

“I Cannot Teach Because I Am Not Smart”: Working Class Mothers’ Support for Their Children’s Education in Japan

Social class is a powerful element which predicts mothers’ support for their children’s academic development in Japan. Middle class mothers tend to hold higher educational expectations, invest in their children’s educational opportunities, and interact with the teachers more frequently than working class mothers (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Yamamoto, 2006). While ample evidence shows social class differences in parents’ academic support, few have examined why working class mothers are not as involved in their children’s education as middle class mothers. In order to understand the mechanisms of social class reproduction and mobility, it is critical to investigate the experiences and elements that encourage and discourage working class mothers’ involvement in their children’s education.

The present study is based on analyses of in-depth interviews with eight working class mothers of young children in Japan. All mothers did not have a college degree and lived in a working class neighborhood. The findings demonstrated that a lack of confidence due to limited education or negative school experiences inhibit these mothers’ involvement in their children’s education. The mothers tended to believe that they lacked ability to effectively support their children’s education. Further analyses showed that social capital, a form of capital that existed in human relationships, was a critical element that helped working class mothers redevelop and renegotiate their parenting models and increase their confidence in navigating their children’s schooling.