

Parenting priorities and pressures: Furthering understanding of ‘concerted cultivation’

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This paper re-examines the purposes of a planned and intentional parenting style—‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau, 2003)—for different middle class groups, highlighting that social class fraction, ethnicity, but also individual family disposition, guides understandings of the purposes of enrolling children in particular enrichment activities. We examine how parents and their children engage in extra-curricular activities for instrumental reasons with a view to securing skills, qualities and distinction for the future. Additionally, however, enrichment activities are understood as offering present day values such as enjoyment, social bonding, and purposeful activity. The paper also highlights that current policy and broader commercial discourses call for the increased responsabilisation and intensification of parenting, which means that ‘good’ parents are required to ‘buy into’ extra-curricular activities for their children, with concomitant implications for those whose access to activities is limited by economic circumstance.

Keywords: parenting, social class, ethnicity, enrichment activities

Introduction

This paper seeks to further the discussion of one particular aspect of modern day parenting: the exponential rise, especially since the 1990s, in out-of-school learning and enrichment activities. Children can take classes in art, music, all kinds of sport, drama, dance, singing, and many more. The availability and uptake of private tutoring—either in the form of shop-front classes¹ or one-to-one tutoring in children’s homes—has also risen markedly (Bray, 2007). Polling by Ipsos MORI for the Sutton Trust shows that 24% of all young people in England and Wales during 2013 said they had received private tuition at some stage in their school career, compared with 18% in 2005.² This figure rises to 40% of young people in London who had received some extra tuition over their school careers. Rates of private tutoring are even higher in many Asian countries, with some studies finding over 60% of secondary school students have received tuition (Bray, 2007). The increased presence of extra-curricular enrichment activities and tutoring, is, we argue, an illustration of the growing ‘responsibilisation’ of parents, an argument we develop below.

In this paper, we offer some reflections on this phenomenon from the experience of conducting several research projects in England that all include a focus on childrearing and parental priorities. The first author, Carol Vincent, has undertaken qualitative research exploring the influence of social class on parents’ actions and

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priorities around education, and we are drawing here on data from a project (with Stephen Ball) on middle class parents' choice of childcare, and one exploring the educational strategies of the Black (Caribbean-origin) middle classes (with Stephen Ball, Nicola Rollock, and David Gillborn). We also refer to an on-going project (Vincent, Neal, and Iqbal) on children and adults' friendships across ethnic and social class difference. The first two of these projects gathered data from parents on their educational planning and priorities, and the last from parents and primary age children on friendship. The second author, Claire Maxwell's work with Peter Aggleton on the education of young women in private schools is particularly important here, because it directly reports on the young people's experiences and reflections on the many extra-curricular activities with which they were involved.

We are both interested in the interaction of social class with parenting priorities and beliefs. Although parenting is a personal, intensive and intuitive experience, it is also infused with classed behaviours, values, actions and dispositions (Vincent, 2012). Class is ubiquitous, though rarely overtly named; what Savage calls the 'everywhere but nowhere' (Savage, 2005, p. 939) quality of class discourse. Enrichment activities are, we suggest, one example of classed parenting behaviours. We start by discussing the phenomena of activities and concerted cultivation. We argue that in a policy climate that emphasises the role of parenting in securing future opportunities for children in relation to employment and the ability to make a social and economic contribution to society, offering your child opportunities to develop talents and skills is understood as a worthy and responsible approach to childrearing. Through this paper we seek to develop a potential future research agenda to explore further how parents' motivations and practices differ across both broad class groupings, and class fractions within those groups, and are additionally shaped by familial habitus.

'Enriching' activities and 'good' parenting

A student cited in the Paired Peers project (led by Harriet Bradley³) gives us a sense of how his parents prioritised their children experiencing a range of activities.

[My parents were] just making sure we've got something that we can have for the future, like windsurfing, surfing, trumpet, climbing, I've done so many activities when I was little it's just stupid ... my sister's now working all round the world doing windsurf teaching and stuff like this, and I've taught break dancing and stuff like that. *So kind of setting us up for the future rather than just giving us [computer games]*. (Bathmaker, Ingram, & Waller, 2013, p. 733, emphasis added)

This young man is categorised as middle class, and has clearly had an upbringing where developing a portfolio of skills and talents was a key concern. Although his description of his extensive involvement as 'just stupid', his description of the benefits (for example, in terms of casual employment) suggests that he is not being derogatory. On the contrary, he presents his parents as understanding this accrual of abilities as very much an investment for the future, and contrasts this responsible approach to parenting with the routine handing out of game consoles. Giving children computer games is positioned here as implying passive parenting, a lack of imagination and interest on the (imagined) parents' part, and a lack of the effort that parenting is seen to rightfully demand. Similarly, Michael, a father from the Black middle class project describes the time and labour he and his wife put into supporting their sons' sports, as part of their purposeful and engaged approach to parenting:

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Get involved in your school, give your child extra tuition, get them involved in extra-curricular activity. I don’t care what the activity is, but take it seriously and be there for them. It takes a lot of time and effort. [We] do not want to get up at 8 o’clock to take [the children to rugby] ... It’s not how we want to spend our Sunday mornings but, you know what, it has to be done. That’s how you raise successful children, you give them opportunity and hopefully they will take the opportunity ... (Michael, self employed, Black middle class project).

Unsurprisingly, the private providers of enrichment activities and tutoring focus in their publicity on the benefits to the child, the development of skills and talents that will serve them in the future. The promise becomes a source of pressure, tapping into parents’ desire to provide their children with a ‘good’—indeed the ‘best’ possible—childhood. We offer three examples below from well-known providers in England. *Perform* offers drama classes, *Tumbletots* is a baby/toddler gym class, and *Kumon* are shop-front tutors.

- For your child, *Perform* will be all about fun. *Perform* helps children be more outgoing, confident, imaginative and happy ... Fun which will help them acquire better concentration and memory, a richer vocabulary, higher self-esteem and a whole range of social and creative attributes that can make all the difference to their confidence, independence and happiness.⁴
- *Tumbletots*: The Springboard to Confidence for your Child, established for more than a quarter of a century’ (by an Olympic gymnast). ‘Designed to develop children’s physical skills of agility, balance, co-ordination and climbing, through the use of brightly coloured *Tumbletots* equipment. The programme is structured to develop children’s positive personality traits including confidence and self-esteem ... Child psychologists and educators agree that a structured programme in movement should be a part of every child’s education.’⁵
- *Kumon*: Our aim is for each and every child to become an independent, advanced learner, with a positive attitude to study ... Through our unique method, children are supported to reach an advanced level of study. By studying beyond the international standard for their age, children are best prepared to succeed in an increasingly global community.⁶

As can be seen, they all emphasise, not just activity-related skills, but also a wider range of personal characteristics and benefits (confidence, social skills, self-esteem). There is an appeal to expert backing by *Tumbletots*, whilst *Kumon* promises to advance children academically, and in so doing, to equip them with the skills needed to succeed in a globalised labour market.

We argue that engaging in extra-curricular activities is becoming a fundamental part of what is understood as constituting a ‘good’ childhood amongst affluent populations, and thus, an indicator of being a ‘good’ parent is that s/he provide such opportunities to their children. Or, more accurately, such work is part of what being a ‘good’ *mother* entails, since mothers are still the main carers in many households, and most likely to be involved with the minutiae of the child’s daily life—such as knowing which activities are on which day, and what practicalities are required to facilitate their child’s participation (Lareau, 2003; Vincent & Ball, 2006). It has been noted before that ‘good’ mothering is generally accepted, as being an all-consuming process in terms of time, energy and effort. Different researchers have referred to this

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phenomenon in various ways. Hays (1996), for example, has written about ‘intensive mothering’, describing the current normative understanding of ‘good mothering’ amongst affluent populations. This is an approach that is child-focused, with the mother (rather than the father) having the responsibility to care both intensively and extensively for all aspects of the child’s physical, moral, social, emotional, and intellectual development. Even if mothers do not, will not, or cannot mother in such a way, Intensive Mothering Expectations (IME) (Johnston & Swanson, 2006) have become pervasive. It is not that there is no resistance from mothers, but rather that the power of intensive mothering as a set of practices and values means that both engagement *and* resistance are shaped in relation to it (Jensen, 2013; Miller, 2005). One of the ways in which IME are realised is through an acceptance by parents, especially mothers, that they are responsible for all aspects of the child’s development. Thus they have to think, plan, and be purposeful in relation to that task—what Arendell (2001, p. 169) calls ‘intentional parenting’. American sociologist, Annette Lareau, coined the phrase ‘concerted cultivation’ to describe such practices. We offer a brief outline of her research below.

Concerted cultivation

Lareau’s (2003) well-known ethnographic study explored the childrearing styles of 12 families in America (from different socio-economic backgrounds, both White and African-American). She argued that there is a classed ‘cultural logic’ directing parenting actions that is particularly visible through the organisation of daily life (such as enrolling children in structured activities *or* letting children spend their out-of-school time playing unsupervised), how parents encourage their children, and model for them, the use of language (such as the degree to which parents are willing to reason and negotiate with their children *or* to issue directives), the types of social connections and networks in which particular families are located (with the emphasis being on social networks of friends *or* kin networks), and how parents interact with key institutions, such as schools. Lareau presents these different types of behaviour as a binary, and argues powerfully for two main types of parenting approach. The first is interventionist—planned strategies for concerted cultivation—including attempts to foster children’s talents through organised leisure activities. The second approach—the ‘accomplishment of natural growth’—focuses on keeping children warm, fed, loved, however, parents do not see their children as a project to be purposively developed. We find Lareau’s work to be a powerful application of a Bourdieusian-informed approach to conceptualising parenting. However, the very structure of her model does imply a middle/working class binary (although Lareau gathers data from three groups of parents—middle, working class and poor (i.e., those receiving public assistance). However, more recent research with both the middle and working classes discerns a variety of approaches to parenting within broad class categories (Irwin & Elley, 2011; Vincent et al., 2012). Perrier (2013) picks up this point. She argues that if middle class parents are presented ‘only as capital bearing and transmitting individuals, [w]hat gets left out is the complexity and messiness’ (p. 658) of the different ways in which middle class mothers negotiate discourses around being a ‘good’ mother.

In earlier work, one of us has argued that enrichment activities serve as an investment for the future, a process of inculcation into the tastes and dispositions of the professional middle classes, and that a ‘Renaissance child’ with skills and talents

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in sport, music, art and so on, can gain (further) positional advantage in competitive education and labour markets (Vincent & Ball, 2007).

The possibilities of the social reproduction of the middle-class family are no longer perceived as certain as they perhaps once were. The anticipation of an objective future is fraught with anxieties and risks. Here then calculation, improvisation and invention are to the fore. The work of transmission of cultural capital really is work; ‘a labour of inculcation and assimilation’ as Bourdieu (2004, p. 18) puts it ... It is an effort of endless responsibility, fuelled by the market, provoked by the state and driven by social competition in a context of social and technological risk. (Vincent & Ball, 2007, p. 1074)

However, we do not suggest that anxiety around social reproduction is the sole explanation for the use of enrichment activities. In line with Irwin & Elley (2011), we would argue that such intense cultivation is a ‘particular’ rather than a ‘general’ account of middle class parenting experiences, shaped by the internal differentiation of the middle classes. One example of such differentiation is provided by the Black middle class project, where the researchers argued that for these parents enrichment activities played a variety of roles (Vincent et al., 2013). First, extra-curricular activities *were* indeed about the pursuit of advantage, but for this group, unlike their white middle class peers, this was a pursuit informed by the knowledge and experience of racism in the education and labour markets. For the Black middle classes respondents, Vincent et al. (2013) argue that activities were a source of extra credentials (so that skills and certificates in music, and/or sport or drama could sit alongside academic qualifications) which would equip their children with as many advantages as possible to facilitate their successful navigation through a racially unequal society. Second, for Black middle class parents, as for their white middle class peers, enrichment activities also acted as a mechanism for the enculturation of children into what is ‘good taste’ and appropriate cultural knowledge. Significantly, for Black families, frequently portrayed in England as a homogeneous working class group, this could be a way of claiming traditional elite culture (e.g. classical music) for *their* children, in order to assert their middle-class-ness. Third, Black middle classes parents in the study were also concerned to educate their children in traditionally marginalised forms of knowledge—such as African history. This was often done in the home, but occasionally through the use of supplementary schools and mentoring organisations for Black young people, aimed at ‘de-centring whiteness’ (Reay & Mirza, 1997). Thus, the findings from the Black middle classes project suggest that enrichment activities have a number of different and nuanced purposes for these parents, when compared to their white middle class peers.

Another example of differentiation across the middle classes is the norm of accomplishment—across academic, sporting, and musical pursuits—for those young people within elite private education. The range of accomplishments and a confident, articulate, capable self-presentation is assumed and expected by schools, families and the young people themselves, a phenomenon we discuss further below (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013).

Enrichment activities: shaping the moral high ground?

We argue here that concerted cultivation is part of an intensification of parenting, in particular, mothering. Such an approach reflects a neo-liberal orthodoxy of ‘responsibilisation’, where individuals are responsible for developing their own

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biographies and life trajectories (Beck, 1992), with parents responsible for generating their children's biographies through the development of the children's intellectual, social, cultural, physical and emotional skills. Bringing up children within this paradigm becomes a risky process where children are positioned as investments for the future, needing to be nurtured and protected (Smeyers, 2010). Thus parents are required to be pro-active; passivity, as noted above, denotes a lack of effort. As Suissa comments, 'the emphasis on *doing* things for children rather than *being* with them pervades all aspects of society' (2006, p. 72).

Parenting, and what parents do, has become a policy focus in England. This emphasis goes beyond the positioning of parents as consumers in a marketised system of education introduced in the 1980s, and indeed beyond the requirements placed by schools on parents to be active and involved in their child's schooling (of which we have written elsewhere, see for example, Vincent, 1996; 2012). The sphere for development is very clearly the home— witness for example the Coalition government's introduction of the trial of universal parenting classes—CANParent (Cullen et al., 2014) as well as intensive intervention for those 120,000 plus (scheme extended in 2014) identified as 'Troubled Families'. Prime Minister David Cameron has argued that, 'a real responsibility agenda must go beyond simply supporting families and helping them stick together, to the complex territory of helping to develop parenting skills' (speech to Demos, Jan 2010). The emphasis on parenting is understood as operating above and beyond material circumstances. 'The UK has witnessed a dichotomous framing of poverty *or* parenting ...with the government positioning parenting as "the principal site for social renewal" ' (Jensen, quoted in Dermott & Yamashita, 2014, p. 130). If one accepts our analysis that being a 'good' parent now includes a focus on giving children opportunities to develop talents and skills in structured, organised ways, then how are those who do not do this positioned? Enrichment classes are clearly easier to access if you have the economic resources associated with the professional middle classes; these classes cost and some cost a lot. Some schools make similar provision available to their pupils, but this is by no means universal. Dermott & Yamashita criticise the Allen Report, a UK government report on early intervention in parenting, for its apparently deficit approach to 'low income' parents,

It is working class parents and those less well off who are the primary targets for new initiatives and interventions. But their failure to perform good enough parenting is currently framed as a lack of will, knowledge or aspiration rather than resources. 'Many parents have a strong desire to do the best for their children but many, especially in low income groups, are ill informed or poorly motivated on how to achieve this.' (Allen, 2011, quoted in Dermott & Yamashita, 2014, p. 137)

Such a policy focus on parental actions and behaviours risks perpetuating the marginalisation of material circumstances in shaping parenting and access to resources.

Lareau's study suggested that working class respondents did not perceive a need for enrichment activities. In contrast, working class parents in Bennett, Lutz, and Jayaram's (2012) later study were enthusiastic. However, they were constrained in the sort of activities available to their children. These parents relied far more heavily on cheaper activities provided by schools and churches, rather than private providers, and there were also lower rates of working class participation in elite cultural activities (such as orchestra). Some working class respondents saw activities as important, not necessarily for the skills learned, but for giving their children access to safe spaces in

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localities where they would otherwise be vulnerable outside the home. Bennett et al. (2012) concluded that the differences between the social classes are therefore not so much a question of class cultures (i.e., what parents understood to be important) as 'class related conditions in which they find themselves' (p. 152) (i.e. what they were able to provide given the resources available to them).

The various purposes of extra curricular activities

In England, an elite form of concerted cultivation, in which more affluent parents can invest, is to send their children to a private school, as these, in addition to academic excellence, also focus on the cultivation of individual children; an all-round education is seen as essential for succeeding in the future.⁷

The expectation that the young people in these schools take part in such activities is driven by the school, family, and peers. The pupils in Maxwell and Aggleton's (2013) research were extremely busy young women. For example, Allie was in her penultimate year of schooling (aged 17 years) at Abbey Mill School (a pseudonym for a girls'-only boarding school): she held two Prefect positions (which have leadership responsibilities), and engaged in eight different sports, as well as studying for five AS Levels (a qualification taken at 17, usually people take four). When asked by Claire how she fitted it all this in, Allie replied, 'Um, we wake up early to train, go to lessons. You train in your lunches, your teas and after school. And then you start your homework when you've finished at 10' [Laughs]. There was certainly pleasure for these young women in the activities in which they are involved, although failure in developing mastery of an activity remained a risk. Opportunities to become 'accomplished' were seen as critical in shaping a surety of the self—developing an understanding of what kind of a person one was, where one's talents and passions lay, and what future employment trajectory to pursue (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013).

The literature on elite education has shown how these institutions shape discourses that ultimately justify the success and privilege of their pupils' experiences, by suggesting both are merited (Gaztambide-Fernandez et al., 2013; Howard, 2013; Khan, 2011). The material context shaping the ability to engage in a wide range of enrichment activities therefore becomes less visible. As they grow older, children who have been honing their 'talents' and 'passions' through attending activities from a young age, become positioned as 'naturally' talented and gifted, thereby obscuring the 'modes of acquisition of culture' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 66), the hours of labour and support put into the development of that talent (Vincent et al., 2013).

Another way in which middle-class parenting strategies and investment in extra-curricular activities can benefit children longer-term, is not only in the identification and cultivation of 'natural' talents, but also in the development of personal qualities—such as perseverance, resilience and team work—'soft' skills valued in the labour market (Stefansen & Aarseth, 2011). These kinds of qualities are also strongly highlighted in the websites of elite/private schools (Forbes & Weiner, 2008; Wardman et al., 2010). Similarly Levey (2009) argues that the parents of children involved in activities as different as beauty pageants and after-school tuition classes (the two attracting differently socially-situated parents) understand the benefit of their participation to be an investment in their future, not only through the skills-specific learning that the particular activities offer, but also more broadly through increasing a child's confidence, their tenacity, and commitment to hard work. Bella from Claire

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Maxwell’s research, explained the benefits of devoting yourself wholeheartedly to an activity, even when it involved physical pain.

Well it’s [rowing] very painful, so I wouldn’t say I enjoy it. But I guess it’s good for us to do a sport ... not being cocky or anything ... but I’m quite good at it and my dad is quite keen on sport, and he wants me to do it ... it’s weird ’cos I like everything about rowing ... I like all the people that do rowing, and I like the coaches and the place and the kind of atmosphere. But then it’s just the pain really, the physical pain ... it’s painful to the point that you actually vomit at the end sometimes ... it’s just the fact that if we’re doing it, we might as well do it as hard as you actually *can* ... and it really annoys me when people don’t ... obviously it’s nice to win but I don’t mind not winning if everyone has tried as hard as they possible could and if the other team’s just better—that’s fine. (Bella, St. Thomas’ coeducational boarding school, aged 15)

Activities also have other advantages beyond the development of individual talents and skills. Crucially, as Bella suggests above, they have a clear moral dimension. Parents in our various data sets understood activities as constructive involvement, which was morally and practically preferable to ‘hanging out’. In this way, parents are seeking to exercise control over what young people do, where, when and with whom.

[The stereotype is that] Black people can only do music and sport, so I have kept them away from that ... There will be no hanging round the streets as they get older. So you move directly from activities to a car, and drive past the people hanging around on the streets. (Richard, third sector, director, Black middle class project)

Of course, being ‘on the streets’ is a more or less dangerous activity depending on where you live and who you are. For young Black boys, ‘the street’ can be a dangerous place, and Richard seeks to organise his children’s time, in part, to protect them (see also Bennett et al., 2012). Other parents in the project emphasised that children *should* learn to use time productively. Meanwhile, those organisations which prioritize the transmission of moral values such as the Scouts, Girl Guides and so forth clearly promote the importance of service to others, personal development, and engagement in productive, enjoyable activities with peers, as valuable and even necessary for children’s development.

Thus, we suggest that enrichment activities are not just an investment in the future, but also offer present-day value. One benefit can be the generation of social capital. The latter is visible in data collected for a current project (Vincent, Neal & Iqbal) on children’s and adult’s friendships across social and ethnic difference.⁸ Shared activities for children and young people can reinforce social bonds, though the clubs or classes in which such activities take place are often populated with others ‘like them’. This, therefore, becomes another way in which middle class families resource the self, by creating communities of and for like-minded others—a phenomenon that is particularly noticeable in diverse urban areas (Neal & Vincent, 2013; Reay, Crozier, & James, 2011).

I don’t want [my son] to have just white middle class friends ... [but] the white middle class kids do all the after-school clubs, and that’s what’s happened ... So that [shared activities] is where the friendships just bonded, it seems to be that is where the kids spend more time with each other outside school, the older they get, it becomes more important. (Claire, white middle class mother, Leewood School, friendship project)

Here we have a form of ‘intergenerational closure’ (Coleman, 1997). Coleman uses the term to emphasize what he understands to be the importance of social connections between families, specifically networks of parents and children where adults and

children all know each other. This is understood to be a positive force for maintaining expectations of children's behavior, as parents share similar values and norms. It is possible in Vincent, Neal and Iqbal's research to identify groups of middle class children at these diverse urban schools, who, after school, participated in an array of activities often with others very much like themselves, thus further reinforcing their social bonds, and also in some cases, those of their parents. In interview, these parents were very positive about the networks generated through shared neighbourhood activities, which were perceived as helping to foster a sense of 'community'. There was not always a recognition that this had the effect of creating a homogeneous community in a heterogeneous locality. Class and class fractional locations are therefore critical in shaping networks of sociality.

We still do not know much about why people enrol their children in particular classes, which groups of parents enrol their children in what kinds of activities, and what the children think about their involvement in these. The voice of the child has been neglected in much research to date (see Chin & Phillips, 2004 for an exception). The enjoyment and pleasure in pursuing activities is a critical motivator, for young people and for their parents (see Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013). Enrichment activities, as we noted above, are not an exclusively middle class phenomenon, although the middle classes, we suspect, make more use of them than other groups. Activities are an important area for study, we argue, because focusing on families' (non)-engagement with them, offers a 'way-in' to an understanding of parents' differing dispositions, what seems 'right' and 'natural' in terms of their parenting and their priorities for their children. Examples of 'the way we do things' in families can include parental rules about appropriate leisure time activities, food, speech, dress, and also more taken-for-granted aspects of lifestyle, such as regular eating-out at non-fast-food restaurants, family activities, or if and where a family goes on holiday (Vincent et al., 2012, p. 342). This collection of dispositions, values and priorities has been variously labeled with terms derived from Bourdieu, such as family/familial habitus (Archer et al., 2012; Burke, Emmerich, & Ingrams, 2013; Reay, 1998; Vincent et al., 2012), parental habitus (Dumais, 2006) and family-specific doxa (Atkinson, 2011). The most appropriate term requires further debate elsewhere, so for the purposes of this paper we will retain the use of family habitus, despite its limitations (Atkinson, 2011). Family habitus can be understood as including both reflective and deliberate, as well as less conscious, assumptions about childrearing priorities. Thus family habitus is an inherited set of dispositions—a 'deeply ingrained system of perspectives, experiences and predispositions family members share' (Reay, 1998, p. 527)—but one that may also be the subject of conscious reflection (Reay, 2004; Vincent et al., 2012). Archer et al. (2012) use the concept to discuss the influence of family practices on children's sense of themselves as potential 'scientists':

Family habitus is used to explore the extent to which families construct a collective relationship with science and the extent to which this is shaped by their possession of particular sorts of economic, social, and cultural capital. In particular, we examine participants' accounts of how science is 'woven' into un/conscious family life (or not). We see the potential value of a concept of family habitus (as opposed, say, to alternatives such as 'family identity' or 'family context') as grounded in its capacity to better encompass a broad spectrum of family resources, practices, values, cultural discourses, and 'identifications' ('who we are'). (Archer et al., 2012, p. 886)

We wish, therefore, to end, by emphasising the importance of studying processes of childrearing as practised by families who are differently socially positioned (not just

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by social class, but also by race/ethnicity), and, critically, examining how family dispositions come into being (Irwin & Elley, 2011, 2013; Vincent et al., 2012).

Concluding thoughts

Concerted cultivation is a strategic response to many parents’ perception of their responsibility to develop and ‘make up’ an individual, with a range of talents and skills. It is a search for distinction. We argue that the degree and form of concerted cultivation reflects the classed practices of the home. Furthermore, involvement in a shared set of activities in a locality can also contribute to ‘intergenerational closure’ amongst ‘people like us’. However, across the middle classes, emphasises and priorities differ. Diversity *within* as well as *across* classes is important, as argued by Irwin & Elley (2011). For some middle class fractions, cultivation and accomplishment are cultural necessities. Cultivation is an accepted and expected part of a person’s knowledge and skills—for example, the taken-for-granted accomplishment of young ladies in particular, attending private schools in England (Allan, 2009; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013). Additionally, concerted cultivation is a racialised, as well as a classed, strategy for social reproduction/mobility, as we have argued with reference to the project analyzing the educational strategies of the Black middle classes.

We have also argued that we are moving towards the normalisation of concerted cultivation as a parenting strategy for all, and, as a result, there is a risk that parents not able to or willing to engage in such activities will be positioned as offering inadequate parenting. The majority of activities have some associated costs and parental labour, so children from the poorest families will continue to miss out.

Through this paper we have sought to highlight some critical questions that still require exploration. First, we have emphasised that understanding the purposes enrichment activities hold for families needs more careful study—considering differences across class fractions and ethnic origins, and significantly, how parents’ own biographies and experiences during their childhoods shape their approaches to parenting, and the opportunities they make available for their own children. It may be that some extra curricular activities have a higher status than others; orchestral musical instruments for example not only require expensive equipment and time-intensive practice, but also an appreciation of classical music, which continues to be associated with the affluent professional middle class (Bourdieu, 1984; LeRoux et al., 2008). Second, research needs to engage children and young people across the social classes to elicit their views on such activities and examine how the purpose of these engagements are conceptualised. Third, a spatial approach to mapping the kinds of activities available in a locality, and how these are differentially accessed by various groups, will also develop a deeper understanding of how the responsabilisation and intensification of parenting is being differentially taken up, whether the imperative of concerted cultivation is increasing social divisions, which activities engage more heterogeneous groups, and which courses or clubs have a greater emphasis on collective and/or individual skills development. Such a spatial approach to mapping provision, uptake and engagement by local families will offer a greater understanding of roles played by providers (the burgeoning private sector, as well as local voluntary sector or public providers), in offering opportunities for all, or only for some. Mapping the impact of extra-curricular engagements on local neighbourhood relations will allow a consideration of the possibilities for sociality across race, class and

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gender lines. Fourth, although it is not routine, many schools do provide low-cost access to extra curricular activities. A study of such provision would generate data on the use and experience of school-based provision by children and their families, and whether these opportunities are accessible to the poorest children, and provide them with comparable resources of cultural capital to their wealthier and carefully cultivated peers.

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Notes

1. These are institutions that operate in high street premises resembling a shop, usually offering individual computer based programmes in English and Maths to children.
2. <http://www.suttontrust.com/news/news/londoners-most-likely-to-pay-for-extra-tuition-as-demand/> (accessed 5 June 2014).
3. Interviews with students attending two universities in Bristol aimed to explore how social class affects the aspirations and employment futures made possible through a university education.
4. <http://www.perform.org.uk/about-us/how-your-child-will-benefit.html> (accessed 5 June 2014).
5. <http://www.tumbletots.com/our-programmes.php> (accessed 5 June 2014).
6. www.kumon.co.uk/private-tuition/frequently-asked-questions/index.htm (accessed 5 June 2014).
7. See for example the message of the Headmaster of Stowe, an elite private school, <http://www.stowe.co.uk/about-stowe/headmasters-welcome> (accessed 7 June 2014).
8. This project seeks to understand what patterns of friendships reveal about the nature and extent of ethnic and social divisions in contemporary multicultural society. The team are considering to what extent and how children's and adults' friendships cross ethnic and social class difference. The project involves interviews with 8/9 year-old children, their parents and teachers in three London primary schools. Other data sources include the children's 'social maps' of their friendships, and researcher observations on classroom/playground interaction.

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