

Serial number 0173

Title Parents as Stakeholders - Do they matter?

Submitter Ms. Catherine Foster, Dr. Ann Davis, Prof. Helen Higson

Theme: Student experiences (SE)

Title: Parents as Stakeholders - Do they matter?

Background

From their child's first year in compulsory education, through to the decision making process around entry to HE, parents are acknowledged to be a key factor in the child's success (Desforges, Abouchaar and Britain, 2003; Payne, 2003). This research aimed to examine the extent to which this role continues once the young person has begun their University career and asked the following research question:

In what way, and to what extent, does the role and influence of parents continue once a student has begun their undergraduate degree programme?

Two measures of parental influence were operationalised in this study. The first was whether the parents themselves have experience of HE or not and therefore are in possession of Cultural Capital, (Bourdieu (1986)) and the second examined the term time accommodation of the student. The dependent variables were student adjustment and student academic achievement.

Parental experience of HE (a measure of family Capital) was chosen as the literature (Bourdieu, 1986; Vryonides, 2007; Desforges et al., 2003) suggests that the impact of Capital can be seen throughout the education cycle, where those families in possession of Capital are afforded advantages over others, including the ability to navigate successfully through the education system and understand how to support and encourage their children.

The second variable, where a student lives during their studies, also impacts on the transition to university, with students who live off campus being less able to engage in the social, extra-curricular, aspect of university life than those who live on campus (Holdsworth, 2006). For those students living within the family home, it was suggested that their parents will continue to have more influence on the student experience.

Methodology

The research was conducted over two academic years to capture different cohorts, and targeted first year undergraduate UK students at a number of universities. The Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ, Baker and Siryk, 1984) was used. This questionnaire measures both overall student adjustment and also the four sub-scales of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment (to the institution). Additional questions identified respondents' parents' experience of HE and whether the respondent was living in the family home or in university accommodation. In total 750 unique responses were obtained.

Findings

The results indicated a significant relationship ($p < 0.001$) between parental experience of HE and term time accommodation. With students whose parents had experience of HE being more likely to be living in Halls, whereas those students whose parents did not have experience of HE being more likely to live at home.

It was anticipated (Bourdieu, 1986; Braxton et al., 2004; Lowe and Cook, 2003; Tinto, 1975) that students who had parents with experience of HE (PEHE) would report a higher level of adjustment. The only significant relationship identified between PEHE and adjustment however was for the sub-scale of social adjustment, whereby students whose parents had been to university were more socially adjusted than those whose parents had not. The influence of term time accommodation however was much more pervasive. It was significantly associated with social adjustment, attachment (to the institution) and with overall student adjustment. Students living on campus reported significantly higher levels of all three aspects ($p < 0.05$).

Moving to the relationship between adjustment and achievement, the data suggested a direct relationship between overall adjustment and the four subscales of adjustment and achievement. This clearly indicates that students who are better adjusted to university perform better than those who are not.

When the direct relationship between parental experience, or term time accommodation, and student academic achievement is analysed, surprisingly, the results indicated no significant relationships. Including either parental experience of HE, or term time accommodation, as a moderator in the relationship between adjustment and achievement the data suggested that while PEHE does not moderate the relationship, term time accommodation is a significant moderator. These results suggest that it is not parents themselves that have the direct influence on the student experience but that term time accommodation may not be measuring parental influence.

Conclusion

In conclusion for this study, this research suggests that PEHE influences your choice of where you live during term time, but has limited influence on student adjustment after that choice is made, with the exception of social adjustment. In contrast, where the student lives during term time has a significant relationship with three of the four subscales of adjustment plus the overall total adjustment measure.

It is not surprising that students who live on campus are more socially adjusted as they can take part in activities with greater ease than those who have to travel to return home, or who need to fit in with 'house-rules'. The same reasoning could be applied to the relationship with attachment; that students who are on campus feel more attached to the university than those living at home. Given the attachment subscale measures the quality of the relationship with the institution, students who are living on campus are more intensely and extensively immersed in the life of the university compared to those living at home. Finally, and because of the above, students who live on campus report higher levels of total adjustment than those living at home. The results indicate a pathway through the variables. PEHE is significantly related to term time accommodation, in that students whose parents have been to university are more likely to live on campus. Term time accommodation is related to adjustment and adjustment is significantly correlated to achievement.

There are clear implications from this research. Not least the importance of understanding the nature of the student experience for those living at home and recognising the importance of the role of the university in their experience. Once the student has enrolled on their degree course, it is essential that the institution provide opportunities for students not living in Halls to become part of the community if student achievement, and potentially student retention, is to be improved.

References

- Baker, R. W., & Siryk, B. (1986). *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)*. Los Angeles, CA: Western Psychological Services.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The Forms of Capital* (R. Nice, Trans.). In J. E. e. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258).
- Braxton, J. M., Hirschy, A. S., Yorke, M., & Longden, B. (2004). Reconceptualizing antecedents of social integration in student departure. In M. Yorke & B. Longden (Eds.), *Retention and Student Success in Higher Education* (pp. 89-102): Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Desforges, C., Abouchaar, A., & Britain, G. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review*: DfES Publications Nottingham,, UK.
- Holdsworth, C. (2006). 'Don't you think you're missing out, living at home?' Student experiences and residential transitions. *The Sociological Review*, 54(3), 495-519.
- Lowe, H., & Cook, A. (2003). *Mind the Gap: are students prepared for higher education?* *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 27(1), 53-76.
- Payne, J. (2003). *Choice at the end of compulsory schooling: a research review*. Research Report RR414. Department for Education & Skills.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.
- Vryonides, M. (2007). Social and Cultural Capital In Educational Research: Issues of Operationalisation and Measurement. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 867-885.