

Teaching and Research Proposal Project

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FOCUS AND RATIONALE FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH PROPOSAL PROJECT

At the school in which I teach, Grand Rapids Central High School, parental involvement is very low. As evidence of this, I give an example of parent responses following a distribution of failure notices. In March, 2010, notices were mailed to the parents of 62 of the 98 students taking Chemistry. The reports not only documented the failing grades of those students at that time, but also requested a parent reply by phone or email as to how we could better cooperate to improve student success. In the following days, only three parents responded to the request. Further evidence of low parental involvement can be found in the attendance rates at parent-teacher conferences. A majority of teachers in the school had attendance rates below 15%. The assumption can be made that these examples show that the parents of students at Grand Rapids Central High School place a low value on education.

I am interested in discovering if the value placed on education by parents affects student performance in school. In other words, the issue I plan to investigate is, "Do parents who place high value on education cause their children to perform better in school than children whose parents place a low value on education?" Since the importance someone places on education is conceptual and difficult to articulate, that value will be measured by multiple variables. To get a clear picture of parental values, I will measure the level of education a parent views as necessary to be successful in life, the grade point average a parent expects his or her child to maintain, the amount of time a parent spends with his or her child assisting with or discussing schoolwork, and the level of a parent's involvement in school activities. Student performance, which also has many facets, will be measured by grade point average as well as student motivation to succeed. Examining multiple variables within each context will allow me to explore the multiple patterns and relationships that may account for a child's success, or lack thereof, in school.

My own experiences from employment in another school, as well as discussions with colleagues, suggest that Grand Rapids Central is not the only school where parental involvement is low. Further proof lies in Detroit, MI, where frustration over the lack of parental involvement is so high that laws are being proposed to prosecute parents who do not attend conferences. It is likely that other urban schools, like those in Flint, Lansing, Battle Creek, and beyond the state of Michigan, face similar problems of low parental involvement and valuation of education. All of these schools, including my own, should find practicality in this study as it may help to one day shape programs designed to improve and increase parental involvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The topic of my research is the value placed on education by parents. In my experience as a teacher, I have seen numerous examples of unsuccessful students with seemingly uncaring parents. I have also witnessed how the involvement and interactions of very engaged parents are reflected in the success of some students. As a result of my observations, it is my belief that many of the low-achieving students have parents who do not value education, and therefore do not set high expectations for their children. I predict that these parents are also less likely to show involvement in their children's education. The

reciprocal belief is that parents of successful students understand the significance of education, and therefore place a high emphasis on expectations and goals. These beliefs will also manifest themselves as high levels of involvement in educationally related activities by the parents. To better understand the influence of parents on student success, I will conduct a study that examines the aforementioned question: Do parents who place a high value on education have children who perform better in school?

Perspectives

A vast amount of information exists on the topics of parental involvement and student outcomes, although none of the literature examines the relationship in quite the way that I intend to. The usefulness of this literature is in gaining perspective on the issue from the views of others, and synthesizing the knowledge necessary to explain the outcomes of my research. As stated above, I believe there is a link between the value parents place on education and the expectations they hold for their children. This belief is validated by the work of the Harvard Family Research Project. Their research summary indicates that the higher the level of education parents desire for their children, the clearer and more demanding their performance expectations become (Patrikakou, n.d.). Other research indicates a link between parental expectations and student performance. Separate studies showed that African American boys perform worse in school than girls, and that Mexican immigrants have lesser achievements than other immigrant groups. Both of the underperforming groups had lower expectations from their parents than the higher performers (Wood, Kurtz-Cortes, Rowley & Okeke-Adeyanju, 2010; Hao & Bonstead-Burns, 1998). It was also proven, in a study by Wood, Kaplan and McLoyd (2007), that even if students hold low expectations for themselves because of gender or other factors, those low expectations can be fully mediated by the high expectations of parents.

From this research, the question of why do high expectations cause achievement, can be raised. This question is answered in multiple studies. One possibility is that parents express their expectations through certain behaviors. Davis-Kean (2005) points to positive behaviors like reading in the home, constructive play activities, and parental warmth that lead to achievement in school. Other beneficial actions, such as verbal interactions and increased involvement in a child's education will also increase achievement (Paulson, 1994). A final explanation is that parents with high expectations set certain academic goals for their children that lead to achievement (Wentzel, 1998). At the opposite end of the spectrum, it is reported by Wood et al. (2007), that discouraging children from taking challenging course work and undermining their confidence are destructive behaviors that will have a negative impact on success.

One interesting point of view I discovered is the belief that high expectations could have a negative impact on student achievement. Kendrick (n.d.) states that unrealistic demands place pressure on children that cause them to stop trying. A similar argument comes from Sullivan (n.d.), in that pushing children too hard damages their emotional state, leading to low achievement. These baseless opinions have been disproven however, as noted by Pondiscio (2010). He cites research to prove that when it comes to high educational aspirations, there are no long term emotional costs to trying and failing.

Practices

After reviewing the research described above, it is clear that parents' value of education affects their expectations, and that high expectations lead to achievement. Aside from having high expectations for students, several other practices related to parental values can have an impact on student achievement. Tinajero (1991) highlights some crucial aspects of parental values that translate to academic success. She notes that when mothers raise their children's aspirations by developing academic skills, increasing channels of communication, setting goals, and planning careers, the children are more successful in school. Expanding on the notion of aspirations, the Pathways to College Network describes the importance of parents helping their children aspire to and prepare for college. This will allow parents to communicate the importance of education, and instill high expectations for hard work and achievement, making students more successful in school (Pathways to College Network, 2007).

An article published by Hao & Bonstead-Burns (1998) also points out how student success is influenced by parental practices related to their value of education. The authors argue that parents with strong values provide the necessary economic resources, serve as positive role-models, encourage specific and meaningful goals, and recognize and praise behaviors that lead to high achievement. By the parents providing opportunities, encouragement, and support for learning, children will exhibit constructive behaviors and will take a more active role in activities that lead to greater success in school. Hao & Bonstead-Burns also bring attention to the fact that parents with high values more closely monitor their children's progress. Closer, more coherent supervision of schoolwork at home leads to greater effort and better behavior at school. This, in turn, has a direct effect on student performance and outcomes.

Another important practice exhibited by parents who value education is involvement in their children's schooling. The Michigan Department of Education (2002) identifies specific behaviors related to involvement that have a positive impact on academic success. These practices include establishing a daily family routine, modeling the value of learning, self discipline and hard work, expressing high but realistic expectations for achievement, encouraging children's development and progress in school, and encouraging reading, writing and discussion among family members. The practices of giving encouragement for reading, as well as fostering communication between parents and children, are also supported by Jeynes (n.d.) as positive parental involvement behaviors. The Michigan Department of Education notes that numerous research studies show that when parents are involved, students have increased motivation and better self-esteem, as well as higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates.

Assessment

A great deal of the information linking parents to the educational outcomes of their children exists in the form of professional research. By examining these studies, not only can they be seen as sources for a great deal of relevant knowledge, but also as models for data collection. I investigated several studies to identify the methods they used to collect data, their samples, and the variables they used. One trend I observed was the use of pre-existing surveys for data collection. In their study on the achievement gaps between different ethnic groups, Hao & Bronsted-Burns (1998) utilized data collected from a single survey. Within data provided by National Educational Longitudinal Study, they selected four immigrant and three native groups to use as their sample. For variables, they chose three indicators of academic achievement, two variables for expectations, and five variables for family characteristics. Using these

variables, the authors were able to construct and analyze a number of relationships and patterns. Like Hao & Bronsted-Burns, Davis-Kean (2005) used pre-existing data in her study of the link between parents' education and children's performance in school. One difference, however, is that she collected data from two different surveys. Similar to the previous study, she chose a diverse sample and multiple variables to develop several relationships.

Another method of data collection involves the use of previously completed surveys, but takes an additional measure. In a longitudinal study to determine the relationship between parents' self-feelings and students' educational attainment, Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan (2001) used data from research done by the Houston Independent School District as a starting point. Two decades later, they conducted home interviews to collect further data. The sample they selected was based on the criteria of having age-eligible children, and once again, multiple variables, such as perceived parental expectations, negative self-feelings, and parental educational attainment, were examined. This method of data collection was also observed by Wood et al. (2010) in the research mentioned above.

The final method of data collection observed was employed by Wentzel (1998). In studying the causes of parents' attainment goals for their children, she collected original data in the form a questionnaire sent home with schoolchildren to their parents. Her sample was a group of 363 students broken down by ethnicity. Some ethnic groups were excluded from the study because of low numbers in the population. Wentzel set the following variables for her research: aspirations for educational attainment, expectations for children's academic performance, theories of intelligence, parent efficacy, achievement values, and social address variables. As with the other studies examined, Wentzel established many relationships with the data she collected. The method of data collection used in this study seems the most practical for my own research.

Conclusion

In the initial planning stages of my research, I intended to collect data from only two assessment items. After studying the work of others, I saw that the original focus of my research was too simple and shallow. Although it may have answered one important question, it would not have illuminated the complexity of the answer. I learned that multiple variables allow for the construction of numerous relationships in the data. Therefore, the two variables I initially chose, parent values and student performance, were not sufficient for my study. My original intent was to collect data on one variable for parental values. I now plan to expand the number to four: belief in the level of education necessary to be successful in life, expectations for children's academic performance, level of parental involvement, and educationally related behaviors exhibited in the home. For student performance, I will collect data from two variables: GPA and motivation to perform well in school.

By adding variables, I will be able to answer more than just my original research question. While reviewing the literature cited in this paper, several related questions, that I will now be able to address, came to mind. These are: Do parent values have an impact on motivation to succeed? Do high parental values translate into high expectations? What behaviors do parents with high values exhibit in the home? And finally, what role does parental involvement play in the relationship between parental

values and student achievement? By virtue of making it possible to target and improve specific beliefs and behaviors, answering these questions will make this research more valuable to me and anyone else attempting to enhance parental involvement.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Question

As previously stated, the question my research seeks to address is “Do parents who place a high value on education have children who perform better in school. My alternative hypothesis for this correlational study is that the two variables, parents’ value of education and children’s performance, will exhibit a positive relationship.

Procedures

From reviewing literature on the subject, I learned that there are many variables that are related to or fall under the classification of parental values. Likewise, student performance can be measured in more than one way. In order to truly understand the nature of the relationship between variables, I must collect data that reflects this diversity. As a plan for collecting this data, I have created an online survey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5SQMC2W>) that I will send in an email to parents or guardians who have children attending the school at which I teach. This school, located in Grand Rapids, MI, is an urban public high school consisting of grades nine through twelve. The enrollment of the school for the upcoming school year is expected to be between 500 and 600 students. I plan to utilize contact information that the school collects at the beginning of each school year by sending the survey to all parents who disclose an email address. I elected to send the survey to all eligible parents, rather than a percentage of them, in an effort to reduce possible errors resulting from a sample size that is too small.

Just as Wentzel (1998) did, I will instruct only one parent from each household to complete the survey. Also adapted from Wentzel’s (1998) study, will be an instruction for parents with more than one child attending the school to complete the survey with reference to their oldest child. The rationale for this decision is that the older child will have had more time to experience, and therefore be influenced by, his or her parent’s values.

Assessment

As I learned from my literature review, both parental values and student performance are complex entities, and can be characterized in many ways. The survey I will email to parents is an attempt to gain a detailed view of the intricate relationship between these variables. I will ask four questions related to parental values of education and two related to student performance. The first question will be, “What level of education do you believe is necessary to be successful in life?” Answer choices will include, “Elementary, secondary, associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and doctorate degree.” A scoring system, again partially adapted from Wentzel’s (1998) study, will convert these answers into quantitative data (1 point for elementary, on up to 6 points for doctorate degree). The second question for the survey will be, “What grade point average do you expect your child to maintain?” The parents will answer with either “0 to 0.99, 1 to 1.99, 2 to 2.99, 3 to 3.99, or 4.0.” Next, to assess the extent to

which parents exhibit educationally related behaviors at home, I will ask them, “How often in one week do you discuss or help your child with schoolwork?” Answer choices will range from never to more than five times, with each being assigned a numerical value. The last question related to parental values will be, “How often in one month do you communicate with your child’s teachers or participate in a school related activity?” The intent of this question is to evaluate levels of parental involvement. Answer choices will range from never to more than 8 times, and like the previous questions, will be assigned a numerical score.

As for the questions relating to student performance, I will ask two questions. The first will look directly at achievement and ask, “What is your child’s cumulative grade point average, as listed on his or her last report card?” The second question will address motivation because not all students who want to succeed actually do. I will ask parents to, “Rate your child’s academic motivation.” The answer choices for this question will include: “My child seldom strives to achieve even the minimum requirements in school. My child attempts to reach the minimum requirements in school, but does not go beyond that. My child occasionally attempts to exceed the minimum requirement in school. My child routinely attempts to exceed the minimum requirements in school and occasionally strives for perfection. My child routinely strives for perfection in school.” Once again, these answers will be assigned a numerical score.

Of the four questions related to parental values, three will produce qualitative data that will be converted, by way of the numerical scoring system, to quantitative data. The same is true for one of the two student performance questions. The purpose of these conversions is so that correlational analysis, through the use of a correlation matrix, can be conducted. By applying knowledge gained from my literature review, the correlatioal matrix can then be analyzed to produce causal relationships.

Design Rationale

Simpler studies could be done to determine the relationship between parental values and educational performance. For instance a two question survey asking parents to rate how much they value education and to report their children’s grade point average could be used. From this survey, however, the depth of interaction of these variables could not be examined. My study uses a number of variables, and multiple levels within those variables, so that I can assess a host of patterns within the data. Likewise, a purely qualitative study might be better at articulating what parental value means, but would be unable to quantify the link between values and performance. Because my research will translate qualitative values into quantitative data, I will be able to establish and analyze the relationship between the variables. The method I have described for studying this relationship is perfectly suited to allow me to predict not only if parental values toward education lead to achievement, but how.

APPENDIX: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Davis-Kean, P. (2005). The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child Achievement: The Indirect Role of Parental Expectations and the Home Environment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, Vol 19(2), Jun 2005, 294-304. doi: [10.1037/0893-3200.19.2.294](https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.19.2.294)

This study examines the link between parents' education and children's performance in school. It is argued that parents who achieve higher levels of education will have children who perform better in school than children of parents with less education. Achievement beliefs held by more educated parents, as well as the types of educational behaviors they practice at home are the reasons for this trend. The research found that even though the process by which parents' education links to children's performance may differ between racial groups, the relationship still exists.

Hao, L., & Bonstead-Bruns, M. (1998). Parent-child differences in educational expectations and the academic achievement of immigrant and native students. *Sociology of Education*, 71(3), 175-198. Retrieved July 27, 2010, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/267>

This article points out the achievement gaps between different groups of immigrant and native students. It argues that, in general, high parental expectations cause high achievement, but for some immigrant groups this does not hold true. One reason that some immigrant groups, namely immigrant Mexicans, lag in achievement is because parental expectations and student expectations are not in harmony. Two main factors cause this disagreement. The first is a lack of parental support, while the second is a lack of ethnic solidarity.

Jeynes, W. (n.d.). Parental involvement and student achievement: A Meta-Analysis. *Harvard Family Research Project*. Retrieved July 28, 2010, from <http://hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/parental-involvement-and-student-achievement-a-meta-analysis>

This article summarizes a meta-analysis done to determine the overall effects of parental involvement on student achievement. The aim of the original research was to understand which specific practices have the greatest effect on academic success. The first finding is that, in general, students do better in school when their parents are more involved. Second, it was discovered that time intensive practices and more subtle aspects of involvement, such as parenting style, had a greater impact on achievement than things like household rules and attendance at school functions. Next, it emerged that parental expectations have an effect greater than any other factor related to student performance. The fourth finding is that the results for the general population hold true for minority groups as well. Lastly, the results indicate that parental involvement programs are effective at increasing involvement and participation. The article is concluded with recommendations for teachers and schools to increase parental involvement.

Kaplan, D. S., Liu, X., & Kaplan, H. B. (2001). Influence of parents' self-feelings and expectations on children's academic performance. *Journal of Educational Research*. 94(6), 360-70.

This study examines the link between parents' educational attainment and the educational expectations they have for their children, and how it is affected by parents' own self-feelings. Confirmed by this research is the previously established positive relationship between parents' level of education and the academic expectations they have for their children. A negative relationship is discovered between parents' negative self-feelings and children's academic success, even when expectations are high. Discussed is how motivation and lack of appropriate resources lead to this relationship.

Kendrick, C. (n.d.). Parents have unrealistic academic expectations. *Family Education*. Retrieved July 24, 2010, from life.familyeducation.com/gifted-education/stress/41434.html

This website discusses the relationship between high expectations and emotional health. A question is posed about the effect on a child of a parent who expects too much academically. The question is answered by a licensed clinical social worker. He states that unrealistic expectations may harm children's mental, emotional, and physical well being. He also argues that unrealistically high expectations may have adverse effects on children's academics by causing them to stop trying in school.

Michigan Department of Education. (2002, March 27). *What research says about parental involvement in children's education*. Retrieved July 25, 2010, from www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_Parent_Involvement_Fact_Sheet_14732_7.pdf.

This document from the Michigan Department of Education summarizes research on parental involvement in education. It addresses factors like the impact of parental involvement, the relationship between parent expectations and student achievement, and different types of parental involvement. Specific examples of beneficial parental involvement behaviors are also given. From the research it is clear that there are multiple ways for parents to be involved in their children's education, and that increased involvement leads to increased academic achievement. Finally, recommendations are made for how schools can increase specific types of parental involvement.

Pathways to College Network (n.d.). *Social support: An essential ingredient to success*. Retrieved July 27, 2010, from www.pathwaystocollege.net/pdf/support.pdf

This document discusses the problem of low participation rates in post secondary education of low-income, underserved students. Statistics show that twenty percent of qualified students from low income households do not attend college. Several methods are described to address the problem, such as peer support, mentoring, parental involvement, and effective preparation. Finally, recommendations to help reverse the trend are given for policymakers, principals, and teachers.

Patrikakou, E. (n.d.). Adolescence: are parents relevant to students' high school achievement and post-secondary attainment?. *Harvard Family Research Project*. Retrieved July 29, 2010, from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/adolescence-are-parents-relevant-to-students-high-school-achievement-and-post-secondary-attainment>

This website summarizes research done by the authors of a study examining the cause of high achievement as related to high parental expectations. The research proves that parent expectations lead to student expectations, which lead to achievement. It also establishes that parent expectations that are properly perceived by students cause students to spend more time on schoolwork, which leads to achievement. The authors of the study use this evidence to make the case for teachers advocating greater parental involvement. Finally, it is argued that school wide programs for increasing parental involvement should be implemented.

Paulson, S. E. (1994). Relations of parenting style and parental involvement with ninth-grade students' achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence*. 14(2), 250-67.

In this study, parenting style was examined for its relationship with children's performance in school. Parenting style was shown to have a positive influence on performance if parents were both demanding of and responsive to their children. The ways children perceived their parents' demandingness and responsiveness were also examined. It was discovered that children's achievement was closely related to their perception of the parenting they received. Also documented in the study was the observation that parental involvement would predict achievement above and beyond parenting style alone.

Pondiscio, R. (2010, March 29). High expectations. *The Core Knowledge Blog*. Retrieved July 27, 2010, from <http://blog.coreknowledge.org/tag/high-expectations/>

This blog entry discusses possible problems associated with parents setting expectations too high for their children. While it has been theorized that unmet goals would lead to frustration and anxiety, the author describes a study done by Sociology Professor John R. Reynolds of Florida State University that proves otherwise. Reynolds' study demonstrates that there are no mental health concerns resulting from over-ambition. In a discussion of his study, Reynolds argues that low expectations will have more of a negative impact on children than expectations that are set too high.

Sullivan, P. (n.d.). *Helping Children Be Their Best*. National PTA. Retrieved July 26, 2010, from <http://www.pta.org/2530.htm>

This article focuses the link between parent expectations and children's psychological well being. The author states that expectations must be realistic and reasonable in order to cultivate a child's mental health. She also argues that high expectations can have a negative impact on children if they are not taught to persevere when difficulties arise. Expectations are broken down into two categories: behaviors and accomplishments. These two types of expectations are dependant on each other in the way they relate to a child's success in life.

Tinajero, J. V. (1991). Raising career aspirations of Hispanic girls. *Fastback 320*. New York: Phi Beta Kappa Educational Foundation.

This article brings attention to the problem of female Hispanic Americans being the most at risk of any subgroup for dropping out of school. Several reasons are given for the high drop-out rates, including disciplinary problems, disproportionate numbers in special education classes, inadequate counseling, and low expectations by parents. The authors then describe the Mother-Daughter Program developed by the University of Texas, the YWCA, and three Texas school districts that seeks to improve the mother-daughter relationships of these girls. The successes of the program in terms of career awareness, self-confidence, educational aspirations and improved grades are documented in the article.

Wentzel, K. R. (1998). Parents' aspirations for children's educational attainments: relations to parental beliefs and social address variables. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*. 44(1), 20-37.

This article explores the underlying causes of parent's educational attainment goals for their children. The research found several factors that affected parents' aspirations for their children, such as confidence in their children's academic abilities, confidence in their ability to teach their children, the nature of the children's intelligence, and achievement-related values. The study also examined the effect of social address variables, such as race and gender on parents' aspirations for their children. It was discovered that these variables were related to parents' goals indirectly through relations to parental beliefs.

Wood, D., Kaplan, R., & McLoyd, V. C. (2007). Gender differences in the educational expectations of urban, low-income African American youth: the role of parents and the school. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 36(4), 417-427.

This study examines the relationship between gender and expectations for future educational attainment of African American students. The study hypothesizes and proves that African American boys have lower expectations than girls. The basis of the lowered expectations is the fact that African American boys have internalized societal stereotypes, such as laziness and low valuation of academic accomplishments, about African American men. The research done in this study proves two relevant things. The first is that low personal expectations lead to low academic achievement. The second is that the effect of gender on expectations is fully mediated by parents' expectations for their children.

Wood, D., Kurtz-Costes, B., Rowley, S. J., & Okeke-Adeyanju, N. (2010). Mothers' academic gender stereotypes and education-related beliefs about sons and daughters in African American families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 102(2), 521-530.

This article highlights the achievement gap between African American boys and girls. The research performed by the authors suggests that parental academic expectations for their children are related to achievement, and that the gap in achievement is a result of African American parents having lower expectations for boys than for girls. At the root of these lower expectations are societal stereotypes that perceive boys as less competent than girls. The authors argue that these stereotypes lead to beliefs held by African-American parents that are conveyed to their children through implicit and explicit behaviors.