching movies and they spend doing...and she likes to watch movies. And she sits just as still and quiet. Course I don't know if they do that at kindergarten or not.

Al seems to know a great deal about Abby's achievements and activities in which she engages as part of her school life and he enjoys talking about her very much! The things that Al talked to me about illustrates his awareness not only in the general sense, but the kinds of specific learning activities Abby is doing.

> Well, what it is mainly what they do is color pictures and staying in the lines and they can write their name. They do a lot of coloring and like those little puzzles with the ABC stuff and they don't give em any hard stuff yet, but...that's fascinating she can get along to write. I mean she can identify what's to...like colors and...color and she can write blue or red or...she knows how to write.

> And she's proud of what she does. Anything like...and she's good with scissors. They cut out things. They cut out a lot of things. They'll draw em a picture and then cut it out.
>
> Because she's got a...I don't know whether she's got a photographic memory. I mean she can...you can read that book to her and she can sit down and read that book to you...every page of it. She just remembers well. And then she knows how to identify words, certain words. You can...she can come and ask you how to spell something and you can sorta do that...you know...thing and she can figure out how to spell that word.

Richard has a real interest in what his son, Jonathan was doing in school as well as when he was in a pre-school program. A knowledge of the daily activities is important to Richard. He feels that this awareness helps to prepare his son for school life.

> [And] of course he started kindergarten this year and...both myself and his mother Carolyn have...try to have a lot of participation in what he is doing at school and like to know what is going on everyday. We like to know what his schedule is.
>
> Miss Rosemont helps us with that on their schedule. When they go to lunch, when they go to gym and art and stuff like that. So we have a good idea of what he's been doing. When they get in their centers and what type work they're doing and when they're...what their schedule is through the day.
>
> ...when he started his preschool, that's when we really started seeing, you know, what we need to do in order to get him used to going to school.

Richard has been in the school building several times when walking his son to class. This way he got a first-hand look at how it is for his kindergartner to walk down

the hall through all those big kids! He seemed aware that Jonathan's environment would have an effect on his total school experience.

> You know, with us being there that early, you know 7 or 7:10 or something like that, there's not that many big kids in the hallway to intimidate them so...that far end of the school, that's the big kids side and then you get on up that's where the kindergartner, 1st grade, so they gotta walk all the way through all that, so there...If we get there 7:30, 7:40 you know they're starting to get to their classroom and they're all in the hallway, you know, I can see some kids walking in as I'm walking out they're...trying to fight their way through all that.

Bob, a parole officer and father of two, has an awareness of what kindergartners do in general. His comments show that he is trying to elicit information about Sarah's day at school, an indicator of his desire to be involved, even if the kindergartner only remembers the important things!

> [They] don't do that much homework, you know, their homework is basically just reading or going over something that they did the night before.
>
> She remembers the names of the books. She remembers things like who the leader was and whether she was the leader or whoever, you know. There for a couple of weeks, I couldn't even get her to tell me who sat next to her or who sat across from her, she just didn't want to tell me or didn't know or something.

Bob knew about the grading policy for kindergartners. It could be that his knowledge of the system is due to his wife being a teacher and that he has "been there,

done that" with his older child. It is, in my experience, unusual for a parent to know about 'reading scores' for the school in general.

> Sharon or Sarah one told me, yeah. I mean but it just...don't... kindergarten is a different, you know, they don't, they don't even grade them in kindergarten I guess, you know, but unless something is really bad happening, you know, I mean it's...you know, they're supposed to call you in before they actually write down in their report card, you know, they're supposed to take corrective measures before it gets that bad.
>
> Rocky Top has been real good about that. They try to reinforce... especially the reading and things like that. And reading scores are up quite a bit and so...And that kinda goes on down the road so when they get to high school you're not going to have a big bunch over there that can't read or spell or whatever...I don't know when Linda starts them reading...Sarah can recognize some words but she can't read.

In his journal, Bob wrote about his daughter's school activities for the day. This shows an awareness of his child's day-to-day events during school and what she is learning. He gets his information from his daughter and her teacher.

> Sarah's field trip went well, she went with another girl from her class and had lots of fun. She said they went to a greenhouse with lots of plants and flowers and helped picked out the pretty ones for Mr. Smith [principal] to take back to the school.
>
> Mrs. Rosemont says that Sarah is doing well in school, she needs to work on her color words. All night long color, color, color. I didn't know that she knows sign language as well as she does, a teacher at school has been showing the whole class.
>
> Earlier today the k-class put costumes on and went to the nursing home across the street from the school. Ms. Rosemont said they all had lots of fun.

In addition to having knowledge of school events and other educational activities their children are involved with, most dads talked about their kindergartner's feelings or attitudes toward school. David, pastor of a local church, told me about Thomas' enthusiasm for school. He also knows about his son's friends at school. It is one thing to know what your child is doing in school and another to know what he feels about what he is doing in school.

> Thomas is doing fantastic. He loves school, he loves his teachers. He has one friend that he had with...in mother's day out program, he attended one of those in a local church last year, and so he has a friend, Raymond, that they get to spend a lot of time together.
>
> David told me that when his son came home from school his first day he said, 'I could go to school a hundred days!' He didn't want to tell him at that time that he was going to go to school a lot more than a hundred days.

David wrote in his journal about Thomas' excitement about some school activities. His journal entries have demonstrated that David knows what's going on at school on a daily basis.

> He was very excited that he listened to a CD. After listening he had to match several items like sock and shoe. He got all of the answers correct. Also on his second day of school, he got to work on the computer. Thomas said the computer was cool.

David also was aware of the academic work that Thomas was doing. This kind of awareness seems to take a more focused effort because of its specificity. Even if his wife

weren't a teacher, I suggest that David would take the same approach. He seems to be very pro-active in his involvement in Thomas' education. He seeks out information rather than taking a more passive role.

> But he is just loving school. He comes home with his paperwork and they do letters...the first letter was M. They were doing munching mouth and I had no idea as why they started with the letter M, you know, I was thinking they should start with A...but my wife reminded me that they do letters that have straight sticks as they call them.
>
> Thomas is excited about what he is learning. Mrs. Rosemont's class went to the library and she read large mouth frog. He must have told the story a dozen times.

David's journal was full of comments about Thomas' daily learning and other activities. He often remarked about his ignorance about certain methods or reasons why certain things were taught and more importantly, how he came to understand them. This takes a more reflective and active involvement on the part of the father than just knowing. David really knows what's going on in the classroom, what Thomas is working on and how he is improving. He told me about Thomas learning to count:

> ...he knew all of his alphabet, he could say his alphabet, you know, A to Z, he could already count to a hundred by himself, and that was just some things that he'd worked with, his mom had worked with him and watching things such as Sesame Street counting up to 20. A funny thing that he had had was we was trying to teach him, and he got up to, he'd get up to 24, 25, and when he'd get up to 29 his big thing is if after 29 should be twenty-ten instead of thirty. And for a long time he would say twenty-ten, twenty-eleven until we could help him. But he just didn't understand that concept.

Max, a firefighter and father of three, was aware of the things that his son, Eric, could and couldn't do. He compares Eric's abilities to his own and has confidence that his son will get his aptitude for math. Knowing letters and numbers is on the 'to do' list for most kindergartners across the United States.

> ...but his A and his D and...B, B he knows. Then he knows...you know, he don't there's about 6 that he has trouble with so we try to associate them with a word that he knows, you know, that he put the shape to the letter and then remember what it is. The...he's not had no trouble with numbers. He's already counted to fifty without stopping. He can go to fifty without stopping and, of course I don't have no trouble with numbers. I...numbers is not a...something I can...they stick in my head. Maybe he's going to be like me on that. Remember...he's not going to have no trouble with numbers...

Joe, father of two teenagers and one kindergartner, knows about some of the things that Andy is working on in school. From my interview with Joe and from his journal entries, I don't see a real pro-active involvement on his part to be involved. But, from this same data, it gives me reason to attribute that to 'not knowing what to do' rather than not wanting to do it which is common among parents of school-age children. Joe told me about the processes that he sees Andy using when practicing and learning the different concepts he is working on in school.

> **Joe:** OK. Well, we go through a lot of his homework. And he likes to show me what he does in school and his papers that he colors and does his letters, and the objects he colors to match up with the letters. And...he likes to count to 10 a lot. And now he's got up to 20 (laughing). And he likes to say the alphabet a lot which is good. And, so....

Robert: And so you are listening...he shows you things?

Joe: Right, right. When he comes home from school he'll get em out and show em to me. And he likes to match stuff up, he has a workbook here he actually works on, too. He matches the letters with the object, you know, like 'bus', b for 'bus', you know, he likes to....he's really creat...he's really getting where he likes to focus on what the first letter of the word is..

Robert: M-hm.

Joe: ...and he'll sound it out like bus, you know, and he'll go...B...and he knows that it starts with a B. He's really doing good at sounding the words out, you know, and knowing what the words start with. And so, that's about all, you know, that we've really...he's done this year. I think he might've read some...been reading a little bit in books. I don't know exactly know what book their in right now, but...

Joe believes that the early years are important for learning. When he talked about the purpose for going to a conference with the teacher, he showed his awareness of developmental stages. Joe also knew how Andy was doing in school from the report card that came home. Since Joe also has two teenagers, he is aware that at some point in Andy's school-life he will discover...girls and baseball.

I think it was just a basic...see what Andy what doing in school. You know...how he was improving and stuff and things that we might be able to work with him at home on, you know. We need to both, me and Ellen both needs to work, I think...he made straight S's this time on his grade card. Which is satisfactory, but I'd like to see...he could improve on probably some things. At that age, I feel like that's the best time a kid can learn. I mean, they learn the easiest it seems like because their brain aint full of all this different stuff. You know, I mean, it's the best time...they're really wanting to learn, he wants to learn. And of course when a kid gets 8, 9, 10 the older they get, the more they want to focus on other stuff.

He also explained to me what Andy was working on at school and the problems he had had with counting. Joe shows a general awareness of what Andy is learning.

> Well, you know, like letters is what they start with, the word's what they start with. And sounding them out...the vowel sounds and knowing what they start with. And his numbers he's got to where he can count...you know, a lot of times he count 1, 2, 3, 5, 8...you know he'd skip around and not count all the way through like to 20. But now he'll...he counts great. And also, I put this in he's learned the pledge in school, the pledge of allegiance...

In his journal, Joe wrote about some of the activities that Andy was engaged in during his school days. In this particular entry, he shows some of the more humorous moments that are possible when listening to a kindergartner talk about his day!

> Andy's class went on a field trip to the pumpkin patch. He went out on a hay wagon to pick out their pumpkin. They showd the kids an Indian cave and told them how Indians used to live in caves. They had apple cider at the end of the trip and got a bag of gordes. When Andy came home from school he was ready for us to cook his pumpkin right then because he was hungry. He also mentioned seeing the caves but that the Indians never came out.

Philip, father of two, expressed his desire to know what was going on with Samuel's education but admitted that he didn't. Phillip, in addition to knowing his deficiencies, also gave some suggestions that would help him become more aware of what was going on in the school. He feels that his lack of awareness affects his ability to work with his children on their school work at home.

Phillip: I wish that I had a little more time to go talk to his teacher and know what they are working on. Then it would help me make him work on something. Just not knowing what they do all day. I don't know. Kids don't tell what they are doing at school. They forget, so, you know. Maybe a [note] from the teacher saying that's what we are working on and what we will be working the next month. Give me a copy of the book. I'll buy it. See what they are working on and I can figure with him. That would be a [good] thing.

Robert: Yeah.

Phillip: But having no basic understanding of what they are working on, I just cannot teach him anything, just, what I feel inside...counting, help to ...So, with Cindy it's a lot easier because she tells me. I can see she has homework and...so based upon the homework she come with, I know she's working on addition, subtraction, or multiplication so, or reading or spelling or more reports and it's a little easier when they get older.

But, Phillip does know what goes on in general and about his son's personality and how that affects his progress in school. Phillip made several references to his anxiety that his children would be underachievers. He was worried somewhat that his son's personality traits would hinder his ability to excel in school.

Tuesday 9/1

Samuel is still very happy. Miss Rosemont told me this morning that he is doing well. He is learning the rules!...I guess he is not following them sometimes?

Samuel told me that he is not giving any trouble. I hope so but I remember several times at preschool where he got in trouble very bad. The best story is when he dropped his pants and urinated on another kid!! I think that he understands that K is going a good behavior example like Cindy was. But I don't expect a boy to act like his sister. A little roughness is needed sometimes. I want him to be strong enough minded to express his opinion.

David, a pastor, was of course instrumental in his kindergartner's religious education. Thomas was enrolled in a Biblically-based academic program called the Rainbows, which is a faith-based group similar to cub scouts where children can earn stripes by memorizing verses, creating crafts with religious themes, and other religion-based educational activities. I visited David at his church several times and I had time to look around a while. I noticed that in the main hallway at the front of the church, there was a long table up against the wall with what looked like children's work from Sunday school. Crafts, writings, and other handiworks were lain out for people to see. There were several of Thomas' works displayed and it was evident that David was very proud of his son's work. There was a shadow box of Thomas' that won first place. The theme was 'Come Grow With Us.' There was a t-shirt that had the same thing written on it with paint and many other arts and crafts created by the children. David told me about a recipe that Thomas had created as part of the program.

> **David:** And so he has a couple of his recipes and one of the things that he did that he cooked was some 'Hello Dollies.' Now his mom did help him quite a bit, but I thing he got a first place ribbon on those Dollies and they are all gone, they ate em. Now another one is a recipe that he has that he made himself, it's a topping for ice cream. Now most of us...well, his mom and his dad won't eat it...
>
> **Robert:** (Laughing)
>
> **David:** But Thomas thinks it's great. You take pecans and you chop those up and then he takes croutons and he chops those up and then he gets a couple teaspoons of Ovaltine mix and he will mix that all together and he will eat this. And he calls it his crunchy surprise. And that was one of his recipes. They thought he had a great imagination and I think they gave him a first place on that for just imagining it.

Thomas also wrote a poem that was part of his Rainbow works which I asked David to read to me. He was very proud of it:

This is a beautiful day
To go out and play
To smell the blue blossoms
And watch the blue water go by
God makes things grow with water and sun
And you might could play and have lots of fun.

> So that was his first poem that he constructed and he tried to get everything to rhyme and I know it's not, the meter and stuff is not proper, but for a four year old at that time I thought he did an outstanding job of making 'day' and 'play' to rhyme and also 'sun' and 'fun.' And he put it in...This is just something that he worked on just a little while and his mom wrote down and made for him.

Making Time

Every father gave accounts of times when their jobs interfered with their ability to be involved with their children's education. The research on this topic is overwhelming; work is a barrier for paternal involvement in their children's lives, especially involvement in their educational.

Although he desires to be involved, when Phillip talks about his work, it sounds like a pre-emptive situation. Because of the traveling involved with Phillip's job, he feels that he cannot be involved in his children's education at all during certain periods.

> Yeah, I went there [to the school building] a couple of times. I bring them every morning to school when I'm here and I tried to go and talk to his teacher once, but I got busy and...I used to go to the PTO meeting last year, this year it's impossible for me to go. I just, not enough...I don't even know when the meetings are. I don't receive, I don't have the papers. So, no, I didn't get involved at all. If I was more living in town, maybe I could but (laughing), there's no way for me. My posi...my job I'm doing and my traveling, I can't get involved in anything.

However, Phillip does feel the need to catch up on what's going on in his children's lives when he returns from long business trips.

> And the teacher told me she has been improving a lot in the last two weeks. So...that's why I believe if I'm around and I know what's going on, I can make stuff happen. And that's...if I'm gone for a month, when I come back, it takes me another two weeks to figure out where they are, what they are doing and I'm tired, jet lag from Europe, you know, go to sleep early and I just don't...takes me six weeks to without really fully notice what they are doing. I'm not too much worried I know they are OK, but they could be better.

He does feel some guilt about not being able to participate more in their day-to-day educational lives. Phillip said:

> Well, my personal feeling is I don't participate enough being out of town. I feel some guilt not being there sometime, but in the meantime I've got a job to do so... I will try to meet Miss Rosemont about this. I know that she wants to talk to me but I didn't succeed yet being so much out of town.

During my interview with Linda, the kindergarten teacher, she confirmed what I heard Phillip saying that although he very much wanted to involved, his work made it almost impossible. In this instance, he was unable to talk to the teacher because of his sporadic schedule. She said that

> Samuel's father [Phillip] travels a lot. He is very concerned about Samuel's schooling but we've had a hard time making contact. I've only talked to him maybe 2 times. He came in...he did not make it for our parent conference. He does not make it for a lot of our events, but he came in...I told him come in any day during my planning time and he came at a spur of moment time and we talked as well as we could.

In his journal, Phillip noted his out-of-town schedule which shows how frequently he is unavailable.

9/17 - 9/23	Dickson
9/26 - 10/12	Italy
10/14 - 10/17	Dickson

Richard also talked about his work schedule and how it affected his ability to be involved with Jonathan's school. He does take the opportunity to participate when he is at home.

> And, you know, our busy schedule and I'm traveling out of town a lot, work and everything...So...you know a lot of times it's difficult. You know we're on a tight schedule, you know, you're tired or whatever...

> I guess, and not really a prime reason is I am away from home a lot. You know it comes and goes. Sometimes I'm away every week, three or four nights a week. So when I am at home, and I have the opportunity to do it, then I want to let them know that I'm there.

Richard also expressed his concern that even transportation to and from school was affected by his and his wife's work schedules. With both parents working, it becomes even more difficult to do the simple, day-to-day activities even when parents work as a team as Richard and Carolyn do.

> And we talked about, had several discussions about what we're gonna do with him before or after school. Both of us go to work at seven, you know one of us has to be late for work so we switch that out, you know and it's not that big a deal, I guess. You know and then after school what are we gonna do? So right now we just happen to...my wife picks him up, or I pick him up, grandparents pick him up, we rotate around. So we had a lot of decisions to make.

Bob, Sarah's father, talked about how his work schedule changed between when his older son, who is now in 4th grade, was in kindergarten and now, and how it affected his ability to be involved in certain school activities. This theme really stands out when we see how things have changed for one father with different circumstances for each child.

> [M]y work was different then I could, I didn't have to usually go in until noon or so and so I had the mornings off.... And then I had at least one weekday off. And, either Monday or Friday so I'd go to school and I'd spend the last 30 minutes or so with him sometimes. And I just haven't done that this time.

In his journal, Bob also writes about his disappointment that he doesn't have enough time to spend doing the "important things." The data shows that Bob is normally involved in Sarah's extracurricular learning events.

> Dance night, get ready for bed eat supper just not enough time in the day or evening to spend with kids and do important things.

He also expressed his guilt of not being able to take care of his kids in the morning how he would like to.

> She only likes to eat breakfast at school for some reason. I've noticed that. But sometimes Sharon has to leave 6:45, I need to leave by 7 sometimes, so, it's just...take em to school and let em eat there. I hate dumping em off on the school system to feed em like that...

David, a minister, mentioned some job conflicts that kept him from some events that he desired to attend. Even with his flexible schedule, work still presented a barrier for participation.

> I have attended the PTO [Parent Teacher Organization] meeting the first PTO. I was unable to because of something with the ministry I was unable to attend the second one...
>
> Nancy (David's wife) did...while I was gone out of town, she did have a parent/teachers conference...I will attempt to make all those I was just unfortunately, you know, something I couldn't avoid. So I couldn't be there this time, but that's something that I plan to be on...

Because of his occupation as a minister, David does have little more flexibility in his schedule. His wife, Nancy, talked about how fortunate he was to be in a position to do some of the things he does.

> But he has a lot of pride in being able, be in a job where he can actually participate in Thomas' education because there are a lot of men who don't have that opportunity because they're, you know, they can't take off work in the middle of the day and go eat lunch with their child. And David is able to do those things. Since we've come here. Had we still been in Memphis, that wouldn't have happened. Where we came from, before we were here, because his, the day was very structured. He worked under another pastor and he would not have been able to have done those things. And I feel fortunate and blessed that we're here and he can go actively participate in Thomas' education and in his life.

On many occasions, the fathers talked about making time to be with the children in general. They believed that they had to compress everything into the weekend because during the work week, time was limited. From the focus group:

> **Max:** The way you have to work nowadays and stuff it seems like the weekend is the only time you really get to…
>
> **Al:** That's it.
>
> **Max:** …make an impression on your child's life.
>
> **David:** I think we have to prioritize our time and decide what's important. And now he's starting kindergarten and the way the school schedule is maybe another couple of months and he'll be graduating elementary school and then…and so time is extremely important and I found we have to schedule time, plan time ahead of time as much as we possibly can to spend quality time and do the things we like to do…

Richard: Well, you know, to me I...talk about working and I travel and stuff, I'm not home that much, and I feel like the weekend, you know talking about weekend is the time that you have that's what you dedicate plans...to be with children and whatever. I feel like sometimes if we haven't done, like it's Sunday night or something and like I'm feeling lost, you know, cause if I haven't gotten in everything I wanted to do or, you know tried to schedule things like I had planned it before, so it helps me and my family a lot if we can do that, we can schedule what's going on, spend the time with them that we planned on.

Phillip: ...schedule...depending on what business you got and what you do so when you can, like weekend possibly parents, hopefully they come home that's the best time I guess. But two days out of seven...I found my time in the morning when I drive them to school, I drive the 25 minutes. During that period in the car we practice, we talk, we exchange ideas. We count, we make plays games, you know, we got little paper we pull out cards and say spell it for me or, you know, just 25 minutes might seem small amount of time but it's pretty good for a 5 year old boy.

Father-Child Interaction

I started most interviews with a question that got the fathers talking about their participation in educational activities with their kindergartners. It is much easier to talk about what you've done than what you've felt emotionally—more concrete. The answers that they gave almost always involved a one-on-one interaction of some kind. The fathers told stories about how they were engaged in a personal pedagogical interaction with their kindergartners. Within the data, I saw four thematic categories emerge which had a father-child interaction element: concept teaching, reading, talking, and playing.

ABC's and 123's

Some fathers were engaged with their kindergartners in teaching the concepts that the children were learning in school. I consider this primary instruction or review, as the classroom teacher would do, trying to augment or reinforce the knowledge base of the child. Some fathers called this the 'book learnin.' This type of teaching came in the form of reviewing work that came home from school, supplemental or related instruction, or working on letters and numbers in general which is a big part of kindergarten-level learning.

Richard, 29, gave his opinion on parents-as-teachers. He might have been influenced by Linda's [Jonathan's teacher] suggestion at the parent-teacher conference when she recommended to them not to do so much "hard teaching and learning but just reinforce what he has learned that day" [Richard's words]. It also reveals his perception of what the parent role in general is in his children's education.

> So, you know, it's not a whole lot of teaching that we do or try to do really at home because he is getting that 7 hours a day at school. What we do a lot is reinforce what he's done there.

Richard described some of that reinforcement activities he mentioned. He talked about several interactive learning 'events' in which he was engaged with both of his young children. As with most of the other fathers, I saw in Richard's account that he is really having fun learning with his children.

> Well, you know, I'm always...we have a tablet at home that...you know, whatever kind of tablet they use at school...and Jonathan always enjoys me sitting down or his mother sitting down with him and letting him show us how he can write the letter...the numbers and those things. You know, we do that on a pretty often, fairly often basis, you know. A lot of times he asks for that. He wants to sit down and do it. And it's nothing that we're forcing off on him, you know. We just say 'Hey you wanna do this?' "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.' And sometimes he'll tell him...both our kids are always asking us for pencil and paper to write on. A lot of times, you know, we'll sit down and...I get a big kick out of several activities I do with both my children. One of em is, you know I can't draw that good, but I think I can draw decently and I'll say 'well, tell me what you want me to draw.' And I'll draw something and then I'll ask them to draw something, you know (laughing). But it's an amazing thing. Jonathan, he can draw a house and he can draw a tree and something like that. And it's very interesting to see how they try to do that.

When Richard was telling me the story in which he describes himself as 'artistically challenged,' he was having a good time remembering these times when he was involved in these learning events.

When Max talks about working with Eric on his schoolwork, he uses the word 'we' as do many of the fathers in the study. I assume that he means he and his wife. Max told me about some times when he worked on letters and numbers with his kindergartner. Max seems to know that learning through 'application' is much easier for kindergartners than isolated concept learning; of course, he didn't use these terms.

> **Max:** Well, just the other night we...he has...they made out with his alphabet but he still has trouble recognizing certain letters and, you know, knowing what they are. He knows the majority of em. So we the other night...Monday night I guess it was...we worked with him and tried to make him recognize the letters that he was having trouble with.
>
> **Robert:** M-hm.

Max: He can do his...he recognized his numbers and stuff. Then, about 5 months or so ago she sent home he's having trouble with his shapes and stuff. We worked with him on his shapes as we was sitting here at the table we'd ask him what shape that book was. You know, whether it be a square, rectangle, whatever, you know. And work with him. And that seems to me, it takes...they can apply more rather than just seeing somebody draw a circle on a paper and asking him what that is, you know. What shape's a cup? You know, is it round? Or...he seems to...he's not having no trouble with his shapes, his basic shapes anyway. His ABC's that he's having troubles with we try to associate it with a word that he knows like a dog with a D, you know he's had trouble A, an A and a B. The harder ones like the K and the H, the ones that you'd think that would be further down the line are harder to remember he don't have no trouble with them....

One of the assumptions that I had going into this study was that fathers, in general, did not participate in direct academic instruction for whatever reason. Although not looking for it, Max told me about his discomfort in this kind of educational activity. He said he learned best by doing. During our interview, Max told me that he didn't feel he had the patience to engage in teaching his children. I saw this theme emerge from many of the father's words.

Well, right now, if we're doing something, whatever it is, and I'm trying to make a point to him...as far as sitting down and saying you know this your ABC's and you know, let's write on the...I don't do that. I don't have the patience for that. I...maybe it's because it's the way I learned things.

Although Max said he was uncomfortable teaching the three R's to his kindergartner, his wife, Lisa, described the kinds of things she saw him doing. This

suggests that even though Max felt incompetent or uncomfortable doing those kinds of activities, he still felt it was important for him to try.

> But Eric he wants to go ride on the tractor and he wants to Max to read to him. He wants Max to...Eric is a real intelligent kid...Max and Eric will be on one side, you know, him teaching him some stuff. And then me and Elizabeth will be on the other side and me trying to keep her from tearing his head off or something. Daddy help me, let me think. And usually at the end of the...him doing the computer or reading to him or going over his letters or something. I mean we do matching games on the floor. We do it more as a big family thing instead of just individual I guess you could say every night. But...it's...I mean, I think we're normal. I mean truthfully Max is a good daddy to Eric. He's a role model that I want Eric to have. I wouldn't have it any other way.

He went on to tell me about how he learned best by doing, and he told me stories which served as examples. Max's propensity for learning in a hands-on environment influenced the way he interacted with his son.

> When we're doing, whenever we're outside, if we're out in the shop working, I got a woodworking shop out there, I get out there and piddle around in it. If I'm doing something I try to explain to him why, you know, what I'm doing and why and you know, what the purpose behind it is.

Bob, father of two, told me about his views on teaching the ABC's. He had similar views about teaching and learning the 'conventional' concepts that kindergartners are learning in today's schools. The theme of deferring to the mother also began to emerge when talking about homework assistance.

> You know, there's nothing really specific that I sit down and make sure that I do. Sometimes I read, sometimes I'm...let your dad read to you tonight (laughs), you know, that kind of deal. Sharon does a lot more of the school work.
>
> But if it's something they can't do because they're having problems with it, then I'll need to work with em and make sure that...first of all I need to know if I can do it first (laughing) cause if I'm telling something wrong...you know that's one of the big things with Will, he'll bring home something and he'll have problems with it and I don't know if it's the right answer or not. You know, I'll look at it and I'll go 'Gosh, how would I know?' And so, with Sarah we haven't had to do any of that yet. I pretty much know my numbers and letters (laughing).

What I found in a lot of the data was that fathers did not take a pro-active approach to teaching and learning with their children; they didn't show initiative in becoming involved. Mostly, they talked about working on something that 'needed' it which supports the popular notion of the male problem-solver mentality. Bob talked about his belief on the subject:

> ...there's been no problems and been nothing going on as a whole. It's just been one easy deal. It's just not been...to me if Linda had called us and said OK, we need to work on this, we're having trouble doing this, I think we would've spent more time with her doing this, but that just hasn't happened and we haven't...like I say we haven't needed to spend a lot of time doing different things.

But, Bob did feel that reinforcing what the school is doing is a responsibility of the father.

> I don't think you have, I think when you bring into the world, you have an obligation to raise them and feed them and clothe and do different things like that. And then, I don't think that even when you say OK here's the schools, it's their deal. I think you have to help...you can't just rely on the teachers to teach them everything. You have to make sure that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing and reinforce those things that...they bring home...you know, we worked on the letter 'C' today, well you need to help work on the letter 'C' to make sure that they don't...you know just different things like that.

Joe told me about some of the learning activities that he did with his kindergartner. He is involved by reviewing Andy's work that comes home and working with him on problems that he might be having like backwards letters.

> You know, like when he brings a homework home, you know, sit with him and go over his homework and he'll bring his paper home on Friday and we'll look over it, you know, and see how good he's done on different areas like coloring and matching letters and numbers and writing his name. He...up to just like 2 or 3 weeks ago he wanted to write his name ANDY which is how you spell it but the N was backwards and he's always spell it, put the N backwards...but now he does it the correct way. And so, I mentioned a couple times to him, you know, about his N being backwards which he's corrected. So, we go over, you know his...they also bring home a little sheet if he's done been good or bad (we laugh). So sometimes we have to do a little correction on that. But in general, you know, we just go over his homework and what he's colored and that's about it.

I was fortunate to get a report from Phillip about an extended 'lesson' that he had with his kindergarten son, Samuel. When Phillip was telling me this story, I could see the impatience that many fathers talked about when working with their young children. But, he had perspective on the situation. Several times throughout conversations I had with

Phillip, he displayed a sense of humor about the whole learning process with his children and knew that children would eventually learn and grow out of this.

> And he knows, like this morning the 10, he told me 8. First we went through all the numbers like 1 and then we come back...the 2, the 3, the 4, the 5. He...the 7, we look at the 8 he told me 8, then we arrived to the 10 and he told me 8 again. I say, 'You just told me 8 with this one, see? What is this?' So... 'that's 8.' 'So why do you tell me that's a 8 too? It cannot be both of them the same.' So I say, 'What do you think it is?' So he tried counting in his mind, you know, 1, 2 and he passed it, you know, he went up to 17 (we laugh). I say I believe you passed it. So he say 'is it a 9?' I say, 'no.' So if it's not a nine, it's a ten.' You know he knows we're working with the number...(we laugh)... 'good deal, you got it. Can you remember that tomorrow?' I say. So I make him review that couple of times. Tomorrow we'll have to do it. Tomorrow is Saturday, but we will change the paper. I work through the same process with Cindy [his older daughter]. There is like the letter N, and K, or some like 16, some numbers and letters they just cannot absorb it and then one day keep them. It does. And it's funny how... come to them and you never know why. I just told you 2 seconds ago this is a 10. Because we did that too this morning and after I show him it was a 10, he cannot say this is a 8. And he was not, I mean, was maybe 11 two minutes later.

Much of the interaction between fathers and children stemmed from working with school-related papers or activities such as looking at or reviewing papers that came home from school. Sometimes, fathers helped with at-home learning projects that the children were working on.

Al talked about a time when he assisted Abby with her endeavors:

> Well, I...you know, a lot of times when she's in there, she don't really know how to make something, like she's painting these pictures...say she don't know what color she ought to use or how do you go about looking at the colors, you know. You'll have to sit down with her and decide which

color you're gonna make it. Of course she'll go and use the color she wants to use anyway. But she wants your opinion on that, more or less. And, now basically she likes...I mean they can do things. There's not a lot of...just don't...there's things she'll bring in there and say well, what do you think about this? or you know she'll bring one home where she's got all out of the lines or she colored bad on, you know, and you gotta tell her about staying in the lines, coloring it neat and then she'll go back and do it and make it pretty.

Richard told me that his son worried a lot about making mistakes and that he and his wife, Carolyn, try very hard to make him understand that it's OK to mess up once in a while. He is encouraging his son to do well by giving positive comments while reviewing his work.

Jonathan likes to bring his papers home with a smiley face or a hundred on it or whatever. And he...if he makes a mistake on his schoolwork, you know, a lot of things they do, I think may be this one was counting flowers and trees or something and they had to write the number, you know, 6 or 7 or whatever on there. And he, you know, counted 6 and it was actually 5, you know something like that. Just going over, so we would go over the entire paper and he would do it again and the he would say, 'Oh, yeah. I got that wrong. That was 5 not 6.' You know and he would see his mistake himself and try to get him to see it. Not just say, 'Well you made a mistake.' You know, 'what's the problem' you know (laughing). Whatever, but...it's gonna be a lot better if he can see it for himself. So that's a thing...as far his reviewing his schoolwork. I mean...one of us, his mother or I do it every night. You know, 'let's see your papers, oh, that was good coloring.' You know, he'll say, 'Oh, I got outside the lines.' 'Oh don't worry about it, Jonathan. Let it roll off your back, don't worry about it.'

David and his son, Thomas, go over papers that come home almost on a daily basis. Both father and son look forward to looking at schoolwork together and it has

become part of their time together. David listens to his son talk about what is going on and just like with Richard and his son, David notices that Jonathan also gets frustrated when he makes mistakes.

> Thomas brings home a paper on matching similar items. He and I went over the paper. He told me that similar meant same. For example, toothbrush and toothpaste were a match. Thomas is writing his name much better. I noticed on this paper that Mrs. Rosemont has made a dot to dot S for Thomas. He still gets upset with himself because he cannot make his S properly. We try to instill into him that he will learn that later.

Reading

A common theme among these fathers' stories was their involvement in reading with their young children. All the fathers were engaged in some kind of book-related activity whether it was buying books, reading books, or going to the library. It is widely known that reading to and with young children is beneficial to the child's language development and reading ability. The school, as mentioned by many of the fathers, actively encourages parents to read and it looks like it is working.

Al talked about his involvement in reading with his daughter. His participation is very interactive because he is not only reading, but listening to Abby read with her unconventional kindergarten elaboration!

> ...we read books every night. She has to have books read to her every night...Well, I mean, she picks the books. Cause we got her every kind of book you can get her I guess. But every night she wants a book read. I mean, that's pretty well...and she likes to read. She don't know what she's reading a lot of times but now she can sit there and read you a book and just

make the biggest conversation you ever seen and I mean, never know what the words are.

Al told a funny story about a time when he was driving home with his family and Abby wanted to stop and eat at a favorite restaurant. This father is aware of his daughter's reading prowess! The exchange went something like this:

And she's smart enough to know, like on the way home we, she said, 'Well, we're going to stop over at O'Charley's and eat on the way home.' And I said "Well, OK." And we was...we was right beside Applebee's. So I whooped her in there, you know, and I said, 'Well, we're here at O'Charley's.' And we got almost in there and she says, 'This is not O'Charley's. It says Applebee's on the sign.'

The conversation that follows is from the interview that I had with Al. He notices that Abby is learning from their reading—how to spell, remembering the story. He talked about a time when he was reading with his daughter—a story that most parents can identify with!

Robert: You talked earlier about reading, that you guys read every night...

Al: Every night before we go to bed.

Robert: Do you read to her?

Al: Well, we swap out. If she's doing something else, I'll read to her.

Robert: Tell me about a time recently, an experience where you were reading, when you were reading to her. Do you remember the name of the book?

Al: Well, we were reading Rumplestiltskin and... of course we've read...you know how you are if you're tired and you want to get this done quick, you know what I mean...

Robert: (laughing).

Al: ...and your flipping through there and you're reading it, but then again you're missing a page maybe here and there. You know, she'll catch up on that after a while.

Robert: Yeah.

Al: And she'll go back and tell you. And she'll tell you word for word what you left out. Because she's got a...I don't know whether she's got a photographic memory. I mean she can...you can read that book to her and she can sit down and read that book to you...every page of it. She just remembers well. And then she knows how to identify words, certain words. You can...she can come and ask you how to spell something and you can sorta do that...you know...and she can figure out how to spell that word.

Brenda, Al's wife, also talked about her husband and daughter reading together at night. Both of them feel that reading is important and it is evident that they have a good time when engaged in this one-to-one interaction.

She'll usually take the book to him to read. Of course I read to her too. But a lot of times she just wants him to do it. So, she will pick out books, we've got tons of books. So right now in her class at school they're doing this accelerated reading where they have to read so many books a month. Or we read em to her. And then if they do so many, they get a free thing from the Pizza Hut. And she's already got hers for November. Cause, you know, I'll read or Al will one two or three books a night to her. And then she goes back and tries to read em. She kind of memorize what you say and looks at the pictures.

Usually she'll get up in the chair with him and sit in his lap and then read. She'll look at the pictures. You know, and then she'll ask questions and, you know, you'll hear em in there laughing and just little things like that. But she loves to be read to. She loves it.

Richard told me about his family's reading activities and his perspective on reading with the children. His story is evident that the school is trying to encourage reading between parents and children, even before they start school as Richard does with his younger daughter. Notice Richard's shared excitement with his son when he can read a book!

> And, I guess one of the biggest things is to read to your children. Get them to read. Rocky Top Elementary has a very, I think, dedicated program to getting children to read, learn to read and get them accelerated in reading. So we do that with both our children, we have a three-year-old girl so she's very active in what we're doing as well. At least not as...we try to, based on our schedule, we try to read to the children. You know sometimes, and they're really interested in it. They sometimes want you to read 3 or 4 books at night with them before they go to bed and stuff like that. And they're simple books. And Jonathan, now that he has went to kindergarten, you know with us reading at home, we've always read, you know at home even before he started kindergarten. Now they enforce...they have this program of simple books like you would have two to three words per page. And the kids really learn the words because of the picture...memorization, you know, they think they're reading but they're really not reading. So Jonathan is really, you know, he does that at home and he really gets a lot of excitement out of showing us that he can... 'Hey, I can read this book!' You know, (laughing) 'Look at this, watch me!' And a lot of times...you know he can go through the book pretty well and then sometimes he misses words.

He also told me that at the parent-teacher conference he asked Ms. Rosemont what they should be doing at home. She encouraged him and Carolyn to engage in reading at home. Richard knows the importance of books and reading in a child's life.

And what we should be doing at home. If there was anything we could do at home to help him with that and that's when we talked to Miss Rosemont about doing their reading. That's one of the big things that we decided would be the best is to read to the child, read to our children and let them get used to books. Our kids have always loved books, we've always stressed that.

I asked Richard to tell me about the actual reading interaction between him and his children. As I read this, I can visualize the closeness that Richard has with his children when they are engaged in this activity.

Richard: Well, it's an occasion, you know, probably 30 to 40 minutes or an hour before bedtime, you know after we've got settled down from dinner and got their baths and nightclothes on or whatever. They gotta...both our kids have...Jonathan has a book case that has books on it and Jade has a room she's got a few books in hers, so we ask him to go get a, you know, 'You want us to ready you a book, a story?' 'Yeah.' 'Well, go pick you one out.' So we let them go pick the story out. And we usually they come back with 3 or 4 different ones and they want them all read to em (laughing). You have to get an early start, I have to go get in bed, you know, get em in bed. And for me, I just enjoy piling up on the couch and ...Mostly I sit the recliner and I try to turn the TV off most times, you know, turn the TV off and get their attention towards the books. So usually they'll sit one's on one hip and one's on the other hip right here and I'm trying...I let them...I try to let them turn the pages and...

Robert: M-hm.

Richard: ...after we get through with the arguing about who's going to do what, you know, we get started with the story so...you know...a lot of times we go through the story. And sometimes I ask em questions about it. A lot of times Jonathan or Jade, Jonathan will pop in and say, 'I know what happens here.' And he'll...he knows from the picture, you know, what happens, and he's proud to show us now, that he's been in kindergarten and had doing things like that, you know memorization and you know, they think they're reading a book. He's proud to say, 'Hey, this is, I know this part. Let me tell you about it.' So I let him tell me what he wants to and...he'll ask for my help which I'm glad he does. He will get to a point

and just go on. He'll say, 'Wait a minute, I don't remember this, what happens here?' And stuff like that.

David elaborates on the relationship that his son has with books and his own role in reading with Thomas. He explained to me that Thomas' interest in books doesn't stop with the reading itself. It extends into other learning activities like storytelling, theater, and other elaborations. Like many of the fathers, David and Thomas have a reading ritual at bedtime.

> We also try to read to Thomas every day, ever since he was very small we would read at least one book a day...at night time. Usually two or three every night and he has probably two or three hundred books in his own library that he has. And now at this age we allow him to choose what books he wants to read and then we also believe in reading the Bible so we read the Bible story to him after we read a book to him. So that's our nightly ritual. And his desire to read and to learn how to read. A few, a couple weeks ago, last week they had the October PTO meeting and I was unable to attend, but my wife was there, and after that Miss Rosemont came up to her and said that Thomas had brought Dr. Seuss's Foot Book. And he read it to the class and took a test on it and he became the first one in her class to be the accelerated reader. And she wrote a statement 'Thomas's hunger and desire for books has, is going over and overflowing into some of his classmates.' And he can tell you, he can go back and tell you about all the stories in those books. And one year we bought him a series of Winnie-the-Pooh books, and, 16, 18 books, I don't really know the exact number. And he'll go and then get his animals, his Pooh animals and act out that story on a...he'll just go over that story and over that story. So he loves not only to hear the books, but he recalls and is able almost to tell you every act or event that happens in those books.

David thinks that his personal love for reading, as well as his wife's, is rubbing off on Thomas. David often talked about being a role model for his son and that is evident in this narrative about books and reading.

> So, I personally love to read, Nancy loves to read and we both took care of a lot of our old books. So I probably had 25, 30 Dr. Seuss books. You know, the Go, Dog, Go's and those type...Cat in the Hat and that type thing. And people have just given him books after books and he has a bookcase, it's probably 6 feet tall and probably 2 foot wide and all of it's, almost all of it's covered with books that he has. So, it's just something that he enjoys, he'll enjoys...to listen to more, and it does help him to relax and settle down for the night.

David's involvement in Thomas' education stems from his desire to be involved in his son's life on the whole. The time he spends with Thomas is important to him and he often includes his son when he is out running errands. This passage is from David's journal. After stopping at a cabinet maker workshop and a carpet business (the church was remodeling) and McDonald's for lunch...

> On the way home from lunch, we notice the library is having a book sale. As we walk in, they stopped the sale, so I take Thomas upstairs so he can 'rent' a couple of books. I read them to him as soon as get home. I enjoy times such as these. He is growing up so fast.

David gives Thomas the opportunity to read a wide variety of books by taking him to libraries and book sales.

> There was a PTO meeting tonight and Nancy was unable to attend. The library was having a book sale. So I took, Thomas early to look at the books. Our entire family loves to read and Thomas loves books. We told him to chose a couple of books while in library class. When we got there Thomas had picked up four books. I paid about $10 for them and he was so happy. At bedtime I read a couple of the books.

David's wife, Nancy, talked about what she notices when father and child are engaged in reading together. I could tell from her tone and her smile that she loved telling me about this as much as she loved watching it happen! She notices the reaction and excitement that Thomas shows as well as his dad.

> He is anxious to get a book when he knows daddy is going to be reading to him. Daddy's special place to read to him is in the living room. And when he knows it's...and what he calls it...when he knows it's daddy's read night, then he's very anxious to get sometimes even several books because daddy tells him he can get two or three. He'll get several books and he goes quickly, he find the book quickly and goes quickly to the living room even more quickly than when it's my time to read. And he sits in his daddy's lap or right beside him on the couch. And it's not like ho-hum when is this going to be over?...it's more like, OK, what's next? You know, that kind of excitement and anticipation for what daddy is going to tell him in that book. And we read a lot of different kinds of books. He has a lot of books. And I think David is a very good reader. Sometimes when he's really tired there's not quite as much inflection as there should be but he, Thomas enjoys being close to David when David's reading to him. He usually ends up giving daddy a big hug when it's over so that lets you know it's been pleasant.

Bob reads to Sarah every now and then. Sometimes it was difficult to interpret the importance he places on activities because of his unique sense of humor. He described the book-sharing process he engages in with his kindergarten daughter.

Bob: Sarah's pretty picky about certain things and one of them is she doesn't like for you...for me to pick a book. She has to pick the book. And she always picks this one book that I hate, so I...it's something that's got a bunch of praise and thoughtfulness it's some...it's crazy. I'll show it to you after a while.

Robert: OK.

Bob: I hate it. I absolutely cannot stand it. And she wants to read...and then, so she brings me a book that's got 4 or 5 words in it, and I think well, we've went from one extreme to the other, you know you need to bring me a book in the middle. It's just like...what was it, Friday night...she brought me a book, we read that and then she wanted another book so we started reading that and she falls asleep on that one so she was pretty tired, you know. But I don't, you know like I say, I don't read to her every night. Try to, just whenever, just to get her to wind down. That's probably the biggest thing. Kind of wind us all down...(laughs)...all down a little bit.

Bob told me about some of the books that he has been reading with Sarah. He has strong opinions about his likes and dislikes regarding children's literature. Again, he talked about that one book...

Robert: Hmmm. It (referring to journal entry) says that you and Sarah read 5 small books on this Wednesday.

Bob: Ahh, for some reason I must've just counted them for some reason we were just going through em just like that, you know...but...

Robert: Do you remember what those books were?

Bob: (long pause)...One was a caterpillar book...and one was a Dr. Seuss spot book...you know which one I'm talking about?

Robert: I know Dr. Seuss...

Bob: Something about there's a...(calls to Sarah in the other room) 'Sarah, what's the name of the book with the polka dot guy?

Sarah: Put Me in the Zoo.

Bob: Yeah, yeah, Put Me in the Zoo.

Robert: (laughing).

Bob: Yeah, Put Me in the Zoo. And, probably…let's see there's one book…let's see what was that…let's see the caterpillar book…she's got two or three that she likes to read all the time.

Robert: M-hm.

Bob: And then there's this one book that I can't stand.

Robert: The book you were telling me about before?

Bob: Oh, yeah the…

Robert: Or is this a different one?

Bob: No. (Calling to the other room) 'What's the name of that book I can't stand?'

Sharon: (from other room) The Lovables.

Bob: The Lovables.

It was interesting to hear the mothers' stories about their observations of the reading interaction between dads and kids. Here is one that Sharon told me about Bob and Sarah.

> I know when I see him work with her whenever they do read a story, he really puts a lot of intonations in the stories and stuff. And you can see a lot of interaction.
>
> I do see some good interaction and it can be fun if…to listen to. It's hilarious. I can hear him read a story and you know…it's just funny when you listen to her laugh, I mean it's just funny.

Max's wife, Lisa, also told me about how she likes to listen to her husband and her children read together. Again, I heard that this time is fun for both father and child.

> But, I mean...we read to them. We try to show him like...I mean, Max will sit down and he'll...he reads better than I do. He can read faster and he can...got like a character voice where I don't. When I read it's like real slow and drawn out and it takes forever for mama to read something. Where Max, he can come off when he reads it and he makes it sound interesting. You know, I want Eric to pick up on that part cause Max is a smart man...
>
> Eric don't get as sleepy as when I read to him (laughing). He's more interested. If he's got somebody that can make the characters a little bit more outspoken or have different changes in their voice, different characters like there's 3 or 4 characters in a book. Well, Max can make it sound...you know, those 4 different people. Where I just...my voice straight through, you know. He's good at that.

Joe likes to know what's Andy's learning, although it may be more a more relaxed or incidental involvement. He told me a story about when Andy was reading some nursery rhymes.

> **Robert:** It says here that he was reading nursery rhymes and he read it to you. Tell me about that experience.
>
> **Joe:** Well, they had a...about nine, I think, nursery rhymes and they must have done one like one every day or something. They colored it and then they must've went over it a few times in class because, I mean, he had....he...I know he can't read it really probably word for word but he's got em memorized and he can say every one of them.
>
> **Robert:** M-hm.

Joe: And he read every one of them to me and...or said em, you know. He showed me the pictures and say it...and told the story that went...the rhyme that went with it.

Robert: Now how did that come about? How did he come to read you those? Did he ask you?

Joe: Well, I heard him...no, I heard him in here going over it with Ellen. And I hollered and told him to come when he got done, that I'd like to hear it too. And so he did. He done em every one...

Robert: Why did you want to hear it too?

Joe: I was just interested in, you know, just see if he was really reading the paper or if he was...you know, just how he was just saying it or what. But he went...he said em every one to me. But, he recited every one of em, word for word.

The following excerpt from the focus group discussion illustrates that reading is an important part of the teaching and learning experience for these dads and their kindergartners. Although the motivations for reading might be different for each father, they are all engaged in some kind of reading interaction.

David: I feel one thing we have done with Thomas since very early before he even got a year old is we always read to him before he goes to bed. Now we read other times, but we read something and it's usually 15, 20 minutes. Now he's allowed to, he has probably 2 or 3 hundred books that he can go and choose which book he wants sometimes we've read them over and over and over again. And he can just tell you what's going on. But because we sit down...and what we do is we sit down on our couch, I have a place next to the lamp and he comes and sits by me and that's like dad time for the day. And I usually read at least two books if not three to him. And I think that has helped him in this entire process of kindergarten of learning because of his...of books as excellent vehicle. I know sometimes it's easier to pop a video in and say go watch that and give me thirty minutes of time off...

Robert: I admit to that (raising hand, everyone laughs).

David: Having that time to just sit down and to read is kind of like an ending to the day.

Robert: What do you all think about that? A theme that I found in the interviews is that a lot of dad time...there's some reading going on. And some of you have little kind of rituals and things like that about it. So, what's happening there with reading and books?

Richard: Same thing as David was talking about, you know, the 200 books and you're...you get on the same book for 2 weeks, you know...(some laugh)...over and over again...got it memorized or whatever...but I think the school has helped Carolyn and I, what my wife and realized, you know, that's, they...We had a good conversation with Miss Rosemont during the parent-teacher conference when we went there right after school started and...she...we were asking her what we should do at home, you know, telling her what we did now, what we should change, what's going on at school...day pattern down and what they were going to be doing in those few weeks. And reading is the most, you know, they're reinforcing that, and I believe that. Reading is the most important thing.

Someone: Yeah.

Phillip: Reading is also quality time to be a dad and more there with the kids. Not just learning.

As the data suggest, these fathers are engaged in reading with their children. Their stories have confirmed that reading is an activity that they look forward to and one that provides a bonding between kindergarten dads and their kindergartners.

Talking

Many stories emerged from the data that described conversations that the fathers had with their children that were educational in nature. All the fathers have been talking to their kindergartners about school, learning, and other educational activities in general.

One father, Al, father of two, told a story about a conversation he had with his daughter. I was surprised that he shared it with me, but pleased that we had built a trust that would warrant this sharing. The topic is a familiar one, but most of the time we, as fathers, expect that it will not be necessary **at least** until the 6th grade or so!

> **Al:** Well, now we went to Florida that one time and we was on that Ferris wheel, going around and she told me she says, 'Well, Dad' says, 'this makes my private parts tingle.' And I mean that's an odd thing for a little kid to say. And, you don't think nothing about that. That's just something she said. And then...
>
> **Robert:** How did you handle that?
>
> **Al:** Well, I mean I just sort of said well, Abby, you know, and I told her...later on, make it short on that, later on that came up again one time when we was just out riding in the country. And she said the same thing and she said well, I really like it. And then you know, you gotta sorta tell her that's your...you don't tell people that. But then again that's your stomach rumbling, that's what causes that to do that.

Richard told me many times about his efforts to engage his son in conversation about his school day. He made it clear that he wants to know what's going on with Jonathan and what he thinks. Even though Richard has a hectic schedule, he still thinks it is very important to talk to his children.

> You know, I don't know what other parents are doing but you always hear a troubled kid has not had a good home life. And I believe that. He...his mother and/or father has not been there for him. He may be there present every night at home or something like that but...and I'm not saying we have the best life, we have a heck of a schedule, my wife works till 7, I'm out of town or something like that. We don't have a lot of meals that we sit down family wise....but, with my wife and I and both children. By golly, when

> we, I'm there, we sit...it's dinner time and my wife's at work or whatever, my kids and I sit at the table with the television off and we talk about things. And I've always done that with them. 'What did you do today? Did you have...did you color something? What color did you color?' You know, just thinking about what's going on.

David told me about an impromptu conversation he had with his son when they were driving to school one day. The fathers in this study all seemed to take advantage of opportunities that presented themselves during the day to casually talk to their children. This dialogue was one of many 'teachable moments' that emerged from the data.

> So it's just my desire, educationally to help Thomas the very best I can. And whatever I have to do to make him feel successful. And I think he is going to be very successful in school. I think he has a desire and a hunger to learn. I gave this illustration in my journal but I think it's good here also. I was taking Thomas to school and right as we turn in to drop him off there are bleachers that have...where the football stadium...and on the back of that they have written TIGERS. And he is learning, he's desiring to learn more about letters and more about reading and so he begins to ask me, 'Dad...', and he begins to spell T-I-G-E... 'what does,' you know, 'what does this letter spell?' and he spelled out T-I-G-E-R-S. And I told him what it meant. And it's just those type of situations, if I just take those times to spend with him, to answer his question, to answer his curiosity, I know that the older he gets there may be some questions that I won't be able to answer on the spot at that time, but I'm willing to try to find the answer for him and try to help him. So as a father, I guess I want to be involved as much as possible with my son.

David wrote about a conversation that he had about Thomas' day at school. Many of David's stories about his interaction with his son have an element of playfulness. He really enjoys being with and talking to his son.

When I see him at home and ask about the day, he tries to give me a hint. He tries to make the B sound but it is hard to understand. He sings a song about B and beautiful buttons. They work on the number 7. Thomas says it is an easy number. It only takes 2 sticks. We talk about numbers. He tells me that 2, 5, and 3 are hard because of the curves. I try to encourage him that he will get the hang of it soon.

David's wife, Nancy, also told me about daily conversations that she notices between father and son that are of a pedagogical nature.

For example, in kindergarten with Ms. Rosemont he learned the alphabet by learning letter people. It's Mr. M, Mr. T, and then the vowels are Mrs. like Mrs. A, Mrs. E. Well, each time that Thomas learns a new letter person, he wants to tell dad what he had learned and he wants to tell daddy all the characteristics of that particular letter. And David makes it a point every evening, if I picked Thomas up, he makes it a point to look at Thomas' papers, every one of them not just the one on top because we look at 4 or 5 papers per day. He looks at every one of them and comments on each one of them. And he makes a point to spend that time with Thomas even if it's just a very short time.

Bob talked about his attempts to engage Sarah in conversation about her day at school. My conversations with Bob taught me that he knows that it's important to ask about his child's day at school, but he is not afraid to let it show that sometimes he is just going through the motions. He is aware that sometimes his daughter doesn't want to talk as much as he does.

Bob: ...we do the things, you know, 'Whadja do at school today?' you know, 'Whadja eat for lunch?' you know, things like that, you know, we try to ask them that everyday. Just to, I think one, make sure that they did eat

lunch or that you know, so they're not hungry. I mean, but like I say, she's always hungry…

Robert: (laughing).

Bob: But, you know, different things like that. But as far as specifically asking her, saying, 'What story did you read today?' I don't, you know I tried that a couple of times and she doesn't remember the names of the books. She remembers things like who the leader was and whether she was the leader or whoever, you know. There for a couple of weeks, I couldn't even get her to tell me who sat next to her or who sat across from her, she just didn't want to tell me or didn't know or something. Where as far as Will, he coulda told me every single kid's name in the class for some reason, you know, it's just, we thought hey, leave it alone, you know. If she wants to tell us, she'll tell us.

Many times the fathers were involved in talking with their kindergartner when the dreaded 'note' from the teacher came home. When Sarah came home with one, Bob tried to get some more information from Sarah about the incident.

Yeah, yeah. Again, you know, I asked her, I said, 'What's the problem again with Samuel?' 'I dunno' (imitating Sarah). 'Why'd you slap him?' 'I dunno.' Just, you know, things like that. Sometimes she'll tell me and sometimes she won't. It's just one of those things.

And after she had been disciplined at school, Bob was interested in finding out more about that. I got to meet Sarah several times and she is a delightful, blond-headed little girl. When I saw her at Bob's house once, she had the 'kindergarten Kool-Aid stain' around her lips and big smile to go with it. I imagined her this way during this conversation that Bob told me about:

Bob: Yeah, Sarah told me finally. She said, 'I had to sit on the black thing.' That's the little thing that goes around the playground that holds in the wood chips. I figured out that's what she was talking about so she had to sit there. I said, 'Did you have to sit next to Miss Rosemont?' 'No, Dad' (imitating Sarah's voice with a slight exaggeration of whininess). 'I had to sit on the black thing.'

Phillip seems to have a more authoritarian outlook than the other fathers in the group. His business-like approach is apparent in many of the interactions that he has with his children. Phillip wrote in his journal about a conversation he had with his son at the beginning of the school year about the school rules.

8/31/98

Samuel, my son, started kindergarten for true today. We went over the rules I expect him to follow. There are 3 of them.

1. Don't kick. Keep your hands and feet for yourself.
2. Listen
3. Don't run, be quiet in hall.

Samuel said he understood.

In his interview, Phillip elaborated on that interaction:

Well, the three rules which is not running and keep...I forgot what they were (laughing). But...we went through it every day and it's just make him repeat. And when after a week I say, you know, 'Samuel, tell me the three rules.' And he would tell me. Now I keep, I see, I keep on seeing some notes sometimes I need just...talk while I, instead of listening so that I don't disturb other people working, you know. Because I know he might finish his work before I know about it. And then it's hard disturbing him about it. The rules are those and I remember Ms. Rosemont say that as soon as I started that, she saw some improvement in his behavior. But when I'm gone, if I'm gone for three weeks, most of the time, if I'm gone there is

going to be few days he's going to be trouble. I don't know what kind of feedback knowing that if I'm going back home that night, you know, that he can really get...not get the...with me yelling at him (laughing).

The focus group was effective in getting the fathers to talk about conversations they had with their children. Through this group facilitation, it was apparent that many fathers felt that conversation was a way of showing their kindergartner that they were interested in their school activities. This was a major theme throughout the study—showing interest.

David: Being as my wife is a teacher, and so you're thinking education you think a lot of the responsibility is hers. And I understand that to a point but also I believe I'm and important figure that I also can back up what she does and what the teacher does, what the school is trying to do. I think it's real important we go over and if I don't pick him up I try to ask him what did you learn in school today? (some others voice agreement) And that starts the conversation off. And even if it's only five minutes, ten minutes, at least you're showing interest in what he's doing cause that's the biggest thing he doing cause he's there, what, seven hours a day.

Richard: Well, you know, review the papers that they send home everyday, you know, if he made mistakes on some things, he or she, you know, made mistakes on things, we always go over those and try to, you know, help him correct those. And then, you know, also ask 'who did you play with, what did you do, did you go to gym, art music?' Just get him talking about what he did during the day, get him thinking about what happened. And then he'll start having questions. And says, well, this...so and so happened, you know, what about this? And just starts a good conversation with us.... And it's very [good] to do that.

Al: Abby's pretty...she's pretty grown up to be that little. I mean she's an intelligent conversationalist. And she'll come right out of the blue and just talk it over with you.

I found that the fathers in this group engaged in informal conversations with their kindergarten children at different times throughout the day. They found that certain moments provided them opportunities to discuss their child's school day and what was going on in their educational lives. Many fathers agreed that it was these informal conversations about their child's school work that were most important.

Joe: Well, I was kinda with Phillip about going over things in the car, you know. Like we'll be at the Wal-Mart or K-Mart we had to sit out in the car and wait on my wife, you know, or something, he'll wanna play colors or, you know…it's small things sometimes that a kid will learn a lot from, you know. And we'll play colors, number games, different things, you know. He always wants to bring us home and show it to me and what he's done that day, like letters and numbers and…

Robert: So you're saying it's the small things…?

Richard: It's a big deal for them to say, they want you to see it. They want us all to see what they're doing. It'll mean that we're there for em, they know that we're there and they go ahead and, you know, 'Hey, Dad, this is what I did today.' They feel…they look forward to that. They feel like that's something they always want to do, they can always look forward to it.

David: I pick Thomas up at school a lot and afterwards also and it's always what did you learn today, what did you bring home? And he has his little backpack and we get that out. He wants me to read while I'm driving (all laugh)…I have to explain to him wait till I get to a traffic light or wait till I get to a stop light or whatever. But I think that is important because…

Al: They want us to look at it…

David: Oh, yeah…

Al: They want you to take your time to look at it.

Max: Oh, yeah…

Richard told me about his self-awareness regarding his approach to inquiring about Jonathan's day because of the possibility of a 'sad face' day. This heightened awareness shows me that Richard knows the effect that talking with his son has on himself as well as Jonathan. The teacher sends weekly reports home which indicate whether the child followed rules for appropriate behavior—sad face or happy face.

> And Jonathan does excellent in his school work (laughing), he just doesn't follow his rules quite like we'd like for him to. And there's always a big discussion at home...every day Jonathan comes home...and we try not to make a big deal out of it but we want him to, you know, not be the...a trouble child or anything like that and I don't think he is. It upsets his mother a lot more than it does me. Everyday when he comes home we'll ask him 'What did you do today?'...And you know we'll review that and just ask him questions about his letters and numbers, what they did that day. Then we'll also, of course, ask him, you know, did he get in trouble that day? (laughing)
>
> **Robert:** (laughing).
>
> **Richard:** Did you do anything? And you can tell immediately...he's gotten to the point now where we ask him so much, I don't know if that's good or bad, we ask him so much that as soon as he gets in the car to go home he's like, you know, he'll sit there with a long face or a happy face. And he knows he's going to have to tell us what happened that day. If nothing happened then he's happy about it. And you can just tell as soon as you see him...we don't even ask him anymore whether he did anything that got him in trouble that day. That's one thing we struggle with quite a bit. I'm not really sure how to handle that situation. I'm pretty confident in all this other stuff, but I'm not sure how to get through to him about following the rules. You know they really stress that a lot and we stress it at home a lot. We went over, when we started kindergarten, Carolyn and I went to Rocky Top and you know we signed a thing—The School Rules. And we went over those with Jonathan before he started. And a lot of those stick in our mind like keeping your hands to yourself, listening to the teacher, staying in your seat.

Playing

Many of the fathers played (games) with their children to facilitate learning as well as taught the children to facilitate playing (sports)! The questions or prompts that I used were very carefully worded (e.g. What educational/ learning activities have you been involved in with your child?) so that the participants' idea of what 'learning activities' were emerged throughout the process.

Games

Phillip tells a story of how he teaches words, numbers, and letters to his kindergartner, Samuel, and multiplication facts with his older daughter.

> We just go to school and we got about a 15 minute drive and I get Cindy to make up multiplication cards, you know, we have to practice everyday. That for this year, last year we were spelling the names like truck or…she have to, I made little piece of papers and she had to get it out of the basket and that she had to read the names, you know, that's when she was learning how to read and Samuel was next to it so I'm sure he got some of it and I'm starting doing that with him now. Like locate letters and upper case letters, cause I know he had some he could not recognize so I put on a piece of paper each letter individually and he picks them out by random and he has to tell me what it is. So we got 15 minutes. We do that with the numbers. He cannot, he never remember what the 9 and the 10 it looks like, just keeping retraining him every day and it's amazing how he forgets so quick.
>
> So those kinds of games we do just for learning, but it since I've got a very limited time with them it's...the best time is in the morning. Me and Cindy and Samuel going to school. We are at a red light and while I'm planning, he pulls those tickets out of the basket and...little Halloween basket from McDonald's, you know...

Richard also plays games with his kindergartner and 3-year-old. He makes up games as they are driving, trying to get them to notice their environment. These types of games are spontaneous and learning-related. Richard stressed several times during our meetings that he wants to teach his children about the world around them and his description of this interaction supports this belief.

Richard: I don't know if that's the right word for it but, you know he sees his surroundings, he sees his environment that way. And that's really... that's one of the big things they always want me to do with them, both of the kids is play a game. And you know, and Jonathan and his sister Jade make a game out of it. She's 3 years old. She's just as good at it as he is now.

I know it's important in their school but I make a game out of it at home...

Robert: M-hm.

Richard: ...similarities and differences between things.

Robert: Hmm.

Richard: And he gets a big kick out of doing those.

Robert: Oh...

Richard: I just ask him 'what's the difference between that picture and this picture?' You know, 'name me one difference.' And he can say 'well that one's blue and this one's green.' Or 'that's a picture of a flower, this is a picture of a house.' Or you know and I say 'well, name another difference.' You know...

Robert: Oh...

Richard: ...he can, he does pretty good with that. You know I say 'what's this...let's pick out something' and I'll be driving him to school in the morning and I'll say, 'What's the difference between that house and this house?' You know, or something like that. And that really gets him to thinking about things...

Bob believes that playing board games is also educational. He tells about when he plays games with his daughter, Sarah:

> There's some games that we play. There's a little, it's a little matching game, it's got faces all over it. (He shouts to the other room) 'Sarah, Sarah, what's the name of that game that has all the faces on it? You know, where you flip em all up and you say, "Does your man have a hat?" (Sarah doesn't know). What's the name of that game?'
>
> Will's been learning to play chess so she's been watching him play chess. And she actually can tell you which way a piece can move, but she doesn't know the strategy. You know, so, there it is, she's picking up things probably quicker than he...(Sarah comes in with the game) Yeah, that game. 'We play that game some, don't we? (To Sarah) Guess Who?'

The car seems to be a popular place for learning for some of these kindergarten dads. Many times dads talked about activities they engaged in when transporting the children to and from school. Again, I am seeing that fathers are having a good time with children whether they're playing silly games or just talking about what's going to happen at school today. This is Bob's story:

> I think we'll hear a song on the radio and then we'll just start making up our own words or I'll just start singing the song real wild or something and then they'll tell me that it's too loud or something. Or we make up songs. I'll ask em, you know, I'll ask em when they get to school what are they gonna eat for breakfast...are they gonna eat grass and leaves, are they gonna eat nuts and bolts and motor oil, you know, just silly things like that. And then you know, it's just, if I do the silly part maybe they'll be the straight man.
>
> ...supposed to happen that's what I'm hoping. You know, get to a red light or something and, you know, say, 'You go on red?' 'No, you don't go on

> red, you go on green.' You know different things like that. As far as jokes, you know, whatever their joke of the day is, you know, whatever they've heard at school, whatever, they'll tell it and I'll try to come up with something that's funnier than that, something...Sarah is always trying to one up Will.

David wrote in his journal that he plays learning games with Thomas in the car.

> On the way to Wal-Mart, Thomas and I play the game I spy. One person finds an object of a certain color and the other person tries to guess what it is. There is no winner or loser but sometimes you do not identify the object. Thomas loves the game.

Almost everyone knows about the game 'Candyland,' a game which helps young children learn counting and colors. David told a story about playing Candyland with his son, Thomas.

> ...and play some games, he's got a game Candyland, and we will play for hours playing this game. And we'll play it many different ways and I'll let Thomas make some of the rules up the way that he wants to play it this time.
>
> [Something that] amazed me about Thomas was that he decided we should play a rhyming game. For instance, Thomas said snake, and we would name words like rake, cake, and bake. As we took turns to name the first word, Thomas was able to hold his own. If I remember correctly, he was able to give a word every time.

Nancy, David's wife, told me about how David plays with his son even though it might be a little different than one might expect between father and son. This shows the child-centeredness that I see exhibited in David's pedagogical interaction with Thomas.

> When most little boys would have asked for a football, Thomas asked for a kitchen. (laughing) So, David's had to change gears in his mind of what a little boy should do. And direct it toward the pleasure that Thomas receives from playing in his kitchen. And so daddy was the one who sat at the coffee table and was served whatever the restaurant was serving that day. Or, Thomas took his order and Thomas fixed whatever daddy wanted. So David interacts a lot with Thomas' playing. David is more patient in that area than I am.
>
> ... And that's Thomas' chief way of learning, his play.

Many times fathers engaged in teaching and learning with their kindergartners in a technological environment. Computers seemed to be a media that brought dads and kids together, whether for fun or for learning or for both!

Max told me about his effort to learn computers so he could teach his son. Max places a lot of importance on independent learning which I heard throughout our conversation. I suggest that Max emphasizes this with his son, too. I see a lot in this segment of the interview—Max is learning about what is available for his son to learn and the importance of life-long learning. He told me that he was amazed at how quickly Eric could pick up on the computer. Soon, Eric was teaching his dad stuff!

> **Max:** Before he started school...I may be one of the few but we got a computer at the fire hall and I had never been around one. I didn't want nothing to do with one. And we got one there and nobody could do anything

with it. Everybody else there didn't want nothing to do with it either. So I thought well, you know, what can I do? I don't know. So they told me they says you can't mess it up. So I just sat down and started fooling with it and picked up on it pretty quick. So everything I do on the computer or anything like that is something that I've taught myself. I'm not...had any type of computer training even in high school I didn't take any cause, you know, that was fourteen years ago and it wasn't pushed as much back then as it was now. As a matter of fact there was very few computers in the high school. I think we had one computer class in the whole high school.

We...I just never had any desire to fool with it. I always thought it was too complicated but they're actually pretty simple, but...you know. I been in there and I had some games but they were, you know, stuff that had came when I bought the computer. They were pretty advanced and I didn't really know there was anything out there for children, you know, realize other than little small ones you buy in the toy department at the K-mart...

Robert: M-hmm.

Max: ...We had thought about getting one of them for Christmas after he started school and learned a little bit and maybe...started his alphabet and what not so he'd know what he was looking at when he...it just wasn't a bunch of keys, you know, with no meaning, so...

Robert: That was before school started?

Max: Yeah, that was before...We had looked at it last year and we thought, well, he won't know what he's really, you know, he don't know what they are the keys or anything and what he's actually doing. So when we went to that parent teacher conference, you know, he just went over there and sit down and played the computer and started it up. And started programming one and went to doing what, you know, following the instructions and doing what it had asked him do and...was really having...really...I was really impressed at how he could...you know, how in such short time they got him to where he could...it seemed like he felt comfortable. So...a couple of days after that I was at Wal-mart and went into the over in the software and was looking around and found this one for kindergartners, and I bought it and brought it home and showed him. And I showed him...I showed his mother how to get into and she's actually showed him the next day cause it was an in-service day, you know, where they're all out of school and I had to work and she called me about 11:00 that morning and said that he was doing real good with it. I took...she showed him...well, after she got in there and got him to working with him and his sister both, then that weekend I was off on Saturday and Sunday and we was all home together and I went and showed

him how to, you know, he wanted to play the computer so I went in there and started it from scratch and...he wanted to, you know, he watched me start the program and you know, of course there's quite a few things you have to do to start it and, you know, couple of times that he went in...that I went in there and started it for him, now I don't even have to ...I don't have to be around. He can go in there and, if he wants to play the computer, he just goes in there and starts it, you know, goes...

Robert: ...by himself.

Max: Yeah, he goes...you know in Windows 95, he goes down to the bottom of the screen on the Start bar, he clicks on it and goes to Programs, clicks on that and goes over to...picks his kindergarten program that he wants, and you know there's quite a big list of programs there and he knows which one to pick...

Robert: Wow.

Max: ...And then he'll go over and there's three options on it, you know, you can go to the...you can go right straight into the program where, the interactive part of it or you can go...it's got another program or other that you can go in and print out workbooks and do different, you know, change the school level of it or whatever. And there's quite a few different things in that. And then there's a help box, and he knows which one to start to get into the interactive part. As a matter of fact he shows me stuff about it now...

Robert: Really!?

Max: ...that he's...you know, of course...anything that...it looks like a little school house inside once you get into the interactive part of it. And anything that you touch in there does something. If it's a paintbrush, you can paint or if it's a...got a little train track in the floor kind of over in the corner and you click it on the train tracks...got this little train and it's got a rabbit that talks to you that's kind of like the instructor or the guide through the interactive part of it. And then it's got two little mice that help him. And these little mice, you know, they... one of em drives a train and the other one gives...tells him the instructions. It'll have little flat cars behind the train and they'll have dolls on em. And they'll want him to arrange the dolls from little to big or big to little, you know. Changes it around so that...changes, it may be dolls this time maybe animals the next time and so on...

Phillip is also involved in technology as a learning tool. During an informal conversation that I had with him, he told me about the computer system that he has at home. He talked about his large screen TV which was mounted high on the wall so the kids could see it better and how it was hooked up to the computer (they used it as their computer monitor). He said they use the internet often. He has a wireless keyboard and a CD-ROM for the children to use their educational software.

> Well, we just...most of the education we did is computer games, and put a cd in the computer and make it go and choose a color, choose a numbers, and the letters. One of those Rabbit...whatever you call this stuff. That's the main education...Well, it's ....Rabbit Reader...there is math blaster, there is...I don't know the name. I mean, just cd's you stick into it and he plays with it. I...it might help, I don't know. Try to teach him French. I've got a cd for that, you know, you have to say the word and the computer tell you if it's OK or not. It's a voice recognition. He works better with his sister because she can pronounce a word better. Samuel has a speech problem. He's getting speech therapy, so he has tough time to say the words, you know, the L and the W and the R. That is another education. I'm putting them in learning a second language in French. I believe he's absorbing it too.

Sports

Playing catch is one of the most common American cultural rituals between father and son. I found that many fathers taught their children about sports—baseball, basketball, football, golf.

Richard explained to me how he taught his son to throw a football. As he was telling me this story, I noticed pride and enjoyment in his voice not only that he was teaching his son this important feat, but that his son was actually learning from him!

I bought him a little soft nerf football so he could catch it, you know, he can catch it from a pretty good distance and I didn't want to hurt him. And it's small enough for him to grip in his hands so I taught him, you know, we'd just get out in the yard in the afternoon in the summertime…and start throwing the football and I would... The first thing I did was start teaching him how to catch it, you know, how to hold his hand and stuff like that. And then, you know, I started throwing…he could always throw it to me. I started teaching him how to grip it to get a spiral, or whatever and not be too wobbly and so I taught him how to hold his finger on it and everything. After about, the first time after I taught him, he'll hesitate. He'll catch the ball and he'll make sure he's got his fingers in the exact position that I told him. And I taught him how to step into the throw and get some distance on it and stuff like that. And he does the same rhythmic thing every time. You know…that's what I showed him how to do. So we would just, you know, we looked forward to that. If it was raining, we would try to throw it a little bit inside.

So that was, I thought that was…it was very interesting to me to see him try to do the exact same thing I was telling him how to do. And along with that we…I got him a t-ball bat and a ball and a glove and everything and try to teach him how to catch a baseball. Got him those soft, they're baseball size but they're soft, you know. (Laughing) The first thing he did when I threw him something hard it hits him and he doesn't want to play anymore…

Richard was also engaged in a kind of meta-cognition when it came to teaching Jonathan these sports skills. I see a lot of similarity between Richard's and Max's reflection on how they learn and what is interesting to them.

Richard: I just try to teach him the right techniques. You know, I'm no expert on it but at least, you know I can teach him…it makes me look and say well how do I throw a football? You know, I don't know how I learned to throw one. I just think well, the mechanics of it, or whatever, I'm not gonna analyze it too much or something (laughing). I don't know…but it made me start thinking…One of the things I remember about that is teach him how to stand and hold the bat to hit the ball. Well, I never thought about it before. I just, I may not have the right stance or not, so I started thinking about it. How do I do it? How do I place my feet? How do my elbows look when I'm hitting it and stuff like that.

Robert: Uh-huh.

Richard: I don't try to get too technical with him, just teach him how to do it and he responds to it. You know he'll...when he sees that he can hit the ball more times than he did before, 'all right, this is right, this is fun, I can do this.'

Another theme I saw emerging from the stories of these fathers was that when fathers were teaching and learning with their young children, it provided a time for connection or togetherness. Sometimes the fathers noticed this and were able to articulate it, sometimes they did not and/or were not. However, there is strong evidence that this is the case.

I think one of the biggest ones Jonathan and I enjoy is golf. Haven't done it a whole lot this year but when we do, I would normally, you know I guess our biggest occasion was on Friday afternoon, you know, when certain other things were happening it gave Jonathan and I the opportunity to go by ourselves. I would go in the summertime, when it gets dark at 8, 8:30 we'd go 5:30, 6 o'clock and play nine holes. We'd just, you know, ride the cart. I started out with him, you know, I would let him carry, he'd want to carry a ball in his pocket so I let him carry a ball. You know and I just talk to him about what I'm doing while I'm there. I guess when we first started, this is what you hit the ball with, this is a golf ball, this is what it looks like. This is a tee, you know this is what you do and he would just watch me. First he would get, you know, just like riding in the cart and help me find the ball. He'd run out there and grab a ball, 'Here you go' (laughing).

Robert: (laughing) Good son!

Richard: (laughing) Don't touch the ball. It'd be about a few times gradually I bought him a junior set of clubs and I would just take a couple of those clubs and put em in my bag, you know, he's not really playing golf. I guess I started with his putter when I got on the green I said, 'Hey Jonathan, get your putter and your ball and come up here and putt with me while I'm doing it. I'd start getting his woods or something and when I'd

> get close to the green I'd throw a couple of balls down there and just say chip em up here or whatever, just playing around with him. You know, just tell him what I'm doing while I'm playing and get him used to it and what the green is, what the object was, you know, trying to get it in this little hole (laughing) here. Just having a good time with him. Enjoying the time together outdoors. Not trying to do anything specific with the golf. Like that throwing the football, pitching baseballs, stuff like that. Just getting him used to different things, you know. I guess there's always a big thing kids play in t-ball and basketball and all that kind of stuff and we haven't really stressed to Jonathan we want him to do that, you know. I think a lot of parents push their kids into it. Cause everybody else is doing it or whatever. I guess that's the feeling I get from some neighbors and friends that have kids...

David also had some sports stories. He told me during his interview that Thomas was not really that interested in sports, that he would rather stay inside 24 hours a day. David's interest in sports is what motivated him to teach Thomas. In this story, it is evident that David thinks that engaging in sports instruction is dad's special thing.

> But I'm trying to build in...what dad can do. And his mom was gone a few weeks ago and I tried to teach him a little bit about football. And he has a little football he got one for his...a nerf football for his birthday, so we wasn't playing hard and we was just playing in the driveway and how he could run and score a touchdown. And just little things like that that I think would be helpful. I was able to go to an Atlanta Braves ball game and I brought back a Mark McGwire poster and that's one of the things he's put on his bulletin board. Because I'm a Cardinals fan, I've bought him a lot of Cardinals pennants, and baseballs, and that type thing that he has in his room. And so he's decided to pick this up and to put it in his room and he'll ask about it and I'll try to tell him a little bit about baseball and sports cause I have a big desire for sports. I have some golf...I love to play golf. I've got him his own little set...I've got him his own little club that's cut down for his size and I let him hit balls and we just go out and have a good time in the backyard...a nice size backyard that we can do that.

When I arrived at Joe's house to interview his wife, Ellen, for this study, he was in the backyard playing basketball with his two sons on the small court he had set up behind the house. Joe told me about teaching his kindergartner how to play baseball.

> Well, it's not really school but...like when we go out there and play ball, you know, baseball, hit the ball, he likes to run the bases. And so we went through and showed him how to go to first, second, third, and then home. And...when to stop and when to go, you know...

Sharon also told me about the sports interaction between her husband, Bob, and her kindergarten daughter.

> **Sharon:** But lots on Saturdays when sometimes when they do go outside, he may go out there and shoot basketball. And he may not realize that she's actually learning during that time. But she is...you know. But she's learning to do her turn taking and I'm not sports oriented and stuff, and he may actually show her the correct way to throw a ball.
>
> **Robert:** M-hmm.
>
> **Sharon:** And that is important.

In the School

An assumption that I held going into the study was that a father's involvement in his kindergartner's education could have a component that was school-based. In other words, he would physically be present in the school building. However, a related

assumption that I had, based on my experience as a teacher and a volunteer father, that fathers aren't in the schools, for whatever reason. During the interview, if a particular father did not talk about any school-building involvement, I did ask a question about it. However, the individual responses were independently generated once the topic had been introduced.

Al talked about his involvement at the school-building level. His comment underscores the theme that most parents don't know what to do, not that they don't want to do it.

> And, as far as going over to the school and doing anything, there's not anything in...that you can actually do that I know of.

Bob talked in great detail about how things were different this time around. He felt that maybe he was in the school too much with his older son, Will, and that affected his participation at the school level with his daughter.

> It's just...and that's why like I feel we've kind of neglected her a little bit in that area but we haven't really probably needed to. I mean we haven't needed to see what was going on every single day, you know, and I think that was part of it...I said, 'yeah, you need to back off a little bit. Cause if you're in there every day, you know, you're never gonna know when something's different or something's going on that you really need to know about. And that was something I decided going into, I wasn't going to walk into school every day and I wasn't going to, I wasn't going to...you know, talk to the teacher every day about 'well, how's she doing today, every thing all right?' You know, just different stuff like that. I mean it's just been...I don't know if it was, maybe if it had been a different teacher we probably, we may have done things a little differently.

> ...I didn't say, 'I'm gonna do things differently', but I kinda said you know I'll back off and just let things happen, you know...I probably only been in the school...well I've been in the school twice this year and both of em were for Will, you know, I haven't gone at all or anything for Sarah, so...it's just...I say...school's been going on now a couple of months, it's the 18th of October, so they've been going about 2 months now. Just, everything's been running pretty smooth and I just haven't felt the need to do anything.

Phillip's son, Samuel, has a speech problem and Phillip told me about his involvement in providing help for him. He made a trip to the school board office, a trip which he told me he initiated.

> Yeah, I initiated that I want to talk to social committee or whatever I had to go behind the stadium there and, small office and it's free, I mean, don't cost anything. But before we started...we started last year so there last year. So I went there and talked to a lady and they...we had to fill out the form and he got accepted and now he's keep going and we believe Ms. Rosemont had some involvement with that because she's a therapist too. So...he get a lot of progress, but...he cannot make a phrase, you know, I don't know what...caused his problem to him, maybe me or my speech or whatever accent...or his brain goes maybe to fast for his mouth or I don't know, but it's doing better.

After checking the events calendar that was provided for me by the principal and conferring with the kindergarten teacher, I made an observation schedule which included school events that could have provided opportunities for dads to be involved at the school building level. During these events, I became a participant-observer, sometimes volunteering to help, sometimes just being a part of the crowd. Some of the events which

I observed in the school are listed as subcategories below. I decided to include them as separate entities to create a scene of each event.

Registration Day

The day before the school year started, Rocky Top Elementary held a kindergarten registration day. This is a day when parents come to fill out the necessary paperwork for transportation, emergency information, and other standard school forms. I was observing during this day to see if fathers are involved in this and to what degree. I sat at a small table in a very small kindergarten-size chair near the front corner of the room so I could see the door and to appear as inconspicuous as possible.

The first one to arrive was Bob and his kindergartner, Sarah, and his older son, Will. Bob seemed somewhat comfortable in the classroom setting and was making jokes as he was talking to Linda. From my interviews with Bob and Linda, I learned that Bob was much more relaxed about being in the school and being involved in his Sarah's schooling in general than he was when his older son was in kindergarten. This was apparent from his banter with the teacher during his visits to these special events. When Linda mentioned something about Will being there, Bob said, "His job is to make sure she's in the right place!" Bob asked for copies of papers that were given out at the Spring registration and filled out that paperwork at a semi-circle shaped table with kindergarten chairs. While Sarah played around the room, Bob asked some questions about filling out the forms and inquired as to whether he had brought in a birth certificate and social security card. During my review of the Spring registration forms, I noticed that Bob was

the one who had filled out the paperwork. He seemed to be involved in every aspect of getting his daughter ready to start kindergarten; he had brought in records, was filling out forms, and asking questions about procedures.

When registration day arrived, I still had not enlisted the number of participants that I desired for this study. After getting permission from the teacher, I used this day to talk informally about the study to parents when they had time. When I asked Bob about participating in the study, he said that he had received my invitations to participate but was going to be very busy with his son's football team four nights a week and he didn't get back from work until 5:00 because he works in a distant town.

David, Nancy, and their son Thomas arrived and we said, "Hello," since we had already met previously at their church to discuss their participation. They sat down together at one of the tables and while Nancy filled out the paperwork, David was reading some of the literature that was given to parents. David and Nancy were very involved in Thomas' first experiences in kindergarten. They both made an effort to attend all of the 'orientation' type events that the school sponsored throughout the year. As David and Nancy completed the required paperwork, Thomas was sitting next to his mom and David asked him if he wanted to go play with some of the toys. Thomas didn't want to. David's demeanor suggested that he was interested in making Thomas feel comfortable in his new surroundings. David was involved in conversation with the teacher, asking Linda some questions about fees and field trips.

I introduced David and Bob and they said they had met last Spring. It was my belief that many fathers didn't know each other, and I tried to get them to feel more comfortable as kind of a 'recruiting' technique for the study.

After talking to the teacher, Bob told his daughter to pick out her name from a group of papers and helped her do that. Already, Bob was involved in teaching and learning with his daughter during her kindergarten year. From their conversation, it seemed that he had worked on her name recognition at home. At first, Sarah was trying to read her name from the side, but Bob took her by the arm and led her around to the right angle where she able to read it successfully. Bob helped his daughter get her 'free cool stuff' together and said he would be back with a birth certificate. It was evident that Bob was helping his daughter get used to the idea that the classroom was a learning environment.

While I was busy talking to some of the parents, Richard and Carolyn had arrived with their son, Jonathan, and were sitting at a table completing paperwork. Jonathan was sitting in Richard's lap and the dad was pointing to the bulletin board on the front wall and whispering in the boy's ear. This supports what I heard in Richard's interview about how his pedagogical relationship brings him closer to his son. As he was involved in looking around the room and whispering with his son, Linda was sitting with this couple at the table and asked if Jonathan knew any of the other children in the class. It seemed as if Jonathan didn't understand so Richard rephrased the question and asked it again which showed the father's efforts to make the child feel at ease in his new surroundings.

Many more moms attended the registration day than did dads. I talked with several of the mothers about participating in the study and inquired whether they thought their husbands would be interested. Several cited dad's work as a problem with participating even before they knew what would be requested of them. I talked to a few dads whom I hadn't met before and they too said their schedule was full.

Back-to-School Night

Rocky Top Elementary holds a back-to-school night which provides a time for parents, family, and students to get re-acquainted with teachers and administrators and other parents. When I arrived on this Monday, I asked Linda what she expected the turnout would be like. She said that she had no idea because usually it was held later in the year, and she didn't know if it had been advertised or not.

After some parents had assembled in the classroom, Linda gave an informal talk about classroom rules, discipline, and the student/teacher/parent contract. This is a form which outlines the responsibilities for each participant involved (e.g., parent, student, teacher, principal) that the school deems necessary for the child to be successful in school. There is a signature line for each party which seals the 'contractual' agreement that each will keep up his end of the bargain.

David and Nancy were present with their son and were busy reading the contract silently. Thomas was sitting in his dad's lap during the teacher presentation. Jonathan was sitting between his mom and dad, Richard and Carolyn. I saw these two couples and their children at most of the events that I observed. Both Thomas and Jonathan were physically

close to their fathers during these times which was a reflection of how the fathers' envisioned their educational relationship with their sons.

Bob came in just long enough to pick up his son who had changed into football uniform. When I had talked earlier to Sharon, she had said that Bob would be in and out quickly because of Will's football practice! It was evident from interviews with Sharon and Bob and from my observations, that Bob's involvement with his son's football did encroach upon time he would like to have spent on his kindergartner's school activities.

Some other fathers, whom I did not know at the time were also involved in this function. A daughter and mother entered and the little girl smiled at her father, who was waiting for them to arrive, and jumped into his lap. She was sitting with her arms around him. Two fathers were discussing handouts with their wives and one of the fathers (with a beeper) was signing papers or filling them out. A blonde kindergartner showed her dad something she had made with tinker toys over in the corner and he made a positive comment. Six men were present at this function, five of which are participants. Bob and Al, the other two participants in the study were not present. Participants who were present were: Joe, Max, Richard, David, and Phillip.

From my observations, I suggest that the fathers and the children both enjoy and benefit from the fathers' participation in these events. They demonstrated concern, interest, and enthusiasm when engaged with their children in these school-related activities.

Parent-Teacher Conference

One of the educational events that is well-established in the educational community is the annual or semi-annual parent-teacher conference. Like most teachers, Linda holds hers in the classroom. She sends home notes with pre-arranged schedules and a return portion of the letter which has a space for parents to note whether or not they can/will attend or if they prefer another time slot. She scheduled these conferences from 3-7 p.m. She told me that she has not received the response she expected even after notes home and other reminders. I examined the conference forms when they were returned to the teacher to see who signed them. Of the six that I reviewed, Richard was the only dad to sign.

Linda told me that she doesn't really like the way they do conferences—they're very unstructured with parents arriving early and hanging around in the room while she is talking to other parents. I told her that I thought this would inhibit conversation between parents and teacher due to lack of privacy. The conferences were scheduled 15 minutes apart, but Linda said that if parents have other children in the school for which they must schedule conferences, they sometimes come early.

I sat in on the conferences that Linda had with the participating families, and I had permission from all parties to record the sessions. My assumption was that I could learn about the fathers' attitudes and beliefs by the kinds of questions they might ask or from their behavior in general during the conference or merely by noting their attendance or absence.

Sharon attended with her children, Sarah and Will, although Bob, her husband, was not present. Upon entering, Sarah showed her mom some of her schoolwork that was displayed around the room. Sharon said they were there early because they had a dentist appointment at 4:00. Mom looked at a self-constructed book that Sarah had created and made positive comments about cutting work. Sharon asked if she was doing well and Linda said she is adjusting well. Linda: "Does she know all of her letters?" Sharon said she knows some adding, number recognition but is concerned that Sarah is staying on task—doesn't wander. Linda says she's right on target. Linda explained the day's activities and Sharon told us that the family has some activity almost every day—dance and other things. I found out from my interview with Bob, that he was involved in some of these activities that Sharon mentioned such as dance. Sharon turned in some money for March Fundraiser, and as they were leaving, Linda and Sharon asked Sarah questions about initial letters and about their sign language instruction.

Joe arrived with his wife, Ellen, and their son, Andy. Mom signed in on sheet and Andy went right to the computer. His parents could see the computer screen from where they were sitting at the front of the classroom for their conference with Linda. Joe and Ellen sat at the crescent-shaped table in the front of the room. As Linda explained what was happening in class so far, Joe listened and nodded throughout the conference. He did not seem as comfortable in the classroom as did some of the other fathers I observed. However, he was there. Linda showed the parents the math book and Andy's workbook as Joe and Ellen viewed with interest. Linda turned the pages as she explained the work that Andy was doing. Linda had Andy explain some of the concepts in his workbook to

his parents. Joe asked one question about ABC's, referring to 'letter people' on front wall. In Linda's kindergarten class, each letter of the alphabet is a character with a certain 'personality' such as Munching Mouth for the letter 'M.'

While I talked with Joe and Ellen after their conference, David's wife, Nancy talked with Linda out in the hallway. David had told me earlier in the week that he would be in Los Angeles at a church-related convention. I could tell from talking with David on several occasions that he regretted having to miss any of the events at the school.

Because some of the parents scheduled for conferences during the 3 hour block (3 p.m. - 6 p.m.) were not participants, I left the room during their session with the teacher. This gave me time to talk with the parents informally out in the hallway as they waited their turn. These kinds of incidental conversations again strengthened the rapport that I had with the participants.

Brenda and I talked in the hall. Al couldn't make it—she said he couldn't get home and cleaned up in time, so he went with his son somewhere. Brenda told me that Abby had been in some beauty pageants and won Miss Congeniality in one of them. I asked Brenda how the little ones reacted if they didn't win. She said some cry, but if Abby did, she would tell her she couldn't do it anymore. Brenda said that she told Abby that **she** thinks she is pretty and that's what matters. During our interview, Al talked about how he thought Abby's participation in these pageants were invaluable learning experiences.

At the informal conference, standing up with other parents present, Brenda asked about the reading program—what books should she read. Linda assured her that she can

just pick up any book and read it with her child. Brenda said Abby knows her letters, numbers, ABC song – and sang it to Methodist Church where she goes for after school care. In his journal and during the interviews, Al told me about his participation in her after school care and other activities at the Methodist Church to which Brenda referred. Brenda asked several questions such as, "Is there anything special that I need to work on?" "When is the money for the Rocky Top March due?" "We usually sponsor it, $100, $200." She also had some praise for Linda, "I always said it takes a special person to be a teacher."

While Linda and Brenda were talking, Abby was playing with another little girl on the floor with a puzzle. Al was right when he said during our conversations that Abby had no trouble making the transition to kindergarten! He knew what a gregarious little girl she was and he was very proud of the fact that his daughter knew what she wanted! While talking to other parents, Brenda said that Abby is in the church choir and she feels that it is good to get up in front of people. Brenda talked about donating books because Abby has a pile this (gesturing to her forehead) high of books.

Richard and Carolyn and I talked in the hallway as they were waiting for their appointment time. We talked about how children have different personalities and perceptions. We talked about how our 3-year olds are more independent than our kindergartners. Richard mentioned something about 'that's how they develop.' He came in and looked through Jonathan's book for a few seconds and tossed it down before sitting down with the teacher at the table at the front of the room.

As Linda showed some of the workbooks. Both parents listened attentively. Richard made eye contact with Linda as she explained the concepts. He nodded and gave verbal listening cues as he listened. He was laughing and smiling and seemed to enjoy the conference. Richard answered questions that Linda asked like: "Have I told you about accelerated reader?" He gave some verbal responses. As Linda pointed to colors on wall, Richard looked at the colors in response. He listened to his wife talk and interjected/agreed with the points she made. Richard seemed relaxed, sitting, leaning back in chair, arms crossed, wearing khakis and a casual button shirt. Carolyn told me that she had gotten off early from her shift (7 am to 7 pm) that night at the hospital as an emergency room registered nurse. They told me about some of the extracurricular activities that their children are involved with such as Karate. Their youngest, Jade, now goes to pre-school.

Max and Lisa were there with Eric and their younger daughter. As Lisa asked a question about being late, Max was looking around the room and at the children playing on the computers. He was dressed casually—jeans and denim-colored shirt, cap with a construction company logo on it and his beeper. Although from the image he projected when he first walked in the room, a very large and intimidating figure only magnified by his walk and his diminutive wife at his side, was not one that a person would envision as being present in a classroom such as this, he later seemed 'OK' with being there. While Linda talked about coloring with Lisa, Max was looking elsewhere, chewing gum. He seemed physically uncomfortable in the 'kindergarten size chair' because he is about 6'2" 250. He looked at the workbook as Linda explained its contents and the work that Eric

was doing. I think maybe Max felt inhibited by the tape recorder—he did not say much. He nodded once in agreement during the entire conference. Max shifted in his chair, wiggled his leg nervously, and pushed glasses up.

The computer made a sound as Eric played with it which distracted Max and caused him to look over in that direction. It seemed as if he was glad that something made a noise so that he could think about something other than listening to Linda talk! Max later talked about using the computer as a learning tool and how he worked on it at home with his son. The younger daughter, who had been playing over in the toy corner, tipped and fell backward in the rocking chair. We all looked in surprise. Lisa went over to help her up—she was OK. Max and Lisa accompanied Eric to the self-published books which were displayed on each student's desk. As Max squatted down to look at book with Eric, Lisa made a few comments. "Good Job," she said when Eric read another boy's name on a folder. As Eric was looking at his book, he turned pages but did not say anything. Max was very attentive and was truly showing interest in his son's school work.

Max and Lisa observed their children while they were at computers. Lisa helped Eric play a computer game and Max watched his daughter learn about shapes using a special computer program. He sat down with his daughter and showed her something. "Nope, wrong one." Max watched. "Which one is down?" he asked. "Now which way do you want to go?" As Max guided her through the computer game, he sat close to her. After some time, she became tired of it and went over to play blocks. Max was having so much fun that he tried to get her to come back and play again. "Hey, Elizabeth. Come on

and let's play the computer again." After 35 minutes in the classroom, they left–Max carrying Elizabeth, Lisa carrying Eric.

Some of the fathers talked about their experiences at the parent-teacher conference. Al talked about his conference experience. I didn't see Al at the scheduled conference night because he and his wife couldn't make it that night. They had asked Linda if they could come at a later time, which they did.

> Well, I mean, that's just where we went in and, Abby showed me where she sits and shows me around where her friend sits. And we talked to the teacher a little bit and teacher brags on her and that makes her smile. You know she's just a...I just bet your a big girl. She's smiling around and strutting around there like she's really...and she has really and that's good.

Joe talked about going to the parent-teacher conference in the Fall. I asked him what he talked about with Andy's teacher.

> ...we just talked one on two about how Andy was doing and the different things he's improving in and the level he is at in school. And she talked real positive about he was doing real good in school. And talked about the workbook he had and working different things in the workbook. Of course she tried to get him to come over, but he was too busy (we both laugh). But just kind of show us in general where he's at, how he's comparing with the other kids kind of or how he was doing. But, we talked about the computer. And...it's been so long ago I can't hardly remember exactly what all we did talk about.

Open House

Open House was a time when parents could come to the school and visit their child's classroom. It was an informal event, held in the early evening, and parents were free to roam around, talk to the teacher, and look at their child's work. Linda had displayed some of her students' work on the hallway walls and on the students' desks. The classroom is decorated with Thanksgiving work of the students – turkeys, log cabins, cornucopia in the hall, leaves hanging from ceiling.

David arrived with Thomas and Thomas' grandmother whom he calls Me-Ma. David asked Thomas to show him his work and David knelt down as Thomas explained what was happening in some photographs that Linda had taken and had displayed on a bulletin board. David and Thomas looked at some of his work at his desk and David asked questions about Thomas' work. "Is that your Turkey?" They worked at the computer as David sat in a small chair next to Thomas. They seemed to be playing a letter game –"Good job" David said. Thomas called over his Me-Ma to have a look, too. David had a conversation with Thomas about his work and was very attentive while listening to all that Thomas had to say. David leaned in to look at computer screen. David talked to Linda about a CD-computer story (Little Mermaid) they got at McDonald's and about some books (10-15) that Thomas received as gifts. David said that Thomas was very excited about them. David and Thomas looked at a book together—while Thomas sat in the rocking chair, David knelt and sang a song from the book to Thomas—*Mama Don't Allow*. "Anything else you need to show Dad?"

Thomas and his dad looked at his work on the wall in the hallway. They returned to the room and looked at another book at the table where I was sitting. Thomas turned the pages quickly and tells a little bit of the story as he goes along. David made a comment--something about Thomas having ice cream that day and it not being a regular ice cream day since it wasn't Friday. David and Thomas sat at another table together looking at his workbook. His Me-Ma walked over and looked at Thomas' math workbook briefly before he closed it and directed David to the bulletin board. "Very good," comments David. Thomas asks his dad if he wanted to hear a story—David said, "We don't have time, have to get back to Mom" (who hurt her back in a fall.) Thomas said, "It's just a short story."—David said OK. David and Thomas put on headphones at listening center where they both were listening to a recorded book. After a short conversation with the teacher about Thomas' cough, David and his family departed.

Some non-participant parents arrived with their kindergartner and her younger brother who looked to be about two years old. While mom looked at a book made by her kindergartner, Dad played with blocks on the floor with the younger sibling.

Another mom talked to Linda about the kindergarten grading system. She thought "S's" were too vague. She mentioned writing a letter to the school board.

Two parents entered and mentioned that they both got off work to come. Dad said that his son is improving in (something). Dad laughed at Linda's story about the picture taking and he looked at the pictures on display. Mom and dad talked about the pictures with their son. "He's stuck on [girl's name in class]," dad said about his son. Dad had a conversation with Linda and told her that he went to this school—so did mom. Dad

talked about his days in school—about the teachers. He said he never did like (something about books.) The dad told Linda about his son's morning routine. The kindergartner read a book to mom while dad talked to the teacher. While the boy showed mom the work most of the time—dad stands back—cap, hands in pockets, jeans.

Ellen, Joe's wife, came in with Andy. Joe was not present. Ellen says "I almost forgot!" Andy showed his mom the photographs on display. Linda talked about Ellen coming for lunch at the school and her seeing the centers. They also talked about Andy's progress, letters, color words, etc... Ellen told Linda about some books—*Alice in Bible Land* that she had gotten for Andy.

Bob came in wearing suit pants and a tie. It looked like he had just come from work. His wife was not with him. He said he knew how Sarah was doing and mentioned that he'd read the weekly reports. Bob and Linda talked about Sarah's expressiveness. Linda asked Bob if he was worried about anything and he mentioned letter recognition, especially 'V' and 'N'. He said he wished he could come (somewhere) but has to work in [name of town]. Bob said that "it'll come" about the letters. He thought that Sarah had to look at the letters and think about it. Bob talked about how much Sarah talks. He talked about her eating lunch—how Will's (older brother) job is to make sure Sarah eats.

David wrote about his visit to the school during open house.

> There was open house at the school. Thomas, his grandmother and I went to school. Ms. Rosemont was very cordial and she had Thomas show us around. They have been doing a tremendous amount of work. Thomas showed me how he could work on the computer. Also I listened to a story at

> the listening center. I was really impressed with the teacher and the classroom.

During the focus group, he elaborated somewhat on his feelings about his attendance at the open house.

> I think the...one day the open house that they had and Miss Rosemont was excellent and she says, 'Well Thomas, why don't you show your dad around, show him what you do. So, he and I sat down at a table and we listened to a tape, and you know, we had the headphones on and this is one of the ones we've done. He showed me the letters, he took me to the computers and played games for awhile. And then I guess they had saved up such and such amount of work and they were not allowed to take it home because the next day I think was right before Thanksgiving. And for him then to be able to, and just the excitement that he had... 'Dad, this is my classroom, this is what I can do' and sometimes I think I didn't understand fully what he was trying to tell me, by going into the classroom and seeing what he did was very beneficial for me as a dad then I understood now they went to this center and they learned at this table about this tape how they do that. To me that was a very good thing that the school did but it also, you know, I don't know how, I was there a certain time, I don't know how many other fathers was there during that time and, but my child was proud of his work that he done and he wanted to show me what he had done. And I think that's of course good for me to be there. His mother was unable to because of illness and she had planned on being there. With her being there or not being there it was important that me, I, the dad was there to see what he was doing.

Richard also talked about the importance of 'connecting' with his son's school environment. From my interaction with these fathers, I saw that school activities sometimes acted as a bonding agent for children and their dads.

> I think, you know, what being there with your kid in the school building...several times I've walked Jonathan in and then...you know, stuff like that. He's always interested, say 'Hey, did you know that, dad?' You know, and just stuff like that. He's connecting me with surroundings of a day. And, but the same thing goes if I take him to work with me, you know, he's connecting with what I do everyday, and something like that. So, it's good for him to know that I can understand what he does in the day, where he's at, things like that.

Parent-Teacher Organization

The parent-teacher organization is the school-based organization made up of teachers and parents which works as a support team for the children's educational experiences in the school. The meetings are scheduled once a month and are held in the school commons area. The PTO president is a father who runs a local daycare and who has a child in the upper grades. I examined the minutes of several meetings looking for fathers' active participation, but found none.

David attended a PTO meeting and told me about his involvement and his assessment of it's effectiveness in helping him learn about the school culture.

> I went to the first one and there was a large crowd of people there and Nancy has been in the school system, has substitute taught, so she knew who the principal was and that type thing. I think it helped me to say this is what we as parents are trying to help our school to do. And they say we just have the one major fund-raiser we do this walkathon thing and we do it early in the year and they explained some of that in detail on how...who gets the money and that type of thing. I also got to meet the principal. Not on a one-to-one basis but I was introduced to him. And he talked about what they are trying to accomplish as a school in general. And that's another thing that I think that the more involvement that as a parent that I can have it will help the PTO organization which will also show that we as parents care about what's going on in the school. I was unable to make the second one and I did talk to several parents after that the next morning; they were

> disappointed with the turnout because they had a high turnout in September and a lower turnout in October. I just think it's another type...another area...organization that I can take an hour and a half out of my time one night a month to find out what's going on at the school and giving some input on that.

Bob told me about his participation in the Parent-Teacher Organization. Like some of the other activities he is involved in, the language he uses and his tone make it seem like a duty that he has to perform. I don't think he feels that what he does is really that important.

> Well, I, you know, I'm not an officer and I haven't run for anything. I like to go to the meetings and just hear what they got to say. I mean sometimes they may say something interesting that you need to know about, other times, you know, it's pretty...gossip, I guess, is the big thing. Last year we...I was just tired of sittin at home so I thought well, some of the parents you know get together and play some basketball, you know. And then it kind of evolved into a team and then a fundraiser and then we wound up playing Channel 6 out of [city name] and raised almost close to a thousand dollars for the school. I don't know what they used the money for, I don't think...That's, you know, that's about the extent of it. I mean it's not anything real...you know...I helped em at a hot dog stand or something one time. I've helped clean up the playground a couple of times, you know, just different things like that, just, you know, trying to be involved, you know...

Bob expressed his cynical attitude toward the PTO and its purpose, a theme that I found throughout the study.

> But as far as running for office or anything, I'll probably never do that. They've got who they want in there, so that's...(laughing)...and then, you know, there's been no big crisis or catastrophes or anything like that. So I

just don't concern myself with it that much. I mean they're not...not trying to run any teachers off or anything like that so...(laughing)...

Special Events/Volunteering

Traditionally, schools have special events throughout the year that provide the opportunity for parents to be involved. These events include fundraisers, carnivals, community-school events, evening programs, performances, and other kinds of activities.

One of the special events that Rocky Top Elementary sponsored was a school dance held in October for kindergarten through 3rd grade. The purpose for the dance was to raise funds; Linda thinks it is to raise money for curtains for the little theater stage. The students rotated through three areas at different times during the afternoon. One area was in the commons where all the tables had been put up and they played music and served popcorn and soda and candy. The children could dance in the big, open area. The second area was in the gymnasium where there were hula hoops, balls, basketball goals, jump ropes and other sports equipment. The third place was on the playground which was your regular, ordinary elementary school playground.

I observed from the front lobby of the school where they had moved the cafeteria tables out of the way so there was a big space for the kids to move and dance. There was loud dance music playing and there was a place in the back where refreshments like soda, candy, and popcorn was being sold. Linda said she had 14 students participating that day. The cost was 3 dollars and they did need permission slips from their parents in order to attend.

I was scanning the commons for participating parents and I noticed that Richard's wife, Carolyn was there with her kindergarten son and younger daughter Jade, who was going to be 4 in February and will start school in 2 years. She is in pre-school now. Since I knew that Carolyn worked the day shift at the hospital, I asked her if it was her day off. She told me that it was.

I noticed a couple of men standing around, but I don't know if they were teachers, dads, or grandfathers. One man was selling refreshments who I later found out is the husband of one of the 2nd grade teachers at the school. I noticed the PTO president leaving with a girl who appeared to be his daughter—she looked to be in the 5th grade.

I saw no dads helping with the dance nor did I see many dads during the dance until right around pick up time. Out on playground I noticed one male standing at the edge of the woodchipped area wearing sunglasses. He watched for a minute and a boy (2nd grade?) ran up to him shouting, "Dad! Dad!" The dad talked briefly with the boy and then left by himself. In the gymnasium I saw three kindergarten moms who were not participating in the study.

About a half-hour before the scheduled end of the dance, I saw Joe and Ellen who were there to pick up Andy. While watching the kids throw balls, run, and jump rope, Joe and I talked about how he injured his back falling off a porch while jumping rope. He said someone wanting to open a daycare should come listen to the noise in the gym!

Bob came in with Will who was dressed in Football gear. He was there to pick up Sarah—we said hello. They quickly left.

During our interview, Richard told me about his lack of opportunity to be involved at the school building level. Many of the dads talked about 'opportunity' to be involved, implying that there was really nothing more they could do.

> And my wife's been good about that. She's a nurse and they have the Rocky Top March and stuff like that. They...she would always volunteer to do those things, but I've not had the opportunity to do any of those so far. The only activity I've had in school was take him to school and the parent teacher conference.

David, however did go to the Walkathon they had at the school. This was one of the many school events that he attended. His flexible schedule allows him to go to the 'day' things at the school. The other six fathers in this study all have regular 9-5 jobs.

> I take Thomas to school a lot in the morning...I do pick him up a little bit in the afternoon, but I mainly take him 3 or 4 times in the morning...help him to get ready and I go in and talk to Miss Rosemont about whatever needs to be said...not major things, but just 'his mom brought this for him.' I have attended the PTO meeting the first PTO. I was unable to because of something with the ministry I was unable to attend the second one, but I did go to the...they had a...called the Rocky Top March which was a walkathon, it was a...I think it was a special day for Thomas. It's where they had a walkathon and Nancy had volunteered to count laps for Miss Rosemont's class. And because Friday was my day off, I was able to arrange it. And I went and walked with Thomas during the walkathon. And after we got through with that, Miss Rosemont said that we could stay and eat lunch. And so Nancy and I both stayed and ate in the cafeteria and they had it arranged where that we could sit across the table from Thomas. We went through the line and just had a really good day with that. I think that's about the only other opportunities that I've had to be in the school. I do walk Thomas into his classroom, and getting to know the assistants, Miss Rosemont's assistant and Miss Rosemont. I talk about a few things here and there about what's going on in Thomas's life.

Bob attended the Spring orientation meetings that Rocky Top Elementary held for entering kindergarten parents. These were informational sessions where the children could get to know the teachers and parents were given some materials, viewed videos and asked questions. He explained the thought process he went through while sitting through some of these sessions:

> When they had that little parenting things last Spring...and I sat there through that and I said, 'Why did I do this? Because we've been through all this before, we know what's happening, you know. I was just trying to show her I'm an interested dad, doing all this stuff...

During our interview, Joe told me about his participation at the school level. Other than the dance, he saw no other opportunity to go to the school.

> I went to the...when they had the dance I stayed a little while there and watched him play. I thought he'd probably be dancing but he was playing with the hula hoops and the balls and stuff like that. But that's about basically all that they've really done this year other than meeting with his teacher. I think we've done that two times.

The focus group elicited some opinions about the lack of support for parent involvement, especially **father involvement**. Although most agreed that their child's particular teacher welcomed fathers into her classroom, the school on the whole did not exhibit such cordiality. Some dads talked about their perceptions of this environment.

David: But, going back to...a thing you said, he said, you know it's like sometimes you don't feel welcomed. You know, for instance at the first PTO meeting, the largest PTO meeting I've seen so far. I've been to all except one and then people shared some things, and it was like they were shot down. We don't care about what you care about. And, made me disappointed in that aspect and...you go to the rest of them and it's like they have their agenda of...so and so has this reports and nobody there really gives a flip about that. And I would like to see the school to work more with the parents. And the last meeting I attended, there was more teachers there because they had two drawings for 25 bucks or something, and then whoever had the most parents there. And there was more teachers there...otherwise there was parents in the whole place. And I'm hoping that that's not a trend. I'm hoping there's something that we can do to correct that to get mom and dad both more involved with what's going on.

Bob: ...had to take care of him. And I did, we did the Halloween parties, and we did the Christmas parties, and went and ate lunch at Thanksgiving. And it got to the point there...I sometimes felt like I wasn't wanted, you know, that I was kind of in the way. Being so, seen all the time, you know, it was like...it just felt that way to me.

Robert: What kinds of things were you picking up on that made you feel...?

Bob: It just felt like, you know, here he is again...none of the other dads come, none of the other dads do any of this stuff.

Robert: So you felt like that it was just like you were the only dad, or...?

Bob: Yeah, sometimes I felt that. And then, and that went through first grade, second grade, third grade...and now this year, basically because of the way that you have to go to the back of the building and everything and don't walk em in all the time and all this stuff. I haven't participated in a lot of things just because of where I work and things. But, I still have that feeling that, you know, they don't, I don't know if they really want you there or not. Now Linda is, to me, she's changed a little bit, too. She's a little more open to people coming in her room and doing things like that. Like I say, Will was the first kindergarten class, you know, the first year that they opened and different things like that. It's kind of old hat now.

Robert: What do you all think about...what are your perceptions of being in the school, doing things at the school?

Bob: I don't think Miss Rosemont's like that. I think she welcomes people now. I think that she…

David: I would agree with that.

Al: Yeah, she's good.

Bob: Yeah, she's…I just haven't been able to do…I do things as the school. I, you know, we do the PTO basketball and different things. Other parts of the school, I think, sorta think that you're intruding. You know, sometimes, I, that's just my own perception that I feel from other people.

You know, education is still a female dominated occupation. And you know, it's to me you've got all these ways that…they know the way things ought to be done and then you've got these dads coming in there, you know. I don't think they're used to a lot of that. And if you think about it, dads used to never go to school.

Al: (utterances of agreement).

Bob: My dad never went to school…unless I was in trouble (some laugh). I mean that's it, you know.

Robert: So are you saying, are you thinking that dads are going to the schools more now?

Bob: I think so…

Bob: I think they say they want you involved, but I don't know if they really…I don't think they want any parent involved really in their day-to-day operation.

Someone: No.

Bob: I'm not talking about...not so much the teachers, I'm talking about administration from the board on down. They don't want you in their business, they're not in your business, you know, we're here to teach your kids, you know…

Communication

A theme which emerged from the data was the communication that fathers had with the school, the teacher, or even other parents. Communication can come in many forms—informal conversation, electronic (e.g. telephone or e-mail), scheduled conferences, and written notes. Since good communication between teacher and parents is widely known to improve the educational process, it was interesting to see it come through in much of the data.

Richard informed me of the weekly communication that he sees from the teacher and how he interprets it. He told me that he and his wife encourage Jonathan's teacher to write as much on the notes as possible. He even makes a reference to communications he had with other parents about the communication system in place. Richard's desire to communicate with the teacher is indicated by his request for as much information as possible, instead of just the regular form.

> And, you know, overall I was very satisfied with the talk we had with Miss Rosemont, you know, that was...we stressed to her that we would like to see...every Friday they send, she sends home a paper, you know, grading him on the schoolwork and their rules and we stressed to her write as much out there as you can. Whether you think it's really a big deal or not. We'd like to see the feedback and see what he's doing. Talked to a lot of different parents that their kids go to different schools and some of them don't do that at all. I'm very glad...they've already got this program in place. This is what they do, you don't have to ask for information so much.

One way that David communicates with Thomas' teacher is through reading the weekly reports that come home. He explained to me the system of the weekly reports, what function it serves for him, and how his son was doing according to the 'smiley face' index!

> Now secondly, she gives...sends home a weekly progress report that she uses that I call the smiley face system. One is like work done and work accomplished and the other side is like conduct. And from the very first one Thomas' just got all smiley faces, and it's just...she's very encouraging of what Thomas does. He completes his assignments on time, things like that...we don't know if he doing it fast enough, is he taking too long? Cause we don't know how long those skills should take, and with Mrs. Rosemont's experience in how the class is going, it helps us to understand that he is on track and doing it at the right speed. Sometimes we feel that it's taking too long, but we have to also realize how small he is.

David also wrote that when he takes his son to school in the morning, he often has the chance to talk to some of the other parents. One such conversation focused on their concern with the traffic during school hours. They hoped that the PTO meeting would help, which I found out later from David, didn't. After attending, he said that a large part of the meeting "consisted of angry parents and the drop-off routine."

At the parent-teacher conference, Richard said he and his wife, Carolyn, learned a great deal about their son's daily schedule. This information was important to them.

> You know we...that's one of the big things we talked about with Miss Rosemont was...and she offered information to us...was what their schedule was everyday. Pretty hectic schedule for a kindergarten class and that's what...we were surprised about that. That a lot of times they don't have time for rest period or whatever. You know they gotta get...and they

try to get so many things in that day. And I didn't really realize that they went to all these different extra classes like art and music, p.e., computer lab, science lab, you know all those things. I think it's great that they're doing that. And we talked to Miss Rosemont a lot about that what kind of activities they did.

I just...sometimes when after school when I pick him up, she's always there, you know leading him to the truck or whatever. So I say, 'How was his day? What'd he do?' You know this kind of stuff. But, when you say how was he, you know, a lot of times we don't even ask how did he do? The times I went to her room, Carolyn and I would always make sure to let her know that any activities coming up, you need help on anything.

You know, one time I asked Miss Rosemont about the reading program cause I saw a kid in there early in the morning...I think she has like some older kids come in and help them, you know, read or whatever. And I asked about that and she told...she...we talked about it at the parent teacher conference and she filled me in a little more about it. There's always some kind of form or activity or they're going on a field trip or they're doing this. I always try to talk to her about those things to make sure I understand what's happening. We always let her know if you need any help, just let us know and we'll do whatever...And I also talked to her about computers.

I'm surprised they use computers in kindergarten. And she's always writing on his schoolwork 'He loved computer lab this week.' 'He loved computer lab this week.' So I'm thinking well try to get...I had a computer at home and it was out of date, I gave it to my nephews. So I have a laptop I use at work so I really don't need one at home. I thought well maybe I should get another one. You know there's so many programs for kids now it's unbelievable. And they can really learn from that and that's what they use at school. So I asked...you know, we talked to her about that and would it be the right time to get one...just trying to get a feel for what's going on.

David's wife, Nancy, told me about the pride that David has when he talks to Ms. Rosemont about Thomas' accomplishments. The information is not going one way like it does for so many parent-teacher communiques with the teacher sending a note home to inform the parents of some event or bad behavior of the student.

> We have talked about conferences that we've had with Thomas' teacher, Miss Rosemont, to see if there is anything we can do to help her understand Thomas better or to help her...relate to Thomas better. One of the things David does a lot is if Thomas does something at church, does well at something, David is the one who...I guess you call it brag, he's the one who goes to Miss Rosemont and brags...
>
> ...He's the one who lets her know about the trophy and he's the one who took the trophy to school for Miss Rosemont to see. He's not really trying to brag, but he's just trying to show Miss Rosemont that 'yes, succeeding and doing his best is an important thing...

Bob mentioned talking to the teacher and I asked him to elaborate on that. When Bob talked about his communication with the school or the teacher, he seemed to focus on solving problems or discipline.

> I don't guess I've talked to her in a month. Sharon talked to her the other night at a conference. I probably haven't talked to her in a month. Well, I did, yeah I did too. I wrote in the journal that, about the boy on the bus or something like that and that was the only thing. That's the only thing that I've said to her probably in about a month. It's just I felt, I haven't felt like I needed to talk to her about anything. You know and that goes back to the old thing about Will was...you know there I was every day, with her you know we had...that's just because we were taking him and picking him up, you know. And we're not doing that this time so...

Other than the parent-teacher conference, Joe said that he talked with the teacher one other time. Again, from Joe's comments, I detect a more laissez-faire attitude about participating in Andy's school-life. I asked him what they talked about.

> I can't really remember what day it is. It was like a couple months ago and we just in general went over how he was behaving and the areas we might

be able to help him in like counting or spelling his name correct...she gave a real good positive report on him, said he done real good. And that's about all we really done. I think it lasted like 10 or 15 minutes.

Joe told an interesting story about some communication he had with another parent before his son started kindergarten. This went against the assumption that I and many people have that fathers don't talk about their kindergartner's education in more 'public' environments.

Joe: And just....in coloring I try to encourage him to stay in the lines, you know, because I knew they'd be doing a lot of coloring in kindergarten cause this girl at work her little girl was in kindergarten last year and she was telling me what all that they did do. And she said that they did a lot of coloring, so...

Robert: How did that come about? You were talking with...now who was this you were talking to?

Joe: It's this girl up there at [name of company]. I can't think of her name right off. But she said her little girl was in kindergarten last year and that they had to...I think it was...3 things that they had to learn. One is tying their...they had to know how to tie their shoe, how to count to 10 or so or 20, and say the alphabet. And...in order to move on. That's three things basically they had to learn.

Robert: M-hm.

Joe: So, it surprised me how quick he learned how to tie his shoe because he picked it up, I think, from that little boy. He was...I think he's 6. He might be close to 7, but learnt Andy how to tie his shoe. And I think Andy picked up on it quicker with him showing him than if me or Ellen had tried to show him.

Robert: Hmm.

Joe: But it didn't take him long to learn how to tie his shoe.

Robert: That conversation you had with the person at work about his school, how did that come about?

Joe: We just talking about the kid, about kids. But she asked me what grade…if he was in school and I said he'd be in kindergarten next year…that was last year. And she started telling me what all that her little girl learned and how she was doing and things that they had to know, you know, in order to get through kindergarten, and so…

Real Life Education

One of the most prevalent themes that emerged from the data was that education was more than just what happens at school. And, these fathers believed they had a big role to play in this 'real life education.' The fathers had many stories to tell about the importance of teaching life lessons to their kindergartners instead of just the 'book learning.' I feel Richard expressed it succinctly when he told me about what this study meant to him:

> But to me, what I've been writing in my journal, what I've been thinking about and what I've been talking to you about a lot is learning **everything else.** (My emphasis)

Richard talked about his definition of education and his role in such. When he talks about learning 'everything else,' he is talking about life education. Richard had very strong feelings about his role in this kind of education. His difficulty in putting it into words was something I found to be true for most of the fathers. He said:

With the education, lack of a better word, informal education, where he's not learning his ABC's and reading and writing, the things I'm trying to teach him and other adults in his life are trying to teach him, I think that's just as important.

His school work and his, I don't know what the word is, but informal education, about life, about social...not that I'm any expert on anything but at least I can convey to him the things that I do know about life and I can always help him with his school work and make sure that he gets those things as accurate as he can get them, and that he's always putting forth a good effort, trying as hard as he can do and then not worry about the rest. And then everything else is just a learning experience for him, everything's gotta be learned.

Yeah, there are so many things...(hard sigh)...I have a hard time saying this, I wish I could say it in a way that everybody would understand, but there's so many things, I guess just learning about life. What, what's going to happen to them in their life. You're going to get into arguments with people, you're going to get into fights with people, you're gonna have
good friendships, you're gonna have very close friendships, you're gonna meet people in the street, you know. You're gonna have your first job, and your first date and all that kind of stuff. I know it's a little early to think about that with a kindergarten kid, but some things...he's had his first day at big school, he's had activities now that he's never had before. He's
always gonna have those things. It's always going to be happening to him. And I think, you know, developing his mind...

In his journal, Richard wrote:

I make a determined effort to not only to try to teach Jonathan his letters and numbers but to teach him about life. How to treat other people. How to act properly around other people. Things like that.

I believe our children need to learn much more than just there ABC's and 123's as early as we can start teaching them. However, I don't try to discuss things that a 5 year old can't comprehend. Right now, one big thing I stress

to Jonathan is how to greet people. When spoken to, look them in the eye and at least say "Hello."

Jonathan was terrified of dogs. We got a puppy (a small Eskimo spitz) about six months ago. It took Jonathan a few weeks to get used to him. Now Jonathan loves that dog a lot and looks forward to playing with him.

I can see Jonathan getting more used to him all the time. He is very proud of himself for doing so. If another dog comes around the house, Jonathan makes an effort to let us know he was not afraid.

Bob told me about the importance he places on his kindergartner knowing about real-life situations.

You know, my big thing is, I want em to know...if I give them a dollar, they've got a dollar and a dollar is four quarters or its ten dimes or...so I do a lot of that...Well, I mean, that's just, you know, I guess real life kind of stuff. That's the big thing. I mean you can ask Will and Sarah, we'll be...you know...I'll say, 'How much is this?' or 'What do you do with this?' And Sharon does more a lot of the to me the book learning as they say...

When we go to the grocery store and things like that, you know, just showing her different things and...

Well we always make sure that when we get out of the car, you know, we look both ways before we, you know, cross the road. You know, to make sure that she doesn't run away. And we do thing like, you know, not to talk to somebody we don't know, and just different, it's just different stuff, it's not anything real specific.

For Phillip, being involved in his children's education was more about teaching values. He places great importance on teaching skills that are needed in the world of work.

> Other education is values, it's not just numbers and stuff. Life values, you know. How to behave at the table and...going, you know, when me and my wife are talking, (laughing) you know just regular education stuff. But I guess like any dad should do anyway, so...other education is church, we go to church once...we take them once a week.

Part of that life education was financial management, and for Phillip it is never too early to start, even in kindergarten!

> Teaching them how to invest money and saves, save money. We got a mutual funds going on. I show him the paper, you know, I have no idea what it is but I do make investment in their name, you know, it's just gift to minor. Cindy and Samuel they got their own retirement saving going on already... But I hope that I will be able to teach them that they've got a egg nest and it can really...the compounding part of your investment can really grow so fast that, they don't touch it and just they're finding a job and put some money in it like 20 dollars a month on it. Calculate from 18 years old to 60 years old or 65, you have a pre-tax...non-taxable investment about 10-12 percent average and if you 50 dollars a month in it, you get a million dollars when you are 65, so...that 50 dollars is so easy to blow it, you know. Samuel is not capable to understand that, Cindy starts understanding it, she's 8, but, that's the value I'm teaching them. Not just...I wish I had known that...

Social Competency

One of the life education concepts that some fathers felt were important to teach was the social-interaction component. I was surprised to see this because my assumption was that the mother would usually be delegated as the social-emotional teacher. This theme had a strong presence throughout the fathers' stories.

Teaching the child to converse with other people was evident throughout the study. Al talked with pride about his daughter's ability to talk to other people.

> Of course we took her Halloweening. And she goes to these people's house and, I mean, she does all the talking. She'll ring the doorbell, I mean, you can't take her up there. She does all that. And she'll just talk. No telling what she'll tell you, but I mean. She's...conversation-wise she can hold a better conversation than I can.

Richard told a story about how he was teaching his son, Jonathan, how to greet people in a social setting. During the focus group session, Richard shared with us how he had trouble overcoming his shyness. This might have made him sensitive to the importance of learning social interaction at an early age. He said:

> Well the most fundamental thing I've taught, you know, when we're out shopping at the grocery store, Wal-Mart, or wherever, he'd come to work with me a day or something like that. Someone always, that I meet that I know will come up and say hello to me and say, 'Hey, Jonathan.' Talk to him, say hello and he would just put his head down and not look up, you know shy, something like that. So, one of the first things I talked to him about is...if you're with your parents or somebody, your grandparents, or me or your mom or whatever, and someone comes up and starts talking to you just look him in the eye and say hello. Then you can just do whatever you want to after that. But at least look him in the eye and say 'Hi' or something like that. Or respond to what they're doing. If they ask you how you're doing say fine or something like that. so he's started doing that he would, you know, I would actually be in Wal-Mart and see someone and say, 'Hey, Jonathan, say hi.' So he would you know, 'Hello!' (laughing). Trying to look him in the eye. And he started getting used to it.
>
> [After that] Well, Jonathan, make some conversation with the people. If they say, 'how are you doing today?' Say 'fine, how are you?' Say, 'it's a nice day' or whatever to him. And he started doing that. Now he just...you know like, shut up (laughing). Don't talk so much. But I enjoy that...just

proud of myself and I'm proud of him for you know. He listened to me; I'm getting through to him. He knows what's going on.

You know, there's so many things that a kid, I think, needs to know and since I...I'm still learning things. And I'm 29 years old and I'm still learning how to interact with people, how to handle certain situations and stuff like that. And I really, in the past few weeks I've seen things that I've been talking to him about, I've seen him react to those. The other day we were at...I took my daughter to get a haircut and, you know, my wife couldn't go and I took them, I took both and took Jonathan with me. And Jonathan sat on the stool right next to her, you know, and he was thinking he was the big boy here, he was going to teach her how to sit in the chair by herself and stuff like that. And he sat up there and he's just talkin to everybody in there and saying 'Hey, how are ya doing today?' And not afraid.

Phillip, the Corporate Vice President, had this to say about the importance of teaching life values and his perceived role in such education. In his telling, I see effects of his corporate management training.

Well, it's just life value is...having a social component, behaving in society. Which is teamwork, sharing. You know kids they argue all the time between children. They want to...all everything they got, they don't want to share it. I guess so important in the future when you have a job that, you cannot do everything yourself and you got to be around other people and you got to be able to understand their feeling and use them in a function that you work together, you know.

...when we [husband and wife] talk about at home at the dinner, you know, say that we've been to a training seminar for just learn how to behave and understand all the people behavior so we can work better together you know. There are so many different kind of people and we need to be together to get the job done.

Phillip has strong convictions about the father's role in teaching social values. He expresses his views about what the school does or does not teach and the parent's role in filling the gap. His discussion of the individual v. the community membership is very interesting.

> Well, I guess with my wife, we talk and the kids are next, so they listen to the discussion. It don't happen a lot, but if I have an opportunities...that something they don't teach at school at all. School people...the school they teach you how to be an individual and how to get a good grade and be smart and have a diploma and reach that level. They don't teach you that sometime...I don't, that's the way I was raised, OK, I don't know about these schools here. But sometime by working together you can really do a lot more work. And when you get out of college, you know how to start but if you don't know how to deal with other people, you can be the smartest man in town, but you won't get nowhere. A lot smart people with high grades and 4.0 average and stuff, they can lose their job in two years if they are too much an individual. So, I prefer my kids make a 3.5 and but work well with other guys, you know. I mean they behave. If they behave well and can connect with other people, then that's what I want. I just don't want to have a scientist...But I hope school understand that because that is not good. I learned that here working and...when you work together with other people, life become a little easier.

In his journal, Phillip talked about the real life application of the values of teamwork.

> He [Samuel] played on the soccer team the last 8 weeks at the youth center. He will be a good player. It also teaches him team play. I want him to understand that team work is the finest quality to excel at work, at home, with friends.

Al talks about some of the life education lessons that he sees his daughter, Abby, engaged in and that it teaches her socialization and adjustment skills, skills he feels are important for Abby to learn.

> But, we've had her in these beauty contests. And her...we've all sorta got into that. And she's real good about winning and losing now. She don't think that you gotta win everything.
>
> Like if...just like, you know, it takes a lot of guts to go up and say well, Dad, if I don't win, says they're always there...contests, you know. That takes a big girl to say that. You know, you take her to these and you can't figure out why this little kid wins, you know. And she's not upset about it. ...I mean that has to learn her, you know, that learns you a lot to go out there and stand in front of all them people, I think. As far as...you know, they introduce you and you gotta be all at your best and, I mean, for someone that little that's a big step. I can't do it.

David talked about the social component of interpersonal communication that he works on with his son. I see many similarities between what David is saying and what the other fathers are saying.

> One Saturday morning we watched a Christian television show that had told three or four jokes and he got to where that he was very bashful, but I could talk him into telling the joke to like one person at a time. And we would be in say Kroger and he would tell the clerk at Kroger the joke, somebody he never knew. Then it came to where he was getting over his shyness by telling the joke because he knew the question and he knew the answer and it was very fun. One of his ones was 'What kind of lights did Noah have in the ark?' And he would say, 'Come on, do you know? Do you know? And you'd say, 'I don't know.' He'd say, 'flood lights.' And because it was kind of cute, you know, people would, people would laugh about it and that would give him some more self-confidence.

Bob thinks that teaching manners to his children is important. He talks about his role in that. Bob discussed manners several times during our meetings and I got the impression that he is very serious about teaching his children how to politely interact with others. I am convinced of this after seeing him react when Sarah's interrupted our interview in the kitchen once.

> I think I do it more than she does. It just kills me to be talking to somebody and them come in and interrupt somebody and he, Will's the worst one and she copies him and Sharon'll be trying to talk or something, whatever, and it's, you know, they just interrupt you and be rude and things like that and I just can't, I don't know, I've just gotten old, I guess, and I just can't stand that. It just bothers me. And things, you know, if they throw something on the floor, I want them to pick it up. And when we go to the restaurant, you know, I expect them to say 'please' and 'thank you' and 'may I' and, instead of just hollering at somebody or demanding something. I expect them to be polite. Cause I just noticed some of the kids at their school are just thugs, that's the only way to put it. My kids aren't going to be like that.
>
> They tried to start this thing at the school, they got this courtesy thing or manners thing going. I don't know where they are along in that. But it's, you know, they're just trying to educate some of the hoodlums over there that, you know, some of their actions won't be tolerated.

Independence/Self-Confidence/Responsibility

Max and many of the other fathers thought that teaching responsibility at this age is very important. He spent much of the interview talking about how responsibility would affect future success including employment. He stressed starting to teach them early, "laying a foundation."

Robert: You mentioned something about, just a minute ago or so, something about teaching responsibility.

Max: Uh-huh.

Robert: Tell me some more about that. Tell me about teaching responsibility to kids.

Max: Well, right now the biggest things, you know, we try to teach em what their responsibility is to keep their clothes picked up and their shoes out of the floor and stuff like that. We still have to remind them every night when they come in. When they come in they take their coat off throw it on the couch and kick their shoes off and laying on the floor. I don't know how long it takes to get em out of that habit. When they put their things up when they get in. We're not having no luck with...we tried to let em feed the dog and stuff. We're not having any luck with that cause we got a dog right here now that's...jumps on em and stuff.

Right now it's time to teach em the responsibility and teach them the...basic things right now. But right now it's...not really talking to em about the effects of doing drugs or drinking and stuff like that. But, right now, laying a foundation, I guess you might say, so whenever you do talk to them about those things that they will respect you and listen to what you have to say. I know from experience that experience is the best teacher. That...I've seen people that don't learn from experience. Basically, look back on it now, when I was in school so and so their mom and dad lets them go wherever they want to whenever they want to if they want to come home at 11:00 on a school night. They've been out with their buddies or been out to the pool hall or whatever, you know. Their parents don't...you get the impression they don't care. I'm sure they do, just maybe don't show the right way or whatever. Letting have their way and run...if they want, is another way of showing them that they want them to have everything. That's not...it seems like they end up on the wrong path, they don't respect things, they're not very responsible. They're not very good workers. You know being in business, I know the importance of dependable and responsible people. Of course, I've always been taught that all my life. And I try to teach that to the kids. If you tell somebody you're gonna...try to do it. You don't always get to do what you say you'll do, but at least try. Don't just tell somebody that because that's what they want to hear. And just turn around and walk off, you know, it's left your mind and that's the last you ever think of it.

Many times the parents told me about transporting the children to the school and the dropping off ritual whether it was walking them all the way to the class or just to the commons area where the teacher would take them as a group when it was time for school to start. Max's wife, Lisa, told me a funny story about Eric and his quest for independence.

> We'd walk him in. And one morning Eric come up and he's been going for 60 days now. And I'd say about 10 days ago he come off and he ask me if he can walk in by hisself. And I said well, yeah, I reckon. But I think I did that mostly for me and not for him. I mean Max would walk him in too, and it was like...OK. He goes, 'Well, Mama,' he goes, 'the only reason why I hadn't been going in before is because I couldn't get them doors open.' He couldn't get the doors open to the school to get in. And that's the only reason why we had to take him and walk him through school for. And I said well, thank you very much.

Some fathers talked about their attempts to teach their children to be independent. For Richard, letting Jonathan walk into the building by himself was a teaching/learning experience:

> **Richard:** And a few weeks into it, we started saying we need to scale back so we would walk him so far into the hallway and stop there and watch him go the rest of the way. So, this Friday I got him to walk and get out of the truck by himself and go all the way in so...he did that again this morning, he did that fine. So he's getting used to...
>
> **Robert:** Did he like doing that by himself?
>
> **Richard:** Yeah, yeah...he takes some pride in doing that by himself. I think...in a way I wanna walk him in. You know, I wanna walk him in, I wanna sit there and chat with him a minute, in another way I want him to be independent and go ahead and do it and not be afraid to walk in there. I told

him there's no reason to be afraid. I'm not sure whether he was afraid to do it or he just liked to have me also...(inaudible)...But now that he's gotten used to doing that, I think he's going to do it fine.

He also talked about the importance of teaching self-confidence.

And if you make a mistake or it's not the right answer, don't worry about it. Feel confident in what you're doing or saying or who you are. A lot of kids lack that nowadays, confidence in themselves.

Phillip believes that teaching self-confidence will prepare his son to deal with pressures that he has to encounter later in life.

Yeah. Teaching, preparing for future behavior...have self-confidence so that they don't get pulled into gang stuff, you know, we're worried about gangs, drugs, and all this stuff. But sometimes pressure from their peers, you know, 'Oh, you're a little boy, come with me and smoke a cigarette." You've got to teach them how to be strong enough to resist (inaudible). To me that's modeling a behavior of self-confidence, self-esteem.

Role Modeling

Social learning theory tells us that learning by observation is most powerful. Richard agrees with this, albeit unknowingly. He told me:

They're smart, kids are smart. They catch on. I guess they catch on more to watching their parents and the older kids and stuff like that than they do actually telling them what to do. Actions speak louder than words and that's true. It's interesting trying to back off and not just drill it in his head that

much. And trying to...wondering if he's understanding me or not. I can see, I can see some results and things. I guess this study has made me, you know, try to see the reaction, the result...

The father's role of functioning as the masculine role model has been in the forefront almost as long as his role as breadwinner. David talked to me about how he sees his role in teaching masculinity.

And we will eat together, we'll have that time of bonding together and we'll just spend some good time and he'll get to play and we may go somewhere else and shop or something that just we as boys, as we call ourself, that ... Thomas and I are together we are called the boys. And we boys wanna do things together and trying to put that masculine thing, or masculine image into Thomas.

The focus group elicited some conversation about role modeling. The fathers know they are being watched all the time and that they are setting examples of behavior for their children. Bob started the discussion with what he observed at the Christmas program at the school.

Bob: You can just tell whose kids belong with which parents, you know, cause if the kids act a certain way, you see the parents acting that way sometimes.

Richard: Yeah.

Phillip: My wife smokes and I know it's bad, it's a bad behavior, and they know it, but that is the way, so, people smoke and they can't get out of it. But if you don't start, you won't be addicted to it. It's an addiction, it's a drug. And that's what, I believe in that, and I believe more power to do.

Bob: You know, I always think it's funny, you know, a parent that smokes that tells a child not…

Phillip: Yeah, I know it (laughing).

Bob: You know, I mean, what kind of example are you setting there. I guess we're getting into moral kind of issues, but…

Robert: Moral education, that's our next stop, our next, let's get into that…

Bob: You know, if you use that as an example of do as I say, not as I do (fathers laugh), you know, but then you go to a school play and something and you're rude and you're obnoxious and everything and then you're kids are running are running all over the place, you know. It's the same difference.

Richard: The kid, the child is learning whether you're actually interacting with them at that time.

Bob: Oh, yeah.

Richard: They're seeing you, they're learning from you.

Phillip: They're learning from your behavior.

Richard: Yes. If they see you out in the backyard kicking your lawnmower, they're going to be kicking they're toys (laughing).

Some father: Oh, yeah (laughing).

Phillip: Sometimes I come by and say, 'go clean your room' right there, my office is a mess (fathers laugh). And they tell me, 'Hey, you clean yours.'

Linda, the kindergarten teacher, believes that the dad as a role model is one of the most important determinants of a child's success in kindergarten and beyond. Her comments, based on her own experiences, do, in fact, support the research that suggests

that parental involvement has more of an impact on children than school could ever hope to achieve.

Linda: I think it's extremely important. I think fathers are special in their own way and I think mothers are special. I think that fathers have a greater role than they probably often realize. And I know that there is a lot of information and studies and people that know lots more than I do but, in general, I just think a child's well-being is centered around the father, a good role model and the mother a good role model. And I don't think that anything surpasses that. Personally, I don't think anything. Nothing I could do, nothing the school can do. I just think it's the most important ingredient in a child's life.

Robert: M-hm.

Linda: And, of course, coming into kindergarten, I think that a child that has...amount of time brings a lot of things into their life, you know, into their year of kindergarten and I think having a father who has been a good role model and has actively been with that child is one of the most important things that child can have. It doesn't matter what else is there. It doesn't matter the amount of money, the amount of time that a father spends is going to make such an incredible difference. Even to a 20 year old ch...person. I'm not an expert but I just feel that I can sense in a class, I can sense their abilities, their....their basic...I don't know what the word...their well-being, a child's self-esteem...what am I trying to say?... help me out here...

Robert: You're doing fine.

Linda: ...just the child that comes to kindergarten, if they have had their father as a good role model, and their mother, it makes an incredible difference. I mean, I can almost sense that after I've had em for [a short time]... I can tell. You know, it's just...it makes such a difference about who they are, what they expect out of themselves, and what they're going to learn in school. It's just unbelievable to me.

Community Learning

One of the assumptions that I had going into the study was that children could learn from experiences outside of the school--learning events that developed from incidental experiences or teachable moments (what I call community learning). Many times fathers talked about providing learning experiences in this community environment.

Al expressed his belief that community learning plays a vital role in learning when he talks about 'exposure' and 'opportunity' for learning. He gave several examples of the community learning that he has provided for Abby.

> Cause they're not gonna ever learn anything if you don't get em out into do all that stuff. You gotta sort of expose em to, you know, she's been exposed to quite a bit of stuff. Whether good or bad, I mean, she's been...she knows the difference.
>
> You sorta gotta put the opportunity there. And my niece has got a new little baby, I mean, Abby she's...she called my grandmother and told her well, she'd done got to hold the little thing and he knowed that she hadn't got to hold her yet. You know, that's a big step. She really liked that. I mean that's learning I think. That's not really learning school stuff but that's learning life.
>
> She goes down to...and you know, they're allowed to four-wheel out there, and go feed the horses, I mean she's...she's picked up on all that. She knows how to fool around the horses.
>
> We took her to...we went off to Gatlinburg this weekend to see the Dixie Stampede. You know, that's...that was to do really with scouts. Of course that's a learning deal.
>
> Well, I have to take her every Saturday night. And we go pick her up and I mean, we're pretty well, pretty tight on all that, on the family And we take

her to her little...That's my niece, that's her cousin. Now she's in the playhouse. So we get to go to the playhouse and she watches all that. And now Abby's at the playhouse dancing. She dances...takes dance lessons over there. And before that we...she took some tumbling over here at the Methodist church after school. All that's a learning process, I think.

Al's wife, Brenda, also talked about Al's participation in these kinds of learning activities. The stories she and Al tells are evidence that this is a way of life—something he does with her all the time.

If there's a lot of snow on the ground, Al will bundle up and go and take him sledding and you know, build snowmans with em and...write names in the snow and that type of thing. I guess Al does more personal one on one things with them as far as taking a book and studying. There's a lot of different ways to look at education on that.

David wants to be involved in every facet of his kindergartner's life. He sees himself as an educator and that role is evident when he talks about the excursions that he takes with his family.

Educationally, I am a minister, and I had to be gone to some business meetings that I'm required to go to or suggested that I go to, and we try to make all our trips to be very educational as possible. A couple years ago we went to New Orleans and spent all of our time, and you know, all the people thought New Orleans is a party place and party capital, however it is a very educational place. They claim to have the best zoo in the South. And we went, and the unique thing about that zoo is they have all their animals together. For instance, like, all the animals that would be in the continent of Africa are together...all the ones from Asia are there together. And so while we were there we went there and also a highlight for that trip was we went to the Children's Museum that we just found out about, and we called and said well how long was, at that time Thomas was 3, I said, 'How long

would a 3-year-old stay and be interested?' And they said maybe hour, hour and a half max. So we decided to go and after about 4 hours, we just had to tell Thomas that we just had to go and we had to leave. But it was all the little things that he could learn, he could touch, he could feel, at this Children's Museum. And then last year, while I was at a meeting in Indianapolis, we got to go to the Children's Museum there, and that was just, they claim that the Indianapolis Children's Museum is the best in the United States. I mean, I don't know, but he spent hours, he spent the whole day just going through the things at the museum and just did not want to go.

David told me that he tries to provide learning situations for his son by giving him a wide variety of things to do. The Friday before the interview, they went to Gatlinburg to see the Autumn leaf colors. When missionaries from the church visited David and his congregation, he saw it as a learning experience for Thomas.

That's a long question and you may think I'm giving a theological answer but our church is very concerned about what's going on throughout the world. And on this occasion we happened to have a missionary from Thailand that we spent the most time with and he has spent probably 12 or 15 years...and Thomas actually got to meet him about a year ago and he remembered him. And he doesn't remember a lot of the details about Thailand, like where it is and that type of thing. But he gets to talk to people and we had a meal together with this guy and his wife and he got to know him. And then we met a guy that was a computer specialist that had been living in Brussels, Belgium that they had recently brought back to the United States to do some other type of work. And he got to eat...we went out to eat, and he got to hear this guy talk. So he understands that it's not just what is happening here in South City and but it's...he can talk to people throughout the world. Thomas has a thing where he likes to work on the computer, I'll put in a word processor and he can type whatever letters he can hit print and print em out. And a few months ago we had a missionary that I did not speak to on the telephone, he was from Colombia and there's a lot of reasons why you can't talk in Colombia for the danger. But he was able to receive e-mail. And I didn't talk to the man... conversed several times through the computer and...but I didn't get to talk to him until the evening he drove up at the church. And how technology is changing...I have an interest, I have an associates degree in computers and so I'm

> waiting to get Thomas a computer as soon as I think he's ready. He does have access at the one at the church any time he wants to. But meeting someone from a different culture and how technology is changing and making everything closer for us... I just took a trip to Los Angeles and I was there for... I was there in four hours flight time. In four hours I can be very close to another country if we started going south. And how everything is becoming close. And I think it helps him to identify with the world. When we were at a yard sale he got a little map, like I believe it's of a map of the world. It's not totally accurate it's just a lot of the countries' names have changed and that type thing, but we can talk about say this is where this man is from and how far away it is.

David's wife, Nancy, also told me stories about when David was engaged in teaching and learning with Thomas during their travels.

> Thomas asks a lot of questions and I feel like every time he asks a question whoever answers it is his teacher. And a lot of times his daddy does answer his questions if it's maybe in the car driving and he may say something like...like we may be going to church one Sunday morning and him say, 'Daddy, why are all those people not in church?' And when David answers his question, then I believe that that's a teaching...that that's an instance of teaching.
>
> ...any opportunity that David has to answer a question about life or about why that stop light is red instead of green, you know, David takes the time to answer the question. And those are teachable moments.

Because Nancy is an educator, not only can she provide that expertise for her family when it comes to learning, she was able to talk to me about the benefits of community learning. She told me a story about the family's trip to the Superdome in New Orleans, LA and to the beach. In her story, it is evident that David and Thomas have a lot of fun during these community learning outings.

So his dad would, we were on a tour and there was not as much talking time as we had thought there might be, but in every part of that tour, as much as possible, David would tell him about what happened here, what happened in the locker room. He let Thomas sit in one of the little benches in the locker room and he told him about how what happened in there. And now when a football game is on TV, if it's in the superdome or whatever, David talks to Thomas about...Thomas, we were there. Remember when we were in the locker room and what happened. So David take those opportunities to not only talk about it while we're there, but we try to when we get home, David tries to relate it to whatever he can relate it to, OK, to make it not just an isolated educational opportunity that he tries to relate it to what's going on in our life now.

Two...three years ago we went to the beach and we were able to go back to the beach this Summer. The two of them, the 'boys' as they call themselves talked about what Thomas remembered from the beach the first time and what the two of them were gonna do when they got back this year. And one of the things they were going to do was a lot of playing in the sand and a lot of racing to the water and back. And so David kind of reviews things for Thomas about remember when we did this and where we were? And what state we were in? When we were in Florida or we were in Louisiana or whatever. Trying to keep Thomas' learning on a continuum instead of just little isolated segments of yeah we were at the Children's Museum in Louisiana and we learned this. And we never ever talk about it again. We, the two of us try really hard to remind Thomas of things and to keep his memory current about learning opportunities.

Max, firefighter and father of 3, lives on a farm and finds that it provides many opportunities for learning. He spent over half of our 70 minute interview talking about non-school learning. Max talked about just hanging out with his son in his shop and taking him to work some days.

Some things when I pick him up I take him with me to work and whatever, you know, trying to...if I aint got much really pressing to do we just fiddle around and do some things...I have dump trucks and stuff. Sometimes I have to drive a dump truck and take him with me. I just... drive that day I go pick him up in the dump truck at school and we go on and do whatever

we're...you know, whatever I'm a doing, you know, it's not too...have to worry about him falling off of a house or anything like that.

Max also sees driving down the road as a teaching and learning opportunity especially when the subject matter interests his little boy, Eric! Max sees a chance to build on that interest.

Other than, you know, I mean, like I say, you know, if we're going down the road or something, we see something maybe a little unusual or something, I'll ask him what it is and then ask him... 'What shape is it?' Say, if it's maybe a barn door or something, 'What shape is that barn?' Or maybe an unusual piece of equipment, of course he takes...he likes equipment and stuff, heavy equipment and farm equipment and anything like that that moves, he likes it.

We're driving down the road, you know, and he'll say, 'Daddy, did you see that road grater?' Yeah, well, 'What letter does that start with?' You know, he don't know but, you know, then we'll tell him what it starts with and maybe he'll start associating sounds with letters and stuff.

The farm culture offers many 'teachable moments' for Max and his children. Max owns a cattle farm and he told me about a time when he took his young children to see the birth of a calf.

Dad called up here said we was having trouble...a cow was having trouble calving and I went down and, of course I had them with me, I had no choice but to take them. I took them down and...I had to pull a calf but they couldn't...they was so excited they couldn't be quiet, so the cow wouldn't lie down while they was around I had to have daddy...daddy had to take them in the house so they would be quiet so she'd lie down and let me pull the calf.

Max had mores calf stories about events which provided learning experiences for his children.

> We, he was about 3, I guess...he was about 2 and...my brother had bought some bottle calves and we were having to feed them every morning and every evening. And the way it worked out I had to feed em...the two mornings that I had to feed was the shift, the day before my shift at the fire hall, and then before I went to work at the firehall. I was having to get up at 5:30 in the morning and I started getting him up and taking him cause he enjoyed the holding the bottle for them. And he...we had them in little pens over there and he barely could hold...get up high enough to...I think I ended up putting him something to stand on in front of the little fence so he could hold the bottle over the top of the fence for the calf to nurse off of it there. And ever since...he can still remember that.

During the time when I was conducting interviews, the county fair was in progress. Max told me about taking his kindergartner, Eric, and his younger daughter, Elizabeth, to the fair. He explained what they saw, what he explained, what they learned, and how they reacted.

> Back during the fair week, we were going to the fair one evening and walked back the livestock building and they were showing cattle in there. And we stopped in there for a few minutes cause neither one of the kids had ever seen them, watched it, you know, show cattle. We stopped in there for a few minutes. They have a cattle show there several nights a week, we just happen to...we had never been to one and with the kids anyway and we stopped in there just to, you know, for a few minutes to let em see some of the things that, cause all they've ever seen is our cattle. It's just, we run em out in the field and we get em back or whatever, vaccination or if we want to separate some out to sell or whatever, you know. That's...you know, they've never actually been around the show itself for registered stock or whatever.

They were showing the cattle and stuff and they got the stick with the hook on it that they position the feet with and stuff and when they want them to stand they're sitting there holding their lead and they take that stick with the hook on it and rub their belly. And that kinda, I don't know exactly, it kinda coaxes the cattle there, and they just stand and not move whenever they're doing that. She said, 'Why do they got that stick?' And, cause she thought it was to whip em with or something. I said, 'No,' I said, 'Watch.' And they'd bring em around there, you know, and they want their feet to be even in the front and the back and this stick's got a hook on the end of it and they reach down and hook the feet and pull em up to even and of course they're used to it and they know want they're wanting. They put their feet up even and they put their hind feet...it's got like a prod on it and they can push the hind feet back, get em even. Then they take that hook and rub their belly with it while they're...cause they gotta stand still while the judges walk around em.

We were down at daddy's one Sunday afternoon after that and Elizabeth which is Eric's younger sister was...she got a hold of Ringo [the dog] and wasn't really paying attention there, she had a hold of his collar leading him around. She had a stick...and we watched after a few minutes and she walked him up there in front of the...me and dad and my wife was all sitting on the porch there and talkin, and she walked him up in front of the porch there and stopped him and took that stick and went to rubbing his belly.

She had remembered what that...of course me and Lisa looked at each other and I said, 'You know what she's doing don't you?' She said, 'Yeah.' She said, 'She remembers watching them cattle at the fair.'

Often children ask spontaneous questions about the world around them. Joe told me about a time when he and his family were on a road trip and Andy asked a question. His explanation is logical and more detailed than just 'for planes.'

Well, on the way to [nearby city], we was going down [the interstate], and he seen them big balls over the electric wires above the interstate. And he noticed them right off the bat, you know, he seen them and he said, 'Dad, what's them balls doing on them lines like that?' And I told him it's probably for airplanes flying through...them being that high, so they could see the lines, you know. Be aware that they're in the air like that. And...that really caught his attention, them big balls (laughing).

Phillip is influenced by his cultural background and expressed his desire to send his children to France for the Summer. His older daughter had already spent some time in France with Phillip's family while he was on business in Europe. He talked about this in the context of learning.

> So we don't, my wife speaks French but she doesn't speak with the kids French, so we...they are not, we are not using French enough around them that, that's the only way I can do it, just send them to France for three months and they will learn. And they will like it. As soon are big enough, they will go and pass a Summer over there.

Sharon told me how she sees her husband, Bob, teaching their kindergartner about the things around them. Her comments reflect the themes in many of the stories that many of the participants, mothers and fathers alike, had regarding the types of pedagogical activities in which these kindergarten dads were engaged.

> A lot of things that he does, is he makes her think. He doesn't really sit down and actually all the time read or ask her math problems and stuff like that. He doesn't actually do that. He may do it like in the car he may ask her like, 'What do you see here?' you know, like...I'm gonna say, 'Is this McDonald's?' I mean this is was he started when she was small and stuff like that. And, you know, 'look at the trees, what do you see, are the leaves changing?' You know, he might mention things like that. And, 'When does this happen?' He may ask her, you know, 'Is the weather cold, the day shorter?' and stuff like that. He may ask her little things like that. He may...let's see...He may ask you to actually synchronize things such as... 'If you do this first, what are we gonna do next?' He may do a lot of that kind of stuff. Like a....and such as with money, he may ask her to 'Look, if this is so much money and you, you know, this is 5 dollars and you've got 4, you know 4, and you spend...will you have enough money to buy it?' 'If

this is 2 dollars, will you have enough to buy something else?' He makes them actually think and rationalize things and which is more important.

One of the reasons I decided to interview the mothers was that sometimes participants can't remember everything they do! Sharon added many stories to the ones that Bob told me about his interaction with his kindergartner. She told me about how Bob makes his children think by using everyday events.

He may help her prepare her meal and stuff like that. They might put something in the microwave and, you know, find the word 'time' in there. Which word starts with a T? He may do that. It goes to 20 seconds. Put something for 20 seconds. Well, how do you make the number 20? You know, what numbers are involved with that? And then what do you have to...But, you know, he may do a lot of things like that. You know...number recognition there, responsibility to get things for herself.

The day that I went to interview Sharon at her home, an important historical event was due to take place. She told about how Bob used the event to interact educationally with his daughter.

OK, like today, I know at 11:30, they're planning on watching the space shuttle come back...Bob was telling her this morning, 'Are we gonna go sit down and watch the space shuttle today?' And Sarah was describing what the space shuttle was and she was saying the big old ugly gray part and Bob said, 'Well, what is the gray part?' You know, what part are you talking...? The landing...the landing stuff is what she was saying and...but the was planning on doing that and...I mean seeing John Glenn, you know. But they were talking about that this morning and she's very excited over that. Really thrilled. But other than that, I don't know how else to say it. But she was thrilled. But, see, Bob does stuff like that. He...I mean I may go over A's

and B's and you know, the little simple stuff, but I think, you know, he brings em the culture and what's going on in the world to her.

According to this data, there is a great deal of community learning activity going on between the fathers and their children. This suggests that the fathers believe that it is an important part of the child's educational development.

Fathers' Feelings

A challenging part of this study was to get the fathers to talk about the affective side of their involvement in their child's education. It was difficult. I did hold the assumption, before the conception of this study, that eliciting emotional narrative from say, a mechanic, would be interesting to say the least. I was correct in assuming that most fathers have never talked about their involvement in their children's education, much less, their **feelings** about it, to anyone but their wives. My interviews with the mothers showed that some hadn't even talked to them about it!

Bob, a parole officer and father of two, even showed signs of avoidance when I asked him about how being involved in educational activities made him feel. I attribute this to the difficulty of the question and the fact that most dads have not thought about it.

Robert: One of the things that I'm trying to learn about in this study is how when you do these things with Sarah regarding her education, when you're involved in these kinds of things, how does it make you feel? What do you feel when you're involved in these kinds of things? Can you tell me a little about that?

Bob: Well, I…you want something to drink?

Robert: No, I'm fine.

Bob: Pepsi? Tea? (long pause)…

Robert: How important is it to you…?

Bob: I think when she gives me, when she tells me what she did that day and it sounds like she had a good day. That makes me feel fine. It's frustrating to me when she doesn't want to talk to me about it or…things or…you ask her about something and she gets wrong or something and you know she knows the answer, you know, just, one of those obvious kind of things, you know those things bother me a little bit. I gotta remember she's only five, fixin to turn six and, you know…

Because an important part of this study was to find out how fathers' involvement in pedagogical activities made them feel, I kept coming back to that question from different angles and at different points during the interview.

Robert: You've read with Sarah, flash cards, and some of the other things that you mentioned, and talking, going to the PTO meetings, why do you do these things? What do you get out of it?

Bob: I still haven't figured that part out yet. What do I get out of it?

Robert: How does it make you feel just, you doing that…

Bob: I don't know…I really don't know. I just…maybe I feel if I do something with them, I will feel involved with it instead of…(did not finish sentence).

After talking awhile with Al about the activities in which he was involved with his kindergarten daughter, in an attempt to dig deeper into the motivation for his behaviors, I asked him why he did these things with her. His response was, "Cause she's my little girl. I want her to do good." This seemed so obvious to him.

Richard said that he enjoyed seeing his children trying to think about things and using their minds to interpret things. He also enjoyed the interaction between himself and his two children when engaged in learning activities with them.

> You know I wanna be, I wanna be there and know what's going on in my child's education. I wanna be there as much as I can and know what his day to day, week to week activities are. I want to know what, you know, if he had any problems, I want to know those first-hand. See what was going on. See if there was anything that I could offer about Jonathan that would help Miss Rosemont. I've noticed it was 6 weeks...and we talked a lot about, you know how...about his attitude and how he does things and stuff like that...

I asked Richard how it made him feel when he was involved in teaching and learning with his child.

> **Richard:** Well, I'm very glad I am involved in it and I...it gives me an overwhelming sense of pride and satisfaction when I can see Jonathan responding to these things. When I can see his education or his ability is there to learn. And he is... you know I can see he's learning, I can see he's responding to things, I can see his knowledge is increasing or whatever...
>
> **Robert:** M-hm.
>
> **Richard:** ...I've always, like I said, I've always believed in being very involved with my children not just let, you know, my wife take care of everything. Take them to school, I want to be involved in what's happening

both at home and at school. So...you know a lot of times it's difficult. You know we're on a tight schedule, you know, you're tired or whatever, but try to let, I try to let Jonathan make some choices about like when we're at home, whether we're going to read a story or not. What the story is and stuff like that. And so I really feel confident that I am getting my message through or whatever in that he can make decisions that he's his own person and stuff like that.

He also talked about the bonding he felt going on with his son that being involved with his Jonathan's education fostered.

Richard: That, you know, that we can always...both of us can always look forward to certain activities, you know, that sort of come pretty often I may be gone sometimes but when I do get back he can look forward to spending time with me and I can look forward to spending time with him and doing those sorts of things...I think, you know, I look forward to that we're building something now. It's not like I'm gonna have a relationship with him when he's an adult. You know, have time for him. We're gonna have things, we're gonna have a foundation, you know...it's gonna be in place and we're gonna have things that we can talk about and that things in common with each other so, you know, I won't feel like or he won't feel like we've missed part of that...

And I've always done that with them. 'What did you do today? Did you have...did you color something? What color did you color?' You know, just thinking about what's going on. And I get a tremendous amount out of that, I get a lot out of it and I feel that they get a lot out of it, too.

Robert: Tell me what you get out of it.

Richard: I get out of...I know what they've done. I get satisfaction and pride and love that they are enjoying talking with me they're enjoying the time that they're having with me. And the time...and since I have two kids, the time they're having with each other. I can step back a lot of times and see them talking to each other and interacting and just tell that they are having fun with each other. They're interacting and talking or whatever they're doing. You know I guess, I've got a family. That's what I like. I've got two kids that I have a little communication with and we feel comfortable

with each other, we know what to expect from each other. All those feelings...

David told me a story about what he felt when his son, Thomas, had done well during an academic competition.

> A couple weeks ago they handed him all of his trophies that he won and I was on the platform and another lady did this...very emotional for me and he just kept winning and kept winning and, you know, tears started welling up in my eyes, of just, of how proud I was, not as the pastor of the church, but I was proud, you know, for the program, but I was also proud because it was my son doing that.... I hate to use the word competition, but in the end that's the only word I can use. And it's one of those efforts where you try to do the very best you can to raise your child, and trying to teach him the Godly values and the things that are important. And when he's able to come back and just reaffirm what you have taught him, it's made me feel important. Thomas's a very emotional child. He can cry very, very easily, he can get his feelings hurt very easily. And for so many years as men, we have been taught to be a man, stand up, don't cry. But yet I think it's good that Thomas can see me at times and he was very close to me on the platform because when he would win a trophy, he didn't know what to do after he had two and he was getting four, and he just...I said, 'Well, Thomas come back here and give it to dad.' And I had a lady in the church come up to me at the end of the service. Our standard procedure is that at the end...the last prayer I stand at the back door and greet people. And she came up to me and just kind of whispered so no one else could here she goes, 'I saw those tears, and I am glad that you were able to shed those tears.' I guess the reason I shed the tears was because I was just so proud of his accomplishments.

After telling me about Thomas' first day of school, David told me how it affected him personally to be involved in that day with his son. Throughout the study I heard the fathers telling me that these times together provided a time for bonding or connecting

with their kindergartner. It was important for David to experience this first-hand rather than hear about if from his wife.

> **David:** So, he still wants us, after two months, to walk him down to class. Some of his kindergarten buddies walk by themselves, but he chooses to have us walk down, and the time that I spend walking down the halls with him is no problem. And I really enjoy doing that. Like I said, I try to do it at least 3 times a week to take him down. And so it's very...I think it's a bonding time that we have together. And we choose...there's certain numbers where we park and they like go from like from 15 to 20 something. And we'll be driving and I'll say, "Which number do you want to?" and he'll call a number out and we try to, if there's no car in that slot, we will try to go in and park. But I recall at the end of the day after Thomas's first day of school that I was glad that I took the time to be with Thomas that day of his life. And I didn't want to regret and his mom tell me all about the day, I was maybe a little sentimental in that I wanted to be there also. Yeah, it took 15, 20 minutes out of my time. But I think it was 15, 20 minutes that was very vital to my son. And I really am glad that I did it that day.
>
> **Robert:** What did you get...how did that make you feel?
>
> **David:** I think that's hard to put into words.
>
> **Robert:** I understand. I know...
>
> **David:** The things that were going on inside of my body, you know, yes, the school was new to me. And, I just think it like kinda reaffirmed 'Dad, you're important in my life, and I want you here today.' And I think that's what it meant to me, that I want you here and I want you to hold my hand and I want you to...and it was more of a protection type thing that I feel safe and secure with you and please take me to my classroom.

Although I thought that my curiosities about the fathers' emotional rewards for being involved in their children's education would come from direct questions during the

interviews, I found that some were hidden inside comments in their journals. David wrote this after a day with his son at school.

> We had a great lunch together. Thomas is still taking his lunch but he did eat some of my lunch. About halfway during the meal, he asked me to stay and go to the playground. After talking with Ms. Rosemont, I decided to stay a little while. It was a fun time.

And on another day he wrote:

> I picked Thomas up from school. The guidance counselor has been working with the class on the ME book The assignment was to draw pictures when you had different emotions such as happy, sad, angry, etc... Thomas showed me every page. On his happy page was his dad taking him to Captain D's. That made me feel wonderful on the inside. One of the questions was what would you like to learn to do. Thomas' answer was to color inside the lines.

Joe talked about how he felt when he was engaged in a teaching moment with his son, Andy:

> Well, it makes me feel good to be able to, you know, tell him what things...why the balls is in the air and different things like that. I hadn't really given it a lot of thought about it, you know really, but you just think...you don't really think about...you don't think about them not knowing. But...until they come up and ask you a question, you know, kinda out of the blue, you know, 'why is them balls in the air?' you look at em and you know but...I don't really put a lot of thought.

Phillip shared with me how it made him feel when he was engaged in educational activities with his children. He felt that it strengthened his relationship with Samuel. During another part of the interview he used the word 'connection.'

> Just...well, I look at him and hope that he making a...have a little more trust in me, you know, just because involved with him, just bonding better. Sure make me feel that I'm in more in control of what's going on. And I know that he's got to be...to me in the future for any reason, cause...play with him or walking with him I know he's got to feel some more bond and trust that he know that I can be there to help him out when he needs something.

Phillip talked about being impatient when working with his young children on some academic subject, a theme which emerged many times from the fathers' words. When I asked Phillip how it made him feel when he was successful in teaching something to his children, he replied with his usual humorous, but insightful perspective:

> **Phillip:** Oh, great of course. And you know, teaching something to kids is not always easy because you need to keep yourself to their level. You know, and sometimes I get so upset when you...like my girl the other day she was trying to add 7 to 14 and she was telling me 20 every time. And I said, 'Cindy, that's second grade level.' But she was...she feel that I was very impatient and I was bugging her and I was mad and she couldn't think. So, when I manage to make them understand something, I mean, not only they learn something but I managed to offer it to them. And it's not easy. I would love to...how to say...those teachers. I don't know how they do it (laughing). That is one of the toughest jobs is transfer knowledge to little kids and figure out a way, a simple way to transfer something to them and after a while they know how to read, you know. And it's amazing. I mean, I know the kids are extremely bright and open, you know their brain can absorb ten time more than what we're really giving them. Make them learn 7 language before they are 7 years old if we give them the tools. But I'm still have a lot of...how do you say the word?...

Robert: Respect?

Phillip: ...respect for the teacher of...maybe 20 kids in front of them and...they...every one of them.

Robert: ...for 8 hours a day.

Phillip: Yeah, wooo...good. I know why they need three months vacation.

Robert: (laughs).

Phillip: But it's just a question of when I manage to do it, I feel good about it because I managed to do it. Because I know myself. Stuff simple and I'm start explaining the same stuff but at the same time, I lose patience. And so I need to teach myself how to don't lose it. He had to...you got bad days (laughing), you have bad days sometime.

Going into the focus group, I had no idea if that forum was going to inspire these kindergarten dads to talk about their pedagogical relationship with their kindergartners and how it made them feel **or** if it would have an inhibitory effect because of the 'public' nature of the group. I am pleased to report the former. Here is a segment of the focus group that 'focused' on the fathers' emotional effect of being involved with their children.

David: I think pride is one of the first things that I feel. Even if we're walking, if we're driving into school, Rocky Top starts, you know...T-I-G-E-R-S is big on the bleachers there, and Thomas will come up and say, 'Hey, Dad, you know, my name has some of the same letters as Rocky Top does.' And it made me proud as a father when after something you've taught him that you think, feel that he's accomplished. And I think that's another thing is, I can feel accomplished through him. In some ways that I feel like that I'm living my life, my childhood again through him or...leading part of my life now, through him and so much of what happens

in our family is what happens to my child. I don't know if that's correctly expressing it, but that's about as close as I can get.

Robert: I'd like to kind of see what every...if everybody could tell me just a little something...

Al: What I really like revolves around what they do cause we spend more time doing what they're doing than what we're doing, you know. As far as that, I mean mine...my wife could be going somewhere and I...you know, they look for old dad, I mean it's pretty well... they're used to sudden change.

Robert: So when they look to you for things like that, what kind of feelings do you get from that?

Al: Well, I mean you get satisfaction out of it plus, they need to learn, that you know...They just help em along in life. They see daddy, daddy as well as they see mama, you know. A lot of it's, a lot of how they're doing this, like this kindergarten, especially Abby, she stepped right off on this, she's got a good outlook on life what's gonna happen. You sorta need to stand behind them, make, whatever it takes to make it work, that's what you need to do, that's the way most people feel, you know.

Robert: It might help you if you think back to a time when you were doing something that was related to education, teaching and learning. You know think about something that you really...that really had an impact on you for some reason or another. You know, think about that event. What kinds of feelings come from that? Can anybody tell me? I know it's real hard.

Max: I was amazed that...I've had a computer at home since Eric was real young. We went into the parent/teacher conference in the middle of October, and...you know like someone, David or Richard one was talking about their child took em out and showed em what they had done and so forth during the day. Miss Rosemont told him, 'Eric, show em all about your room, you know, and what you do and stuff.' The first thing Eric does he goes over to one of the computers and turns it on and goes to playing this little game on the computer, you know. What he was doing, you know, seems to me, would be difficult for a 5 year old to grasp the perception. And, you know, he was picking it up there I thought how do you make a 5 year old understand how these things operate and know what they're supposed to be doing? And he...I was amazed that he can, that he has the ability to grasp that kind of knowledge or...skills, you know, that's just amazing.

Robert: So, I've heard amazement, I've heard responsibility, pride, and satisfaction.

Richard: I think one of the big things is fulfillment, as myself as a father. Like we've been talking to our kids, you know, teaching them things that we know, helping them learn what they're, you know, reinforcing what they learn in school or whatever. We get fulfillment from the thing that you see when they're doing the computer, looking at the letters and writing, and you know, whatever is going on. It gives us, you know, we're trying to give so much to the kids, they're giving just as much to us as well. And we see the feedback that they're creating, you know. I was talking about my son, you know, not being so shy, and going and asking for something that, you know. It gave me a sense of fulfillment and pride that what I've been preaching all the time is getting through to him and that makes me want to have an even greater satisfaction in keeping on those things.

Robert: What about this side over here, what do you guys think?

Joe: One of the things I...same thing Max did, when I went up there in October, see what all he's...his work, he got up on that computer, started messing with it, you know, and doing stuff with it. She said he really enjoyed doing things on the computer and I wish when I was in school, we didn't even know what a computer was (laughing). A lot of difference, but one of the things Andy...the first days he went, I went with him and I told him this is the school...the first year it was open, I went there. And that made me feel good he was going to a school that I went to, you know. I think that made him feel a lot better.

Robert: What about you, Bob? What do you get out of being a dad and doing these educational things?

Bob: I think you get, you know, you see pride, you see joy, you see, you know all the good things, you know, when you see them accomplishing and doing well and things like that. I think it's just a...the old saying you always want you're kids to have it better than you had it, so they can even pass it on down, you know, and just know that they're getting the tools to be able to go on and do things like that. It's...you know, you get disappointed and, when you don't think they're doing what they should be, but then you try to say well, how can I make it better for them? And then when they get better, you know, stuff like that. It's...

Bob: Something that just kind of clicked in my head I thought, you know, I didn't think about it before, but...Sarah had a birthday and we made cupcakes and I took...she wanted... Sharon couldn't get off so, you know, I

made arrangements to leave early and get there early and all that stuff. Well one of the kids hadn't been behaving so he was in the room by himself and Linda was in there. So I showed up early, and they were still in the library or down at the gym or somewhere. And she needed to leave and, you know, she kinda said, 'Do you mind staying with him?' You know kinda like, 'No, of course, I don't mind.' I we sit there and I thought, you know, she has enough faith in me or trust in me that she knows what kind of dad I am, that she could leave me here with this other person's kid, or other parent's kid, I guess. And, you know, I just thought, you know, well maybe I am getting a lot out of this, you know (laughing). I just felt that she might not have done that with any other...person. So I thought it was neat.

David has eaten lunch with Thomas in the school cafeteria, participated in the Walkathon fundraiser, and has been visible in the school when other children in the class could notice his presence. In his interview, he talked about the connection he felt with the class as well as with his son.

> It was not Mr. So and So, it was a child's dad... And how all the kids now in the classroom know who I am. I'm Thomas's dad and like yesterday they were so much more open to me cause they've seen me around, mingling.

The fathers' pride in their children and in themselves for being involved often emerged from their conversations. The focus group brought out some stories on this theme.

> **Bob:** I think every parent wants to feel proud, you know, of their children and that they've taken responsibility in raising a good kid, you know. You don't want to be the...I hope I'm not offending anybody...but you don't want to be the one that 'Yeah, it was my son that was picked up at the Wal-Mart shoplifting', you know, you don't want that. You want to make sure...and it's, you're proud of things they do, you know, the extra things,

you know, not just the things at home, the good grades they bring home. You know you always want to say 'Yeah, my kid got all A's' you want to tell that kind of stuff. But that's...you know. I wasn't a good student growing up and you know, I'm paying for it now I think in a lot of ways as far as work and things like that. I wish I had done better. That's why I want to make sure that my kids, you know, not be the thumb on em, you know, but make sure that they....

Al: He's going to be as proud of his as he is his. You know, that's...I mean, we going to have...Just like when you go to the school things, you know, you're proud, you're proud of all of those kids, and I mean, you more proud to see yours standing there. You're focused on that. And everybody feels that way. And the kids look at it like, especially the girls, you know, their daddy needs to be there. You know, if they do something.

I asked the moms to talk about what they felt their husbands were feeling emotionally about interacting with their children in an educational capacity. My assumption was that through conversations with their husbands and observations of their behavior with their children, they would have some insight into how their husbands felt about their participation in their children's kindergarten experience. Nancy, David's wife, talked about her desires for her child and his father which I saw embedded in David's stories.

And I'm so glad Thomas has his daddy because I can see that the communication between the father and son is important for the development of a little boy. And I want him to develop a close relationship with his daddy now, so that hopefully it will stay close...

...he enjoys being a father.

Brenda talked about how she thought Al felt about be involved in his kindergartner's early childhood development. She mentioned how his childhood might have affected the decision he made to participate more fully.

> I think he probably feels real good about hisself. That he...I think it's a feeling that he probably never had from his mom and dad. Cause as far as really raising him. They didn't. They've been in his life off and on but not really a parental figure. So I think that's one thing he tries to be more of than, you know, not to be treated the way he was. So I think that's one thing...and I think he's always done that. So I think it makes him feel real good...especially when they'll want him over me. Well, they'll say I wanna go with daddy not mama. I think he really likes that.

I feel David speaks for most of the group when he said simply:

> It makes me feel better as a father that I'm more involved with my child.

Self Assessment

Some fathers, whether formally or informally, evaluated themselves on their involvement in their children's education. Many of them told me that they had not given much thought to their participation in their child's education prior to this study. However, the interviews and journal entries provided them a 'fresh look' at their participation.

Sometimes the fathers didn't realize they were 'participating' in their children's school life. The following dialogue is an example:

Robert: What kinds of other things have you done in the school?

Bob: ...(pause)...I don't think I've done anything other than just...We've been, you know, we go to the little functions and things like the academic banquet and things like that with the kids.

Robert: Tell me some more about that.

Bob: Well, that was stuff from last year. Just where you go and you sit and you watch all the kids, you know, kinda, you know, just a program kinda. I mean we just sit there and watched, you know, there wasn't any...any participation on our part...just going...

Robert: Going and watching are participation.

Bob: Yeah, I mean, but that's the extent of it.

David gave his participation in this study a great deal of thought. I was pleased that some dads were becoming more aware of their role in their children's education and the effect that they could have or did have.

I'd like to go back to the time when I got the letter to be asked to be involved with this [study]. And my first response was, 'I don't have enough time to do it.' And I think that's what a lot of people give a lot of time. But I felt the project was going to be beneficial because of the importance that I have of fathers in their relationship with their child. Now I understand this is for kindergarten age, but I know from before that and also later. And so I think one of the main reasons that I wanted to be involved is because of my concern for children. Maybe as my...as a minister, I see a lot of children that I feel are neglected by their fathers. And I feel that if I could go through a process and be doing some writing down of some things and by just going through the process it would make me a better father and then also have the

benefit of helping other fathers in this situation when they come through it. And maybe being helpful...is the reason why I wanted to be involved with it totally. Also I like the idea of several other kindergarten fathers getting around a table and just talking about their children. I'm excited about that. It's probably one of those days that I will try to listen as much as possible and try to glean from what other fathers are doing. I don't wanna blow off my child's education. I wanna be as active as I possibly can be...And that's very vitally important to me also. So, yes, it does take time. Yes, it does take effort to try to put some words into a journal but I think that I will be the one that most benefited from this process. Yes, my friend Robert will be doing a lot of work and be reading a lot of things, but I did this and I'm finding out that I'm going to be benefiting more from it and I think if that benefit can be carried on into my son's life that he will be benefiting from it also. And I'm real interested to hear what other fathers are saying and sharing those experiences and I don't feel that the school system is going to allow for that unless it's just done on an individual basis type thing. So I enjoy the whole process. Sometimes I feel like I didn't say enough or I didn't say the right things, but maybe some other fathers are in the same boat I am. So I don't think there is anything else I would like to add to that, but I just try to do as much as I can for my son.

The very last entry in David's journal is very revealing of his commitment to being a part of his son's educational life.

To Robert:

I would like to thank you for allowing me to be involved in this study. By writing in this journal has helped me to think and know a lot more about my child. Even though there were days I struggled with writing, I felt that I have grown as a father. Thank you for your encouragement. Keep in contact about your results. May God bless you in your writing.

About his assessment of his involvement in his kindergartner's education, Max expressed a common belief that I found throughout the data. Many fathers felt they did not have the patience for teaching the nuts and bolts of kindergarten concepts.

The only thing that I wish is that I had more time to spend with em. And that I had more patience...of course now my patience is...my my patience is, I guess, or lack of patience is more not because of them particularly, my patience will be tried during the day and, you know, a lot of times it carries over into them. That's one of the reasons I don't try to teach Eric his letters or his numbers or, you know, as far as just sitting down and writing them with him, because I have a problem with, well, that's so simple, why can't they pick that up. I've been doing it for 25 years, it's simple for me. I have a problem realizing that...I don't have the patience and the understanding that they don't, that they don't know what they're doing.

Bob has an older child, Will, who has already gone through the kindergarten experience and is now in 4th grade. Bob feels that he has already learned what is going on in kindergarten, especially since they both have had the same kindergarten teacher, and doesn't really feel the need to be that involved with Sarah at the level he was with Will. However, he does feel like he has short-changed Sarah during her first year in school. Bob attributes this to his involvement in Will's football playing which takes up most of his time in the Fall.

Bob: Especially for being with Will more this Fall, than her with time. I haven't spent nearly the amount of time with her as I did with Will. I mean, it was just...it seemed like Will didn't have problems in this, this, this...so I decided to let Sarah...the problem is we used to walk Will in to school every morning. And, you know, 4 or 5 years ago, and now this year, she runs in to school by herself. I mean, it's just no big deal. And, but like a say, you know, for all of September and here it is half of October, I haven't spent much time...[less] than I should have...

Robert: You said in your journal that you were more 'hands-on' with Will. What did you mean by that?

Bob: Well, I think that...just by doing everything...walking him into school everyday...(long pause)...I guess...probably not, I don't know if hands-on if that was the right term. It was more of a...you know the second time

around, you know, you just take things more for granted I guess that you expect, you know, certain things to be done, and we know how Linda is, you know, this time around as opposed, you know, we never...we always wondered what Will was doing in school and everything and now this time we pretty much know what he's doing as far as their routines for the day and different things like that. It's...like I say, it's not been real hard...

Robert: You've mentioned several times in the interview something about, to make it so you're an involved dad. Tell me about that. Is that important to you, to be an involved dad? Tell me more about what you feel about that?

Bob: (pause)...Well, I don't think like I'm Ward Cleaver or anything like that, you know, I'm not that...

Robert: What do you mean?

Bob: Well, I got my faults at different things. I just, I wanna know what my kids are into. I don't want them to grow up and...be in trouble or anything like that.... As far as, 'Well, how was today, son?" (mock voice) You know, we don't do that, those kinds of things.

Phillip also talked about his self-assessment on the topic of educational involvement. He expressed how he sees himself differently with younger children as opposed to older ones.

So I don't really do a lot, I think, just minimum. I wish I could do more. Don't have a lot more going on actually. It get better. I guess when they get older, I feel more comfortable with them. When they're small, I don't know what to work on. I just don't.

Phillip thinks that being involved at the front-end of the learning experience would be beneficial for his children but regrets that sometimes all he ever sees is the end product.

It's true, you know, if you think you're doing OK but the little...hey, I'm glad you're here today, will you help me out? or...It's very important. So sometime, you know, I look at what the kids do and....look at their reports but that's not enough. Sometimes a report is too late, you know, when they got a spelling, she had a C in spelling and I wish I'd known that real ahead of time so, I wish she would have had a B, if I could've been there to make her spell a little more or just provide a book or computer game for her to practice on what she's needs help with.

He also had some ideas to improve parent involvement through parent education. Phillip expressed his feelings of inadequacies when trying to help his children with their school work. He used a phrase that is common throughout the literature and throughout the data from this study: "**Maybe some of the parents they don't get involved because they don't know what to say or what to do.**"

Phillip: ...the only tools I got is some report cards which happens once a week, I mean behavior mainly. And a note here and there and a quarter report. But from the day to day or intensive knowing exactly what I'm working on I don't have no clue. And that's what I wish I had. Then I can do some more, I can really help them. And I believe the kids could really...if the parents were better educated it would help the parents. Maybe some of the parents they don't get involved because they don't know what to say or what to do.

Robert: M-hmm.

Phillip: Anyway that's maybe something should be an important point in their education and school should provide parents some...they have to participate in the cost of it but videotape, or cds, or computer games and give some instruction this quarter you should do this, next quarter you should do that and so on. More communication with parents, teachers.

Not just a meeting once in the quarter...better understanding when they provide some books for us to read or some what they are working on and maybe some...stuff teachers...they go to college for a long time before they become a teacher so I know we cannot get that. But some basic books

> parents should know about kids' education. Kindergarten, 1st grade, what is important at that time, psychology, and...I wish that I would like to have the school should be the one provide it, not me and go ask for it.

The Fathers' Perceived Role

One of the encompassing research questions for this study was: How do fathers perceive their role in their young child's education? The answers ranged from the very specific to the very general. In order to better understand the men's perception of their role as they socially construct it, I have prefaced this section with some stories that these fathers remembered about their childhood, especially **their** fathers' role in their own education.

Fathers' Childhood

Much research has been conducted on the effects that a father's growing up has on his fathering style. Society has changed since these dads were in school themselves. They see a change in the attitudes that fathers had when they were young. The fathers in this study talked about how it influenced their involvement in their children's education.

Richard talked about his relationship with his father.

> Another reason I guess is...goes back to when I was a kid, my dad didn't do that with me. I had a good relationship with my father, I always have. But my father was a truck driver and he was gone all the time. You know, and I can just a few instances, you know, I said, 'I wanna play football, I wanna throw the football, I wanna do this, I wanna do that' and he didn't have the

time to do it. And so I'm gonna make darn sure that I can do that with mine, with my kids.

David told me that when he took Thomas to school on his first day he had some flashbacks of when he was in first grade or going to a new school. He said he rode the bus and that there was nobody to walk him down the hall. He wasn't being critical of his parents, he said, that's just the way it was because of the distance between school and his home.

> I'll go back to just spending time with my child. I want him to attain more in his life than what I attained. I had a great family background, I was sent to private schools because at that time private schools gave you a better education than the public schools. And my parents provided me opportunities to go as far as I could possibly go. I have three degrees, I have an associates degree, I have a bachelor's degree, and I have a master's degree. And possibly in the future I may go to get a doctorate's degree. And I know how vitally important my father was and the things he taught me. Now I will admit that my mom had to help me more with my schoolwork because my dad quit school when he was in the 8th grade because he was a farmer and had to help his father and that type of thing. And I can remember how proud my dad was when I graduated high school and I had that degree. And as I went through each, you know, of those other degrees it just...I think it just added to my dad. It made him feel important of what I had accomplished in my life. He raised me in church and I am now in the full-time ministry and that gives him sort of a bragging rights that I trained my child in the correct way. And so I think that I want to do the same thing for my child. I want him to have the very best that I possibly can do.

When I asked Max why he participated in the educational activities that he had talked to me about, he said, "I guess to be involved. Just to, you know..." I asked him to tell me what he meant by that. And this is what he shared with me:

> Well, my dad...most of my...teenage life anyway my dad worked second shift out at a plant in town and he wasn't...I didn't get to spend as much time with him as I would like to have. But I can't...course, I played football all through school and stuff and he didn't get to participate in that because of the fact that he worked second shift, he was gone every evening. About the only time I got to spend any time with him was Saturdays and Sundays and teenager life, you know, I had things going on in my life that, where we had a school trip on Saturday or something like that. I just, I want to be more involved in my children's lives than my dad got to be mine. It wasn't because he didn't want to it's just that was his, he had to work second shift because of his...what he does, he's a maintenance supervisor and he didn't have enough seniority to go to first shift. I didn't want him to have to work third shift because I really, probably wouldn't have got to spend much time with him anyway cause he'd want to sleep before work so. Cause he was the type that he came in the morning and worked around the house and the garden, whatever on the farm whatever, and the he'da slept up till time to go to work so, you know, it woulda been hard on him, so either way I was losing out on getting to see him so I guess it was better that he work second shift. I just wanted to be more involved than my father got to be with me.

Again, I heard similar stories about this generation of fathers and their level of involvement in the formal education process. Bob also talked about his childhood and how he saw his dad.

> And I think a lot of it goes back to when I was a kid I remember certain things. You know, my dad didn't do a lot with us as far as everyday kind of things. He was, he'd go into work at 4 or 5 in the morning and get home at 7 or 8 o'clock at night.
>
> Well, I want them to be...you know every parent wants their child to do better than they did. And I remember how lazy and how just squeaking by and just doing enough to get by, you know, how I was. You know, I realize that was wrong and it's...you know to this day, I've went back a couple of times to school just to try and...you know, I don't have my B.S. degree. I wish I did. But you know, that's part of it. I'm gonna make sure both of my kids do better than...And I think that...you know, I saw some things that I did when I was in the fourth and fifth grade that, or I remember things, you know, that I'm just not gonna let them get away with (laughing). I'm gonna

> make sure that they do certain things. You know I've seen tendencies in like Will, you know, to not finish work and to not do work and to do things like that. And I remember, I remember bringing home work and not doing it and faking sick the next day so I wouldn't have to go to school and face the teacher, you know. I'm not gonna, not gonna let em do that. I don't want to have this militaristic kind of approach about it, but if that's what it takes (laughing) I may have to do it. But, I don't want to do that.

Phillip gave a little of his educational background and the influence that his father had on his learning and what it taught him about his relationship with his own children.

> But, my father, why he didn't have a college education himself, but he was expecting, he was showing how much...he was showing interest in what I was doing. And when you do that, you are looking for something more when you're dad is there and he is encouraging to ask question about it, look at it, what you've been doing. And say, 'Wow, I'm proud of you.' You know, that's enough to say...make them next day do a little more. So I guess like anybody else, you need to have expectations, someone...you need to feel that someone else is looking at you.

Are Fathers Important?

The focus group discussion revealed many beliefs that the fathers held regarding their role in the education of their children. The majority of the fathers believed that the father is just as important or equally important as anyone else when it comes to the education of their children. I started off the focus group discussion with the question: **Are we important in our children's education?** The fathers talked for more than two hours.

Al did not hesitate a bit. He spoke first stating that dads are equals to teachers, mothers, and anyone else involved in the education of children.

> Well, we're...I think we're just as important as anybody else. Cause, I mean, we gotta see to it, too, that, you know, everything goes smooth...that they like school...you sorta gotta go along with it. And I think that means a lot to the kids doin it...

Phillip agrees that parents' participation in general is critical in providing a good education for their children.

> Because they [the schools] need the parents. They need the parents in the back to support it and expect those kids to get an education. Without the parents, I don't believe the teacher can excel in that kid's knowledge. They need to have the parents to support it, have them do what they're learning at school. I believe the parents are not aware of what really the kids are doing at school. How can they help them?

Richard talked about how he sees the father's role in raising the kids in general. He thinks that he and his wife have an equal role in their children's education as in everything else. I also saw in the data that many fathers felt they were part of a team with their wives in educating their children.

> Every, every child has two parents, father and mother, so we're, we're just, you know, we're 50-50 in the thing. We should be raising our children, seeing their education goes as smoothly as possible, they learn as much as they can at school and at home about, you know, life and everything else. It doesn't matter whether you got a boy or a girl. I think that the father is just as important to em—to be there for both of em.

He brings to the surface one of the factors influencing society's perceptions of the mother/father role in educating their children. But more importantly, Richard seems to be defying those societal expectations.

> Well, I think traditionally the child's upbringing and education and taking him to school, picking him up from school, you know, everything is traditionally think about the woman, the mother is the caregiver. I mean that's...I think that has a lot to it but, I wanna be involved in my child's life and education as much as I can be, you know...
>
> I think I play a very significant part in it. Like I was talking about earlier, I want him to know that his father is there for him. We can count on doing things together. It's not only doing, you know, traditional mothers always take care of kids and so forth...Also not only with his education but I'm responsible, and I want to be responsible for getting their meals ready, getting them to school, knowing what's going on in his day-to-day life and all that kind of stuff. So, you know, I think I have an equal part with my wife in his education, in the decisions that we make, you know...
>
> I feel comfortable, I always want to be involved in his schoolwork and making sure that he is doing the best he can do. If he does the best he can do, I will be very satisfied.

Richard talked about how he and his wife work our their schedules so they can share the responsibility of taking the children to school and picking them up afterwards. Although he doesn't get to do it as much as he would like, Richard said that it shouldn't always be the mother's responsibility. Al sees his role as just 'one of the parents.' He talks about the 'we' involved in providing learning activities for the kids. For Al, it's a way of life.

> Me and my wife, we go at it with our kids...I mean...we're into everything. Scouts, dance...I mean we do all this stuff if she can't get him, I'll get him. I mean we pretty well...we see our kids a whole lot because we do all this, I mean we have to. And it's a full-time deal. There's no free time. I like doing it. All of us do this really, you know, to a point...

David believes that the parents are important teachers. He uses words like 'we,' 'our,' and 'both.'

> We're trying to give Thomas the best education we think...Our feelings are that the more that Nancy and I both can put in to his education, the better he will be. And we don't think it's just the teacher's job to do that.

During my interview with Nancy, David's wife, she confirmed what I had been hearing from David's stories about his involvement and how he saw his role in Thomas' education. She talked about the first day of school.

> ...but when Thomas started to school it was important for David to go with him on the first day. He had wondered if he should and then he had actually planned not to and then at the last minute he thought he wanted to be part of it. **He didn't want it just to be a mommy thing.** (My emphasis)

David shared with me in his journal some thoughts about his role as a father. He said:

> I had my interview w/ Robert this morning. I feel that it allowed me to state several principles and values that I hold dear to my heart. I realize that

Robert is researching fathers but I had a sense of being a team player. I felt like a small cog in a complex machinery that was working together.

Max started us talking about the changing family in society and how that makes a difference when it comes to family responsibilities.

Max: You know, like we was talking earlier, the traditional family…when I started school, mom was at home, dad was at work. Dad didn't…there was no sense in dad taking off work to do things at school because mom was free anyway. But nowadays, you know, 90% of the people you see, both parents work, nowadays you have to, you know, the father has to take more…

Al: …responsibility.

Max: Yeah, responsibility to see that the child gets to school in the morning, he's picked up in the afternoon…because mom has other responsibilities now. It not her sole responsibility to get the children back and forth to school, and you know, make sure their lunches get paid up and…

Robert: Is this a responsibility that everyone feels? Tell me. I need to get a consensus of yes or no. Is it a welcomed responsibility? Being more involved? (Several fathers give verbal yes's).

But, the dads did steer the discussion towards the cultural differences in the mom's role v. the dad's when it comes to caregiving and homework checking and hunting and gathering…

Bob: You go back to caveman days, you know, the male, the head male is the hunter, the gatherer, I think it's been passed down through our genes or whatever that we're the ones who set the parameters, you know, that this is how things are done, you know. And everybody else follows along. Then

you got the mother that takes care of the…I guess, you know, I don't necessarily call it the social, but I think it's more the emotional, emotional issues. And that deals with…I've got a boy and a girl so we're kinda new at this all the time, you know. I deal with more the manly things, you know, and…

David: One thing I see is if my son falls and bumps his head or scrapes a knee, he doesn't yell Dad, you know, he wants mom to come and take care of that. And I think some of that is just our culture that mom's the one make sure the homework is done…

Max: Yeah.

I interpret Phillip's perceived role as a mixture of conventional and 'new' fathering ideas. He talked a great deal about being a provider, not only the financial provider, but educational provider.

Phillip: My role is that be sure that his education is going the way it's supposed to be, I mean get…be in the upper…I want to watch some good report from the school, and his behavior OK and his understanding is OK, if not, I will have to provide a…be the provider as the male of the family, not just financially, but as the provider of education a provider of tools to earn a life, you know, to get well in serving in the society so in the case something fails, he may need kind of speech or something, discussion, communications and stuff, I've got to provide it. If he's out of the school, I will have to provide it. If not me, I'll have to find someone to do it for me…or my wife, or therapist, or buy books, just provide. I need to provide for him the tools to get the education.

Robert: That's interesting.

Phillip: I mean that's…I guess life in family. I don't know, I think the rules, I mean the way I understand the family is supposed to be is just…the provider, the dad gets to herd like in rows, follow the dad, the power of the male used to go hunt get the food, you know. The mother keeps the warmness of the house, the security and the safety of…the cooking and all this stuff, you know (laughing)… I guess I am, but I'm still believe I am the

provider and I should be the provider for his safety and insure that they got what...good education.

When talking about the mother/father roles in education, Phillip said:

You need to have someone to [be involved] with what they are doing and giving them some pride in what they are doing and sometime...I don't expect that...you won't do that again. I believe I do a little more than my wife this kind of stuff. You know, my wife does the day to day, be sure they are dressed properly and she make them do their homework and she worry about it, but I guess I'm maybe being the more the male of it, I guess I'm a little more concerned that they know I'm really cannot do something...I know I'm the authority and they know my expectations. I know, I expect them to behave and do...results.

I also heard strains of the dad as disciplinarian which has been a common perception regarding fathers and homework.

David: ...and she's always done that in the past. Dad's there to reinforce, dad's the hammer. 'Son, your mom says you didn't do your homework today' is what we've been doing.

Robert: Is that the way it is?

Richard: I agree with that. (Fathers talking over each other).

David: I don't know about you but sometimes Thomas gets frustrated with some things making this letter and that letter and I try to show him, and his mom takes more time with him to do that than I do.

I was interested in finding out if these fathers felt that they had anything special to offer, as a dad, when it came to their children's education. Before I even asked that question, Richard shared with us his ideas on the subject. He does believe that mothers and fathers can and do have different things to offer their children.

> **Richard:** I think that a man, you know, has experienced different things growing up as a woman has. You know each experiencing different things and I'd say a lot have experienced some of the same things in modern life. You know, I think, men have things in common with it, women have things in common, so...I'm going back to what Bob was saying earlier, you know, we're seeing what we did, of what happened to us and what we thought, and you know, we were whatever age, you know. We try to put some of that back, give some of that back to our children. I think we can give different things to our children than the mother can. Mothers can give things that we can't give. You know, that's why it's important for both of us to be there.
>
> We have certain things to offer that the mother can't or doesn't or not interested in, you know, they get all aspects of it if parents are involved. And I feel like, as I stressed to you before, that the ABC's and 123's, you know, is important, but the life education is just as important as well. Learn how to interact with people, learn how to deal with certain situations. You know, that's the social aspect of it. But, a lot of things I do with Jonathan is, you know, teach him how to throw a football, teach him how to hit a baseball. That's the sports type of stuff that women aren't, they're not interested in those things...we're providing things that we're interested in, we share those with our children and the mothers are providing things they're interested in sharing with they're children. You know, men...
>
> **Joe:** Talking about hitting a softball or throwing a football...my older boy I just learned him to work, use a ax this year, you know, how to chop wood (all laugh). I chopped a lot of wood in my time and, you know, he can't hit the same place twice...I can't imagine my wife out there trying to show him (some laugh). But anyhow, that's one of the things, you know, that...how to split wood...

It was fascinating to hear Al almost 'defending' moms as if the focus group was turning the tide on society single-handedly. He had some personal experience in observing moms and **their** ability to overcome the stereotypes that they have endured.

> We're dealing with a...like I'm a, been a scout leader for years. I mean these women that, where there's no daddy involved, and these women, they handle it very well. I mean they handle...we take em camping we do whatever it takes to make it happen for em, but I mean, them women is just as important as we are about that.

David told the story to the other fathers in the focus group that he had told me in his interview about taking Thomas to children's museums when he went on conferences and going to the toy store to buy books. He agrees that 'school' does not stop when school is out.

> So I think that education goes beyond the 7 or 8 hours and it goes and it's on a constant, constant basis.

Bob agreed. He feels it is his job to help his children learn even when they are out of school.

> Well, I mean, school education is, you know, from kindergarten to college is set. You know what they teach, you know what you're gonna learn. It's those other 16 hours of the day...

A recurring theme in the data is that these fathers see the mother's role as dealing with the day-to-day operations of the household which includes the education of the children. Many of these dads talked and wrote about the day-to-day versus the long-term or life lessons. Here is what some of them said:

> **Richard:** I think the father is doing that. We are looking ahead. Give them the experiences, give them the life education, the moral education, the...every education, phase of education we can give them. We're looking ahead at their entire life. You know, I think you could make it a little too premature for a kindergarten kid, but not really...And the mother is more concentrated on, in the day to day thing...getting the day to day things done. What needs to be done at the house? What needs to be done at the school? What does my child need at this time? You know, we are too, but we're looking into, you know, when our kids, you know, teaching them about the shoplifting, the right thing, the wrong thing, giving them confidence, the independence to go and make their own decisions.
>
> **Bob:** With the kindergarten, you know, they don't have a lot of the homework kind of stuff, you know, but now with my son, he goes to both of us, you know, he'll ask...by the time I get home in the evening, they're already started working on homework and stuff and then I'll jump in and say, 'Well, do you need me to help you do this?' She probably works with him more on an individual basis and then when he needs help, he may come to me. They always have spelling tests on Fridays so Thursday night we know, Thursday night is spelling night, you know. Just different things like that. And you're gonna see when the kindergartners start going, you know...you're going to see this progression, you know, and you'll be more involved, you know. Except for the reading, you know, there's just not much there for kindergartners to actually, you know, work on...of the night or something.
>
> **Phillip:** Who has the competence?...more competent in other things. You got two parties in agreement on...I'm more competent in finance than she is but she is more competent in learning, teaching our kids how to cook and dress themselves, wash themselves, they go...the competence that we need to agree from the top.

Thomas was selected to be in a regional church-affiliated competition and won several trophies for his work. David, through both interviews and journal writings expressed his pride for his son's accomplishments. He was quite clear though that his responsibility as a father for his son went far beyond his early childhood education—something that I heard throughout the stories. David said:

> More importantly than a contest I hope my assistance will help him to excel in life.

Max sees his involvement in Eric's education as part of the greater commitment to being involved in his life. He is looking at the big picture.

> **Robert:** Let me go one step further. Why is it important to you to be involved in Eric's education?
>
> **Max:** Well, not so much his education, but just his childhood life in general. I want to be able to influence him. Maybe to hopefully steer him away from the bad side…I want to be able to maybe keep Eric and Elizabeth and them from having to deal with that, going through that.

Max told me several stories about young adults he knew that turned out not so responsible or dependable. He attributed their failure to a lack of teaching by their father. Much of what Max told me had to do with the effect of the father's teaching on responsibility and career goals.

Max: I've got a friend that's got a son that's 22 years old and he acts like he's about 10 years old. There's nothing wrong with him, he's not mentally retarded or anything like that. He just has never been taught any responsibility. His dad works in wood and stuff too like I do. As matter of fact he works at the fire department the same as I do. We got a lot of things in common and I see through him that, you know, he'll tell his boy to go over there and cut a board, cut a 2x4, or a 2x6 30 inches long. He bring back a 2x4 36 inches long.

Robert: Hmm.

Max: You know, rather than explain to him what he's done wrong or why he needed this particular something, he just, fine get out of my way, I'll go do it myself. Now his boy is 21, 22 year old and has a hard time holding a job...

So Max won't let this happen to him.

Max: When we're doing, whenever we're outside, if we're out in the shop working, I got a woodworking shop out there, I get out there and piddle around in it. If I'm doing something I try to explain to him why, you know, what I'm doing and why and you know, what the purpose behind it is. If we're out riding on tractor bushhog and I ask him something, you know...I hope that the things that I'm teaching Eric, you know, will prepare him for that.

Robert: For that? What is 'that?'

Max: Well, for, to be able to hold a job and be responsible and do the... We'll be on the house or whatever and I'm on top of the roof or something and I need him to cut something and he's down on the ground, you know, I don't need to climb down and, you know...I don't want to get to the point that...you know, I'd just as soon he stay at the house and stay out of my way as to....

Robert: M-hmm...

Max: ...you know...and I feel like my responsibility is to teach him not necessarily his book education. That's why I send him to school why these teachers spend so much time in college is to learn to be professional in

> their...I'm not really...I done my schoolwork to get through school, graduate, get done, get over with.

Max talked about his perceived role as a father. He summarized his job as father and teacher. His summary could've just as well come from many of the other fathers in the group.

> Well, I feel that my role is to...teach em responsibility, teach em to be dependable, and try to be a responsible, honest, dependable adult. I'm hoping that what I teach em and I'm hoping by starting now that they will learn that this is an ongoing thing and the importance of it. That they'll be responsible. That's my goal. What I feel my role is in teaching. Not necessarily to give em their book education, but give em their life education as you put it a while ago.

Bob summarized his feelings on his perceived role as a father in regards to his children's education.

> Well, yeah, I mean. I think every parent is...obligated to make sure their kids learn and...you know just have the tools to go on to the next step, you know, whatever that next step is. In a general context, I think all fathers want that and my specific...you know I just feel like, you know...as long as you're there and not...and they have somebody to turn to when they have questions or they have problems. I think...I don't wanna say just being there is it but that may be part of it, you know, it's kinda like insurance (laughing). If it's there, you need it...but as far as I'm gonna teach the math and spelling and Sharon's gonna teach the reading and social studies, no, we don't do that.

Joe told me about his perceived role in the education of his kindergartner. He sees his role as more passive using words like encouragement and interest.

> Well, I just wanted to go. I think it's a father's duty to be interested in their kid, what they're learning and how they're improving in school. And know the areas where they...you might be able to help them if they need help.
>
> I think the more you can show interest in what they're doing, the more interested they'll be, you know, about what they're doing because, you know, they learn from you to, from your input, you know. If you show interest in anything like the...just like I went to Mike's football games and showed interest, you know, that kind of motivated him to want to do good, and of course, he didn't get to play a lot but still he really enjoyed being on the team and going to all the games. But, as far as Andy, I want to try to show him that I'm interested in what he's doing and...so he'll achieve, you know, what he can do, do what he can do the best.
> Well, to try to back em and encourage them in all their classes and...do like...the home to help em. Encourage em and as a father, just be there for em and try to help em all you can. We, Ellen and I both go over it quite often about...encouraging...tell em that they need to do the best they can in school because it's something that they'll...it'll go with em all their life.

As the kindergarten teacher, Linda told me what she thought about the importance of fathers in their children's educational life. Because she has the ability to create an atmosphere of paternal support, her attitudes about the same give us insight into the culture within which the fathers are participating. She talked about many of the things that the fathers were saying and doing—communicating, showing interest, being aware of the children's learning.

> I think that a father who takes the time to talk their child about what they've done at school or the father who takes the time to read...we send a little note home every Friday about their work and about their behavior. I think

that the father that looks at that paper, the father that in some way indicates to his child I'm wondering about school, I'm thinking about it, I think that that child just instinctively knows that school is an important place to be and they're going to do better. I think that the father who doesn't say much about it probably that child doesn't realize that his father has those kinds of expectations of him. Children are so sensitive and they know so much about what parents are thinking. I mean they really pick up on that kind of thing and I think that the parent who talks about what happened at school is going to a parent, I mean a child who knows the parent expects and they will do better. I think they will do better. Now I know some parents it's just a difference in people and some parents don't know what to ask or they don't know how to talk to their children, that's a difference in people. But I think the one that tries to communicate about school is the one who will have a student who will be more ready to learn and more aware that he's...what school is all about. I think that it makes a big difference in how a child learns...that they come to school expecting of themselves...their role, what they think their parents want them to do.

Chapter Summary

I captured these fathers' words through interviews, journal writings, and a focus group session. They did not talk about their involvement in their children's education **in sections**. I created the sections in order to interpret what was happening at different levels and areas in their participation. The fathers conceptualized and narrated their stories according to their own agenda—sometimes what was most important to them, sometimes what they felt was important to their children, sometimes chronologically. Ideally, I would like to have submitted these fathers' stories intact and unadulterated so that every reader could share their lived experiences.

CHAPTER 6

Make lots of forts with blankets.
Sark

CONVERGENCES

Theory Construction

From interviews with fathers, mothers, and the teacher, observations of fathers participating in school events and interacting with their kindergartners, reviews of participant journals, examinations of documents, and a focus group discussion, I was able to learn something about how fathers perceive their roles in their kindergartners' education, how they are involved in such education, and how their involvement makes them feel. Based on this data, I have constructed some theories about what is really going on with these kindergarten dads.

What Do They Think?: How do fathers perceive their role in the education of their kindergarten children?

The fathers in this study believe that they play an important role in their young children's educational development. Their participation in such education stems from a desire to be involved in their life as a whole. Every father in the study demonstrated a deep concern for the welfare and happiness of their children and they all believe that

education plays an important part in their children's ability to live, work, and interact in society.

The data shows that the traditional historical notions of fatherhood still exist and are at work shaping the ways that these fathers think about their educational roles. Although they believe that they have a part to play in the education of their children, they still see some parts of that education as traditionally male and female. They defer to their wives when it comes to the day-to-day operations of homework and other school-related activities.

During an initial meeting with one of the participating fathers, Richard told me that I would probably find that most dads would write that their wives did most of the things with the kids involving school activities. His observation was partly correct. These kindergarten dads do view the mother as the primary care-taker which has embedded in that role the primary overseer of their formal education. The fathers see themselves as a 'closer' or 'problem solver' when it comes to the ABC's and 123's. Many of them talked about gender-oriented personality traits that made them less effective when teaching kindergarten concepts. They view the mother as the primary teacher and see the father's teaching responsibility mobilized if there is a particular problem either with behavior or learning in school.

Several of the responses to questions about participation suggested that the 'helping out' role was a part of these fathers' perceptions. I heard many responses like this one from Ellen, Joe's wife when I asked her about going to a school function: "He usually goes to them with me...if we had one he'd go with me unless he's working or

something." I interpret this as 'It is my responsibility to go no matter what. He goes if he can.' I propose that this arises as an obligation-opportunity dichotomy where the mother is bound by societal and familial duties to prioritize so that her children come first whereas the father is less constrained by these boundaries.

But, the evidence is strong that these fathers see themselves as real-life educators. They are very involved in teaching values such as responsibility, independence, and interpersonal communication, things they feel are important for their children to learn in order to lead productive lives. It seems that some of the fathers are trying to break through the socio-cultural barrier that has been keeping fathers in the background of the educational process. These kindergarten dads think that it is important for them to show interest and encourage their young children to learn and explore the world around them. Their stories tell me that they care about their children's education and their own place in it.

What Do They Do?: What kinds of teaching and learning activities characterize fathers' participation in their children's early childhood education?

The fathers in this study are participating in many areas of their kindergartners' education. They have a knowledge of what's going on in the classroom, in the school, and in the home. More importantly, these fathers know their children. In many of the stories that I heard through interviews and journal writing, the fathers were talking about their children's learning styles and how that affected their ability or interest in certain subjects.

In order for the fathers to know their children so well, they must be spending time with them in an educational environment which the data confirms they are doing.

The data shows that the fathers are observing their kindergartners learning behaviors. They are knowledgeable about the progress, achievement, and concept levels of their children as they are learning at home, in the school, and in the community.

The fathers in this study are involved in many different teaching and learning activities with their children. The fathers are involved in reading with their children and have knowledge of their reading abilities. This reading time provides a special time for most dads to be close to their kindergartners both physically and emotionally. Many of the dads talked about special reading times and places which brought father and child together.

One of the most prevalent behaviors exhibited by these fathers was their engagement in conversations with their children about their school day and related activities. All the fathers in this study talked about regular conversational topics in which they were involved with their kindergartners. This type of father-child interaction provided the fathers with a chance to learn more about what was going on in the school life of their children. From their stories, this is extremely important to these dads.

Games were commonly used as teaching tools by these fathers. Whether they were formal games that teach strategy and thinking skills, or made-up games by either the dad or the child while driving in the car, fathers and children were playing learning games on a regular basis. Fathers are still the primary teachers when it comes to sports and other

outdoors activities. Most of the fathers told stories about teaching their kindergartners how to throw and catch, swing a golf club, or run the bases.

How Do They Feel?: How does interacting with their children in these pedagogical events affect these fathers?

These kindergarten dads desire to be involved in the lives of their children and reap many rewards from their involvement. They feel satisfaction, enjoyment, fulfillment, and pride when engaging in teaching and learning events with their young children. The dads in this study showed many signs of what Erikson has called *generative fathering*. Dienhart (1998) believes this means that fathers are working to create and maintain the father-child relationship. Many of the stories told by these fathers suggest that they see that involvement in their children's early childhood education provides an opportunity for them to form a bond or connection with their children. It was difficult for many of the fathers to talk directly about their feelings regarding their participation. From the data on the whole, however, I conclude that these kindergarten dads feel a responsibility and a deep commitment to being involved in their children's education.

Mothers' Perceptions of Fathers' Roles

A father's perception of his role in the education of his young children is shaped and influenced by the experiences he has had and the culture in which he has lived. Part of that contextual influence comes the family microculture. The mother, one of the people

in this microculture, also plays an important part in teaching her children as well as influencing the behavior and attitude of her husband and his role as teacher.

During our interviews, I asked the mothers what **they thought** was the father's role in this area. I was not surprised to learn that opinions were similar across the group of mothers as well as within the group as parents of each family.

Nancy, who is continuing her education to teach in the elementary school and is the wife of David, a pastor, talked about her perception of the father as teacher. She prefaced this with how she thought her perception had been shaped by her childhood. She did not have a father figure in her home because her dad died when she was four. She had a stepdad but he was never one that she communicated with.

> **Robert:** As a mother, what do you think about the role of fathers in the education of their young children?
>
> **Nancy:** Well...parenting is a difficult thing. It's a very exciting, very challenging, very rewarding thing to do (laughing). But, it's very difficult, and I feel very, very fortunate that I don't have to do it alone. Because David is stronger in some areas than I am. We kind of complement each other in not only the educational part with Thomas but in every area of his life. Teaching him the things about God that we think are important, which that is a part of the education process, it's not a part of his school education process...
>
> **Robert:** M-hmm.
>
> **Nancy:** ...but, teaching him how to use good manners. You know, I'm glad that I don't have to do all of that all by myself. I could if I had to, I guess, but I'm glad I don't. So I feel very blessed, very fortunate that David is in our household and that he is actively participating in the parenting process (laughing). Because not only that it just makes my life simpler, but it also helps me to feel more confident in Thomas' raising because there is a father figure. And I believe that he will be a more well-adjusted child because of it, because he's had both parents. I believe that he feels secure knowing that

is there. I believe that he feels a certain pride when he knows that he can share his accomplishments with his daddy. And I don't know how much of that would relate to a mother because I've never been a male child and I've never really had a daddy. So I don't know how to express my feelings about things from a child...myself being a child...having a daddy in the household. I'm just looking at it from a mothers' perspective. I'm glad that I have help. I'm glad Thomas has a daddy. I'm glad he has a daddy to sit on his lap. And to pick him up when he falls asleep in the van and carry him to his bed. Cause I think those things are important for Thomas. And the security of having daddy there is good. Provides a certain stability, a stability for his children...

Brenda, Al's wife, shared with me her beliefs about the importance of the father's role in their young children's development. Her comments support the theory that most of these participants, the mothers and the fathers, believe that this is a team effort even if the roles are different.

Robert: How do you see that role in their young children's education?

Brenda: I think it's important. I think without that involvement they don't get the full feel of the want to go [to school]. And I think that little bit of initiative just to brag on them a little bit...you know, I think they need it, I think they need a dad. I think they need their mom but I think they need they're dad too. And they need that father figure. You know, even a lot of your divorced people...you know, a lot of them are fussing over their kids and don't want this one to have one and this one to have it, you know, I think they...to me...I think they're being selfish. They're not thinking of their children. So, you know, I think the child needs the dad as much as it needs the mom.

She even talked about his role in childrearing in general which shows the commitment that Al has made to being involved with his children.

> But he's always been good changing diapers. He'll load em up three days after they're born, I mean, it wasn't no big deal to take em somewhere. Cause he turned around and change the diapers just as well as anybody else. That's one thing I was really surprised with. That he took that involvement. He didn't, you know, a lot of dads...I know dads here today that...I'm not changing that diaper. I'm not...don't leave it with me. You know, a lot of dads are that way. But he don't care a bit to...

Ellen, Joe's wife, notices the change occurring at the school regarding fathers' participation. She had this to say about her observations.

> I'm glad to see that there's more fathers getting more involved than what there used to be. And he is more involved than what he used to be with all three of the kids, he's more involved...
>
> ...You see em more at the interview...you know, at the parent teacher thing, you'll see em more coming picking up their kids like when we was up there for that dance...
>
> ...And I see a lot of times...men come back, bring their kids to school and stuff like that. And I'm glad to see that.

Linda, the kindergarten teacher involved in this study and a mom herself, told me about the change she has seen this year and since her children were in kindergarten.

> This year I have noticed that the parents, the fathers in particular have been a lot more active than the parents I had last year... they get back to school with things, they remember events, they participate in events at school. They send notes more often, they communicate with me more often through notes or through phone calls or through messages. They actually come into the room and speak to me about certain things. I have seen the parents at school at PTO and special events during the day or after school more than I have in the past on the whole this year.

Lisa, Max's wife, believes that the father is very important in the development of their children. She spent a large portion of the interview talking about the importance of Max teaching Eric the things that men are usually interested in.

> Max can teach him a lot of things as in being a man. Where mama can't always teach him to be a man. I mean I want him to hunt. You know, I want him to fish. I want him to know that it's out there.
>
> I mean every kid deserves a daddy. I mean...daddy's gonna teach him something that mom can't.

Sharon told me how she saw Bob's role in the education of their young children. She also sees a 'team' effort with no particular task falling to either mother or father.

> **Robert:** What do you think about the role of the father in early childhood education?
>
> **Sharon:** Well, I think the roles can be different if both parents are working or if one parent is at home. You know, because I think if the father is out working and the mother is home, I think more than likely the mother is going to taking them to school and dropping them off and all that sort of stuff, but if both parents are working, I think the father should take an equal part...quote, unquote equal in the education situation, you know...
>
> **Robert:** M-hmm.
>
> **Sharon:** ...you know we're doing the...you know, you need to check homework, you need...you know maybe tomorrow you can cook, but...you know. Just alternate and stuff like that. But I think they should take equal, not just one parent be the school person, one person be the home person...
>
> ...Well, I, you know. I think he should take an active part. And I think he tries to...you know, I think, you know, his life is important too. I mean, you know, he needs to do a few things for himself to be able to do things for her. And...I don't know. But...I think if he wasn't so stressed with his work and

everything that he would take a more active part. Cause I have seen that in the past.

Earlier in this paper, I cited a research study which showed that 60% of mothers in a survey did not want fathers to be more involved. The researchers theorized that this was due to a desire for the women to have and keep some control of a family situation. I **did not** find this to be true of any of the mothers in this study. All the mothers talked about how they were pleased and thankful that their husbands were such involved dads. They talked with enjoyment and enthusiasm about the kinds of educational activities that the fathers and children were doing together.

Fathers in the Classroom

This section would more appropriately be titled 'Fathers Are Not in the Classroom.' Pruett (1987) emphasizes the importance "getting fathers into the learning places, and getting them there early..." I believe that these fathers, like many others are ready to be included in the classroom environment.

Throughout the year, most kindergarten classes celebrate birthdays and other holidays with organized parties. Linda's class had many parties and most were organized by parents...mothers. She said that for her parties this year it was strictly moms. She said that a mom organized them. Most importantly she said:

So that may be they just tend to call moms.

That comment, at the time, seemed innocuous but may be an important observation when trying to find out why there are so few fathers participating at the classroom level. Why did that mother only call moms to help with the classroom parties? Are parties just women things by nature? Did she not want fathers to be involved? Did she feel uncomfortable asking fathers to be involved? Did she think that they would not want to be involved? Are fathers not participating in the classroom because the dads don't know **how** to become involved at that level? I suggest that this problem extends far beyond party planning. Pruett (1987) believes that men do not have the social support network that women do when it comes to parenting. I believe this extends to their participation in the school life of their children and explains why some men feel uncomfortable in the school environment.

At most schools, and according to the data, also at Rocky Top Elementary School, there are numerous opportunities for dads to participate in the education of their kindergarten children at the classroom level. Volunteering with reading groups, art projects, one-on-one instructional help—basically all the things that volunteer moms are doing and have been doing for a long time. Linda did tell me that she admits to innocently perpetuating the systematic exclusion of fathers from the classroom. She said:

> I would hope that I would encourage fathers as much as mothers but I'm sure that I do not. I'm sure that I tend to draw upon my mothers simply because of the old thinking that mothers are at home and they're available to come.

Linda told me that one of the few times a dad came to the class during school was for an occupationally related demonstration. He was a paramedic and came to the class to show the children what they do to help people.

> He came with his fellow worker paramedic. They brought their ambulance and they brought all their stretchers and all their equipment. And showed the children. I wanted them to see all the things and go into the ambulance because I thought it would help the little ones to not be...to kind of maybe know, you know, if that situation ever came they would know. And the dad was so willing to come. He wanted to come. I asked him if he would and he was willing and he was excellent. And I loved seeing that role. I always think the children relate really well to the men in the lower grades. I just, I really don't know why. I think it's kind of neat the way they listen to them.

Linda feels like there is so much more that dads can contribute to their children's learning at the classroom level. I asked her what she would like to see in the future concerning the participation of fathers in the school and in their early childhood education in general.

> **Robert:** What would you like to see as a teacher as far as dads being involved in the school and at home and in the community, those three different areas? You're an expert in the classroom. What would you like to see dads doing?
>
> **Linda:** I would like to see a father feeling comfortable coming to school and I would like him to do the kinds of things he likes to do. I would like him to feel free to come in and do something in the class if he wants to, if he feels comfortable. I would just like to see him having a good idea of what's expected at school and learn the expectations of school. I'd like to see him doing things for the school that he wants to do. Any kind of volunteer thing from anything from outside, planting trees in our garden to just walking his child in every morning, if that's what he wants to do. But I would definitely

like him doing something. I would like him talking to his child, reading to his child and asking...If he's a father who is very busy that's fine if he can't actively participate, he can still talk to his child, look over his work when he's home. Talk to him about...you know, just really talk to him about what's going on. Because the children will tell them lots of things, if they listen (we laugh)...take the time to listen. I would like a father to be comfortable and do the kinds of things he wants to do, you know. I would really love it if they could understand how important their role is, but I don't know always how to communicate that to them.

I asked what other kinds of things dads were doing in the classroom. We were talking about special reading days she has had in years past and she told me about a celebration of Dr. Seuss' birthday where parents come and read his books to the children.

Linda: But...I just think that was neat any time the dads would come in. In February we will have our celebration of Dr. Seuss's birthday and we'll probably have some fathers come in and read stories. I always try to get fathers and mothers.

Robert: Did you have a lot of dads (last year)?

Linda: No. (laughing) Quite honestly I did not.

Linda's comments about how the children related to the fathers in the class when the paramedics came should motivate everyone involved to encourage the expansion of paternal participation in the classroom and the school as a whole.

Changing the Learning Context

If we decide, as the data in this study show, that fathers perceive themselves as an indispensable part of their children's early childhood education, and that the cultural expectations of them as educators are incongruent with the fathers' perceptions of their roles, what then? Because the socio-cultural context within which fathers are busy 'being fathers' has been developing since the beginning of mankind, it seems presumptuous to think that we can make substantive changes before the next school year begins.

However, the results of this study suggest several implications for the educational community, fathers, and society. First, if elementary schools wish to reap the benefits that fathers can give to the school, and to their children individually, it must be responsive to fathers' needs. The participants in this study very much want to be a part of their children's educational lives, but they talked about the negative and unwelcoming feelings that they experienced in their attempt to be involved in the school's activities. If the schools cannot be sensitive to fathers' desires to participate in their children's education, they will not be effective in garnering the parental support that the research has shown is so important. Second, this study should be a reminder to fathers that there are many emotional rewards in participating in their children's education, and that there are many fathers who are making the move toward greater involvement. The mothers in this study affirmed that they noticed the growing number of fathers who were

participating in this part of their children's lives. The fathers themselves agreed that their involvement in teaching and learning with their children fostered a closer father-child relationship. Third, if society values a stronger commitment by men to be involved in family life, it must support and encourage fathers to become active in their young children's education. As this study has shown, fathers perceive themselves as important people in their children's early childhood education. However, if society perpetuates the stereotype of the uninvolved father, change will be difficult. It takes a village to raise a child. In that village live many fathers.

Many of the fathers in this study are effecting change everyday. Every time they visit the school, or bake cupcakes for a party, or sit down with their child to teach them the numbers and letters, they are clearing the way for society to move in behind them. Linda, the kindergarten teacher participating in this study, told me about this year's group of parents.

> ...but they have been as active as any dads I've ever had. Now I don't know if that's...like I say...**it's a new generation of dads.** (my emphasis)

I believe that the future of paternal involvement in early childhood education rests primarily on the individual fathers. Marsiglio (1993) comments that we can look at paternal involvement as an enabling as well as a constraining perspective and that it is both socially patterned and individually created. Social processes affect the opportunities and constraints that fathers face as they interact in context. Based on the data, I believe

that although the social processes are powerful, **they are not determinant.** Individual fathers can and do challenge the social patterns that are acting upon them. I saw and heard this happening with the fathers in this study. Most made conscious decisions about the kind of participation they wanted to engage in. Parke (1996) writes that "fathers do not simply decide to be involved or uninvolved; rather, their participation in family routines evolves out of a system of influences" (p. 77). This study shows, however, although there are contextual forces working against them such as societal norms and the school's 'hidden expectations', these kindergarten dads know the importance of being involved in their children's education, they have experienced it's intangible emotional rewards, and they have **decided** to be involved in their children's early childhood education.

Epilogue

This part is reserved for the fathers who are reading this study and who might be reflecting on their own participation in their young child's education.

Go to your child's teacher and tell him/her that you want to help, that you want to be involved in your child's learning—in his/her life. If you are not that bold, write a note to the teacher. Most teachers will be overjoyed that you're interested! Volunteer in the school, in the classroom. Ask if you can go with them on their next field trip, if you can teach the class about something you are interested in, if you can read a funny story to the class, build kites, work a booth at the school carnival, pass out milk at snack time. Talk to your child about what he or she is learning. Learn some stuff together. Read. Listen. Play. Laugh. Watch ants.

As the fathers in this study have experienced and have shared with us through their interesting and humorous stories, you can form an ongoing connection with your child through learning. This connection will provide you and your child with many rewards.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Research Project Information

The purpose of this study is to learn about the educational experiences that fathers have with their kindergarten children.

Data collection techniques to be employed are group discussions with fathers, interviews with participants, and observations of fathers and children in educational settings.

There are no foreseeable risks to any of the participants in this study.

Participants will have a chance to learn about the experiences of other fathers with their kindergartners as well as reflecting on their own experiences. The journals that they keep will provide them with some recorded moments of their experiences with their children during their first year of school. In addition, participants will be helping educators, parents, and communities learn about fathers perceptions and experiences regarding their kindergartners' early childhood education.

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. The dissertation that comes from this research may be submitted for publication in a professional journal. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link the district, school, or participating individuals to the study.

The participation of the people in the study is completely voluntary: they may decline to participate without penalty. If any person agrees to participate and later decides to withdraw from the study, he/she may do so at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Robert M. Denn, at 142 Claxton Addition, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996,
(423) 974-3034. If you have questions about the rights of the participants, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (423) 974-3466.

Appendix B

Letter of Permission to Conduct Research

After having read the information sheet and discussing the proposed research project with the principal investigator, I hereby authorize him to utilize the facilities of this school district as set forth in the research proposal. I understand that the researcher will be working with one selected kindergarten classroom in one of the elementary schools in our system for a period of five months. I also grant permission for the researcher to contact the school principal(s) as necessary to go forward with the study.

Name of School System _____

Name of Superintendent (please print) _____

Signature of Superintendent _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Letter of Permission to Conduct Research

After having read the information sheet and discussing the proposed research project with the principal investigator, I hereby authorize him to utilize the facilities of this school as set forth in the research proposal. I understand that the researcher will be working with one selected kindergarten classroom in this school for a period of five months. I also grant permission for the researcher to contact the kindergarten teachers as necessary to go forward with the study.

Name of School _____

Name of Principal (please print) _____

Signature of Principal _____

Date _____

Appendix D

Letter of Permission to Conduct Research

After having read the information sheet and discussing the proposed research project with the principal investigator, I hereby authorize him to utilize the facilities of this classroom as set forth in the research proposal. I understand that the researcher will be working with volunteer fathers and their children selected from my class. I also grant permission for the researcher to contact these parents as necessary to go forward with the study.

Name of Teacher (please print) _____

Signature of Teacher _____

Date _____

Appendix E

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to learn about the educational experiences that fathers have with their kindergarten children. As a participant, you will get to take part in a group discussion with other fathers, keep a journal of your experiences with your child, and participate in some one-on-one interviews with me. I will also observe your interaction with your child during school or other education-related events.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in your participation.

Through your participation, you will have a chance to learn about the experiences of other fathers with their kindergartners as well as reflecting on your own. The journals that you keep will provide you with some recorded moments of your experiences with your child during his/her first year of school. In addition, you will be helping educators, parents, and communities learn about fathers perceptions and experiences regarding their kindergartners early childhood education.

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Robert M. Denn, at 142 Claxton Addition, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996, and (423) 974-3034. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (423) 974-3466.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in the study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's name (print) _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix F

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM
KINDERGARTEN MOMS

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to learn about the educational experiences that fathers have with their kindergarten children.

As a participant, you will participate in some one-on-one interviews with me.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in your participation.

Through your participation, you will have a chance to reflect on your experiences with your husband and child. In addition, you will be helping educators, parents, and communities learn about fathers perceptions and experiences regarding their kindergartners' early childhood education.

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Robert M. Denn, at 142 Claxton Addition, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996, and (423) 974-3034. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (423) 974-3466.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in the study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's name (print) _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix G

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR CLASSROOM TEACHER

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to learn about the educational experiences that fathers have with their kindergarten children.

As a participant, you will get to take part in some one-on-one interviews with me. I will also observe your interaction with fathers and their children during school or other education-related events.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in your participation.

Through your participation, you will have a chance to learn about the experiences of fathers with their kindergartners as well as reflecting on your own. In addition, you will be helping educators, parents, and communities learn about fathers perceptions and experiences regarding their kindergartners early childhood education.

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Robert M. Denn, at 142 Claxton Addition, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996, and (423) 974-3034. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (423) 974-3466.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in the study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's name (print) _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix H

Invitation to Participate

Dear Kindergarten Parents,

You are invited to participate in a research study! I am a student at the University of Tennessee and I am learning about the educational experiences that fathers have with their kindergarten children. I am inviting all parents with students who will be in Ms. Linda Rosemont's kindergarten class at Rocky Top Elementary School in the Fall. The superintendent, principal, and classroom teacher are all working with me on this project.

As a participant, you will get to take part in a group discussion with other fathers, keep a journal of your experiences with your child, and participate in some one-on-one interviews with me. I will also observe your interaction with your child during school activities and other learning-related events.

Through your participation, you will have a chance to learn about the experiences of other fathers with their kindergartners as well as reflecting on your own. In addition, you will be helping educators, parents, and communities learn about fathers' perceptions and experiences regarding their kindergartners' early childhood education.

All names will be kept confidential and no reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. If you think you might be interested in participating, please complete the information below and mail this letter back in the enclosed, stamped envelope. **If you have any questions about the study, please call me collect at (423) 447-3075.** If you have questions about research authorization or credentials, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research, University of Tennessee at (423) 974-3466.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Denn

Name of Father_____

Name of Mother_____

Phone number where you would like to be reached_____

Best time to call_____

Appendix I

Interview Questions for Fathers

1. Tell me about some of the learning experiences you have had with (Child's name).
2. Tell me about how these experiences with your child make you feel.
3. As a father, what part do you think you play in your child's education? What do you think is your role in your child's early childhood education?

Appendix J

Interview Questions for Mothers

1. Tell me about some of the learning experiences your husband has had with your child.

2. Tell me what role your husband plays in the education of your child. What do you think about his role?

3. Tell me about any conversations you have had with your husband about your child's education.

Appendix K

Focus Group Questions/Prompts

1. Are we important in the education of our children?

2. I noticed that some of you mentioned _____ in your interviews and/or your journals. What do you think about that?

3. What do you think should be the father's role in the education of his children?

Appendix L

Sample Interview

Interview Transcription for Max --

(This interview was conducted on November 12, 1998 at the home of Max and Lisa in South City.)

Robert: I'm here with Max , he's one of our kindergarten dads participating in the study. And Max, what I'm trying to learn about is fathers' involvement, what kinds of things do they do with their kindergarten child regarding their education. Any kind of learning activity whether it's at school, or at home, or in the community, wherever. But I'm trying to learn about what dads do and how they feel about their child's education. And so I think it would be great if we started with you just telling me some of the things that you've been involved in with Eric's education. It can be either since he started kindergarten or you can even go back before that into his earlier childhood if you can remember but we're kind of focusing on the kindergarten experience and...so I'll let you start telling me some of the things that you've been involved in with Eric

Max: Well, my biggest involvement is getting him either back and forth to school or stuff like that and then after school activities. Some things when I pick him up I take him with me to work and whatever, you know, trying to...if I aint got much really pressing to do we just fiddle around and do some things...I have dump trucks and stuff. Sometimes I

have to drive a dump truck and take him with me. I just...drive that day...I go pick him up in the dump truck at school and we go on and do whatever we're...you know, whatever I'm a doing, you know, it's not too...have to worry about him falling off of a house or anything like that. We, in the course of a night, after we get in and stuff is...especially now that the time's changed, it's dark at 5 and we got quite a bit of time before bedtime now, and we...try...If I've got nothing to do I try to go over what he brought home from school and maybe help him with it, you know, Ms. Rosemont sends stuff home that he's having trouble with and I try to...practice on what he's having trouble with. Maybe help him, you know, get a hold of it a little better. He's...like I said, in my journal, I didn't really think about this, of course, the journal got away from me...I work so much. The 15th reminded me at the parent-teacher conference I was really amazed at...course I got a computer in here and...I had a few games and stuff on it and he had never been able to grasp the computer and game stuff and then after he'd been at school for a month and a half or so, he...at the parent-teacher conference he sat down at that computer and just went to doing whatever he told it to do there. He was not having a bit of trouble with it and I was kind of impressed at in that short of time they've got him where he can just take hold of a computer and so now I went and bought him a program from...for kindergartners and he goes in there now whenever he wants to and get on the computer. He helps his sister now, she's 4 now. He helps her get a hold, try to get a hold of the computer. He gets...he can go in there and start the program from scratch. He don't have to have nobody to help him now after I showed him a time or two how to get into it and get the program started. He goes right to it now and don't have a bit of trouble getting

it started and gets it in there and it's real...it's an educational program, you know. Helps him with just everything. I was quite amazed at the program. As a matter of fact, I was amazed at how he...he didn't have no trouble he could listen to the instructions and do what they ask him to do. If it was arranging little balls by size or doing...recognizing his ABC's or his counting off, you know, picking the square that had the number that they asked for in it or whatever. You know, he doing a real good job on that. Of course helping his sister, she's...she'll be ahead of him by the time she gets to school cause she won't get to start for two more years, so...he's gonna have her really jump started. But, you know, it's amazing how he picks up on stuff. You know, around the house even before he was in school and stuff, you know, we could if it was something interesting he wouldn't have a bit of trouble picking it up. He could...whatever it was he could take hold of it. If he wanted to do it, you know...I had a Nintendo game, it hadn't been played in years and I didn't know that he could even...and he asked me to play with it there one evening, I just got it out for some reason and was playing with it and he asked if he could play it and...I leave it put up most time and then we started to hook it up to the TV, I showed him how to hook it up and everything and now he gets...you know, he asks if he go play with the Nintendo. And he goes up and hooks it up, puts the game in it, hooks the control pads up...

Robert: Hmm.

Max: ..he just...he takes off on it. He don't...I don't think he's as open at home as he is at school. He don't like to do his work at home. He's real shy. And he gets that from me I don't...I'm not a very outgoing person, I guess, I don't what the exact...because I'm, I

used to be real bad to...you know, my...talk and stuff and just didn't like to be in front of people or anything. He's a lot like that. Maybe we can get him out of that. He's doing, like I say, he's doing well in school and it's amazing how he's picked up on stuff. We tried to work with him a little bit, you know, prior to getting in kindergarten and he just didn't seem to take an interest in it, you know, it was too hard to hold his attention on what we was trying to...but now he's, you know, he don't have no trouble at all. Course he's a lot better with his mama than he is with me about...he's...when he's around me he is real quiet like I am when but when he's around his mom he's a little more talkative and she can get him to do his stuff that Ms. Rosemont tells us that he's having trouble with or whatever. I don't have as hardly as much luck getting him to cooperate. He's real quiet around me. He...

Robert: You said that sometimes you try to work with him on things that come home from the teacher. Can you think of some examples of some times when you worked with him?

Max: Well, just the other night we...he has...they made out with his alphabet but he still has trouble recognizing certain letters and, you know, knowing what they are. He knows the majority of em. So we the other night...Monday night I guess it was...we worked with him and tried to make him recognized the letters that he was having trouble with.

Robert: M-hm.

Max: He can do his...he recognized his numbers and stuff. Then, about 5 months or so ago she sent home he's having trouble with his shapes and stuff. We worked with him on his shapes as we was sitting here at the table we'd ask him what shape that book was.

You know, whether it be a square, rectangle, whatever, you know. And work with him. And that seems to me, it takes...they can apply more rather than just seeing somebody draw a circle on a paper and asking him what that is, you know. What shape's a cup? You know, is it round? Or...he seems to...he's not having no trouble with his shapes, his basic shapes anyway. His ABC's that he's having troubles with we try to associate it with a word that he knows like a dog with a D, you know he's had trouble A, an A and a B. The harder ones like the K and the H, the ones that you'd think that would be further down the line are harder to remember he don't have no trouble with them....

Robert: (laughs).

Max: ...but his A and his D and...B, B he knows. Then he knows...you know, he don't there's about 6 that he has trouble with so we try to associate them with a word that he knows, you know, that he put the shape to the letter and then remember what it is. The...he's not had no trouble with numbers. He's already counted to fifty without stopping. He can go to fifty without stopping and, of course I don't have no trouble with numbers. I...numbers is not a...something I can...they stick in my head. Maybe he's going to be like me on that. Remember...he's not going to have no trouble with numbers...

Robert: M-hmm.

Max: ...but, we need to, you know, work with him on his alphabet. He's still having trouble with that. And, yet, he has had since school started, but...

Robert: You mentioned that he was really picking up on the computer and you noticed that he was...you know...that game you bought him, the program, and that he was teaching his sister who's...

Max: M-hmm.

Robert: So what kinds of...did you do something with him on the computer, or did you...what kinds of involvement did you have with that?

Max: Well, basically, like I said, before he started school...I may be one of the few but we got a computer at the fire hall and I had never been around one. I didn't want nothing to do with one. And we got one there and nobody could do anything with it. Everybody else there didn't want nothing to do with either. So I thought well, you know, what I can do? I don't know. So they told me they says you can't mess it up. So I just sat down and started fooling with it and picked up on it pretty quick. So everything I do on the computer or anything like that is something that I've taught myself. I'm not...had any type of computer training even in high school I didn't take any cause, you know, that was fourteen years ago and it wasn't pushed as much back then as it was now. As a matter of fact there was very few computers in the high school. I think we had one computer class in the whole high school. We...I just never had any desire to fool with it. I always thought it was too complicated but they're actually pretty simple, but...you know. I been in there and I had some games but they were, you know, stuff that had came when I bought the computer. They were pretty advanced and I didn't really know there was anything out there for children, you know, realize other than little small ones you buy in the toy department at the K-mart...

Robert: M-hmm.

Max: ...We had thought about getting one of them for Christmas after he started school and learned a little bit and maybe...started his alphabet and what not so he'd know what he was looking at when he...it just wasn't a bunch of keys, you know, with no meaning, so...

Robert: That was before school started?

Max: Yeah, that was before...We had looked at it last year and we thought, well, he won't know what he's really, you know, he don't know what they are they keys or anything and what he's actually doing. So when we went to that parent teacher conference, you know, he just went over there and sit down and played the computer and started it up. And started programming one and went to doing what, you know, following the instructions and doing what it had asked him do and...was really having...really...I was really impressed at how he could...you know, how in such short time they got him to where he could...it seemed like he felt comfortable. So...a couple of days after that I was at Wal-mart and went into the over in the software and was looking around and found this one for kindergartners, and I bought it and brought it home and showed him. And I showed him...I showed his mother how to get into and she's actually showed him the next day cause it was an in-service day, you know, where they're all out of school and I had to work and she called me about 11:00 that morning and said that he was doing real good with it. I took...she showed him...well, after she got in there and got him to working with him and his sister both, then that weekend I was off on Saturday and Sunday and we was all home together and I went and showed him how to, you know, he

wanted to play the computer so I went in there and started it from scratch and...he wanted to, you know, he watched me start the program and you know, of course there's quite a few things you have to do to start it and, you know, couple of times that he went in...that I went in there and started it for him, now I don't even have to ...I don't have to be around. He can go in there and, if he wants to play the computer, he just goes in there and starts it, you know, goes...

Robert: ...by himself.

Max: Yeah, he goes...you know in Windows 95, he goes down to the bottom of the screen on the Start bar, he clicks on it and goes to Programs, clicks on that and goes over to...picks his kindergarten program that he wants, and you know there's quite a big list of programs there and he knows which one to pick...

Robert: Wow.

Max: ...And then he'll go over and there's three options on it, you know, you can go to the...you can go right straight into the program where, the interactive part of it or you can go...it's got another program or other that you can go in and print out workbooks and do different, you know, change the school level of it or whatever. And there's quite a few different things in that. And then there's a help box, and he knows which one to start to get into the interactive part. As a matter of fact he shows me stuff about it now...

Robert: Really!?

Max: ...that he's...you know, of course...anything that...it looks like a little school house inside once you get into the interactive part of it. And anything that you touch in there does something. If it's a paintbrush, you can paint or if it's a...got a little train track

in the floor kind of over in the corner and you click it on the train tracks...got this little train and it's got a rabbit that talks to you that's kind of like the instructor or the guide through the interactive part of it. And then it's got two little mice that help him. And these little mice, you know, they... one of em drives a train and the other one gives...tells him the instructions. It'll have little flat cars behind the train and they'll have dolls on em. And they'll want him to arrange the dolls from little to big or big to little, you know. Changes it around so that...changes, it may be dolls this time maybe animals the next time and so on...

Robert: Hmm.

Max: ...and he's got to arrange em in the order that it tells him to arrange them. It's just...you know, I just kind of played with it a little bit and showed him what all it would do now he's...of it by hisself. He's tried about everything and he knows what his favorites are.

Robert: You said that sometimes Eric shows you stuff.

Max: Yeah.

Robert: Can you think of an example of something where he was showing you, teaching you something?

Max: Well, he...like I say, he gets in there now by hisself and he finds...well, say, like the music box. It's got a little thing over here that's looks like a radio and you click on it and it plays and everything. But you know, each...he's been through each...he's clicked on about every item in this room and now he knows about what they all do and which one he likes to play with and which one he don't. And...he goes and if he finds something

new he'll...if I'm around he'll, he comes and gets me and takes me and says watch what this will do. Course...he found out that he can go outside now and do different things, but...

Robert: Outside?

Max: ...outside the schoolroom.

Robert: Oh.

Max: ...they've got a playground there, and relay races and which you have to...like you...the relay races, they'll have like a track down through there and they'll have this rabbit that runs. but you have to line it up on the right track, on the right lane on the track with the letter. Say it picks the letter G, it may pick maybe a goat and there'll be a girl and, you know, there'll be four items there and he gotta pick the one that starts with the letter G and line it up so that it'll go through...past the ones that's not right. He's still has a little trouble...it moves a little fast for him. By the time he says each one and figures out which one starts with the right letter, and what not, he has...

Robert: You talked about your involvement with the computer with him and with some the...helping him with his shapes and numbers and letters and things like that. Can you think of any other examples of things, before we move on to something else, that you do with him at home that's related to his education or any kind of teaching, teaching and learning activities that you do?

Max: Other than, you know, I mean, like I say, you know, if we're going down the road or something, we see something maybe a little unusual or something, I'll ask him what it is and then ask him...'what shape is it?' Say, if it's maybe a barn door or

something…'what shape is that barn?' Or maybe an unusual piece of equipment, of course he takes…he likes equipment and stuff, heavy equipment and farm equipment and anything like that that moves, he likes it.

Robert: M-hmm.

Max: We're driving down the road, you know, and he'll say, 'Daddy, did you see that road grater?' Yeah, well, 'What letter does that start with?' You know, he don't know but, you know, then we'll tell him what it starts with and maybe he'll start associating sounds with letters and stuff.

Robert: Yeah. I know that you said that sometimes you take him to work with you and something about a dump truck or something like that.

Max: M-hmm.

Robert: Can you tell me about an experience like that when you took him…?

Max: Well, I had to…one of my drivers was out and I had to drive when we were hauling the dirt to the New Ruby Tuesday's…out there across from Lowes…and I picked him up at 3:00 that evening and he stayed with me till about…we finished up about 5:30 or 6:00 that night and he was with me the whole time. And still yet to this day, whenever we drive past that place, you know, he still remembers that we hauled the dirt in there. Building things and stuff, he don't miss nothing. We go and get a load of gravel of something down at the plant, and you know he knows the routine going in and…he knows you go up there, whichever pile of gravel you want, you back there and wait and he gets to watch the loaders load the trucks and he really likes equipment, you know, like I say. He knows the majority of your pieces of equipment.

Robert: How does he know all of those?

Max: He's always interested in em and he's...you know, we'd be going down the road, if he'd see a piece of machinery on the side of the road working or sitting off over in a field or something, you know, he'd ask what it was. And after you tell him a couple of times they stay...stuff...if it's interesting it sticks in his head. And he...now he can tell you about any...You're driving down the road and he'll ask you, 'Did you see that track hoe sitting over there on the side of the road?' Matter of fact he'll ask me a lot of times that...I'll be off thinking about something else and not really paying attention and he'll ask me if I seen it and not necessarily...I won't be paying any attention to a piece of equipment of something...he don't miss nothing.

Robert: Hmm.

Max: He's pretty...I thought I was going to get to let him and his sister there watch a calf being born, but they couldn't be quiet over here. One Saturday afternoon I was...I actually came home to watch the [college] football game...

Robert: Uh-huh...

Max: ...course I was...had them...Dad called up here said we was having trouble...a cow was having trouble calving and I went down and, of course I had them with me, I had no choice but to take them. I took them down and...I had to pull a calf but they couldn't...they was so excited they couldn't be quiet, so the cow wouldn't lie down with they was around I had to have Daddy...daddy had to take them in the house so they would be quiet so she'd lie down and let me pull the calf.

Robert: Was it born OK?

Max: Oh, yeah. If they get home before dark, they have to go check on it down there. Right across, my brother lives in the next house and my daddy lives in the next house. Our farm goes all the way...it's a little over a mile around the road here on the right hand side is all our farm. My uncle live on over a few houses over, and my grandpa, his great grandpa lives on the...on past my uncle and, you know, he...he's been exposed to the farm life. He really got...you know...the farm equipment he got a hold of first. Cause I've had a tractor since before he was born. He's been on a tractor since he was big enough to...

Robert: Tell me some of the, since you have a farm, tell me what kinds of educational things, or teaching things do you do that has to do with your life out here.

Max: We, he was about 3, I guess...he was about 2 and...my brother had bought some bottle calves and we were having to feed them every morning and every evening. And the way it worked out I had to feed em...the two mornings that I had to feed was the shift, the day before my shift at the fire hall, and then before I went to work at the fire hall. I was having to get up at 5:30 in the morning and I started getting him up and taking him cause he enjoyed the holding the bottle for them. And he...we had them in little pens over there and he barely could hold...get up high enough to...I think I ended up putting him something to stand on in front of the little fence so he could hold the bottle over the top of the fence for the calf to nurse off of it there. And ever since...he can still remember that. We still have one of the cows we're gonna slaughter this Fall or here shortly that we raised from the bottle you know and he still remembers that and I gonna get him back into that when he gets a little bit older, you know. Course now we have to get up at 6:00

in the morning to get him ready for school in time and...I'm gonna start...I'm gonna get some calves maybe this Spring, when it warms up and let him start helping him and his sister both start helping do that. And teach them some responsibility and plus they like to play with the calf. After this calf was, that I had to pull the other day, after he'd been born a little while I took them back over there and... the cow was still having some trouble, since she hadn't got up and cleaned the calf up yet. I got her up and they were standing back watching. I got her up and got her started on what she needed to be doing. And his sister, she still remembers what the calf looked like before he got cleaned up and after, you know. She still remembers that. If they get home before dark every night, and they can see out in the field, they want to go and check on that calf and make sure he's all right. Of course...right before the time change though it wasn't a problem getting home, we weren't used to...went and go check the cows and we've got cows here and we've got em all down the road here and we just drive around and make sure they's all, wasn't none down or anything. They know when I pick em up in the evening that they're gonna, that's one of the things we gotta do when we get home is check the cows.

Robert: Hmm. That's interesting.

Max: That shepherd...you know...of course the black dog you seen coming in, he's a stock dog and he rustles cattle. We come by and check the mailboxes and wait for him...but, I don't know...he must recognized my truck coming down the road cause whenever we turn in down here, he's running across the yard to meet us. And, when we get to...we stop to check the mailboxes he usually jumps in the back of the truck with us

and we'll go on and do...we'll check the cows and what not. Sometimes we'll have to get out and walk through them or whatever.

Robert: You mentioned something about, just a minute ago or so, something about teaching responsibility.

Max: Uh-huh.

Robert: Tell me some more about that. Tell me about teaching responsibility to kids.

Max: Well, right now the biggest things, you know, we try to teach em what their responsibility is to keep their clothes picked up and their shoes out of the floor and stuff like that. We still have to remind them every night when they come in. When they come in they take their coat off throw it on the couch and kick their shoes off and laying on the floor. I don't know how long it takes to get em out of that habit. When they put their things up...when they get in. We're not having no luck with...we tried to let em feed the dog and stuff. We're not having any luck with that cause we got a dog right here now that's...jumps on em and stuff. And we had one when Elizabeth was a baby that jumped on em and scared her to death and she don't...she likes Ringo, he's the black dog, stock dog, but...Matter of fact the other day we was out there, we was all outside, it was the day after the calf was born and we'd all got up Sunday morning and walked over in the field there, checked the calf and came back. We stopped to talk to the dog and he's a bulldog and he's not mean but she got close enough to him and he's on a chain there and he jumped up and knocked her down. She...the dog aint worked out too good for being responsible for...without the responsibility, cause they don't get...they don't like to get around him cause he jumps on em and stuff, knocks em down. He's just playing but, you

know, he plays a little too rough for the kids. Back during the fair week, we were going to the fair one evening and walked back the livestock building and they were showing cattle in there. And we stopped in there for a few minute cause neither one of the kids had ever seen them, watched it, you know, show cattle. We stopped in there for a few minutes. They were showing the cattle and stuff and they got the stick with the hook on it that they position the feet with and stuff and when they want them to stand they're sitting there holding their lead and they take that stick with the hook on it and rub their belly. And that kinda, I don't know exactly, it kinda coaxes the cattle there, and they just stand and not move whenever they're doing that. We were down at daddy's one Sunday afternoon after that and Elizabeth which is Eric's younger sister was...she got a hold of Ringo and wasn't really paying attention there, she had a hold of his collar leading him around. She had a stick...

Robert: (laughs).

Max: ...and we watched after a few minutes and she walked him up there in front of the...me and dad and my wife was all sitting on the porch there and talkin, and she walked him up in front of the porch there and stopped him and took that stick and went to rubbing his belly.

Robert: (laughs) That's great...

Max: She had remembered what that...of course me and Lisa looked at each other and I said, 'You know what she's doing don't you?' She said, 'Yeah.' She said, 'She remembers watching them cattle at the fair.' And...

Robert: This was the County Fair?

Max: Yeah. They have a cattle show there several nights a week, we just happen to...we had never been to one and with the kids anyway and we stopped in there just to, you know, for a few minutes to let em see some of the things that, cause all they've ever seen is our cattle, it's just, we run em out in the field and we get em, or whatever, vaccination or if we want to separate some out to sell or whatever, you know. That's...you know, they've never actually been around the show itself for registered stock or whatever. We stopped in there and let em watch that, you know, just for a few minutes to let them get...I didn't think they'd ever even pick up on it, but Elizabeth, you know, she asked me. She said, 'Why do they got that stick?' And, cause she thought it was to whip em with or something. I said, 'No,' I said, 'Watch.' And they'd bring em around there, you know, and they want their feet to be even in the front and the back and this stick's got a hook on the end of it and they reach down and hook the feet and pull em up to even and of course they're used to it and they know want they're wanting. They put their feet up even and they put their hind feet...it's got like a prod on it and they can push the hind feet back, get em even. Then they take that hook and rub their belly with it while they're...cause they gotta stand still while the judges walk around em and...

Robert: M-hmm.

Max: ...that calms em down to stand still. And that's...like I say we stopped in there and watched one group show. We were maybe in there for 5 minutes and they picked up on it that fast.

Robert: That's very interesting. I don't know anything about cattle, so...Can you think of...I know that I saw you at the...was it the conference the other night? The parent-teacher conference?

Max: Yeah, the parent-teacher conference.

Robert: What kinds of other, we'll talk about the conference later, what kinds of other things have you been involved with at the school that you can think of?

Max: Nothing that I've been personally involved with, you know, with Eric's class itself or the school itself.

Robert: Tell me about the teacher conference then because I know you were there. What did you think?

Max: Right. I was very impressed with his...like I said his ability to, that he grasped the computer as quickly as he did. And she showed some of the work he'd been doing and some of the books he's working out of and stuff. You know it's...well, I guess on up in the education and things like that's maybe not that impressive cause you can't expect them to advance and go on, but the starting level where you know you first make em understand that, you know, there's a reason for you maybe needing to remember what this letter is and being able to get the point across you know that they're trying to learn something rather than, you know, this is not playtime anymore, we're actually trying to...accomplish something...

Robert: M-hmm.

Max: ...and Miss Rosemont's demeanor, you know, she's real quiet...you know, she's not a...she's not really...quiet I don't guess you'd say, I mean as far as...you know, her

voice is not real rough and real raspy, you know, she's...seems like she has a genuine care for the children in her class and, you know. Her tone, I guess, is calm and she's having...she seems to be having real good luck with her children that's in her class. You know she's understanding of these little 5 year olds is, you know...the first time they've ever been around a environment that's geared toward trying to teach them something, you know. Of course, all through their young life they're learning stuff, you know, from the time that they're infants, you know, they learn to walk and talk and stuff. But they don't, they're not realizing, you know, it's just something they pick up. And now they're, you know, they're...Miss Rosemont's got to convince them that they're trying to pick this stuff up for a reason, you know.

Robert: M-hmm.

Max: The importance of it or whatever. She really impressed me...as, you know, she's...Every time I've ever met her, she's always seemed to be in a...she's really been listening to the kids. You know, she's not, you know...well, this is what you're supposed to today. Go over there and sit down at your table and color. She seems like she goes around and works with each individual child as they need it.

Robert: Have you observed this? When did you notice this?

Max: Well, just when...of course, I take him to school every morning sometimes and, if I'm take him and she meets him, she really acts like she really wants to see him or she wants to...she's glad that he came and stuff like, you know. As far as actually observing her it was just the days that, the day that we went up to the parent-teacher conference, that we were, you know, she told him to go get his little workbook that he was gonna...that

they had him cutting things out of and pasting and coloring and stuff and with the story along with it. And he went over there. And she just had em laid out on the table, you know, and he picked his particular book up and showed it to us. As we were standing there talking over the table and all the other children's books were there on the table and...he picked up another book and said this is and called Andy's name off, you know, said, 'This is Andy's book.' And, you know, kind of impressed Miss Rosemont or whatever and so she went to ask him what other people, 'Whose book's this?' And he called off their names...I'd say he know who half a dozen of his people who...who the book was by. You know, by recognizing the cover of it, maybe recognizing their name and stuff. Also when we were out in the hall waiting on the parent-teacher conference, he was going down through there naming off whose locker they was cause each one had their, has their name on the locker, but, you know, he recognizes a lot of the names and stuff and...calls em off say this is Jonathan's locker, this is Andy's locker or whatever. He seems to...that part of it's what's really, you know, really amazes me, he can grasp that stuff that quickly. Her tone with him is...cause Eric is real...he's kind-hearted and, like I say, he's quiet. If she was a teacher that rant and raved, I don't believe she would be getting the results out of Eric that she is. Some kids take to that and do better with someone...Eric he's real kind-hearted and if she hollered at him or stuff like that, she'd get him to the point that he would be intimidated by her and don't believe she would accomplish as much.

Robert: Let me ask you...you went to this parent-teacher conference.

Max: M-hm.

Robert: Tell me why you went. Why did you go to the conference?

Max: That's a good question. I guess, I didn't really know what to expect. I don't know why I went to the conference. I didn't know if she was going to tell us that Eric was behind...he needed to be catching up. I didn't know, like I say, I didn't know what she was going to tell me. So I was kind of...I don't know went into this thing kind of...not knowing what to expect. Like I said, I don't know why I went. I guess to be involved. Just to, you know...

Robert: Tell me about that.

Max: Well, my dad...most of my...teenage life anyway my dad worked second shift out at a plant in town and he wasn't...I didn't get to spend as much time with him as I would like to have. But I can't...course, I played football all through school and stuff and he didn't get to participate in that because of the fact that he worked second shift, he was gone every evening. About the only time I got to spend any time with him was Saturdays and Sundays and teenager life, you know, I had things going on in my life that, where we had a school trip on Saturday or something like that. I just, I want to be more involved in my children's lives than my dad got to be mine. It wasn't because he didn't want to it's just that was his, he had to work second shift because of his...what he does, he's a maintenance supervisor and he didn't have enough seniority to go to first shift. I didn't want him to have to work third shift because I really, probably wouldn't have got to spend much time with him anyway cause he'd want to sleep before work so. Cause he was the type that he came in the morning and worked around the house and the garden, whatever on the farm whatever, and the he'da slept up till time to go to work so, you

know, it woulda been hard on him, so either way I was losing out on getting to see him so I guess it was better that he work second shift. I just wanted to be more involved with, than my father got to be with me.

Robert: Let me go one step further. Why is it important to you to be involved in Eric's education?

Max: Well, not so much his education, but just his childhood life in general. I want to be able to influence him. Maybe to hopefully steer him away from the bad side...what I do for a living, I see a lot of the...the bad side of people, I guess. I get to see the good side of people from time to time but the majority of what I see is the bad side of people. You know and automobile accident was caused by a driver that was drinking or whatever, you know, stuff like that. Somebody gets mad at their spouse or whatever and burns their house down because they couldn't get along and stuff. Well, it put the children in a...they're the innocent ones. They don't really have no choice at that particular time. I want to be able to maybe keep Eric and Elizabeth and them from having to deal with that, going through that.

Robert: You said steering them the right way. Are those the words that you used?

Max: Yeah.

Robert: What do you...elaborate on that a little bit. See, I consider that a part of education, life education. So tell me a little bit about how you've done that.

Max: Right now it's time to teach em the responsibility and teach them the...basic things right now. But right now it's...not really talking to em about the effects of doing drugs or drinking and stuff like that. But, right now, laying a foundation, I guess you might say, so

whenever you do talk to them about those things that they will respect you and listen to what you have to say. I know from experience that experience is the best teacher. That...I've seen people that don't learn from experience. Basically, look back on it now, when I was in school so and so their mom and dad lets them go wherever they want to whenever they want to if they want to come home at 11:00 on a school night. They've been out with their buddies or been out to the pool hall or whatever, you know. Their parents don't...you get the impression they don't care. I'm sure they do, just maybe don't show the right way or whatever. Letting have their way and run...if they want, is another way of showing them that they want them to have everything. That's not...it seems like they end up on the wrong path, they don't respect things, they're not very responsible. They're not very good workers. You know being in business, I know the importance of dependable and responsible people. Of course, I've always been taught that all my life. And I try to teach that to the kids. If you tell you somebody you're gonna...try to do it. You don't always get to do what you say you'll do, but at least try. Don't just tell somebody that because that's what they want to hear. And just turn around and walk off, you know, it's left your mind and that's the last you ever think of it. Of course it don't always work out and don't be....don't be disheartened by it, you know, failing at something. If you don't never fail anything then you've never tried anything. But learn from what's you've done wrong. Sometimes you have to punish them for the things that they do. They might be a little headstrong you'll want to give them a swat on the bottom to change their mind remember who the boss is...

Robert: One of the things I'm trying to learn about is how dads feel, what they get out of their participation. Whatever participation they're involved in. How do they feel about that? How does it make you feel when you're doing these things? When you're involved with Eric in some kind of educational, teaching, you're teaching...?

Max: Well, right now, if we're doing something, whatever it is, and I'm trying to make a point to him...as far as sitting down and saying you know this your ABC's and you know, let's write on the...I don't do that. I don't have the patience for that. I...maybe it's because it's the way I learned things and the way that things stick with me the best is...when I learned how to frame houses, I was with an older partner and he was not in the best health in the world and, you know, we didn't go out there and just throw things up just to get em up and get gone. It was just me and him and, if we build a house that was 48 foot long, we had to build the long walls in fours sections so we could handle em. And he taught me how to...you know, things like that he'd explain. This is why we're doing this and whenever we'd get to another point he'd say why we done this back then because this works out now. When we're doing, whenever we're outside, if we're out in the shop working, I got a woodworking shop out there, I get out there and piddle around in it. If I'm doing something I try to explain to him why, you know, what I'm doing and why and you know, what the purpose behind it is. If we're out riding on tractor bushhog and I ask him something, you know, and...ask him to explain something...or explain something to him and then ask him...maybe we're out doing something else a couple days later and I ask him the same thing again if we drive by some particular or you know, whatever, and I ask him again what was that? You know I told you other day what it was,

you tell me. If he can remember and tell me what it was and what it's purpose was or, whatever. If it was a...or something like that, then I think that maybe I've gotten through to him. If not, you know, I explain it to him again. Try to explain it the same way I did the first time. It's life experiences, I guess, more...

Robert: How does it make you feel when you're doing things like that with your son?

Max: Well, usually a sense of pride that he does grasp things as quickly as he does. I've got a friend that's got a son that's 22 years old and he acts like he's about 10 years old. There's nothing wrong with him, he's not mentally retarded or anything like that. He just has never been taught any responsibility. His dad works in wood and stuff too like I do. As matter of fact he works at the fire department the same as I do. We got a lot of things in common and I see through him that, you know, he'll tell his boy to go over there and cut a board, cut a 2x4, or a 2x6 30 inches long. He bring back a 2x4 36 inches long.

Robert: Hmm.

Max: You know, rather than explain to him what he's done wrong or why he needed this particular something, he just, fine get out of my way, I'll go do it myself. Now his boy is 21, 22 year old and has a hard time holding a job and, or has had a hard time, he is holding one now. But it's something he's interested in. He's always been interested in heavy equipment. He got a job with a guy working with heavy equipment. I guess he's patient and he's teaching this is why you, you know this is how you push grade or whatever he's doing. And he stayed with him a for a good while and he enjoys his job and this guy is teaching quite a bit of things. But I seen...it's easy just to say, you know, we'll learn do something...over there and shovel that pile of sand or something just to get

out of my way. Let me do…he aint learning anything by shoveling that pile of sand. Other than he don't like to shovel a pile of sand. He's not learning the importance of…if you tell him to go pick up a particular board and cut it a particular length, you know, he don't understand the importance of that…and if you don't do it right the first time, you don't have much…time is wasted. I hope that the things that I'm teaching Eric, you know, will prepare him for that.

Robert: For that? What is 'that'?

Max: Well, for, to be able to hold a job and be responsible and do the…We'll be on the house or whatever and I'm on top of the roof or something and I need him to cut something and he's down on the ground, you know, I don't need to climb down and, you know…I don't want to get to the point that…you know, I'd just as soon he stay at the house and stay out of my way as to….

Robert: M-hmm…

Max: …you know…and I feel like my responsibility is to teach him not necessarily his book education. That's why I send him to school why these teachers spend so much time in college is to learn to be professional in their…I'm not really…I done my schoolwork to get through school, graduate, get done, get over with. The only thing I really picked up on was math and for some reason, I don't do math the way most people do. When I was in math class, I figured instead of learning how to do the stuff, you know, it didn't take me just a minute to pick up on how to do a particular problem, I learned shortcuts. I taught myself shortcuts how to do…

Robert: That's great.

Max: ...multiplication. You know, I don't do multiplication like most people do. I've got a...addition, adding like 38 and...I don't add it like most people do. I've got a shortcut that I worked on. And on simple stuff like that, I can spit you an answer out easily faster than you can punch it in on a calculator. But....you know, I tried to teach my brother, he helps me sometimes build houses and stuff. And, like fractions and stuff, I add fractions...it's 24 and ¼ inches over to this particular...over to this particular place and we need to add 24 and 5/16 to it. Well, 5/16 is a 16th over a ¼ , a ¼ and a ¼ is a ½ and another 16th is 9/16. That's the way I do them. I tried to teach him that way and it confused...

Robert: It confused me!

Max: That's where, you know, I guess that's one reason I don't want to teach him a lot of things like that because the way I do things is not the way that he'll learn how to do em in school and it'll be confusing for him. But if I can teach him the importance of why it needs to be that particular length rather than how to get to that particular length, you know, that's...You know, whatever it is. If I...whenever we were fixing the...we were getting ready to work on the yard one day...

Robert: You and Eric?

Max: Yeah. We got out there and with the tractor and the little wagon and picked up rocks. And, you know, he 'Well, Dad, why are we picking up rocks?' 'Well, we don't want em in the yard cause they mess up the lawnmower.' Well, that was good enough for him. He was...just...You know, a lot of times he just needs a reason, you know. But...

Robert: As a father, this is kind of a wrap-up thing, what do you feel like is your...you've told me a lot of this already, I just want you to summarize. What do you think is your role, your part, in general, for Eric's, your young children's education? What do you think the dad...what is the dad's role?

Max: Well, I feel that my role is to...teach em responsibility, teach em to be dependable, and try to be a responsible, honest, dependable adult. Because I've seen different situations where...I know another little fellow that's...his daddy's drove a truck all his life and his daddy...he's a real intelligent boy. He got out of school when he was, just turned 17, graduated high school. He's having trouble getting a job, didn't really want to work at the Wal-mart or nothing like that or McDonald's. And his daddy said well, he's my responsibility till he's 18 I told him he's got to get him a job when he turns 18 and starts supporting himself. And I thought, if you would have taught him all through his life that he needs to be responsible and stuff, he'd done have him a job even if was working at McDonald's or something that's all he could get till he turned 18 and maybe when he turned 18, get a better job. A lot of...get better jobs and stuff and more...I don't really want to say respectable jobs because, if you're working you're respectable, but, you know, your...more desirable jobs, I guess, is a better way to put it...

Robert: M-hmmm.

Max: ...you know, they want you to be 18, you know...

Robert: Legal thing.

Max: Legal thing. You know, when you wait till 18 to try to teach em that they need to be responsible and take...you know, on their own two fee and doing their own thing.

They don't have to be away from home to do that. But, you know, when you wait till they're 18 to try to start teaching em...they don't seem to turn out to be very responsible people. And I've noticed that through hiring, I've hired 18, 19 year old kids that never had to do nothing in their lives never even mowed the lawn. And then all of a sudden, you know, well, daddy says if I want to buy me a car, I've got to get out here and work for it, you know, he aint gonna give me a car. So I'm gonna go out here and get me a job and they think it's that simple. They don't realize that there's responsibility and stuff, they only want to work 2 days a week and leave the employer high and dry the other 3 days of the week. I'm hoping that what I teach em and I'm hoping by starting now that they will learn that this is an ongoing thing and the importance of it. That they'll be responsible. That's my goal. What I feel my role is in teaching. Not necessarily to give em their book education, but give em their life education as you put it a while ago.

Robert: As an interviewer, it's impossible for me to ask all the right questions and...so is there anything that I didn't ask you about or anything about your involvement with Eric's education that you'd like to add before we end? Anything that maybe we didn't touch on about your participation in their early childhood education?

Max: The only thing that I wish is that I had more time to spend with em. And that I had more patience...of course now my patience is...my patience is, I guess, or lack of patience is more not because of them particularly, my patience will be tried during the day and, you know, a lot of times it carries over into them. That's one of the reasons I don't try to teach Eric his letters or his numbers or, you know, as far as just sitting down and writing them with him, because I have a problem with, well, that's so simple, why

can't they pick that up. I've been doing it for 25 years, it's simple for me. I have a problem realizing that...I don't have the patience and the understanding that they don't, that they don't know what they're doing and that they...but if I can...like I said earlier, I pick things up easier if I actually do em and somebody explains to me why I need, you know, the purpose behind the positive pressure ventilation fan in the...Why do they put in the house? Well, you know, that's pretty obvious. And if you, you know, if I sit down in a class and somebody says, you know, this is what you need to start doing there, and don't...because we said so. Well, I don't the right technique or whatever, you know. But if I can show em why we're doing something, the right technique for doing this or why they need to do it this way or which step comes first in a particular process and how it...It seems to stick better and, you know, to me, to me personally it sticks in my mind better and I think it sticks in Eric's and Samantha's mind better because they've proven that to me when we go back to do something. If we're driving down the road and they say that's so and so's thing, we hauled a load of gravel up there one time. You know, stuff like that they remember that seems to stick in their mind better.

Robert: Yeah.

Max: That's what I think, that's what I feel my role is in their education...is more in their life education and not their book education.

Robert: Well, this was a terrific interview.

VITA

Robert M. Denn, Sr. has been married for almost 7 years and is the proud father of three children. His wife, Ronda, is a wonderfully inspired and very popular 2nd grade teacher at a small, rural elementary school. His son, Michael, 6, started kindergarten this year. He is an intelligent, kind, and sensitive boy, and loves playing baseball. Lauren, an inquisitive and curious little girl, is 4 years old and has the most wonderful independent and creative spirit. Sean, 1, is a little teddy bear and laughs and plays with the energy of a...well, a one-year old. He also eats more than the other two put together.

Before starting the Ph.D. program in education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Robert earned a B.A. in Education from Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond and an M.A. in Education from the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. During part of his doctoral work, Robert was a stay-at-home dad—a job which he truly loves. He has developed and conducted workshops for parents, has taught in grades K-12, and currently works for the Tennessee Department of Children's Services.