REFEREED ARTICLE

Helicopter Parenting in High School

Tanya Polasek

Abstract

While parental involvement is often seen as a cornerstone in high school students' success, too much involvement can be problematic. Often teachers feel caught between supporting students' personal growth and parental expectations of students' academic achievement. Certain practices can be developed and implemented at a classroom and school level that can help parents and students. Developing student skills in areas of personal autonomy and self-control is helpful. Creating parent-teacher and student-teacher partnerships can support student growth and may mitigate the negative effects of helicopter parenting.

Parental involvement is generally believed to be beneficial for aiding schools in meeting the goals of education (Robinson & Harris, 2014). While parents' involvement helps children to develop relationships with educators and peers (Cheung, 2019), and encourages development by explaining expectations and offering strategies for academic success (George Mwangi et al., 2019), there are questions about how much involvement is too much. As a high school teacher, I understand the benefits of parental involvement in the lives of students. Teachers can establish certain practices at a school level and at a classroom level that can support the parent in adopting a positive level of involvement and the student in mitigating the effects of helicopter parenting.

The Threat to Well-being, Skill Development, and Academics

There is a difference between beneficial parental involvement and parental over-involvement, which has a negative effect on student well-being and academic outcomes (Darlow et al., 2017). Over-involved and controlling parents – helicopter parents – risk creating an unhealthy environment for their children's academic growth and compromising their children's well-being. These children also lack the skills needed for autonomy. Educators often contribute to the effects of helicopter parenting in their communication and use of technology. This is concerning for high school teachers as we work with parents to prepare students for success in academics and in life.

Parents want what is best for their children; however, they may lack knowledge in how their involvement could have a positive or negative influence on their children's education. Many scholars argue about which mode of involvement would have the desired positive effect on academic achievement (Robinson & Harris, 2014). Controlling involvement has a negative effect on intrinsic motivation (Fan & Williams, 2010). Helicopter parents unwittingly contribute to a decline in students' intrinsic motivation with controlling practices such as rules for maintaining a certain grade point average, which encourages students to develop a performance goal orientation. While parents are attempting to do what is best, their involvement may be misguided.

Parental over-involvement has a negative effect of the well-being of children. Helicopter parenting impedes the growth of coping mechanisms, which leads children to feel a lack of control in their own lives (Darlow et al., 2017). I have seen the unfortunate effects of helicopter parenting in many of my high school students. These parents place high priorities on grades, but not necessarily on learning. As such, to ensure success, many want to complete tasks belonging to their children themselves (Darlow et al., 2017). This type of behaviour restricts, controls, and lessens the self-control of the child (Love et al., 2020). While they may have

obtained the desired academic outcome, students may have sacrificed personal growth to accomplish it.

Developing skills to be successful is an important part of adolescence, and if parents are over-involved their children often lack skills needed for autonomy (Darlow et al., 2017). Parent involvement characterized by higher levels of psychological control and reduced encouragement for autonomy leads to supporting performance goal orientations (Xu et al., 2020). Overparenting is connected to lower levels of self-control and self-efficacy (Darlow et al., 2017), and a lack of self-control exhibited in children raised by helicopter parents contributes to school burnout (Love et al., 2020). Furthermore, academic success is predicted by self-efficacy (Fan & Williams, 2010), and students who lack this construct may have felt badly about who they are and powerless to make changes in their lives (van Ingen et al., 2015). When parents are perceived as intrusive, students feel a diminished capacity to perform or to accomplish tasks on their own.

Educators play a role in contributing to and exacerbating the effects of helicopter parenting. Digital communication tools and learning platforms provide parents with instant access to grades, homework completion records, and even assignments. Tools such as Remind101, Google Classroom, and Maplewood Parent Portal keep parents up to date with what is happening in classes, what assignments are due, and current grades. The concern I have is that educators appear to be encouraging "responsibilisation" (Selwyn et al., 2011, p. 322) in parents, whereby parents have become responsible for their children's work. By communicating due dates and grades directly from teacher to parent, we may be stripping students of their responsibility. These digital tools are easier for school personnel to use, but questions have been raised about the effectiveness of using them (Selwyn et al., 2011). Educators need to choose communication technologies that make the most of school-home communication (Heath et al., 2015). Educators should be aware of their role in the effects of helicopter parenting.

Helicopter parents risk undermining their children's personal and academic growth, and compromising their children's well-being. Parental over-involvement hampers children from developing coping mechanisms (Darlow et al., 2017) and restricts their sense of self-control (Love et al., 2020). High school educators are caught between educating and supporting the growth of their students, and helicopter parents who are more interested in high grades than learning. When teachers are forced to use digital tools to communicate to parents, they may be encouraging over-involvement and shifting the responsibility of the learning from student to parent.

The Way Forward: Information, Skills, and Partnerships

Practices can be established by teachers to support parents in adopting positive levels of involvement. Educators can share strategies for parents to use at home in order to raise student achievement (Robinson & Harris, 2014). Some of the most effective parental involvement is subtle and involves shared positive values about learning and education. Students need to develop skills that improve their self-control. Parents should implement practices that support their children's development of autonomy. Creating teacher-parent and teacher-student partnerships is crucial to supporting student growth, while avoiding the negative effects of helicopter parenting.

Parents often look to the school for advice on how to improve their children's achievement, and educators can provide parents with strategies to use at home in order to improve academics. Offering information sessions about higher education opportunities and other benign communication (Fan & Williams, 2010) can steer parent involvement in the right direction. Specific scientific knowledge on parenting and ideas about education should be provided by schools to parents (Xu et al., 2020). Supportive parents show that they care about their children's future while refraining from pressuring the children to excel in school (Robinson & Harris, 2014). When parents have high academic aspirations for their children, self-efficacy

increases in their adolescents (Fan & Williams, 2010). One successful approach is when parents are seen to support their children in all aspects of their lives without creating pressure for their children to perform well (Robinson & Harris, 2014). Likewise, when parents provide information to their children, it supports their children's intrinsic motivation (Fan & Williams, 2010). Positive parent involvement contributes to student development by clearly articulating expectations and giving strategies that support academic preparedness (George Mwangi et al., 2019), and this can be supported by educators.

Some of the most effective forms of parental involvement are subtle and involve passing on positive values about education and learning. Robinson and Harris's (2014) "setting the stage" concept captures my own thoughts about how parents can approach child rearing that will have a positive effect on children's academic and personal growth (p. 210). Stage setting focuses on sending the right messages and values about education and learning, while at the same time creating "life space" that is conducive to growth (Robinson & Harris, 2014, p. 210). Another form of positive involvement is evidenced through positive emotions in children. Emotions such as enjoyment may expand students' thinking and attention, increase motivation, and improve academic engagement and performance (Dong et al., 2020). Educators need to be aware of the influential factors so that they can offer insights when parents are seeking ways to help their children improve academically.

Parents and children can be taught the skills that offer adolescents opportunities to develop self-control. At a certain age, the controls parents once used that undermined their children's autonomy decrease in effectiveness at regulating their teenagers' behaviour (Cook, 2020). Parents are looking for skills to support their children academically, and self-control is one of the most beneficial to learn. Practice is key for adolescents to develop self-control skills (Love et al., 2020). Students need to have opportunities to acquire this practice and, in many cases, need to be explicitly taught how to acquire control. Self-control has been shown to mediate school burnout and helicopter parenting from mothers (Love et al., 2020). This skill is useful to adolescents, but it becomes even more useful to emerging adults.

Supporting the autonomy of their teenagers is an important skill for parents to acquire. When children are granted autonomy through the emphasis of reasoning and independence instead of through punishment, they feel more competent, are better able to regulate on their own in the classroom, and perform better academically (Robinson & Harris, 2014). Encouraging independence in adolescents also helps these children adjust to college (Darlow et al., 2017). Teenagers need to be encouraged and have their capabilities affirmed. If so, they will be less likely to doubt themselves and will instead persevere when they face challenges (Fan & Williams, 2010). Students entering post-secondary school are at a time in their lives when they should establish identity and independence. Overparenting can interfere (Fletcher et al., 2020), so educational institutes should have a plan to increase their students' autonomy (Darlow et al., 2017). Transitioning to adulthood is a complicated time, and students who show higher levels of self-efficacy put in more effort and persist when they face academic adversity (Fan & Williams, 2010). Identity and independence stem from strong roots, and the parent-child relationship is foundational. Having a reciprocal parent-child relationship supports adjustment to post-secondary education (Darlow et al., 2017). When parents are shown the researched benefits of supporting their adolescents' autonomy, they may be convinced to provide their children with space to grow instead of insisting on perpetual hovering.

Strong partnerships between parents and teachers and between teachers and students are crucial in supporting the academic achievement and personal growth of high school students. Communication and collaboration between staff and parents are the foundation of a healthy partnership (Heath et al., 2015). Creating a partnership between parents and teachers may encourage parents to begin home-based learning (Smith et al., 2020). During early adolescence, students may lose interest in school and a good relationship with teachers can give teenagers that extra push to stay engaged in their education (Cheung, 2019). Additionally, students who have a positive relationship with their teacher often internalize the expectations of

the teacher. Partnerships with families should be reinforced (Xu et al., 2020, p. 715) because strengthening the teacher-parent relationship and creating interactions that are meaningful show significant effects (Cheung, 2019). Parents may feel an increase in motivation to maintain these strategies of involvement over time (Smith et al., 2020). Positive teacher-student relationships aid in the adjustment of adolescents to school (Cheung, 2019), and long-term effects on children's academic learnings (Xu et al., 2020). Students thrive when they are part of healthy student-teacher partnerships and strong parent-teacher partnerships.

Conclusion

Parental involvement in the lives of students is paramount to children's success, but over-involvement can be detrimental. Teachers can establish certain school practices to support parents in assuming a positive level of involvement. Some of the most effective parental involvement is subtle and has parents sharing positive values about learning with their children. Because parental over-involvement hampers children from developing coping mechanisms (Darlow et al., 2017) and restricts their sense of self-control (Love et al., 2020), students should be taught skills to improve their self-control and parents should support their children's development of autonomy. While high school educators are often caught between educating and supporting the growth of their students, creating teacher-parent and teacher-student partnerships may avoid the negative effects of helicopter parenting and will support student growth.

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About the Author

Tanya Polasek is embarking on a new adventure: pursuing her master's degree in curriculum and pedagogy at Brandon University. She has been teaching English language arts and drama in rural Manitoba for the past 16 years. Learning with and from her high school students is a delight.