

Leveraging Parents as Academic Capital in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract:

The “helicopter parent” has captured popular and academic attention, and, indeed, toxic parenting can undermine student autonomy and weaken university efficacy. A growing body of research, however, parental involvement positively correlates with university acceptance, student life satisfaction, emotional stability, and graduation rates. Most universities, in turn, have developed parental engagement programs to take advantage of the economic and social capital that parents represent. Within the university classroom, however, parental engagement is virtually nonexistent. This exploratory study was conducted at two private universities in Japan to explore how parents could be leveraged as academic capital. The participants comprised third-year English majors ($N = 26$) and their parents ($N = 26$). The students and parents collaborated in a WebQuest project designed to help students investigate issues they may confront as working professionals via interview, literature review, and group discussion. The students cooperatively produced a database of interview questions for their parents regarding topics, such as stress, salaries, and work-life balance. After interviewing their parents, students read further research studies to analyze their parents’ responses. Students then delivered in-class presentations and participated in group discussions about their findings. Following the project, the students and parents were asked to share their opinions of university engagement and the project via anonymous 5-point Likert surveys. Parents reported mixed levels of satisfaction with the university’s parent outreach efforts ($\bar{x} = 3.15$) and similarly mixed levels of communication with their children about their studies prior to the project ($\bar{x} = 3.00$). Results and comments about the project indicate that both parents and students were highly satisfied for its unique parental engagement and academic merit. Discussion of further research avenues for educational practitioners and university policy makers will follow.

Keywords:

Parent engagement, higher education, WebQuest.