

Exploring parental involvement in Higher Education through the eyes of university teachers and administrators

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Abstract: This paper reports data from an on-going qualitative study seeking to explore the nature of parental involvement in higher education and how this might differ across ethnicity, social class, student gender, and year/semester of study from the perspective of faculty and administrative staff at a private university in Cyprus. Increasing demands for higher education in view of its importance for social mobility and equity (see, for example, the Cambridge Journal of Education's Special Issue on Globalisation and Student Equity in Higher Education, March 2011; also, the latest call for the EquNet Competition 2011 on equity in higher education organised in the framework of the EquNet EU LLP Erasmus project), along with indications that parents of higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have higher involvement in their children's school careers (Crozier, 2000; Horvat, et al, 2003; Lareau, 1987; 2000; Symeou, 2006; 2007; 2008), speak to the importance of investigating phenomena of parental involvement within higher education. Furthermore, research evidence showing that students from socially underserved groups have less participation in higher education and are also at higher risk for dropping out of education (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005), point to the significance of this study in relation to whether and how parental involvement in higher education influences students' academic experiences. Specifically, interviews have been conducted with ten purposefully selected faculty and administrative staff at a private university in Cyprus in an effort to investigate in depth the rationale, nature, and understandings of this involvement from the participants' perspective. Preliminary results of this study depict the relationships between universities and families and shed light on their complexities in terms of the ideologies, power relations, and meanings involved. Such an account offers a fruitful avenue in describing, understanding, and seeking common ground between higher institutions and students' families for the purposes of providing effective academic support and ensuring equal educational opportunity in higher education (Crozier, Reay, & Clayton, 2008). To that end, it also provides a springboard for further clarifying the roles of involved agents in the process, namely higher education faculty and administration, students and their parents. Findings of this study hold implications for the field of sociology of education with particular relevance to higher education, national and transnational education research institutions, tertiary education institutions, and higher education providers.