Exploring How Parents Structure Their Children's Out-of-School Time

Dissertation Proposal

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Why do some children fair better at school than others? While this question can be addressed in many different ways I am most interested in looking at how children's home lives influence their school lives. The purpose of this research is to examine how children spend their out of school time and how their parents understand the decisions they make about their child's leisure activities. It will also examine parent's perceptions about their role in their child's educational career. The questions guiding this research are:

1. How do parents structure their children's out-of-school time? How does this differ by social class?

2. What type of activities and experiences do parents provide their children during the summer and during the school year that may amass cultural capital for their child?

3. How do parents understand their choices? How do their understandings differ by social class?

To address these questions I will interview lower class and middle class parents of children in grades kindergarten to grade 3 to find out how they structure their children's time and how they understand their decisions (see below for definition of social classes). From an interpretivist standpoint this research will endeavour to understand parent's constructions surrounding the leisure choices they make for their young children and the meanings behind those choices. The main contributions this research will make to the field of study will be in its ability to analyse in-depth descriptions about how children from different social class backgrounds spend their out-of-school time and how parents make decisions about their child's leisure time. Contextualizing this data with school data, such as report cards and test scores, will provide a more holistic picture as to what home-factors may influence student's academic achievement at school. Little research has linked these ideas together coherently.

Achievement Gaps

  A central aspect of social inequality that this research is concerned with is achievement gaps. While there are achievement gaps found between students of different races, different languages, different family size, etc., this research is most interested in examining the achievement gaps between social classes. Achievement gaps begin before school even starts. Downey *et al*. (2004: 632) found that the gap between lower class and middle class children is substantial at the very beginning of school. Janus and Daku (2007:399), using Canadian data, confirmed that there is "indeed a gap in school readiness among kindergarten children." Children who come from lower class homes begin school with fewer skills than their advantaged peers and this gap continues to widen throughout their lives. Many researchers have examined achievement gaps. One such set of researchers, Karl Alexander *et al*. (2007), wanted to find out what the lasting consequences of learning gaps are for students. Using American data, they found that 62% of middle/upper class students became enrolled in a college preparatory program in high school versus only 13% of the lower class students. In addition, 60% of middle/upper class students attended a 4-year college by age 22, while just 7% of the lower class group of students did so. Meanwhile, over 33% of lower class students but only 3% middle/upper class students had been classified as "permanent dropouts" at the age of 22, meaning they still lacked high school certification. Clearly achievement varies based on one's socio-economic status and not only are achievement gaps apparent before school begins, they continue to grow.

  There are several literatures that try to account for academic achievement gaps between lower class and middle class children that broadly fall into two main categories: school effects and family effects. Both literatures provide compelling arguments about which effects (school or family) impact academic achievement gaps more. The literature review below will highlight the research that contributes to both viewpoints of this discussion.

Literature Review

The literature points to two main sources of achievement gaps. First, there is an established body of literature that says that schools are to blame for achievement disparities between social classes. However, a newer body of literature has emerged which offers compelling evidence that families impact achievement disparities between social classes more than school effects. This literature review will examine both sides of the debate. It will also discuss what we know and what we do not know about school and family's impact on achievement gaps.

School Effects

Are schools to blame for achievement gaps between lower class and middle class students? Social reproduction theory would say that schools *are* responsible for the disparity. However, there is a growing body of literature that suggests that schools actually act as an equalizer rather than as the root cause for achievement gaps.

Social Reproduction Theory

Social reproduction theory says that those who come from families whom are already advantaged are the most likely to be advantaged throughout their lives and into the next generation (Brint, 2006:172). Attending a formal educational institution means that a student is more likely to "grow up to occupy the same class position of his or her family of origin" (Wildhagen, 2010:520). This theory believes that schools are set up in ways that favour the values and lifestyles of the middle/upper classes and devalue those of the lower class (Davies, 1994:86-7). Social reproduction theory states that it is most challenging (maybe even impossible?) for students from lower classes to get ahead in life simply through "getting a good education." While there is little evidence that supports the idea that school and teachers knowingly and systematically discriminate against lower

class students or directly reproduce the social hierarchy (Brint *et al*., 2001; Kingston 2001), this theory believes that because schools are set-up to reproduce inequalities found in society, that they are to blame for achievement gaps.

Neo-Marxists, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis are well known scholars who look at how capitalist power relations are replicated in schools (1976:12) and how schools "serve to perpetuate the social, political, and economic conditions" in society (1976:11). Their correspondence principle promotes the idea that there is a direct relationship between social relations of production and education in that "the division of labour in education, as well as its structure of authority and reward, mirror those of the economy" (Bowles and Gintis, 1988: 237). In other words, the structure of schools corresponds or mirrors the work-world and therefore there is great inequality in schools just as there is in the work-world and in society at-large. Not only do schools mirror the work-world, student selection and allocation processes within schools creates hierarchies among students that are legitimized under the guise of meritocracy.

The school system functions on the ideal of meritocracy in that achievement in school is perceived to be based on one's ability. The notion that "the cream of the crop rises to the top" and "hard work pays off" epitomize the idea of meritocracy. It is the philosophy that schools follow a meritocratic system, whereby those who work the hardest, regardless of their gender, social position, or other demographic characteristics, will be the most successful. Schools embody the fundamental "value of equality of opportunity" (Parsons, 1959:309) so if you work hard, you will succeed. Any failure is seen as an individual deficit (Bowles & Gintis, 1976:4). Schooling is based on this notion of meritocracy.

However, theorists who work in the social reproduction tradition will quickly refute the ideal of school being a meritocractic system that rewards students based on individual talent and effort. Rather, reproduction theory believes that meritocracy is a myth because "the schooling system

frequently fails to see the potential of those who do not inherit the language, culture, and values of the upper classes" (Brint, 2006:172). School values are directly inline with middle/upper classes values and therefore, they function in a manner that gives advantages to that group while devaluing those of the lower class (Davies, 1994:86-7). The socio-economic status of one's parents is consistently a better predictor of one's future economic success than measured IQ (Taylor, 1994:48), so achievement based on merit is secondary to a student's social position.

Bowles and Gintis (1988) suggest that the patterns of socialization in schools, which treat different social classes differently, do not occur by accident. Instead, they say, "that the educational objectives and expectations of administrators, teachers, and parents differ for students of different social classes" (1976:132). This creates inequality within the education system as, they say, students are treated differently based on their class position. Taken as part of reproduction theory, these ideas further suggest that schools perpetuate inequality because of differential treatment which continues generation after generation. This line of reproduction theory would place the blame on schools for achievement gaps saying that schools treat students differently based on their social position.

Bernstein's (1971) code theory is an example of how schools disadvantage students from lower class homes and how schools and teachers reward status cultures. Code theory says that children bring to school with them a set of linguistic codes that are derived from their parents and home life and that schools are designed to favour some lingustic codes over others. There are two general types of codes: elaborated and restricted. Restricted codes are the domain of working class individuals and they are context dependent and particularistic. Elaborated codes are context independent and universalistic and are used by middle and upper class individuals (Sadovnik, 2008). Sadovnik (2008) provides the example of a lower class student telling a story by describing a picture using restricted code language. This can be compared to a middle class student being able to tell a story, in detail, using an elaborated code, without the listener needing a picture to understand the

story. Bernstein's theory suggests that success at school requires an elaborate code. Teachers use an elaborate code and expect their students to understand and use the same code. Therefore, lower class children are disadvantaged because they do not know or use the dominant linguist code used in schools (Sadovnik, 2008:21-22). Social reproduction theory advances the idea that schools replicate the existing social class positions that are reflected in society and that they also work to recreate class positions generation after generation. Reproduction theory sees schools as reproducing inequality.

Schools as Equalizers

While schools were seen to actively discriminate against the lower classes (Davies, 1994:87) and set these students up for failure, the opposing argument has also gained momentum over the years. Namely that, "schools are doing a far better job than they have been credited with" (Entwisle *et al*., 2001:95). Conley and Albright (2004:1) suggest that, "a tacit consensus has evolved across the ideological spectrum that the effects of various dimensions of background – family, community, genotype – are stronger influences on educational achievement than are specific school-based policies." Family background may be more important to student success in schools than school-related factors.

When achievement test scores are considered for student's with differing social backgrounds, it is found that students from lower class families actually learn at the same rate as students from middle/upper class homes during the school year (Entwisle *et al*., 2001). This is a key finding because if schools and teachers actively discriminated against lower class students, we would expect these rates to differ greatly. This side of the debate indicates that schools are *not* to blame for the inequality that exists but rather *families* may be the root of the cause.

This side of the debate often focuses on school-readiness of young children, before they have had exposure to school, therefore, making the effects of home-life apparent. It is well documented that children from lower class homes begin school below (on measures such as reading scores) their higher class peers (Downey *et al*., 2004:624; Alexander *et al*., 2007:21). "School readiness is defined as the ability of the child to meet the task demands of school. This definition includes not only the ability to learn the material being taught, but also the ability to behave in a way that allows the child to learn" (Thomas, 2006). Eleanor Thomas (2006), working on behalf of Statistics Canada, found that receptive vocabulary, communication skill, number knowledge, copying and symbol use, attention, and cooperative play were aspects of school readiness where children from lower class families scored lower than children from middle and upper class families. She found that "daily reading, high positive parent-child interaction, participation in organized sports, lessons in physical activities, and lessons in the arts were linked with higher scores on readiness to learn measures" and that lower class children were less likely to experience a home environment that included these aspects. This suggests that the home environment impacts how ready a child is for school when it begins.

In regards to school readiness, research suggests that one way to close the achievement gap is to offer pre-school programs that may help bring lower class children "up to speed" before they start elementary school (Entwisle *et al*., 2001:96). Another way this could be accomplished is having children start school earlier, such as full-time junior kindergarten so that schooling has the opportunity to equalize home disparities earlier on.[1]

Research suggests that schools are actually a great equalizer (Downey *et al*., 2004) because "schooling helps disadvantaged [children] more than it helps advantaged children" (Entwisle *et al*.,

Proposal – A.Bestard   10

2001:87). The disadvantages that lower class students face at home are greater than at school. "We conclude that elementary schools are probably better than they have been given credit for at levelling the playing field between children of better-off and no-so-well-off families: it is in summer, when students are not in school, that the real gap in achievement opens up between disadvantaged and higher SES students" (Entwisle *et al.*, 2001:87). This type of research and its findings suggest that because students from all social backgrounds learn at the same rate, that factors unrelated to school, such as, what happens at home, play a pivotal role in children's achievement at school.

While theorists such as Bowles and Gintis place the majority of the blame on schools for perpetuating inequality and gaps in achievement scores, research tells us that schools are not fully to blame; what happens in family homes matters too. Because "socioeconomic variables, most often family income, parent education, employment, or a combination thereof, are a reliable correlate of children's outcomes" (Janus, 2007:378) it is necessary to look towards families' role in this process.

Family Effects

Students arrive at school having come from all different types of families and children are very affected by their home life. "Sociologists have documented extensively the importance of home environment to children's development, along with substantial variation in children's home experiences" (Downey *et al.*, 2008:244). There are several factors that play a role in childhood development that are also linked to school achievement. The family effects become sensitizing concepts to this research and can be held together by the theory of cultural capital, which will be outlined below.

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[1] The Pascal Report (2009) conducted in Ontario recommend the best way to implement full-day learning for 4-and 5-year-olds (www.ontario.ca/PascalReport). Since this report, Ontario is currently in the process of implementing a full-

Parental Education

The most important overarching variable that effects how well children do in school is level of parental education because this has a direct relationship on the family's socio-economic status. Children whose parents have more education do better in school than children whose parents have less education; and that such parents are also more likely to have higher occupational status and income. Taken together, parental education and parental income have a huge influence on the life chances of children including their academic achievement (Brint, 2006:193).

Research suggests that parent's level of education may actually have more influence than socio-economic factors on children's success at school. If a parent was successful themselves with academics they are likely more equipped to act as "co-teachers" in the home providing a stimulating learning environment for their children that may lessen the effects of financial restrictions (Davis-Kean, 2005:302). Parents who have completed more education are more equipped to help their children at home because they may better understand the teacher's expectations. In addition, parents who have completed higher levels of education themselves may set higher goals for their children believing that their children should also attend higher levels of education. Therefore, parental expectations for achievement by their children may be a contributing factor to how well their children do in school (Davis-Kean, 2005:303).

What is it that more educated parents do that less educated parents do not do? "Higher parental education was correlated with more studying, less TV watching, and more reading on the part of children" (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997:334). Therefore, more educated parents appear to spend more time with engaging their child in meaningful activities. For example, more educated parents may have more creative ideas for children's games and they may understand the areas their child needs practise with better than less educated parents. In addition, educated parents are more likely to

day kindergarten program across the province.

hold "white collar" or managerial type jobs that have more flexible hours, giving them more free time to spend with their children. Bianchi & Robinson (1997:342), who examined this question, noted that parental educational attainment was the most important family characteristic impacting student achievement. They found that college-educated parents encourage their children to read and study more and limit the amount of television viewing more so than less educated parents.

Some research questions which parents' level of education matters more to predict how well their child will do in school? Historically the fathers' level of education was considered the most important determinate because his occupational status would predict the family's outcome as many mothers did not work outside of the home for a wage. Therefore, the mother's status was not considered a determining factor in how well a child might do in school. However, now the situation has changed and many mothers also work outside of the home. Research has now begun to examine which parents' level of education matters more in predicting their children's educational attainment (Korupp *et al*, 2002).

While the conventional hypothesis focuses on only the father's position and the dominance model focuses on the dominant parent, the joined model suggests that the SES background of the child is most accurately reflected when both parent's level of education and occupational status is combined and averaged (Korupp, *et al*., 2002:21). Korupp, *et al*. (2002:37) found that "the Modified Dominance Model that classifies the SES of both parents hierarchically (into a higher and lower status parent) fits the data best," while the joined model was also fitting. These findings indicate that considering both parents' level of education is an important aspect when looking at children's achievement in school.

Research suggests that well-educated parents spend more time interacting with their children which impacts their development and their school achievement. The level of education that parents have impacts not only the time they spend with their children but also their parenting style (Lareau,

2003), their goals and aspirations for their children, and their involvement in their child's school life.

Level of parental education and family income are key because they are linked to the other

sensitizing concepts in this research: time, involvement in schooling, and parenting style.

Time and Time Use

Parental time spent with children also correlates to children's development. Research has

shown that there are great differences between the amount of time well-educated parents spend with

their children compared to less educated parents. Well-educated parents spend about 40-50 more

minutes a day with their children (Gauthier *et al*., 2004:663). In addition, well-educated parents

provide children with more thoughtful activities that encourage their children's cognitive

development (Sayer *et al*., 2004:1152). Bianchi & Robinson (1997:334) found that mothers with

more education focussed their time on playing with, interacting with, and teaching their children in

addition to taking their children on education outings. Furthermore, as Downey (*et al*., 2008:244)

summarize, researchers have also found that professional parents expose their children to more

words:

> As one example of how much home environments vary in cognitive stimulation,
> Hart and Risley (1995) observed that among children aged 6 months to 3 years,
> those whose families were on welfare had 616 words per hour directed to them
> compared to 1,251 word for children of working-class parents and 2,153 words for
> children of professional parents. Given such varying exposure to language, it is not
> surprising that large gaps in skills can be observed among children at the beginning
> of kindergarten.

Parental time spent one-on-one with children influences the amount of exposure children have to

language and learning experiences more generally. This will impact a child's academic achievement

in school.

Involvement at School

Home effects research also captures parental involvement at school. This may include "attending parent-teacher conferences, attending programs featuring students, and engaging in volunteer activities" (Lee, 2006:194). Also, "parent educational involvement at home may include providing help with homework, discussing the child's schoolwork and experiences at school, and structuring home activities" (Lee, 2006:194).

Wendy Barnard (2004:39) examined the association between parent involvement in elementary school and success in high school. She found that "even after controlling for background characteristics and risk factors, parent involvement in school was significantly associated with lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time high school completion, and highest grade completed." Spera (2005:130) notes that parental monitoring of homework and after school activities can influence student achievement. These pieces of research illustrate that parent involvement in school makes a difference when it comes to student success. Research clearly indicates that when parents are involved in their child's education, be it helping with homework or volunteering at school, their child benefits positively from their involvement.

While looking at father's involvement in school, McBride *at al*. (2005), again, found that involvement in a child's school life, from either parent or both parents, is important to student achievement. Overall, "for school-age children, there is a consistent body of research suggesting that regardless of background characteristics, parent involvement makes a difference in developmental outcomes (Janus, 2007:380).

Parenting Style

Spera reviewed the literature on the relationship between parenting practices, parenting styles, and adolescent school achievement. His review of the literature indicates that the authoritative

parenting style is associated with positive school outcomes (2005:135). He (2005:134) explains this

style as follows:

> Authoritative parents are warm and responsive, providing their children with affection and support in their explorations and pursuit of interests. These parents have high maturity demands (e.g., expectations for achievement) for their children but foster these maturity demands through bidirectional communication, induction (i.e., explanations of their behavior), and encouragement of independence. For example, when socializing their children (e.g., to do well in school), these parents might provide their children with a rationale for their actions and priorities (e.g., "it will allow you to succeed as an adult.").

As a result, children of authoritative parents can be more mature, independent, active, prosocial, and

achievement-oriented than children with non-authoritative parents (Spera, 2005:135).

Parenting style is impacted by socio-economic status. "Scholars have repeatedly concluded

that families from different social strata raise their children differently" (Chin and Phillips,

2004:185). For example, "middle class parents provide more tangibles for their children (i.e., books,

trips, computers, etc.), but they also provide more of the kind of emotional support that boosts school

performance" (Alexander *et al*., 2004:48). It is important to note that socio-economic status

influences many aspects of a child's life including the style of parenting they are accustomed to.

Annette Lareau (2003) has done very influential research that examines two different

parenting styles. She takes an in-depth look at some of the disparities found within the home

environments of students in her ethnographic study that involved interviews and observations in

eighty-eight families from different SES and racial backgrounds. Lareau looked at how families and

children structured their leisure time as well as how they interacted with each other and various social

institutions such as medical clinics and schools.

Lareau found two types of parenting styles in her ethnography. First, upper/middle class

families with higher levels of income and education use what Lareau calls a, "concerned cultivation"

style of parenting. With this style, parents attempt to provide their children with several extra

curricular activities (sports, piano and dance lessons etc.) (39). These parents emphasize language development (such as negotiation skills) (110) and give their children the ability to customize social interactions with adults (132) which leads to a sense of entitlement (133). Parents who use a "concerned cultivation" parenting style have a level of comfort in dealing with professionals and advocating for the child and this is passed onto the child (180).

The second style of parenting was found in lower class families where lower levels of education had been attained by parents. This style is what Lareau calls "the accomplishment of natural grown" (66). Parents who use this style are less involved in their child's free time and do not plan numerous extra-curricular activities for their children; children are free to play like children. Children are given boundaries and are allowed to grow within those boundaries being much more autonomous from adults (67). These families have stronger bonds with extended families (67) and language is used in "practical conduit of everyday life" (146) rather than used as "teachable moments." Parents from lower classes generally mistrust authority figures (140) and therefore they do not teach their children how to advocate for themselves in the same way that middle/upper class parents do. Discipline within these families is more severe, sometimes physical (154), and there are few negotiations between parents and children.

While there are benefits to both parenting styles (241), the reason that these two parenting styles are of significance is because of the outcome they produce within social institutions such as schools. As has been noted, schools are often assumed to reward the values and lifestyles of the middle/upper classes. Children from "concerned cultivation" homes are more comfortable with authority figures and have a sense of entitlement which enables them to advocate for their needs within the school system as well as to get the customized programming they feel they deserve. This gives this group of children an advantage in schools. Having the ability to ask for special treatment likely means it is awarded more readily when sought. Lareau also found that educators want parents

to be more involved and assertive (198) like the middle/upper class parents, in her study, were. These differing parenting styles "appear to lead to the transmission of differential advantages" to children (5). Lareau's research illustrates that parents of differing social positions offer their children different experiences based on their parenting style, which may impact student's achievement at school.

Cultural Capital

As I have outlined, student achievement is impacted by the family effects of socio-economic status, parent's education level, parental time spent with children, and parenting style, to name a few. These concepts are all linked together, in that, for example, an individual's level of education will impact their socio-economic status and a family's socio-economic status will impact their parenting practices. The "glue", if you will, that holds all of these sensitizing concepts together in this research project is the theory of cultural capital.

Classic understandings of cultural capital, originating with Pierre Bourdieu, help explain another way that schools reward students differently based on social characteristics or "elite cultural practices" (Kingston, 2001:88). The theory of cultural capital looks at the process by which certain children obtain certain experiences (such as piano lessons or museum outings) that are rewarded by the educational system. While Bourdieu was not considered to be very forthcoming about clarifying his definitions, he suggested that any "competence" can become a form of capital if it reflects society's "cultural heritage", is unequally distributed, and therefore, creates "exclusive advantages" (Weininger & Lareau, 2007).

The operationalization of "cultural capital" has been a point of contention in research (Wildhagen, 2010:522): what counts as cultural capital and what does not? Lareau and Weininger (2003:568) note that the concept was first introduced by Bourdieu to "denote knowledge or

competence with "highbrow" aesthetic culture (such as fine art and classical music)" in France at the time he was writing. Lareau and Weininger (2003) argue that since this time, applying the concept to different countries in different time periods with different definitions has diluted the original concept. Bourdieu, when discussing cultural capital in a widely cited article from 1971, defines a variety of activities that impact cultural capital, such as: museum visits, reading habits, theatre attendance, classical music appreciation etc. (Lareau and Weininger, 2003:578). Then in future writings, Bourdieu himself drops the "highbrow" from his definition and says that any given competence can function as cultural capital (Lareau and Weininger, 2003:579). These authors suggest that past research has taken great liberties to define cultural capital as needed.

Kingston (2001: 90) finds the "highbrow" definition problematic and notes, for example, that few people (children and/or their parents) actually prefer classical music, signalling a problem with this definition of the concept. After examining the many various definitions used by researchers of the concept, Lareau and Weininger suggest we embrace an expanded definition of cultural capital. They write, "in our view the critical aspect of cultural capital is that it allows culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next" (Lareau and Weininger, 2003:587). More recent interpretations of cultural capital, such as this, have decidedly used expansive definitions of cultural capital.

In terms of acquisition, cultural capital takes time to accumulate and it eventually becomes an integral part of the person (part of their "habitus"). Cultural capital cannot be gifted but rather it is "inculcated unconsciously" (Bourdieu, 1997: 48) by becoming "embodied" by the "bearer" (the person who "holds" it). Transmission of cultural capital is most important and begins immediately for children in families with strong cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997:49) such as those in middle and

upper classes. Cultural capital is seen as "exclusionary" offering specific special advantages only to the bearers.

It is believed that educational systems reward students based on the amount of cultural capital they have. Students with high amounts of cultural capital will be able to communicate better with their teachers because their teachers have an appreciation for culture (Dumais, 2006) and according to Bernstien's (1971) code theory, they speak the "same language." However, "according to Bourdieu, this cultural bias is not recongized as such because the ideology of schooling is that scholastic success is meritocratically awarded to students who have a greater natural ability and who expend more effort" (Davies, 1994:87). The bias towards rewarding students with cultural capital is supposedly invisible under the guise of meritocracy.

Newer interpretations of cultural capital focus on how cultural capital aligns with school values. These versions of the theory assert that children from middle class families acquire cultural capital at home from experiences provided to them by their parents. These experiences can range from piano lessons and being on a soccer team to watching their mother interact with doctors and teachers, or even the ability to speak English (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Recalling Lareau's (2003) description about parents who ascribe to the "concerned cultivation" style of parenting, these parents seek rich experiences for their children in an attempt to provide them with advantages in their lives. They schedule their children's leisure time in a purposeful manner and cart them from activity to activity in the hopes of cultivating a child who is rich in cultural capital amassed from their various extra-curricular experiences. Children are then able to use their acquired cultural capital at school, or within other institutions, giving them better chances of achieving higher levels of education than lower class children with less cultural capital.

Middle class families are better equipped to align with the institutional norms within schools. Their approach to parenting better supports academic achievement. It is said that middle class

parents "pursue interactional strategies and deploy cultural resources that are absent among their working-class and poor counterparts" (Lareau & Weininger, 2003:589-90) thus making the acquisition of cultural capital an important stratifying mechanism. "The critical aspect of cultural capital is that it allows culture to be used as resource that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next" (Lareau & Weininger, 2003:587).

     Kalmijn and Kraaykamp (1996:23-4) provide a good explanation for the role cultural capital plays in the schooling process:

> Cultural capital is believed to be an asset in the schooling process for several reasons:
> Children who are exposed to cultural capital may be better prepared to master academic
> material, may develop a greater taste for learning abstract and intellectual concepts, and
> may be favored directly by teachers over children who have less cultural capital. A lack
> of cultural capital may discourage students to stay in school (self-selection) may hamper
> their accomplishments while in school (indirect exclusion), or may lead to a lack of
> recognition from teachers (teacher selection). Although there is a debate about which of
> these mechanisms is most likely to operate, empirical studies have generally under-scored
> the role of cultural capital in the schooling process.

There is contention within current discussions about the extent to which the schooling system rewards cultural capital. Some researchers (Kingston, 2001) have found little evidence that support that teachers give special treatment to students who activate their cultural capital within the classroom. However, Kingston (2001:97) also asserts that the experiences that children accumulate as cultural capital are valuable not because they are rewarded within schools but because "they directly stimulate intellectual development and engagement" thus offering benefits to students who have those experiences. Futhermore, DiMaggio's (1982:195) cultural mobility model suggests that "the impact of cultural capital will be greater on the grades of less advantaged youth" perhaps because lower class children generally have less cultural capital therefore, any amount of it that they *do* have will be that much more revered and "get them further" then it would a middle class student.

The theory of cultural capital ties together the essential quality of the sensitiszing concepts laid out above. Cultural capital is one way we can examine what role home effects have on children's achievement in schools. This research intends to use the theory of cultural capital to examine one way that parents may understand the decisions they make about structuring their child's out of school time. Do parents make leisure time decisions, on behalf of their children, with notions of amassing cultural capital on their minds?

Out of School Time
Summer, After-School, & Weekends

To gain a better picture about how student's home life may impact their school achievement it is necessary to look at the environments where children spend their out-of-school time. When children are not in school, they are at home under the influence of their parents. Some researchers suggest that children actually spend very little time in school: "the average eighteen-year-old … has spent just 13 percent of his or her waking time in school" (Downey and Boughton 2007:34). For most of the year, children split their days between home and school, spending between 6 and 8 hours at school, 4 to 7 hours at home or doing extra-curricular activities, and 6 to 10 hours sleeping. To gain a better understanding of how school effect may influence school achievement it is necessary to look at how children spend their out of school time. What are they doing after school? Are they playing organized sports in the evenings? Do they visit museums on the weekend? Are they taking piano lessons, skiing lessons, or singing in a choir? Or perhaps children are not participating in any organized activities and are left, like Lareau (2003) found, to make their own fun playing outside with siblings and/or children in their neighbourhood. It is important to note that it is not any *one* activity or experience is the "bullet proof method" of ensuring a child is gathering cultural capital. Rather, such activities may act as a marker of parent's active engagement in structuring their child's

leisure time and when considered in conjunction with other qualitative data may help us to better

understand how cultural capital plays a role in parent's decision making.

Susan Shaw (2008) discusses how conceptions about parenthood, including "intensive

mothering" and "active fathering" have created a new focus on family leisure. She (2008: 697) notes

in her conclusion:

> In many ways family leisure reflects the dominant discourse of parenthood, with its
> focus on the needs of the child and the importance of active parental involvement.
> Family leisure is not seen by parents as simply having fun together with their
> children (i.e. enjoying leisure), but as a highly significant part of child-rearing
> through which children will be exposed to a range of positive developmental
> influences and will learn lessons important for their success in life. Thus, family
> leisure is clearly accepted as a responsibility of parenthood and one that requires
> thought, attention, time and commitment.

Shaw's ideas here further extend her ideas about "purposive leisure" developed with Dawson (Shaw

& Dawson 2001). They explain: "we recommend that family leisure should be seen as a form of

purposive leisure, which is planned, facilitated, and executed by parents in order to achieve particular

short- and long-term goals" (Shaw & Dawson, 2001:228). The idea is that parents organize their

family's leisure time with a clear purpose in mind. For example, a family day-trip to the zoo is not

just for the purpose of having fun, it also has numerous pragmatic functions, such as, teaching

children about animals, habitats, wild life rescue, or even map reading. These ideas suggest that

there are many aspects of family leisure time, and how it is structured, that may be quite complex and

also contribute to the development of a child.

Shaw (2008:694) suggests that family vacation time is a form of purposive leisure in that it is

"planned, organized and 'constructed' so that it has a particular value or quality." As Shaw

(2008:695) notes, "activities, outings and vacations are typically selected, organized and managed for

the sake of the children. However, this is done not simply in terms of whether the children are

expected to enjoy the activities, or whether the activities are deemed to be age appropriate, but also

what the children will learn from or gain from their participation." One thing that parents may be

hoping their child gains from family vacations or family activities may be related to cultural capital

in the sense that the experiences parents provide are purposive and may have educational benefits.

For example, during a family vacation to Ottawa parents may include a tour of the Parliament

Buildings which they may hope will help their child to better appreciate and understand topics

discussed in their "social studies" class at school. Family vacation is not simply an activity that

families do for bonding, quality time, and togetherness (Hilbrecht *et al*., 2008:542) but it is often

considered to be utilitarian in that children may learn or gain from the experience.

     The idea of "family vacation" was examined by Hilbrecht *et al*. (2008) who not only

interviewed parents about the goals of family vacation, but also their children, to look at how the

goals may differ between adults and children. Children's primary goal during family vacations was

"having fun" so the fact that their parents may have had an underlying educational purpose for going

to the science centre, or other places, was not evident for the children. "Children . . . did not

conceptualize activities selected by parents as a means to promote education, athletic abilities or the

development of social skills" (Hilbrecht *et al*., 2008:567). This research highlights that for some

parents family vacations are sometimes purposive in nature thus providing evidence that parents *do*

consider cultural capital when making leisure decisions.

     In terms of extra-curricular activities, there has been a steady rise in children's participation in

extra-curricular activities. For children aged 3 to 12, the number of hours per week spent in sports,

art activities, and youth groups was 5.5 hours in 1981 and increased to an average of 7 hours by 1997

(Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). While increasing, participation in extra-curricular activities is

influenced by social class. Research indicates that 97% of children in the highest SES quintile

participated in at least one extra-curricular activity in Kindergarten or grade 1 while only 54% of the

students in the lowest SES quintile did so (Dumais, 2006:129).

Parents enrol their children in extra-curricular activities for various reasons. Dunn *et al*. (2003) examined parental values and the role that after-school activities has in transmitting values to children. Researchers interviewed 23 families about their children's out-of-school activities. All children were involved in more than one activity outside of school. Overall, Dunn *et al*. (2003:1384) found that in addition to having fun parents saw children's extra-curricular activities as an opportunity for their child to discover new talents and be physically active. The values that parents felt extra-curricular activities provided to their children included: "personal faith and values, discipline, responsibility, respect, social skills, teamwork, and helping behaviors." Overall, parents felt that involved in out-of-school activities would help their child develop into a competent adult (Dunn *et al*., 2003:1384).

Besides developing self-esteem and other important values, extra-curricular activities have also shown to improve test scores. Thomas (2006) found a 44 percentage-point difference in test scores between the most advantaged upper class children and the least advantaged lower class children when it came to participation in organized sports such as t-ball or soccer. Interestingly, while participation in extra-curricular activities is related to gains in reading achievement test scores, the gains are larger for lower class children than middle and upper class children (Dumais, 2006:132) illustrating that activities outside of school have more of an impact on the group of students who participate in fewer activities. This finding is consistent with DiMaggio's (1982) cultural mobility model which suggests that the impact of cultural capital is greatest for disadvantaged students.

Dumas also examined television watching, an activity that many children do outside of school. She found that during kindergarten and first grade, lower class children watched 8.6 hours per week of television while the most advantaged children in the middle/upper class watched only 6 hours per week (Dumais, 2066:130). This highlights that young children in lower class homes spend more time watching tv than their middle/upper class peers. Overall, research tells us some parents

plan their child's leisure time purposively and that extra curricular activities are good for children.

We also know that children's lives outside of school differ based on socio-economic factors.

Summer Learning Loss

In addition to after-school activities and leisure time over the weekends, the summer months (usually late June to the beginning of September) provides children many more hours of leisure time since school is not in-session. Generally, it is hard to isolate the effects of home environment over the effects of the school environment because children's lives are split between the two different environments. However, the summer months give researchers a unique opportunity to examine children's lives outside of school. Summer learning loss is a well documented problem with roots that go back as far as 1906 (Borman & Boylay, 2004:ix). First introduced as "summer slide," the theory depicts the phenomenon that over the summer students lose some of the academic gains they have made during the school year. It is like the analogy of two steps forward and one step back. Say, for every four units of knowledge a student gains during the school year, they lose one unit of knowledge over the summer. Several studies have found that summer learning loss not only occurs but that it occurs in a patterned manner. Most notable is that students from lower class homes sometimes lose more over the summer than their middle class peers. Middle class students often gain knowledge and skills over the summer while lower class students remain stagnate or lose slightly (Downey *et al*., 2004; Entwisle *et al*., 2001). This finding begs the question why? Why do some students lose math and reading skills over the summer while others do not? Why do middle class children sometimes gain reading and math skills over the summer? What are the differences in summer experiences of lower class and middle class children that creates a gap?

It seems as though the types of summers that children experience differ greatly and likely differ based on families socio-economic status.' For example, Entwisle *et al*. (2001) say that, "better off children also did things in summer different from what they did during the school year – they

attended day camps, took swimming lessons, went on trips, visited local parks and zoos, played

organized sports, to name a few. These activities provided children with experiences unlike their

experiences in school." This research suggests that middle class children do different things in the

summer than they do during the school year.

Chin and Phillips examined the different experiences lower class and middle class families

provide to their child specifically during the summer months. The purpose of their research was to

"investigate social-class differences in children's summer experiences" (2004:188). To do so, Chin

and Philips (2004) conducted a qualitative study that looked at the summer vacations of 32 fourth-

grade students. They conducted interviews and attended events and activities with children and

families. During their observations they were hoping to capture children doing what they "normally

do." Interviews were conducted with both the children and their primary summer-time caregivers.

Their main finding was that middle class children "tended to have varied and often highly organized

summer experiences" while "none of the working-class or poor children in our sample experienced

entire summers as active and varied as the middle-class children's" (193-4). These findings are

consistent with Lareau (2003) and indicate that children's summer vacations varied greatly

depending on their social class.

In addition, Chin and Phillips (2004:194) found that lower class parents were just as focussed

as middle class parents "on developing their children's skills and talents." Middle class parents were

more successful in creating enriching summers for their children because they had greater financial

resources, more flexible jobs and "more knowledge about how to match particular activities to their

children's skills and interests" (204). The researchers conclude that these social class differences

probably produce two types of gaps: a "talent development gap" and a "cultural exposure gap" that

"if exacerbated each summer [may] contribute to disparities in children's future life chances" (206).

Chin and Phillips (2004) did not discuss how the structure of children's summer vacations may

impact summer learning loss. From this study we learn that all parents, regardless of social class, wish to provide their children with enriching experiences over the summer but that some families experience barriers that force them to tailor their children's summers in different ways. If all parents wish their children to have similar summer experiences, these barriers are important to consider when looking at how parents structure their children's out-of-school time.

Middle class families are able to provide their children meaningful experiences outside of school, helping them accumulate cultural capital, that differs from the experiences they receive while in school and differs from the experiences of lower class students. Children in middle class families not only have access to more monetary resources than lower class children but they also often have parents who ascribe to a parenting style (call it either concerned cultivation or authoritative parenting) that strives to purposively structure their child's out-of-school time so that it will benefit them in the long run by helping to amass cultural capital. How parents structure their children's out-of-school time seems to have great impact on their achievement in schools. However, more details about this relationship are needed.

What we know

We know that children from middle class homes fair better in school than children from lower class homes. But why? Social reproduction theorists would have us believe that this is because the school system sets lower class students up for failure by rewarding middle and upper class students under the guise of meritocracy (Davies, 1994:87). However, we also know that students of all SES groups have the ability to learn at the same rate during the school year regardless of their socio-economic status (Entwisle *et al*., 2001). This suggests that something other than attendance at school creates achievement gaps between students. We also know that children from lower class homes start school behind their peers (Alexander *et al*., 2007) and that this gap widens over the summer months as upper and middle class children gain while lower class children lose ground or remain

stagnate in their learning (Downey *et al*., 2004; Entwisle *et al*., 2001). Children from lower class

homes experience summer learning loss at greater rates than middle class and upper class children.

Findings indicate that children whose parents received a post-secondary education fair better

at school than children whose parents did not finish highschool or did not go onto post-secondary

education after highschool. This is believed to be the case because more educated parents engage

their children in different types of activities, discussions, and negotiations than less educated parents.

They also structure their children's time differently (Bianchi & Robinson 1997:343). Researchers

have found that parents who have received a post-secondary education feel more comfortable

navigating the school system on behalf of their children and as a result their child is likely to receive

"special treatment" that may help them along the way (such as a better class placement or special

programming) (Lareau, 2003).

We also know that there are other factors that impact achievement. Research shows that

children whose parents are more involved in their schooling have better achievement illustrating that

a home-school connection is important. Children are most successful in school when they have a

parent or parents who volunteers in the school, attends parent-teacher conferences, and

communicates regularly with their child's classroom teacher (Lee, 2006).

Research demonstrates that participation in extra-curricular activities has a positive influence

on childhood development (Xu *et al*., 2009). Along with new skills, activities outside of school,

build self-esteem, awareness, and social networks for children. While research indicates that about

one-quarter (26.7%) of children do not participate in extra-curricular activities outside of school (Xu

et al., 2009:338), we know that such activities do benefit children. Research also indicates that there

is a relationship between SES and participation in extracurricular activities. Children from middle

class families are 1.8 times more likely to participate in organized sports compared to lower class

children. Children in upper and middle class families are 2.3 time more likely and those children in

the highest income families are 3.9 times more likely than children from lower class families to participate (Xu *et al*., 2009:334). Participation rates are also found to be higher for children whose parents had higher levels of education (beyond highschool) (Xu, *et al*., 2009:337), yet again indicating the parent's level of education is a key factor in regards to how children's leisure time may be structured.

Overall, we know that factors outside of school, or home/family effects, influence children's success and achievement at school. Therefore, it is important to look at these home effects and how children are spending their out of school time to better understand achievement gaps between students.

What we do not know

While research has already shown that home life effects academic achievement, there are still things we do not know. The research in this area leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

Quality of Time

While time diary studies have documented the quantity of time spent on various activities, the main void in this research is an understanding about the *quality* of children's activities. Time-use diaries have been used in the past to capture what children are doing and for what duration. Bianchi and Robinson (1997) used time diaries to look at how children were spending their time and they concluded that many contextual elements were missing from their analysis. For example, they suggested knowing how much time was spent doing activities *with* family members and the nature of that interaction would have been good data to consider (Bianchi and Robinson, 1997:343).

Therefore, simple time diary-type data often lacks depth, in that, it does not tell us the quality of the experience. For example, to say that Johnny did his homework for 30 minutes after school and then went outside to play soccer with his friends for one hour before supper, leaves a lot of details

missing about Johnny's after school activities. Did someone help Johnny with his homework? Who

helped him and how did that person help? When he played soccer, was he actively playing soccer or

just kicking the ball around casually? Were any adults playing with the children? How did the

children decide the rules? How did they negotiate who was going to be goalie? Did any conflicts

arise during his game that had to be sorted out? What role did Johnny play in this experience? Often

times, a time diary does not reflect the quality of the experiences of the participants. A key finding

from Chin and Phillips (2003) suggests that parental/adult involvement in the activity impacts the

quality of the experience for the children participants so it is key to find out who is interacting with

children during their activities and how that interaction is taking place. This type of information is

lacking from time diary research.

The details about the *quality* of children's activities are best gathered through in-dept

conversations or interviews with parents about the detailed nature of their children's time use. This

type of research is lacking. Chin and Philips (2003:149) believe that:

> Research on time use can more accurately capture variation in children's activities
> by measuring the intensity of activity, the extent of peer involvement, the extent of
> adult involvement, and whether the activities takes place in a typical or atypical
> setting for the child. These four variables cut across many different types of
> activities and seem to represent the aspects of children's time that are most likely to
> be associated with children's development.

Information about the intensity, peer and adult involvement, and location of children's activities is

best gathered through in-depth interviews. Furthermore Chin and Philips (2004: 206) reiterate this

point when they note that:

> Surveys that simply ask about children's participation in various activities such as
> whether children went on vacation, attended summer camps, or practised academic
> skills over the summer, will likely miss much of the social class-related variance in
> children's experiences. These nominally similar activities are so heterogeneous that

surveys must ask much more detailed questions about the content of activities and how well they were supervised for sociologists to model the causes of differential summer learning.

This all points to the fact that there is a lack of emphasis in previous research placed on understanding the quality of children's time use outside of school.

In-Depth Analysis

In terms of summer learning loss, we know children's test scores vary by social class but the contextual aspects of this data are missing. The vast majority of research into summer learning loss and school entry gaps has been done from a quantitative standpoint such as by assembling student test scores and comparing the results at various times during the year. These studies are unable to answer *why* learning gaps are widened over the summer months because they do not examine children's situations in-depth. There is a gap in research "on identifying summer experiences that can account for summer learning differences" (Alexander *et al*., 2007:20). As Entwisle *et al*. (2001) ask, "what is it that better-off parents and neighbourhoods do in summers that poorer parents and neighbourhoods do not?" This information has yet to be gathered.

By asking parents how their child fared at school that year, I can examine parents' reactions to their children's performances at school, and watch how it shapes their responses. What is their interpretation of those results? Subsequently, how does it inform how they structure their children's out of school time? Answering these questions would provide a more holistic picture about the relationship between out-of-school time and achievement at school.

Parent's Perspective

Another component missing from past research is how parents understand their decisions. While we know that parents make purposive decisions surrounding family leisure, often around the ideals of communication between family members and family cohesion and unity (Shaw & Dawson,

2001:228), we do not know how far these ideas extend and how well they may fit within a cultural

capital framework. What drives a mother to sign her son up for a baseball league? What motivates

parents to enrol their child in various activities outside of school? What impedes parents from

enrolling their child? How do families go about making family vacation decisions? What are the

factors that parents take into consideration when considering how to structure their child's leisure

time? Specifically, do parents make leisure decisions for their children based on their child's school

achievement or their teacher's recommendations? How much do parents consider their child's

interests in these decisions? From a theoretical standpoint, do parents consider cultural capital when

making leisure decisions? Specifically, do parents make conscious decisions about leisure activities

on the basis that it may amass cultural capital for their child? These are the types of questions that

this research is uniquely positioned to address. Working from an interpretavist standpoint this

research will examine the meaning behind the decisions that parents make. Meaning is one of the

fundamental elements of an interpretavist paradigm (Maines, 2001).

Lareau (1996) found that parents understand aspects of cultural capital differently.

Specifically addressing the idea that parents want to be more involved in their children's education,

Lareau (1996:59) states that "the meaning, however, differs radically. The same phrase 'contacting

the school, checking homework, helping with homework, and talk to teachers,' appears to have a

different meaning to parents in our current study." Therefore, it is not only important to look at what

types of experiences parents offer to their children outside of school but also what *meaning* parents

attach to these experiences and how they interpret the benefits it may bring to their children. All of

these social constructions can be experienced differently by parents. Research needs to capture how

parents' understanding of their decisions shapes their practises.

Past research has focussed on establishing the patterns: there is a learning gap between

students from lower class homes and students from middle class homes, with the lower class students

fairing worse in terms of achievement. This gap is often exacerbated over the summer months with

the learning gap between students widening. There has been less of a focus on "identifying summer

experience that can account for summer learning differences (library usage for example)" (Alexander

et al., 2007:20) as well in a void in looking closely at how leisure time is spent during the school

year. Quantitative researchers have theorized that summer learning losses and gains are connected to

the quality of children's summer vacations and, specifically, whether or not children have access to

opportunities to gain or maintain literacy and numeracy skills over the summer. Researchers suggest

that vast differences are found between how upper and lower class parents construct their children's

out of school time (Bianchi & Robinson 1997). Some of these differences have been examined

during the summer months (Chin & Philips 2004) but more research is needed in this area. In order

to understand how family differences may contribute to learning gaps, research needs to focus on

what happens when children are not in school (Alexander *et al*., 2004:26). While Chin & Philips

(2004) have examined children's summer vacations, Dumais (2006) has examined participation in

extra-curricular activities, and Lareau and Weininger (2003) have examined cultural capital within

families, what has yet to be researched is how parent's structure their children's out-of-school time

through a perspective that seeks to uncover how parent's understand the importance of cultural

capital when they make leisure decisions.

Research Questions

In order to examine children's out-of-school experiences I intend to conduct a qualitative

study that will interview parents using semi-structured interviews about how they structure their

children's out-of-school time including during summer vacations and throughout the school year.

This research will examine the types of experiences (deemed "cultural capital") that parents of

different means provide to their children when they are not in school. It will also seek to interpret

how parents understand the decision making process in regards to leisure time for their young child

and the importance of cultural capital ideas in those decisions. The research questions guiding this

research are:

1. How do parents structure their children's out-of-school time? How does this differ by
   social class?

2. What type of activities and experiences do parents provide their children during the
   summer and during the school year that may amass cultural capital for their child?

3. How do parents understand their choices? How do their understandings differ by social
   class?

Defining Concepts

Social Class

An important concept for the proposed research is "social class", as my research will be

examining how children's leisure activities and parent's choices differ by social class. The terms

advantaged, disadvantaged, middle-class, lower-class, working-class, high SES, low SES, low

income, high income, all depict some type of variance in social class positions within society. They

are all social constructions and have no meaning on their own. Each means something different by

those who use the terms. Generally, social class constructions are hard to define. This is worth some

comment.

As Brint (2006:193) explains, "sociologists often use indexes of socioeconomic status (SES)

to measure social class. These indexes are based on weighted combinations of education,

occupational prestige, and income." We can draw on examples from research on schooling and

social class to illustrate how the concept of "social class" has been measured. Lareau (2003:261),

used a combination of "authority in the workplace" and "credential barriers" to create two groups:

"working-class families" and "middle-class families." Authority in the workplace examined the

extent to which the individual had any type of managerial authority over other workers, while, credential barriers considered separating occupations with stringent educational requirements from those without. In addition, she classified participants who were living on social assistance as "poor families." Each family had to have at least one parent that fit within the definition to be classified as such. Therefore, Lareau also used a combination of education, occupational prestige, and income to classify her participants into three social classes.

Linver (*et al*., 2004:35) examined the importance of family environment and neighborhood to child outcomes and note that mother's level of education is consistently associated with a child's language, achievement, and IQ scores for children aged 2 – 8 years (Linver *et al*., 2004:29). Their income measure included total pre-tax income of all family members over multiple years (the year of the child's birth through 1996) as examining one year's income does not take into consideration yearly fluctuations. In another publication, these authors highlight that measuring SES can be challenging because family-level economic conditions are complex. While, "*earned* income is the most common indicator of family economic well-being", a measure of "income" can include: cash-on-hand, wealth, assets (savings accounts, stocks, bonds, homes etc.), government cash transfers, tax benefits, hourly earnings, number of household members, and in-kind benefits such as food stamps and housing vouchers, etc. (Brooks-Gunn *et al*., 2005:415). These authors define SES broadly because the multiple indicators of SES (income, wealth, parental education, family structure, and occupation) all may have an independent association with child well-being and because "these SES conditions usually co-occur, such that even when studies present results for individual conditions, they cannot always be neatly unpacked" (Brooks-Gunn *et al*., 2005:415). This set of research suggests that even for quantitative studies the operationalization of "social class" is a challenge and that reliance upon "income" as a key variable in determining "social class" may be problematic.

For the purposes of this research, I will be using the terms "lower class" and "middle class" to describe two different social classes. This research will use a combination of parental education (the strongest predictor of student achievement), parental occupation and income to determine a family's social class (Brint, 2006:193). This is congruent with similar research previously conducted by others which places emphasis on parental education when examining child outcomes (Bianchi & Robinson 1997; Downey *et al*. 2008; Linver *et al*. 2004). The process of categorizing participants will be a combination of art and science. Level of education, income, and occupation are the central ingredients that I will consider when situating participants. However, not all of these ingredients need to be present in order for a family to be situated into one or the other category as social class is made of a complex mixture of these characteristics. For my purposes, "middle class" families will be defined as having at least one parent with a post-secondary education and at least one parent working in a white collar, semi-professional or professional occupation. This recognizes that one family member may have a high level of education but may not be working while their children are still young. Family income would likely be above the low-income cut off but again, it is possible that one parent may not be working so this is only one consideration. [2] "Lower class" families will be defined by both parents having a high school education or less, one or both parents unemployed or working in blue-collar, manual, seasonal (etc.) occupations, and/or families that rely on some form of social assistance (welfare, disability support programs etc.) and a family income that may fall near or below the low-income cut off. Participants in this research will be classified as either "middle class" or "lower class" based on these considerations.

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[2] This research will use the Low-Income Cut-Offs from 2006 found here:
http://www.ccsd.ca/factsheets/economic_security/poverty/lico_06.htm. The low-income cut-off tables are based on size of geographic location and family size. For example using these tables, a 4-person family living in Kitchener-Waterloo would be defined as "low income" if they earned less than $33,930 before tax ($28,095 after tax).

Classifying participants in this way forces us to make certain assumptions. For instance, we assume that there is some type of "similar experience" among those of the same social class. We also assume that parental education, family income, and occupation are somehow related to one's social class and that level of education, for example, in some way reflects income and occupational status. Classifying participants in this way assumes that it matters to this research; that there is a relationship between one's social class and their educational achievement. This is warranted as research suggests that there is a strong correlation between parental education and parental occupation and school performance and attainment (Brint, 2006:193). This classification also assumes that the low-income cut-off tables accurately reflect the general cost of living based on community size. Low-income cut-off tables in Canada are developed by the Canadian Council on Social Development (a branch of our government) using Statistics Canada data and are used extensively in social science research. Any type of classification of participants into groups based on social class will have assumptions built into it but it is necessary, on some level, to group participants in this way if we want to understand how experiences may differ based on social position.

Cultural Capital

It also important to ensure that it is clear how cultural capital is being defined in this research. As was described at length in the literature review, cultural capital is a concept that has been used for decades in educational research. Because of its usefulness the concept has evolved from Bourdieu's original proposition and multiple understandings exist. This research intends to use cultural capital in the same vein as Annette Lareau. As the literature review discussed, Lareau's use of cultural capital, and thus the definition this research is adopting, allows any and all activities to be considered a form of capital. This would include: sports, music lessons, dance, family vacations, museum outings, summer camp, language lessons, community-organized groups such as scouts or brownies, as well as

any other "activity" children may experience. Lareau's focus is on how cultural capital aligns with school and how middle class families are better equipped to align with the institutional norms within schools. Their approach to parenting, by providing enriching "cultural capital experiences" better supports academic achievement. This research will use this understanding of cultural capital as it examines how parents may amass cultural capital for their child through out-of-school activities.

Research Methods

If children's out-of-school time dramatically influences their academic achievement, then we need to develop a deeper understanding of how parents construct their children's out-of-school time. As I discuss above, quantitative research has contributed to our understanding about the important differences that are found between achievement scores of lower class and middle class students and has begun to quantify how children spend their out-of-school time. However, there is a dearth of research that would allow us to flesh out the qualitative dimensions of children's out-of-school time.

Chin and Philips (2003:149) believe that in terms of time-use, the aspects that are most likely to be associated with children's development are: "the intensity of activity, the extent of peer involvement, the extent of adult involvement, and whether the activities takes place in a typical or atypical setting for the child." Information about the intensity, peer and adult involvement, and location of children's activities is best gathered through in-depth interviews. Because this research is not only interested in knowing the details about how children's out-of-school time is structured but also in examining how parents understand the mechanisms of cultural capital in providing certain experiences to their children, this information is best obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents that accentuate parent's understandings of their decisions, beliefs, and actions.

Theoretical Perspective

This research will adopt an interpretivist approach that believes there are multiple views of reality. The overall goal is to gather an "understandings [of] the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994:118). Adopting a social constructionist approach, stemming from the symbolic interactionism tradition, this research accepts the following propositions (adapted from Maines, 2001):

1. people can think and people possess self-awareness

2. communication is central to all human social activity

3. all forms of human activity occur in situations

4. human relationships and groups are forms of activity

5. human activity involves transactions of meanings

6. people act towards objects and other people based on their meaings/constructions

7. variation, change, and uncertainty are intrinsic to human group life

Central to this research is the idea that concepts are a social construction and therefore have no meaning without interpretation by humans through social interactions. This research will examine how parents make sense of the decisions they make about their children's leisure time. It believes that people make sense of their experience by constructing a model of the social world and how it works (Leeds-Huwitz, 2006:230). Kenneth Gergen (1985:266) explains, "social contstructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the process by which people come to describe, explain, or other-wise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live." Therefore, in Gergen's view, describing, explaining, and accounting for one's experience are all parts of constructing one's world.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1994:113) the aim of inquiry in constructionist research is "understanding and reconstruction of constructions that people initially hold, aiming towards consensus but still open to new interpretations." As such, this research intends to consider each participant's experience, as they explain it, and attempt to interpret the constructions aiming towards some type of consensus. Lincoln and Guba (1994:113) explain that for constructionists, knowledge is created when there is "relative consensus (or at least a some movement towards consensus)." In order to find consensus in participant's recounted experiences, this research will look for patterns in meanings. For example, there may be some patterns in regards to how parents went about choosing which extra-curricular activities to enroll their child in, thus leading us towards a consensus about parent's motivations. That being said, constructionists recognize that any type of knowledge (a relative consensus on constructions) is subject to continuous revision as different constructions are compared to existing understandings (Lincoln and Guba, 1994:113).

Because concepts such as "leisure time", "extra-curricular activities," and "involvement at school", for example, are all social constructs, using a social constructionist lens is particularly appropriate for studying how children's lives outside of school may impact their school achievement. This is the best perspective for the research questions presented above because it allows us to consider each participant's perspective as unique, valid, and valued. It also permits us to look for patterns but to constantly reinterpret our understanding as new constructions are considered. The literature to date has not explored the research questions this project will address using this interpretivist approach.

This research will be grounded in the belief that the researcher's voice is present throughout the research process. In constructionist research the inquirer is a "passionate participant" rather than an objective observer. Therefore, the researcher is "actively engaged in facilitating the 'multivoice' reconstruction of his or her own construction as well as those of all other participants" (Lincoln and

Guba, 1994:114-5). Knowledge that emerges from interviews is at least partially created by the

researcher as each researcher would conduct the interviews differently, obtain different data from

participants, and interpret meanings differently, making research a collective process. Constructionist

research believes that there can be multiple interpretations of the same data, all of which can be

meaningful. In pursuing research from this perspective it is important to consider the assumptions

that the researcher brings to the research and the socially constructed nature of the research in terms

of what meanings are attached to the interview context as well as the socially constructed meanings

that shape, or may impede, a specific interview experience or the interpretations of participant's

accounts.

Target Population

Before school begins children must be exposed to appropriate stimulation to create the

building blocks of abilities they will need to have when they begin school (Janus & Daku, 2007). The

things that happen in a child's life, the exposure they've had to learning, begins before they even step

into a school. Research suggests that achievement gaps begin before school has even started and that

these gaps grow as children get older. Researchers also indicate that early achievement gaps have

long lasting consequences right through high school and into college (Alexander *et al*., 2007).

Alexander *et al*. (2007:19) suggest that the first two summers are the most "critical times for

the retention of basic skills because that is when we see the largest gain differences." This highlights

that pre-school and early elementary school are the stages when learning gaps are most significant,

making the experiences of young children the most appropriate category to conduct research into

achievement gaps. For this reason, this research will focus on children in grades Kindergarten to

grade 3, or ages 5 to 9.

In addition, when children are young they do not make their own decisions about how they

will spend their time. While in school, children's time is regimented and under the direction of their

teachers. However, at home, it is their parent(s) and/or caregivers who decide what they will do on a

given day or how they will spend their weekend. Young children lack autonomy and are under the

control of an adult to make these decisions on their behalf. It is therefore important to ask caregivers

about how they make leisure decisions on behalf of their young children. This research

acknowledges that children are sometimes raised by family members or others who are not their

biological parents. For this reason, this research will interview the child's primary caregiver, whether

it be a parent, a grandparent, or an aunt or uncle etc.

Families with more than one child aged 5 - 9 will be asked to focus their answers on their

child who is closest age 9. Only one caregiver per child will be interviewed. The disadvantage of

interviewing only one caregiver is that other caregivers may have different perspectives on how

decisions were made. For example, a mother may have enrolled their son in piano lessons because

she thinks an appreciation for music is important, while, a father's rationale for piano lessons may be

because he wants his son to learn the discipline involved in making time to practice piano outside of

the lessons. By interviewing only one parent or caregiver it provides only one person's perspective

on the child's leisure time and how decisions were made. The advantage to interviewing only one

parent is that there will be less duplicate information about the child's schedule to analyze. Overall,

this research will target a population of parents who have at least one child between the age of 5 and

9 (kindergarten to grade 3), who are classified as "middle class" and a separate group of parents

defined as "lower class."

Research Sampling & Recruiting

I will be conducting interviews with parents in South Western Ontario between June 2011 and

August 2012. Parent participants will be recruited three ways. The first method of gathering

research participants is through the Avon-Maitland District School Board (AMDSB). I have

obtained the interest of several principals in this board who have agreed to allow me to send home

my recruiting flyer (see Appendix A) with their students in grades Kindergarten to grade 3, to

parents, providing information about participating in my research. The recruiting flyer invites parents

to contact me via email or telephone if they would be willing to be interviewed for my research. In

June 2011, approximately 300 flyers were sent home to parents through three schools (2 rural schools

and 1 urban school) but I only heard back from a few parents. As of October 2011, I have conducted

four pilot interviews with volunteer respondents. These interviews may be used for data analysis but

mainly served the purpose of testing the interview schedule. More recruiting flyers will be sent home

at more schools, within the Maitland District School Board, in the fall of 2011.

The second method of recruiting will be to attend parent-council meetings at schools within

the Avon Maitland District School Board. At parent council meetings I will have the opportunity to

briefly describe my research, explain the process, and seek participants. My goal will be to highlight

for the group of parents why this research is important and what benefits they may acquire by

participating. I will focus on explaining that achievement gaps exist and we need more contextual

data about why this is the case. I hope that by making personal contacts with some parents at these

meetings to secure more interviews.

The third method involves using my personal contacts in the Kitchener-Waterloo region for

interviews. My personal contacts will likely refer me to other people they know in the region that I

may be able to interview. This approach will mainly be used towards the beginning of data

collection for the purposes of testing my interview schedule and beginning to gather data. It can be

used again at the later stages of data collection to help "fill in" or expand the sample. It is likely that

using the other two methods of recruitment I will obtain a sample that is highly concentrated with

participants who have higher levels of education and more income. Therefore, using snowball

sampling from my personal contacts I can target participants with lower incomes and less education.

This is important because the research questions seek to examine the differences in leisure time

between middle class and lower class children. It is the goal of this research to obtain 30 interviews using all of these recruiting methods: 15 middle class and 15 lower class.

School Demographics

Table 1.1 displays the demographics of the target elementary schools for this research. Recruitment letters were sent home with students in grades Kindergarten to grade 3 at Belgrave, Blyth, and Avon in June 2011. Within any one school we can find a mixture of lower class and middle class families. However, some schools are a higher concentration of certain social classes. Belgrave has a student population where 32% of students live in lower income households. Lower income households is defined by the ministry of education as: "The estimated percentage of children who attend the school and whose families devote a larger share of income to the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family. This percentage is calculated using postal code data collected by the school and cross-referenced with Statistics Canada data about income from the 2006 Census."[3] As Belgrave has a higher percentage of lower-income families, it is my hope that sending the recruitment flyer home again with students will yield more respondents from this school.

The percentage of students who have at least one parent whose highest certificate, diploma or degree is from a university, is far lower in many of these target schools. While the provincial average is 37%, only one of the target schools exceeds this (Brookside at 41%), three schools fall below 10% (Belgrave, Blyth, and Sprucesale), three schools fall between 15%-20% (Wingham, Turnberry and Huron Centennial) and one school (Avon) falls on the provincial average with 33% of students having parents who have some university education. In general, students from six of the eight schools have parents who are less educated than the rest of the province.

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[3] http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sift/glossary.asp#demo1

Table 1.1 also illustrates that all of the chosen schools (where the information is available) fall below the provincial average of the percentage of students achieving the provincial standard in reading and writing. 62% of the students in Ontario meet the provincial standard in reading while only between 40% and 58% of students in these schools meet the standard. In terms of writing, the provincial standard is met by 70% of students across the province but three of these schools (Blyth, Brookeside, and Avon) have 60% or less of students meeting the standard. That is to say that generally most of the target schools' elementary students are faring worse in literacy than other students in the province.

Table 1.1 : Student Population Information and Grade 3 Student Achievement by School

Student Population	Province	Belgrave School	Blyth School	Avon School	Sprucedale School	Huron Cen School	Turnberry School	Windham School	Brookside School
Percentage of students who live in lower-income households	16.5%	32%	4%	5%	9%	14%	11%	16%	16%
Percentage of students whose parents have some university education	36.9%	5%	2%	37%	7%	21%	11%	15%	41%
Percentage of students who receive special education services	13.1%	6.6%	7%	3.5%	1.7%	10.9%	7.6%	14.1%	7.7%
Percentage of students identified as gifted	1.3%	0.6%	1.6%	2.7%	0.9%	1.7%	NA	0.4%	NA
Grade 3 Student Achievement– 2009-10[*]									
Reading: Percentage of students achieving the provincial standard	62%		58%	58%	64%	57%		52%	40%
Change in reading achievement over three years	+1 points		+8pts	-8 pts	+1 pts	-4 pts		+11pts	
Writing: Percentage of students achieving the provincial standard	70%		53%	62%	70%	69%		52%	60%
Change in writing achievement over three years	+4 points		-7pts	+7 pts	+4 pts	+10pts		-1 pts	
Math: Percentage of students achieving the provincial standard	71%		68%	62%	71%	71%		79%	45%
Change in math achievement over three years	+3 points		+18pts	-28 pts	+3 pts	-4 pts		+38pts	

(Adapted from: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sift/ Date: May 2011)   * English students

The data in Table 1.1 illustrates that the chosen target schools are diverse in terms of family income levels and parental education. In addition, all of the target schools have fewer students achieving the provincial standard in reading and writing than other students in the province. This cross-section of schools is predicted to provide a diverse sample of family experiences for this research, depending on who opts to join the study. As explained above using a combination of family income, parental education, and career status I will classify respondents into either lower class

or middle class. This cross-section of schools is predicted to provide a sample of 15 middle class

families and 15 lower class families. Any imbalance in these two groups can be corrected through

snowball sampling.

With this type of research there is no way to ensure a representative sample nor will I be

attempting to generalize my findings in any way. However, using this methodology, I am only able

to interview parents who contact me (or get referred to me). It is likely that the parents most likely to

contact me will be parents who are more educated with higher incomes. This will mean that it is

likely that my sample will be over-represented in these areas and I will need to account for this in my

analysis. It may be possible for me to seek out lower income, less educated parents, through

snowball sampling people I already know. This may help to equalize the representativeness of my

overall sample.

Data Collection

Flyers will go home with students in grades Kindergarten to grade 3 to parents at the target

schools during the 2011-2012 school year. Parents who are willing to participate will contact me via

telephone or email to arrange an interview time. I will contact parents that I already know to arrange

interviews with them directly and attend parent-council meetings starting the fall of 2011. All

interviews will be scheduled based on the availability of the parent. I will conduct the interviews

myself and they will be audio-recorded. I anticipate that each interview will last between 90 and 120

minutes. Plans include conducting all initial interviews in-person face-to-face. I may ask certain

parents if I may follow-up with them by telephone at the end of the school year for an update on how

their child did in school that year. All interviews will be transcribed and NVivo will be used to

organize and code interview data. Please see below for more information about coding.

Transcription may at least partially, if not fully, be conducted by a paid third party. I will do all

coding and analysis myself.

Interview Schedule

Interview questions (please see Appendix B) will cover many broad themes that try to capture what children's out-of-school lives are like in terms of how they spend their time and the meaning making processes involved. Interview questions are designed to answer the research questions: How do parents structure their children's out-of-school time? How does this differ by social class? What type of activities and experiences do parents provide their children during the summer and during the school year that may amass cultural capital for their child? And finally, how do parents understand their choices? How do their understandings differ by social class?

Part A of the interviews will begin with some questions to warm the parent up to speaking openly. After reviewing the confidentiality and anonymity aspects of the research and beginning the recording device, I will open with asking participants to tell me about their children and their family. Then I will ask about how they came to live in the town and neighbourhood where they live. The purpose of these questions is to get participants comfortable speaking about their family and to have them begin thinking about how they made certain decisions.

Part B of the interviews will ask about their child's pre-school experiences. I will ask about child-care arrangements and what types of organized and informal activities their child participated in before starting elementary school. This set of questions will provide me background information about what the child's life was like prior to starting kindergarten.

In Part C of the interviews I will begin to ask about informal and organized activities during the school year and summer. This will include finding out all information about the child's activities in the past, the present, and any future planned activities. I will also ask respondents how they decided to have their child participate in these activities so that I can evaluate their motives for enrolling their children in certain organized activities or their reasoning behind certain informal

activities. This section of the interview directly answers many aspects of my research questions and begins to address the decision making process so it can be interpreted.

Part D will ask about the family's summer activities. I will gather information about what the family has planned for the summer (vacations, day trips etc.) including the details such as a duration and timing, and how these activities were chosen. In interviews that are completed after the summer, these questions will be asked about the previous summer's activities. These questions are important because it will highlight for me how the child's "extra" (non-school) time is spent over the summer.

I will ask respondents to describe to me a typical day in the life of their child in Part E. We will co-create a type of "time diary" where they recount all of the child's activities for a recent day that was spent at home, including what the child did, for what duration, and who they did it with. I will also ask about how weekends are spent. This set of questions will help me draw a mental picture about the child's life on a typical day.

Questions about homework will be the focus of Part F of the interviews. I will be asking what types, if any, of school-related work (workbooks, flash cards, computer usage etc.) does the child do during the summer months and during the school year. In addition, this section will also ask about the reading habits such as how often the child gets read to and how often the child looks at print material by themselves.

Part G will ask questions about their child's play including what types of things they enjoy playing and who they play with. This section will also include questions about playing games as a family and television watching. These questions will help me further understand how the child spends their time doing interactive (playing games with adults) and/or reactive (television viewing) activities.

Questions about school and achievement will be asked in Part H. This will focus on gathering information about the child's report card in terms how well they did in literacy and numeracy at

school. I will also ask the parent how they felt about their child's grades and what challenges their child faced. This will provide the parent an opportunity to account for their child's grades in school. I will also ask from the parent's perception if their child's main classroom teacher seemed to show any favouritism to certain students. Here, I am attempting to find out if the parent perceives any teacher-bias and it gets at the core ideas of cultural capital. This question may reveal more about their child's relationship with their teacher.

In Part I, I will ask questions about the parent's involvement with school. As suggested above, parent's understandings about what "school involvement" means may differ so it is important to ask questions to unearth how parent's construct ideas about their involvement in their child's education. These questions include asking questions such as if they help their child with homework, if they attend parent-teacher interviews, and if they volunteer in the class or at the school. Questions will also ask about how much contact and the nature of the contact that the respondent has with the classroom teacher. In addition to helping me understand how parents construct meaning around their involvement (or lack of involvement) at school, this line of questioning should provide an illustration of not only how involved the parent is in their child's school-life but also how comfortable they are manoeuvring the school system themselves.

Questions about future goals for their children will be the focus of Part J. I will ask respondents what their educational goals are for their child and also what role parents and schools play in this. This provides me with important information about what aspirations they have for their child which may explain their answers to other questions. For example, I anticipate that parents who have high educational goals for their child will have more contact with their child's classroom teacher than parents with low educational goals for their child. One of my last questions is: "How does your child's achievement at school effect the types of activities you plan for your child outside of school?" This question makes an explicit connection between their child's school achievement

and decisions that they make for their child which may provide data to help promote the theoretical concept of cultural capital.

Finally, I will ask demographic and background questions about the family. I will gather demographic information (age, sex, ethnicity, income, level of education, occupation, family composition, etc.) about both parents (if applicable). I will also ask about work schedules and vacation time from work because parents who work long hours may be less able to have their child enrolled in extra-curricular activities or have less time to devote to informal games and activities as a family.

Overall, all interview questions are designed to be a guideline for interviews and the wording may change when the questions are delivered. In addition, it is likely that the order of the questions will differ as they are asked in the course of a semi-structured conversation. This type of open-ended questioning is fundamental to an interpretivist approach to research. Questions are designed to not only capture how parent's structure their children's leisure time during the school year and summer months and information about their achievement in school, but also to bring to light how parents understand their decisions and how this may relate to the ideas of cultural capital. There are several questions woven throughout the interview schedule that aim to uncover the different constructions that parent's have of their lives and the meaning making processes involved in their decisions.

Coding

The coding strategies that will be used for this research will likely be diverse. It is not possible to know at this stage which type of coding will be most useful until the coding process begins. I anticipate using the following types of coding, adapted from Johnny Saldaña (2009).

Attribute Coding

Attribute coding refers to the organization of basic descriptive information (Saldaña, 2009:55). Interviews will be coded for attributes using the NVivo version 8 functions of "Classifications," "Cases" and "Attributes" which allows me to set-up attributes (i.e. "child's sex") and then assign values ("girl" or "boy") for each case (participant). The attributes for this will include the demographic information (respondent's age and sex, child's sex at age, income, parental levels of education, occupation etc.). It is possible other attributes may be useful to classify the data such as report card grades but this will depend on the quality of the data once it is gathered.

Structural Coding

Structural coding will be used for the first cycle of coding. It applies to a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific question used to frame the interview" (Saldaña, 2009:66). This approach to coding allows me to initially organize my data by topic, or interview question. I forsee beginning with my interview questions and coding based on responses. For example, responses to the question "What types of informal activities does your child participate in on a regular basis?" can be coded by the types of activities the respondent lists. Then, the responses, such as crafting projects, ball hockey, lemonade stands, and skating would all then becomes nodes and each time another respondent gave a similar answer that fit within one of those nodes, it would be added. This produces several codes under the main code of "informal activities." Overall, structural coding is a first cycle coding method that organizes the interview responses by topic or interview question.

Values Coding

Values coding "reflects a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspective or worldview" (Saldaña, 2009:89). Saldaña defines each of the terms quite broadly. A value is the importance a personal attributes to oneself, another person, thing or idea. An attitude is

the way we think and feel about something, an idea, one's self or others. And a belief is part of a system that includes our values and attitudes and is based on our knowledge, experiences, opinions morals, prejudices, etc. While it may be hard to recognize these types of codes when reading through a passage I think it will be a useful strategy to really unpack the meanings behind how parents come to make the leisure decisions they make on behalf of their young children.   The meaning making process is a central tenant of constructionist research and as such this will be an important coding strategy. It is likely that values coding will help me answer my research question which asks about parent's use of cultural capital.

Holistic Coding

         This method of coding is described as a "middle-order" approach in that it attempts to "grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole rather than analyzing them line by line" (Dey, 1993:104). Based on my reading of Saldaña (2009:118), I believe this strategy will be helpful as a second cycle coding method in that I can go back through my structural coding and values coding and pull together "chunks" of data (Saldaña, 2009:118) that can be grouped together by their basic theme, issue, or sentiment. This will allow answers from different questions (organized through structural coding), but having the same sentiment (for example), to be coded together under the same category. For example, I can forsee getting responses from participants about how great/poor their child's teacher is from numerous different questions during the interview. The following interview questions could all include responses about liking/disliking the classroom teacher: "This past school year, do you think your child's classroom teacher showed favouritism to certain students?" "How often would you speak to your child's regular classroom teacher? What did you discuss?" "Did you like your child's classroom teacher?" Holistic coding allows me to go back through the data and pull out pieces of data that convey similar meanings into separate codes.

Focussed Coding

The final coding method I intend to use if focussed coding. This method helps to develop categories from the previously created codes by giving tentative names to the codes and re-organizing the data based on the new category (Saldaña, 2009:155-6). While it is very challenging to foresee where the data may take me at this stage, an example is possible. For instance, all the similar responses and sentiments that may pertain to "parenting style," because this is not a specific question in my interviews (or else it would already be coded during structural coding), may be placed under a category called "parenting style" with its differing attributes (authoritative parenting etc. stemming from the literature) using focussed coding. I anticipate this coding method will be more approachable once I have completed the earlier stages of the coding process.

The interpretive process of coding is hard to predict at this early stage of the research process. As a researcher I must be flexible and be willing to re-evaluate my strategies throughout the course of this research endeavour. However, at this point, I anticipate the coding methods outlined above will be most useful to me in analyzing my data and answering my research questions.

Ethical Considerations & Challenges

There are no serious ethical concerns with this research. However, because I am talking to parents about their children, the most serious ethical issue I may face is that if any type of child abuse or neglect is disclosed to me I would be obliged to report it. This would infringe on the promise I have made to participants that their information will remain confidential and they will remain anonymous. Although it is unlikely that such confessions will occur during my interviews, it is still a possibility that I am prepared for. The University of Waterloo Ethics clearance of my methodology was approved in June 2011 and while certain revisions may need to be made through this process, there were no remaining ethical concerns with this proposed research.

This research faces two main challenges which are related. First, this research is challenged by classifying participants into either the "middle class" or "lower class" group. As already mentioned, this classification will a combination of art and science. While parental level of education is the strongest predictor of a child's achievement in school, it does not necessarily mean that the person holding higher degrees will also hold a more prestigious job and thus have a higher income. In addition, blue-collar workers with less education can get paid very well in certain sectors raising their family income closer to that of individuals working in professional or semi-professional careers. The challenge here is finding a way to group families based on their socio-economic status in way that fairly represents their life situation. Therefore, the classification of participants into "middle class" and "lower class" groups will be a subjective process based on a combination of parental level of education, parental occupations and family income, akin to how previous researchers have used these constructs.

The second challenge that this research faces, which has been outlined above, is finding participants who fit within the "lower class" category. It is likely that the parents who will respond to my recruiting flyer sent home with their child and the parents who attend parent-council meetings will be the parents with higher levels of education and income. It will be challenging to find fifteen participants to place into the "lower class" category. However, I feel that using the additional snowball sampling method that I will be able to reach my goal.

Overall, the methodology for this dissertation includes in-depth semi-structured interviews with caregivers of parents who have at least one child in grades Kindergarten through grade 3. It takes into consideration participant's perceptions and experiences through the contexts in which they occur. From a constructionist perspective, the research will interpret patterns of constructions from the viewpoint of its participants through the filters of the researcher making it a socially constructed

piece of research. The data that is produced in this endeavour will be in-depth and will attempt to help us better understand how children's school achievement is effected by their home-life.

Summary

Overall, this research intends to examine how parents structure their children's out-of-school time, both over the summer months and during the school year. This research will also explore how parents understand the choices they make about how their children spend their leisure time giving special attention to how parents understand the role of cultural capital within these decisions. Past research suggests that children from different classes are exposed to different experiences outside of school which impacts their development and academic achievement. Do parents make conscious efforts to structure their children's time in ways that will benefit their children's educational futures? How do these facets differ between middle class and lower class families? By using a constructivist qualitative approach to research, numerous interviews will be conducted with parents to explore the ideas of cultural capital in the home and the impact it may have on educational outcomes at school. This proposed research is positioned to provide new insights into what children's out-of-school lives consist of, how parents understand the decisions they make concerning their children's leisure time, as well as what impact out-of-school time may have on children's academic success.

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