Beyond Parental Educational Attainment: How Parents’ High School Experiences are Associated with Young Children’s Test Performance

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Abstract

Most researchers agree that there is a stable correlation between parents’ educational attainment and their children’s educational outcomes. Parent’ educational experiences are more complete than the number of years of schooling attained, yet little research examines how these experiences may influence the scholastic performance of their children. Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), we explore how parents’ high school experiences are related to academic readiness, reading and math test scores and general knowledge test scores among children in the first grade. We find that parents’ high school experiences are related to academic readiness, reading and math test scores and general knowledge test scores, even when controlling for demographic and other socioeconomic differences.

Background

• Parents’ educational attainment is associated with both higher educational expectations for their children and higher educational achievement of the children. High school type, the number of years of schooling attained, and other high school experiences, held constant.
• Cultural capital is another pathway through which parents’ socioeconomic status is related to child outcomes (Bourdieu 1977; Campbell 1983; Jencks, Crouse, and Mueser 1983).
• Family background, parental education, and Nykia Perez for assistance.
• We gratefully acknowledge support from The Russell Sage Foundation and the Spencer Foundation. We thank Frances Woo and Nykia Perez for assistance.

Data and Methods

• Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) nationally representative of kindergarten children. Parents’ educational expectations for their children are positively associated with academic readiness, but this does not attenuate the relationship between parents’ high school experiences and academic readiness.
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Key Variables

• Dependent variables: Children’s youth achievement, and general knowledge test scores.
• Key independent variables: Parents’ educational composition, parental educational expectations, and academic readiness.

Results

• Among parents who have less than a Bachelor’s Degree, high school grades are strongly predictive of math and reading test scores, and type of high school is strongly predictive of general knowledge test scores.
• Highest math scores taken in general are not predictive of children’s academic readiness at the beginning of kindergarten. But students whose parents did not take any math in high school were at a disadvantage.
• Parents’ educational expectations for their children are positively associated with academic readiness, but this does not attenuate the relationship between parents’ high school experiences and the academic readiness of their children.

Discussion

• High school experiences of parents delineate another route of intergenerational transfer of status and may help explain the disenfranchisement of minority youth beyond traditional measures of socioeconomic status.

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Conceptual Model

Parents’ educational attainment

Parents’ high school experiences

Educational expectations for children

Academic readiness

Research Questions

• What is the association between parents’ educational experiences in high school and their children’s academic readiness at the beginning of kindergarten?
• How do parents’ educational experiences for their children mediate the relationship between parents’ high school experiences and academic readiness?
• How does the relationship between parents’ high school experiences and academic readiness at the beginning of kindergarten vary by race?

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