

The Parent Trap

BY AUDREY FISCH

We are awash, perhaps as never before, in books that offer anxious parents different tricks and strategies to get their progeny ahead.

Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* is probably one of the best known, advocating that parents demand complete excellence from their children rather than "slathering praise for the lowest tasks." Chua's approach, based on what she calls "Chinese parenting," defines childhood as a "training ground, a time to build

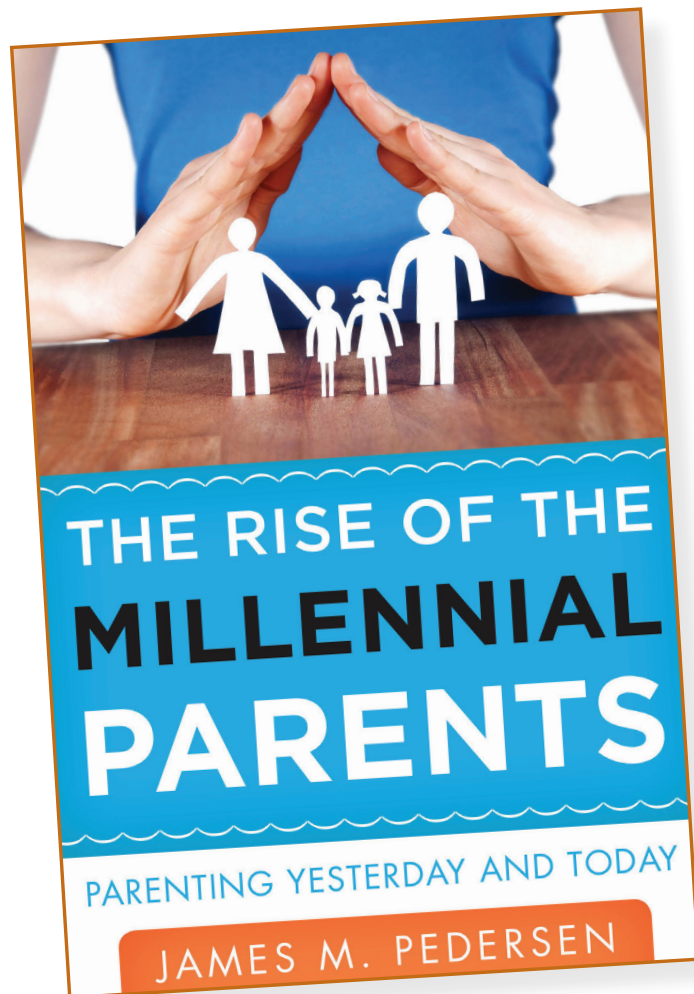
character and invest for the future," and identifies the tiger mother as the chief trainer.

More recently, Julie Lythcott-Haims, former Dean of Stanford University, has countered this argument with *How To Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare your Kid for Success*, suggesting that overparenting, a high level of parental investment and involvement in the lives of children like that advocated by Chua, can have debilitating effects on kids in both college and career. This book has become particularly

pertinent to university faculty trying to cope with the challenges of teaching the new generation of millennials, some of whom, according to Lythcott-Haims, have been disabled by an upbringing in which parental involvement in their kids' lives "robbed [those kids] of a chance to develop a belief in their own selves"

Into this vibrant field of debate, one of New Jersey City University's own, James M. Pedersen '96, '97 '02 M.A., has entered with a contribution of particular interest to K-12 educators: *The Rise of Millennial Parents: Parenting Yesterday and*





Today. Pedersen, who received a B.A. in secondary English education from NJCU in 1996, an M.A. in special education in 1997, an M.A. in urban leadership in 2002, and an Ed.D. in educational leadership from Seton Hall University in 2011, offers his volume as an educator guide to help teachers and other education professionals forge an effective “partnership between home and school.” Drawing on his 20 years of experience as a teacher, tutor, assistant principal, and principal, Pedersen, who now works as superintendent of the Essex County Vocational Schools, suggests that educators today need an understanding of the diverse landscape of parenting styles.

Pedersen attributes our current “potpourri of approaches” to

parenting to the diversity of cultures and lifestyles in the United States, social networking in the Information Age, economic factors, and changing family structures and dynamics. His goal is to explore and categorize the many different approaches families take to childrearing, from hyper-parenting, which includes Chua’s tiger moms and dads, to hypo-parenting, which includes best friend parents who “interact with their children in a friendship capacity and provide an environment free from most rules and restrictions even beginning at an early age.” A father himself, Pedersen is uniformly generous about the difficulty of parenting and never judges; he recognizes and appreciates the fact that most parenting approaches are “well-intended and work within their

unique family dynamics.”

Each approach, however, poses different challenges for the parent-educator partnership. Pedersen’s readable volume offers background and examples to help educators understand each parenting style, anticipate common problems and reactions, and implement effective strategies for working with parents.

For example, Pedersen explores “bestseller parents,” who are “well-informed and seek out best practices” but also may be inundated by information and thereby lack consistency. This inconsistency may be challenging to teachers (and children) who try to meet certain requests only to be surprised by different instructions and expectations a few months later. To best meet the needs of students with bestseller parents, Pedersen recommends clear, accessible learning objectives, careful reflection on the ways in which complaints may really disguise an insecure and overwhelmed parent’s need for help or expertise, and a specific action plan that does not “promise something that might not be possible to deliver.”

The strength of Pedersen’s book lies in its informed and thoughtful exploration of scores of different parenting approaches. With each, Pedersen offers readers an opportunity to understand the parents of our students and thus to forge stronger teacher-parent relationships, which better serve students. *The Rise of Millennial Parents* is an important and timely contribution. **NJCU**

Audrey A. Fisch is Professor of English and Coordinator of Secondary English Education at NJCU. Her recent publications include *Connecting Across Disciplines: Collaborating with Informational Text* (Rowman, 2016) and *Using Informational Text to Teach A Raisin in the Sun* (Rowman, 2016), written with Susan Chenelle.