Book Reviews
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Studying as a Parent: A Handbook for Success
Helen Owton
Palgrave Macmillan, 2014
Review by Liesl Conradie

This book is not an academic text but rather a self-help, practical and motivational guide for parents considering Higher Education for themselves. The term used to define this group of students is student parents. Student parents appear to be an almost hidden group within the Higher Education system. This book aims to rectify this situation and provides prospective and current student parents with a guide, starting from thinking about becoming a student, all the way through to completing a PhD. As well as focussing on accessing Higher Education and the application process, it forefronts these experiences through the eyes of an author that was a student parent, and also other student parents that she interviewed.

Throughout the book, the realistic emotional and physical challenges of parent students are evident and incorporated into the journey of becoming and being a student parent. This is done in a real-life, sober manner through the use of ‘Inside view’ boxes, but in a way that encourages student parents to view these challenges not only as challenges but also as opportunities. As a student parent myself, I felt I could relate to this text and wished something like this was available when I started my further studies, as the road would have been much smoother!

Part two of the book focuses not only on being a student parent, but also addresses becoming pregnant as an existing student. A main concern for most students is the financial implications of study and sources of funding available. A chapter is afforded to this real concern and incorporates not only student loans, but also accommodation, living expenses, childcare and also the very practical need to budget. The chapter highlights grants and sources of advice and support specific to the needs of parents studying, and as such is an invaluable resource.

Part three of the book provides the crux in dealing with the juggling acts that student parents have to develop. A chapter is afforded to each of these and includes the demands of a potential social life, child care, time and stress management as well as support services available (or if not available some useful guidance on what can be created for student parents).

The book is a truly unique and inspirational text that I will definitely recommend to all my student parents. It acknowledges them as a group, but also individuals, and reminds them why they are studying. It puts the focus on their children as motivational factors and studying as a means to a better life for the whole family, rather than as a selfish act on the side of the parent. It is forward looking and has as end goal graduation day, more control over your future and a happy family that sees you as a role model. The main point that stuck with me after reading the book is an answer given by a student parent when asked how she manages to study with children. She responded that she couldn’t imagine doing it without them.