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## ARTICLES

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# CHILDREN'S CULTURAL CAPITAL AND TEACHERS' ASSESSMENTS OF EFFORT AND ABILITY: THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL SECTOR

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*Bourdieu (1973) theorized that differences in social background correspond to differences in possession of cultural resources (cultural capital), as well as the orientation to those resources (habitus). Additionally, Bourdieu argued that struggles for power occur in different settings (fields). This essay reviews Bourdieu's main ideas and describes how they may apply to the American educational system. In particular, two settings are considered: public elementary schools and Catholic elementary schools. Based on analyses using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), Catholic school kindergarteners are more likely to participate in arts activities, and their parents are more likely to be involved in and comfortable with the school environment. Regression analyses show that arts lessons and attendance at arts events do not affect teachers' perceptions of the effort or ability of students in either public or Catholic schools. Parents' orientation toward school has more of an effect in public than in Catholic schools. In public schools, attending open houses and conferences, volunteering, and feeling unwelcome at school all affect teachers' evaluations of students' effort and ability, while only attendance at school events and conferences affect teachers' perceptions in Catholic schools. These findings suggest that the traditional definition of cultural capital may not be appropriate for young American children, that parents' orientation toward schooling should be included in future studies of educational stratification, and that more research is needed in the examination of public-Catholic school differences in cultural resources.*

The French sociologist Bourdieu is well known in American sociology of education for his theory of cultural capital, which states that upper-middle-class children are privileged in the educational system because their families possess cultural knowledge and language skills that are valued by teachers. For the past 20 years, sociologists have operationalized cultural

capital in a number of ways and assessed its effects on educational outcomes with a variety of methods. Some researchers have used large data sets with samples of high school students, while others have conducted qualitative research, studying smaller groups of young children in more detail.

Despite the wealth of existing research on the subject, the current understanding of cultural capital has three limitations. First, the existing research on cultural capital and education has focused on students in public schools, ignoring the different ways that cultural capital may function in the private school sector. Educational research has discovered differences in the academic climate of public schools and Catholic schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987), but has not examined differences in the possession of or the effects of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1973) noted the importance of the school setting, but few American educational studies have taken school sector into consideration. Second, differences between children at the very early stages of their educational career – the kindergarten year – have not been studied with regard to public-Catholic school differences in general, or with regard to cultural capital differences by school sector in particular. Third, few studies have considered cultural capital as part of Bourdieu's broader theoretical framework, which includes the concepts of one's orientation to the world (what Bourdieu referred to as *habitus*) and the setting in which people enact their cultural capital (what Bourdieu referred to as *field*).

In this essay, Bourdieu's theoretical framework is employed to study the differences between kindergarten students who attend public schools and kindergarteners who attend Catholic schools. In particular, the cultural resources possessed by the students are compared across the two school sectors, as are the orientations toward schooling possessed by the kindergarteners' parents. The teachers' academic evaluations of the students based on the students' and their parents' possession of these resources are also compared by school sector. The findings from this study contribute to two areas of educational research that have not been linked in previous studies: school sector effects research and cultural capital research. The findings also contribute to the understanding of the educational experiences of young children.

In the next section, the differences between public school and Catholic school environments are discussed. Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and the concepts of cultural capital, orientation, and setting are presented, and research on cultural capital and schooling is reviewed. A nationally representative sample of kindergarten students and their parents is analyzed to address how cultural capital and parents' orientation toward school affect teachers' perceptions of students' effort and ability, and how the effects of cultural capital and parents' orientation vary by school sector.

## **THE CULTURAL CLIMATE OF PUBLIC AND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

Compared to public schools, Catholic schools have lower per pupil expenditures but higher average achievement test scores, higher rates of graduation, and higher rates of graduates going on to postsecondary education (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Sander, 1996). To explain this relationship, Coleman relied on a theory of social capital (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Schneider, 2000). Social capital refers to the network of relationships within a family, or within a community, such as a school. This network generates trust and a set of norms. In particular, when parents of students in the same class know each other, social closure is achieved, which allows for the creation and maintenance of norms regarding learning and effort. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) described this type of environment as a functional community. These shared norms lead to higher student achievement levels than would be found in a school lacking such social closure. The Catholic school environment is more likely than the public school environment to generate social capital, in part because the students' parents are often involved with the church community affiliated with the school.

The different environments in public and Catholic schools may influence the relationship between students' background characteristics and their achievement outcomes. Within Catholic schools, teachers may have expectations for both students and parents that are different than the expectations at public schools. For example, if Coleman's theory of social capital is correct, teachers in Catholic schools may expect more parental involvement and student motivation, and the consequences for lacking these resources may be more severe in a Catholic school than in a public school. Furthermore, the value of a student's cultural knowledge may vary by school sector, with one type of school expecting students to be well versed in a variety of cultural skills and another being more forgiving of students who do not have these skills at their disposal. These characteristics, parental interaction with the school, student motivation toward getting an education, and students' cultural resources, all relate to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and educational inequality.

### **BOURDIEU'S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Bourdieu argued that cultural capital, one's orientation toward the social structure and social institutions, and social setting all work together to generate social action, or what Bourdieu (1984) referred to as practice. All forms of social action, from decisions in the political realm to processes in the classroom, are based on the combination of these three factors.

The element of Bourdieu's theory that has received the most attention in sociological research is cultural capital. Along with economic, social, and symbolic capital, cultural capital serves as a way for groups to remain dominant or to gain status (Bourdieu, 1997). Cultural capital comes in three forms: objectified cultural capital, which refers to objects, such as works of art, which require special cultural abilities to use and appreciate; embodied cultural capital, which is the disposition toward appreciating and understanding objectified cultural capital; and institutionalized cultural capital, which refers to educational credentials and the credentialing system. Objectified cultural capital refers to what is considered high art, and tends to be found in museums, concert halls, and the homes of the upper classes. It is the second form of cultural capital, embodied, that most researchers try to operationalize in their studies, by showing students' interest in music or lessons in art or dance. The third form of cultural capital, institutionalized, develops as a result of one's having embodied cultural capital and successfully converting it via the educational system.

Bourdieu argued that cultural capital, particularly in its embodied form, serves as a resource that people can use to gain or maintain power and privilege. While embodied cultural capital is a resource, one's orientation toward using that resource is critical in determining the type of social action that occurs. Bourdieu described the concept of orientation as a "structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices" (1984, p. 170). It is generated by one's place in the social structure. By internalizing the social structure and one's place in it, an individual comes to determine what is possible for his or her life and develops aspirations and practices accordingly. This orientation reflects both a general worldview and one's relationship to different social institutions. A person's place in the class structure affects his or her orientation toward schooling, toward religion, and so forth.

The internalization of the social structure takes place during early childhood and is a primarily unconscious process, but the consequences go beyond individual actors. Bourdieu (1984) argued that the reproduction of the social structure results from people's orientations toward it. Based on their class position, people develop ideas about their individual potential. For example, working-class individuals tend to believe they will remain in the working class. These beliefs are then externalized into actions that lead to the reproduction of the class structure.

Finally, the actions that result from one's orientation and capital take place within specific settings. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) described the social setting as a configuration of relations between social positions. Settings are spaces where dominant and subordinate groups struggle for control over resources. Each setting is based upon one or more types of

capital (an intellectual setting would be organized around cultural capital, for example). Indeed, Bourdieu argued that capital does not exist or function except in relation to a setting.

Applying these three concepts – cultural capital, orientation, and setting – to education, Bourdieu (1973) argued that schools reproduce social inequality, describing the school system as a particular setting, within which the most valuable form of capital is cultural capital. Rather than individual talent, then, it is the possession of cultural capital that leads to academic success (Swartz, 1997).

Cultural capital is concentrated in the upper classes. Bourdieu (1984) found that middle-class teachers also have high levels of cultural capital and tend to reward those students who possess it. Children who have more cultural capital (having been exposed to it in their upper-class families) will feel more comfortable in the school setting, will communicate easily with teachers, and therefore will be more likely to do well in school. Lower-class students, on the other hand, find the school environment different from their home environment and lack the capital necessary to fit in as well as the upper-class students. Even those lower-class students who do manage to accumulate cultural capital in school and advance successfully through the school system will be easy to distinguish from their upper-class peers, because their cultural capital will be more scholastic and conservative than those who were exposed to cultural capital in their homes (Bourdieu, 1984).

However, it is not cultural capital alone that leads students to succeed in the school system. One's orientation toward the social structure also plays a role. Students' decisions to invest in their education, study hard, and go to college depend on their place in the class system and their understanding of whether people from that class tend to be successful academically (Swartz, 1997). For younger students, the parents' orientation affects the early school years. Working-class parents do not feel comfortable in the school environment and have a harder time interacting with teachers than middle-class parents. Children witness their parents' interactions and attitudes and internalize them, creating larger differences in the working-class and middle-class orientations each year that the children spend in school. Bourdieu (1973) argued that one's orientation develops in relation to how much cultural capital he or she has; a person from the lower class is aware that people from that class tend to have very little cultural capital, and that without cultural capital, they are unlikely to succeed educationally. Therefore, students from the lower classes will tend to, on average, have lower expectations about succeeding in school, and may be less likely to use what little cultural capital they have because they do not see much chance in succeeding academically.

The importance of cultural capital and parents' orientation toward schooling certainly may vary by setting. What is considered irrelevant in a public school, for example, may be considered vital in a Catholic school. Although these two research areas, school sector differences and cultural capital, have not been linked in the past, Coleman's views on norms and schooling can be linked to Bourdieu's concept of orientation. Both one's orientation toward schooling, and norms generated by social capital, are indications of one's disposition and commitment to particular values. One would expect that parents who enroll their children in Catholic school have specific reasons for doing so, which may have to do with curriculum, discipline, or beliefs. An implication of this school choice, then, is that these parents have a different orientation toward the world and what they expect for their children than parents who send their children to public school. We should therefore expect to see a stronger parental academic orientation among Catholic school parents than public school parents, and this academic orientation should have an effect on students' educational outcomes. Indeed, a positive parental orientation may lead to the generation of social capital. As parents attend school events and open houses, they should become acquainted with other students' parents and begin to build the networks and shared norms that Coleman argued are important for student achievement.

Bourdieu's conceptual framework has not been without criticism. Swartz (1997) noted that in large, differentiated societies like the United States, where there is not as strong a dominant culture as there is in France, cultural capital may not be as useful a concept. Additionally, a number of researchers have found that in American schools, cultural capital benefits not only students from privileged backgrounds, but also all students who have it. This phenomenon has been referred to as the "cultural mobility" model (DiMaggio, 1982), in contrast to Bourdieu's cultural reproduction model. Nevertheless, the concept of cultural capital remains a major focus in the sociology of education and has been analyzed in a number of quantitative and qualitative studies.

## **REVIEW OF RESEARCH: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES**

Research on cultural capital in America has operationalized a number of different variables as "cultural capital" and "educational success"; indeed, Kingston (2001) criticized researchers' use of conceptually distinct variables under the "big umbrella" of cultural capital. Nevertheless, the majority of studies in this area have found that cultural capital has a positive effect on whatever educational outcome is being studied. Some of the earliest studies of the effects of cultural capital in the United States were done

by DiMaggio and Mohr (DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). Using a large dataset of high school students from 1960, DiMaggio (1982) found that cultural capital had a significant effect on students' grades, even after controlling for ability and fathers' education. Using the same data set, DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) found that cultural capital had significant effects on several educational outcomes (educational attainment, college attendance, and college completion).

Kalmijn and Kraaykamp (1996) used data from the Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts, finding that parental cultural capital (attendance at arts events and encouraging their children to read) was associated with higher levels of schooling for children. Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) used the same data set to show that cultural participation, particularly taking lessons in arts activities, positively affected educational transitions (going to high school, completing high school, moving from high school to college, and completing college).

Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) to study how cultural trips, cultural classes, and household educational resources (such as a dictionary and an encyclopedia) affected grades and achievement test scores. They found that all three forms of cultural capital positively affected both outcomes, and that the returns for cultural trips and educational resources were less for African American and low socioeconomic status (SES) students. Teachman (1987) focused exclusively on household educational resources, and using data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72), found that controlling for family background, educational resources had a positive effect on educational attainment.

In the United States, then, a number of different data sets have been used to show that participation in cultural activities and possession of educational resources in the home result in higher grades, higher achievement scores, and higher levels of educational attainment. Several studies have considered cultural capital in other countries, but the findings have not been as consistent as those in the United States. Using data from the Netherlands, De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp (2000) found that parental reading behavior had a positive effect on children's educational attainment, especially for children whose parents had low levels of education; parental participation in beaux arts, however, was not found to have any effect on attainment. Katsillis and Rubinson (1990) found that cultural capital (operationalized as participation in high culture) did not affect the grade point averages of high school seniors in Greece. Robinson and Garnier (1985) used fathers' education as a measure of embodied cultural capital in studying class reproduction in France, and found that education played only a small role in reproducing ownership over the means of production.



None of these studies in the United States or in Europe considered the role of orientation toward the social structure in general, or toward schooling in particular. McClelland (1990) conducted the earliest quantitative study of orientation toward the social structure in American educational research, using the NLS-72 data to operationalize orientation as students' occupational aspirations, particularly whether or not they aspired to white-collar jobs. McClelland's study did not include cultural capital, which examined how students either reach their educational and occupational goals or change them over time. More recently, Dumais (2002) used data from NELS to examine gender differences in the effects of cultural capital and orientation among eighth-grade students; cultural capital was operationalized as students' participation in arts activities and orientation toward the social structure was operationalized as students' white-collar occupational aspirations. Dumais did find that orientation had an effect on students' grades, while cultural capital affected only the grades of girls.

Research including measures of orientation toward the social structure is only now beginning to be conducted. One important issue to consider in this research is how early in a student's life his or her orientation becomes salient. Quantitative studies have primarily come from surveys of students who are junior-high school age or older, but several qualitative analyses have focused on younger children.

## **REVIEW OF RESEARCH: QUALITATIVE ANALYSES**

Qualitative work from the late 1980s through the present has provided a rich description of the experiences young students and their parents have with the school system, and has considered the role of cultural capital. Overall, qualitative research has shown that there are class differences in the ways that children and parents interact with the school system, but has not examined the consequences that these differences have for student achievement. The most thorough research to date on cultural capital in American elementary schools has been conducted by Lareau and colleagues (Lareau, 1987, 1989, 2000, 2002; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Lareau (1989) studied the relationships between parents of first-graders and school personnel in a predominantly working-class and a predominantly upper-middle-class school. At both schools, teachers and school officials were middle class. Lareau argued that working-class parents lacked the resources (education, occupational status, and so forth) to feel comfortable confronting teachers, referring to these resources as cultural capital. Lareau did not explicitly study the effect that parental involvement had on teachers' perceptions of students. However, the study did find that upper-middle-class parents tended to be most involved when their children were doing

poorly, and working-class parents were most involved when their children were doing very well.

In another study, Lareau (2000) found that class differences were larger than racial differences when following the daily lives of White and African American working-class and middle-class boys in third and fourth grades. Interestingly, this study found that the middle-class boys had very structured lives outside of school, filled with a variety of activities, while the working-class boys had much less structure and spent their free time playing and watching television (similar findings were described in Lareau, 2002). Lareau hypothesized that these differences would result in advantages for the middle-class boys: With a wide variety of experiences through their activities, they had different repertoires on which to draw, while the working-class boys did not have the same opportunities to gain experience and expertise. The differences in experiences might be interpreted as the difference between a working-class and a middle-class orientation, although Lareau did not explicitly state this.

Reay (1995) studied two primary school classrooms in England, one working class and one middle class, and examined the differences in orientation between the two groups of students. While the middle-class students did not want to tidy up at the end of class (because they saw it as "someone else's job"), the working-class students were eager to help the teacher. Reay also observed a group of middle-class girls playing a computer game, and they assumed they held the role of the mistress, while the working-class girls assumed they held the role of the servant. This research provided a description of the different forms of orientation that students may possess, but did not examine the effects of orientation on educational outcomes.

None of these studies of cultural capital and schooling addresses the differences that might occur by school sector. School type has been included as a control variable in some cultural capital studies (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999), but has not been a major focus in this area of research. Furthermore, research in the area of public school-Catholic school differences has not addressed the concepts of cultural capital and orientation. Additionally, although more students are enrolled in Catholic elementary schools than in Catholic high schools, the majority of educational research on Catholic schools has focused on the secondary level, with a notable exception in Jepsen (2003).

A true test of Bourdieu's theory would take into account both cultural capital and orientation toward social structure or specific social institutions while taking into consideration the setting, or the site of social action. Because research has shown that the public school environment differs from the Catholic school environment in several key ways, it is reasonable to expect that the influences of cultural capital and orientation may also dif-

fer by school sector. The recent availability of a data set that follows children from the onset of their education and that includes children from both public and Catholic school sectors provides a unique opportunity to examine the early effects of cultural capital and orientation on students' educational experiences and educational outcomes.

The analyses in this study address three major questions: (a) do public-Catholic school differences exist in the possession of cultural capital by kindergarten children and in their parents' orientation toward schooling? (b) how do children's cultural capital and parents' orientation toward schooling affect teachers' perceptions of kindergarten students' effort and ability? and (c) do the effects of children's cultural capital and parents' orientation vary by school sector?

## ANALYSIS

### DATA AND SAMPLE

Data are from the public-use files of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 (ECLS-K). The ECLS-K follows a nationally representative sample of approximately 22,000 children from kindergarten through fifth grade; currently, data are available from the kindergarten and first grade waves of the study. The children's teachers, parents, and schools all provide information.

Data in these analyses are from the Spring 1999 Questionnaires for Parents and Teachers, and from the direct child assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics are all included in the sample. For these analyses, the sample is restricted to kindergarteners in public and Catholic schools.

The two dependent variables come from the teacher's questionnaire. The first is the teacher's response to the question, "How often does the student work to the best of his or her ability?" The teacher can respond: *never*, *seldom*, *usually*, or *always* (a scale of 1 to 4). For public schools, this variable had a mean of 3.2 and a standard deviation of .7, while in Catholic schools, the mean of this variable was 3.3 and the standard deviation was .6. The second dependent variable asks the teacher to compare the students' language and literacy skills to other students in the same grade level; teachers may respond: *far below average*, *below average*, *average*, *above average*, or *far above average* (a scale of 1 to 5). For public schools, the mean of this variable was 3.1 and the standard deviation was 1.0, while for Catholic schools, the variable had a mean of 3.3 and a standard deviation of .9.

The independent variables include a dummy variable for gender (1 = female), a dummy variable for minority status (1 = African American or

Hispanic), and a composite SES variable, generated from information on the parents' education, occupational status, and income. A direct assessment of the kindergarteners' reading skills in Fall 1998 is used as a control variable for ability; the IRT scale score for this assessment is used.

Parents in the ECLS-K report on two different types of cultural activities in which their children are involved outside of school: one-time cultural activities, such as visiting a museum or going to a concert; and sustained lessons, such as classes in art, dance, drama, music, performance art, foreign language, or crafts. For all activities, the survey responses were *yes* (has participated) or *no* (has not participated).

Because the children in the ECLS are quite young, there are no survey questions asked of them directly in the kindergarten wave. Therefore, in order to examine orientation toward schooling, it is necessary to turn to the information that the parents provide about their own experiences with their children's schooling. The parents' experiences fall into two main categories, actions and attitudes, and each category can be seen as a reflection of the parents' orientation toward schooling. Among the actions that a parent could take are volunteering at the school, attending school events (such as performances), attending open house, and attending parent-teacher conferences. There are two questions that reflect parents' negative attitudes about schooling. The first question asks whether the parent has found it more difficult to be involved with the child's schooling because the parent does not feel welcomed by the school. The second question inquires whether the parent has found it more difficult to be involved with the child's schooling because there is nothing that interests the parent.

### **CULTURAL PARTICIPATION, PARENTS' ORIENTATION TOWARD SCHOOLING, AND SCHOOL SECTOR**

In Table 1, the parents' reports of children's participation in cultural activities are reported by school sector. In every activity except performance art, the Catholic school students have a higher participation rate than the public school children. The differences between the two groups are statistically significant for every activity except performance art lessons and foreign language lessons.

The most popular activities for all students, both public and Catholic, are the one-time cultural events. More than a third of public school students have been to a concert, and 28% have been to a museum. Among Catholic school students, 43% have been to a concert, and 35% have been to a museum. The least popular activities are repeated lessons in areas such as drama, foreign language, music, and art. In the public school sector, 6% or fewer children participate in each of these lessons; in the Catholic school sector,

Table 1

*Percentage of Children Participating in Selected Cultural Activities by School Sector*

	Public	Catholic
One-time events		
Concerts	36.0%	42.7%***
Museums	28.4%	35.4%***
Lessons		
Dance	14.2%	26.1%***
Music	6.0%	7.1%*
Drama	1.2%	2.1%**
Art	6.2%	8.6%***
Performance art	14.0%	12.5%
Crafts	9.8%	13.2%***
Foreign language	4.6%	5.3%

*Note.* Appropriate sample and design weights were used. The sample size varied by question and ranged from 12,958 to 12,967 for public school students and from 2,020 to 2,021 for Catholic school students. Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

fewer than 10% participate. Dance is the most popular type of lesson in both public and Catholic schools, with 14% of public school students, and more than a quarter of Catholic school students, participating.

Overall, about 38% of public school students, and 25% of Catholic school students, participate in no cultural activities at all. Among the public school students, 15% participate in three or more cultural activities, compared to 21% of the Catholic school students. The average number of cultural activities is 1.2 for the public school students and 1.6 for the Catholic school students.

Catholic kindergarten students, then, are more likely to participate in a greater number and in a wider variety of cultural activities than public school children. In part, this may be due to SES differences between the student populations. The Catholic school students have a higher average SES level than the public school students, and in both schools, higher SES

groups are more likely to participate in cultural activities. Nevertheless, the SES differences between school sectors do not account for all of the difference in students' participation in cultural activities. For example, in the lowest SES quintile of students, the average number of cultural activities was .65 in public schools but 1.3 in Catholic schools. On the other hand, within the top SES quintile, public school students participated in an average of 2.0 cultural activities, compared to 1.9 in Catholic schools. SES appears to have a greater influence on cultural participation in public schools than in Catholic schools. Indeed, a student's total number of cultural activities (all of the one-time events and lessons added together) had a correlation with the SES of .33 in public schools and only .19 in Catholic schools.

In addition to differences in levels of cultural capital, Bourdieu argued that people have different orientations toward social structure and social institutions. Those who are from more privileged backgrounds will feel more comfortable in academic settings and will be more likely to conduct intellectual conversations (Lareau, 1989). These differences in perspective may affect the ways in which the parents of kindergarteners engage with the school system, teachers, and other parents.

Table 2 presents several indicators of parental educational orientation and the percentage of parents in each school sector who have them. For all four of the actions parents could take, public school parents have a lower rate of participation than Catholic school parents; all of the school sector differences in parents' participation are statistically significant. The activity with the greatest gap between public school and Catholic school participation is volunteering at school: while 71% of Catholic school parents volunteer, only 44% of public school parents do so. The majority of parents in both schools engage in the other three activities.

Overall, the average number of activities in which the parents participate is 2.6 for public schools and 3.3 for Catholic schools. Taking SES into consideration, the average number of activities for public school parents ranges from 1.9 in the lowest SES quintile to 3.3 in the highest SES quintile; for Catholic school parents, the average number of activities ranges from 2.9 in the lowest SES quintile to 3.5 in the highest SES quintile.

The other component of parental orientation, attitudes, consists of two questions about factors that lead the parents to be less involved in their children's schooling. The first question asks the parents whether they have been less involved in their children's schooling because they do not find school activities interesting. Fourteen percent of parents in public schools answered "yes" to this question, compared to 8% in Catholic schools. The second question asks parents whether they have limited involvement with the school because they don't feel welcome; 6% of public school parents,

Table 2

*Percentage of Parents Who Agree with School Orientation-Related Statements by School Sector*

	Public	Catholic
<b>Actions</b>		
Attended open house	71.5%	84.9%***
Attended parent-teacher conference	83.4%	91.2%***
Attended a school event	62.7%	82.7%***
Volunteered at school	43.7%	70.5%***
<b>Attitudes</b>		
Does not find school activities interesting	13.6%	7.6%***
Does not feel welcome at school	6.0%	3.6%***

*Note.* Appropriate sample and design weights were used. The sample size varied by question and ranged from 12,944 to 12,975 for public school students and from 2,020 to 2,021 for Catholic school students. Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

and 4% of Catholic school parents, responded "yes" to this question. Like the measures of cultural capital and the actions measures for parental orientation, SES plays a role here. Higher SES parents are less likely to agree with these two negative statements. Again, the SES differences are greater within the public school sector than within the Catholic school sector. The correlation between SES and parents' orientation is higher in public schools (SES and actions: .41; SES and attitudes: -.11) than in Catholic schools (SES and actions: .23; SES and attitudes: -.07).

Like the measures of cultural capital, the measures of parents' orientation are clearly associated with school sector. Catholic school parents have higher levels of involvement in their children's schooling than public school parents. Although the majority of parents from both school sectors disagree that they feel unwelcome at their child's school or uninterested in school activities, public school parents are more likely to agree with these statements.

## **SCHOOL SECTOR DIFFERENCES IN THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL CAPITAL AND PARENTS' ORIENTATIONS TOWARD SCHOOL**

Table 3 presents the pooled within-school regression estimates for two sets of models, with separate analyses for public and Catholic school students. The pooled within-school models, also called fixed effects models, control for school level variables, such as the urbanicity of an area, which might affect the availability of cultural resources. The final models are presented here. Earlier models, such as analyses with the cultural capital variables alone, with the orientation variables alone, with a sum total of cultural capital activities rather than separate variables for each activity, and so forth, had very similar results. Additionally, these analyses were conducted using ordered logistic regression, and produced nearly identical results.

The dependent variable in the first set of models is how often the teacher believes that the student works to his or her best ability. A higher value of the dependent variable represents a more favorable evaluation by the teacher. In the model for public school students, the reading test score, being female, and SES all have significant positive effects on teachers' evaluations of students. However, the cultural capital variables – both attendance at arts events and taking arts lessons – do not have an effect on teachers' evaluations. This result is quite different from past studies that have examined the effects of cultural capital on middle school and high school students, where positive effects have consistently been found.

All four of the “actions” components of parents' orientation toward schooling have significant effects on teachers' evaluations of public school students' working to ability. However, one of the variables, attending parent-teacher conferences, has a negative effect. In other words, teachers have less favorable evaluations of students whose parents have attended a parent-teacher conference, even after controlling for the students' ability levels. The ECLS data do not provide information about why the parent-teacher conferences take place, but perhaps conferences are more likely to occur if the student is having problems at school. The other three variables, attending open houses, attending school events, and volunteering at school, all have positive effects. Only one of the two attitudes variables, not feeling welcome at school, has an effect on teachers' perceptions.

The next model uses the same dependent variable, the teacher's perception of how often the student works to ability, but focuses on students in Catholic schools. A higher reading score, being female, and higher SES all correspond with more favorable teacher evaluations, as they did in the public school model. Neither the one-time events nor the cultural lessons have any effect on the teachers' evaluations. For both public school and Catholic school students, then, the possession of cultural capital is not associated



Table 3

*Effects of Cultural Capital and Parental Orientation on Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Effort and Ability in Public and Catholic Schools*

	Ability		Language skills	
	Public	Catholic	Public	Catholic
Reading test score	.02*** (.00)	.02*** (.00)	.06*** (.00)	.07*** (.00)
Female	.21*** (.02)	.15** (.05)	.16*** (.02)	.08 (.05)
Minority	-.04 (.02)	-.06 (.04)	-.12*** (.03)	-.04 (.08)
SES	.05*** (.01)	.07* (.03)	.13*** (.01)	.10** (.03)
One-time events				
Museums	-.01 (.02)	-.02 (.04)	-.00 (.02)	.00 (.05)
Concerts	-.00 (.01)	.03 (.03)	.03 (.02)	-.02 (.04)
Lessons				
Dance	.02 (.02)	-.01 (.04)	.04 (.03)	-.03 (.06)
Music	.00 (.03)	-.06 (.06)	.03 (.04)	-.07 (.07)
Drama	-.05 (.06)	-.18 (.10)	.02 (.07)	-.05 (.13)
Art	-.01 (.03)	.04 (.05)	-.02 (.04)	.15 (.09)
Performing	-.01 (.02)	.07 (.05)	.02 (.03)	.05 (.05)
Crafts	-.02 (.02)	.06 (.04)	.04 (.03)	-.05 (.08)
Languages	-.06 (.03)	-.02 (.07)	-.07 (.03)	-.06 (.10)
Actions				
Open house	.06*** (.02)	.02 (.04)	.08** (.02)	.03 (.06)
Conference	-.07** (.02)	-.11* (.05)	-.10** (.03)	-.06 (.09)
School event	.05** (.01)	.12** (.05)	.02 (.02)	.15* (.06)
Volunteering	.06*** (.01)	-.01 (.04)	.07** (.02)	-.09 (.07)
Attitudes				
Not interested	-.02 (.02)	-.01 (.05)	-.01 (.03)	-.03 (.09)
Not welcome	-.06* (.03)	-.11 (.06)	-.14** (.04)	.04 (.14)
Constant	2.72*** (.03)	2.71*** (.09)	1.87*** (.05)	1.61*** (.13)
Adj. <i>R</i> -squared	.19	.23	.38	.43
<i>N</i>	11,033	1,586	11,073	1,597

*Note.* Standard errors are in parentheses. Appropriate sample and design weights were used. Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

with higher teacher evaluations of student effort. The variables indicating parents' orientation do not affect Catholic school teachers' evaluations in the same way they affect public school teachers' evaluations. Attending school events results in a more positive evaluation, while attending parent-teacher conferences results in a more negative evaluation. Attending open house and volunteering at school do not have effects on Catholic school teachers' evaluations. Additionally, neither of the two attitudes variables has an effect in this model.

For both public school and Catholic school students, then, teachers are more likely to say that students work to their best ability if they are female, have higher test scores, or come from a higher socioeconomic background. Whether or not students take cultural lessons or attend cultural events has no effect on teachers' perceptions in the public or the Catholic schools. More of the parents' orientation variables have an effect in the public school model than in the Catholic school model. In public schools, all of the actions parents could take affect teachers' perceptions, while only conferences and attending school events have an effect in the Catholic schools. Among the attitudes variables, only not feeling welcome has an effect in public schools, and neither variable has an effect in the Catholic schools.

The first set of models examined the effects of cultural capital and parents' orientation on teachers' assessments of students' working to ability. In the next set of models, the dependent variable is teachers' assessments of students' academic skills – in particular, how a student's language skills compare to other students at the same grade level.

In the public school model, the student's score on the reading test has a positive effect, as would be expected. Being female results in a more favorable teacher assessment, while minority status has a negative effect. Socioeconomic status has a positive effect on teachers' evaluations. The two components of cultural capital, one-time cultural activities and long-term lessons, do not have a significant influence on teachers' perceptions. This finding is similar to that of the previous set of models. The cultural activities that have been found to have an effect on adolescent students in past research do not have an effect on kindergarten students.

Three of the actions variables of parents' orientation toward schooling have effects on teachers' perceptions, and the effects are in the same direction as they were in the previous set of models. Attendance at open house and volunteering at school result in more favorable teacher evaluations, while attending parent-teacher conferences results in less favorable evaluations. Attending school events, which affected teachers' evaluations of working to ability, does not have an effect on teachers' evaluations of students' skills in language arts. Of the two attitudes variables, only not feeling welcome has an effect on teachers' evaluations; not feeling welcome results in a lower teacher eval-

uation of students' skills. For public school students, then, teachers' assessments of effort and skill are affected similarly by parents' orientation, with the exception of attendance at school events, and not at all by cultural capital.

The estimates in the Catholic school model differ both from the public school models, and from the previous Catholic school model focusing on effort. While higher reading test scores and higher SES levels result in more favorable evaluations of students' language arts skills, gender and minority status have no effect. As in all of the previous models, none of the cultural capital variables has any effect on teachers' perceptions. Only one of the parents' orientation variables, attendance at school events, has an effect on teachers' evaluations; the rest of the actions and attitudes variables have no effect. Interestingly, attendance at school events was the one action in the public school model that did not have an effect on teachers' evaluations.

## DISCUSSION

The answer to the first research question, whether cultural capital and parents' orientation to schooling differ by school sector, is clear: Catholic school students are more likely to participate in cultural activities, and Catholic school parents are more likely to be involved in and have positive feelings toward their children's schooling. Moreover, these school sector differences cannot be accounted for by the different socioeconomic make-up of the student bodies.

The second and third questions, how cultural capital and parents' orientation toward schooling affect teachers' perceptions of students, and whether these effects vary by school sector, have answers that contradict previous theories and research. Cultural capital, as it has traditionally been operationalized in educational research, does not significantly affect teachers' evaluations of students' effort or ability. This is true for students in both public and Catholic schools. Past research on American middle and high schools has consistently found a cultural capital effect on various educational outcomes, and the lack of an effect for kindergarten students is puzzling. One possible explanation is that kindergarten teachers, on average, have lower levels of cultural capital themselves, and do not value it as much as teachers in the higher grade levels. Another possibility is that the effects of cultural capital build slowly over time, so that by second or third grades, the effects of cultural capital become evident in students' educational outcomes. Both of these possibilities should be explored in future research. The second possibility – that the effects of cultural capital accumulate over time – can be answered as the third grade and fifth grade waves of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study are released.

A positive interpretation of this finding is that for kindergarten stu-

dents, lack of access to cultural resources does not appear to have a negative effect. Students from less privileged backgrounds are not necessarily at an educational disadvantage (from a cultural capital perspective) if they do not take arts lessons or go to museums. The lack of a cultural capital effect may be because of the age of these children; it is possible that kindergarten students are too young to display the embodied cultural capital that has been found in adolescent students. Conversely, the lack of a cultural capital effect may be due to the dependent variables used in the analyses. The measurement of teachers' perceptions of the students' effort and ability may be weak. Studies of older students have often used grades as the dependent variable; while grades are not available for the kindergarten students, they are available in the follow-up waves of the survey, when the students are in first, third, and fifth grades.

Parents' orientation toward schooling does affect teachers' evaluations, and these effects vary by school sector. In public schools, attending open house, volunteering, and going to parent-teacher conferences all affect teachers' evaluations of both student effort and ability: The first two variables have positive effects, while the third has a negative effect. Attending school events has a positive effect only for teachers' evaluations of students' effort. Additionally, in public schools, teachers' evaluations of effort and ability are both negatively affected when parents agree that they do not feel welcome at their children's schools.

In Catholic schools, however, another contradiction arises. Based on past research about social capital and parental norms, one would expect parents' orientation in Catholic schools to have a strong effect for both dependent variables. The Catholic community should reward parents' involvements and efforts to generate social closure, and to see their children in a more favorable light. In fact, neither of the two attitudes variables has an effect on teachers' evaluations of effort and ability. Of the four actions variables, only attendance at school events has positive effects for both types of teacher evaluations, while parent-teacher conferences have a negative effect on teachers' evaluations of effort. Since this is one of the first studies of cultural capital and parental orientation in Catholic schools, it remains to be seen if these findings are replicated. Perhaps, like cultural capital, the effects of orientation toward schooling during the high school years are stronger than they are in kindergarten. By third grade, the students as well as the parents respond to the survey questions in the ECLS, which will provide the opportunity to study orientation toward schooling and its effects at both the parent and the student level.

Teachers' perceptions can have serious repercussions – teachers decide which ability groups to place the students into, whether to hold a student back, and how much time to spend with each student – which in turn may

exacerbate pre-existing educational inequalities. The findings in this study indicate that public school parents, in particular, need to be made aware of the importance of their involvement in their children's schooling and encouraged to attend open houses or volunteer at school.

While race and gender are included as control variables in the models, they are not the main focus of this study. Being female results in more favorable teacher evaluations of both effort and ability in public schools, and in more favorable teacher evaluations of effort in Catholic schools, even after controlling for ability level. Minority status has an effect in only one model, public school teachers' evaluations of language skills, but this effect is negative, again after controlling for ability level. Future research should consider these issues of gender and race.

Research has shown that school sector differences exist in the types of social relationships parents have with other parents, with Catholic schools generating more of this social capital. In turn, social capital has been found to have a positive influence on the educational outcomes of students in the Catholic school sector. In this study, the distribution and effects of another important form of capital – cultural capital – were examined. Higher levels of cultural capital are found in the Catholic school sector, but cultural capital does not have any impact on kindergarteners' academic outcomes in either sector. These findings indicate that Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital may not apply to the American educational system in the same way he believed it applied to the French system. Cultural capital may not become relevant in generating educational inequalities in America until students reach secondary school.

Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that there are school sector differences in parents' activity levels and comfort levels with school involvement. Catholic school parents are more involved and more comfortable in their children's schools, but ultimately, it is only parents' attendance at school events that results in educational advantages for Catholic school students. This specific indicator of parents' orientation toward schooling is in fact the one most closely related to Coleman's notion of social capital. Attendance at school events is a way for parents to meet with other parents, generating the social closure that leads to shared norms.

To gain a complete understanding of the influence of school sector on the effects of cultural capital and parents' orientation toward schooling, it will be necessary to study sector differences over time. Bourdieu argued that the generation of both cultural capital and orientation toward the social structure are lifetime processes, and therefore, differences between school sectors that appear minor or even nonexistent during the first year of schooling may grow gradually over subsequent years. Continued longitudinal research in this area will be necessary to fully understand school sec-

tor differences in the accumulation of and benefits from cultural capital and orientation toward schooling.

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