

Abstract:

Lessons from families with children succeeding against the odds of social disadvantage

Prof. Dr. Aziza Y. Mayo
University of Applied Sciences Leiden

When children start school they bring with them a personalized set of beliefs, values, attitudes and practices that they have developed and continue to develop over the course of their experiences within and through their families. While early learning experiences of children from middle-class families typically result in these children starting school well prepared for learning in the classroom, this is less so for many children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families. Given the disadvantaged position of many of these children in the educational system, it is important to understand how parents and families might support these children to do well in school.

The paper reports on 20 case studies that were conducted as part of the Effective Provision of Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 3-16) research project in England. Using in-depth interviews with adolescents and parents this study investigates socialization practices of parental involvement with school and learning during primary school years in working-class families with children who have academically succeeded against the odds of disadvantage. By the end of primary school these children not only performed significantly better academically than peers from similar backgrounds, but also were more often attributed child-characteristics that are typically associated with better school achievement, such as self-regulation abilities, positive attitudes towards homework, positive perceptions of personal competencies and internal locus of control.

The study focuses on practices of emotional, practical and actual support that parents offered their children with regard to school and learning. It identifies a socialization practice termed 'active cultivation' (Siraj & Mayo, 2014) that differs from the practice of 'accomplishment of natural growth' typically found in working-class families (Lareau, 2003). By providing support these parents communicated to the child that they not only valued education but the child itself and that they were willing and able to help the child to become an active agent of their future. For these working-class parents these parenting practices were not obvious. Their personal experiences as children with parenting and education had rarely been aimed at installing such a sense of self-direction. Nonetheless they had taken their experiences, good and bad, and had developed a strong sense of agency, both towards their personal lives and towards their roles as parents.

The paper discusses implications of this research for the way teachers and schools may collaborate with parents from socioeconomically disadvantaged families to create a strong support system for children's experiences with education.

References

Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods. Class, Race, and family life*. London: University of California Press.

Siraj, I. & Mayo, A. (2014). *Social class and educational inequality. The impact of parents and schools*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.