

Title: An analysis of social class differentials in parent-initiated contact with teachers

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Abstract: This article analyses the association between social class and parent-initiated contact with teachers. Hypotheses are derived from Lareau's theory on 'concerted cultivation' and status maintenance theory on rational educational decision-making. Data from a national survey on French students traversing secondary school are used to study social class differentials in parents' involvement in Grade 9 when students are about to proceed to an important transition from lower to upper secondary school. Linear probability models reveal that the likelihood that parents initiate meetings with the teachers decreases as student's performance increases and that concerted cultivation beliefs have positive effects. Through inclusion of interaction terms into the models, clear evidence is provided that middle-class parents are more likely to seek a meeting than working-class parents when their children face difficulties.

Introduction

Parent-initiated contact with teachers is associated with parents' sense of participation in school governance and influence on their children's school environment (Martin and Vincent 1999; Vincent and Martin 2000; Vincent 2001), teachers' perceptions of parents' interest in the children's education and parents' comfort in dealing with teachers (Epstein et al. 2002; Stormont et al. 2013), and parents' school track choices (Barg 2013). As it can imply that parents' get regularly detailed information on their children's school situation and their options for future educational pathways, parent-initiated contact with teachers also has indirect positive effects on student achievement (Kohl et al. 2000; Sirvani 2007) and choices on further education enrolment (Doo Hwan and Schneider 2005). Moreover, this form of 'spontaneous parental involvement' has to be differentiated from involvement that was induced through teacher invitations or specific school programmes (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003: 3). It is highly stratified by social class and socioeconomic status (Barg 2013; Sacker et al. 2002; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996).

Why parental involvement in school differs over social classes is not fully understood. One reason is because existing research tends to incorporate parent-school interactions in more general parenting constructs. Quantitative research for instance subsumes parent-school interactions under broader parenting patterns combining it with parental involvement at home and extra-curricular activities (e.g. Cheadle and Amato 2011) or, when it focuses on parental involvement in school, combines contacts initiated by parents with contacts initiated by teachers (Kohl et al. 2000; Stormont et al. 2013; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996). Hence, this literature tests only ‘broad’ mechanisms and obscures the motivations underlying parents’ self-directed involvement in school.

The analysis of social class differences in parent-initiated contact with school is also problematic because this kind of communication tends to be more situation-related than contact through parent evenings, regular invitations from teachers or school events, for instance. Qualitative research shows that middle-class parents are more likely than working-class parents to ask for a meeting in the event of difficulties such as a child’s low performance or behavioural problems (e.g. Crozier 1997, 1998) but there is little corresponding quantitative evidence. The studies that include school performance as independent variable combine different parent-teacher contact types and, again, therefore lack to identify its effects on parent-initiated contact (Anderson and Minke 2007; Deslandes and Bertrand 2004; Stormont et al. 2013; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996). Moreover, they do not analyse an interaction effect of class and performance on parent-initiated contact, which seems the appropriate approach to study whether middle-class parents get involved when their children have difficulties in school while working-class parents do not. Understanding the influence of student school performance on parents’ active contacting of the school and how this influence interacts with social class effects is important. It shows how social inequality in school outcomes is not only a consequence of social inequality in parenting behaviour but also a driver of it. Furthermore, complementing the qualitative evidence in this area with quantitative results enables an assessment of the size of the impact of social class and school performance, and of the extent to which social class differences increase when a student’s performance is low.

Against this background, the present paper aims to extend the knowledge about social class differentials in parental involvement through focussing on parents’ initiation of meetings with teachers, paying particular attention to the role of student’s school performance and using large-scale quantitative data. I derive hypotheses from two different sociological research

traditions – Lareau’s theory on cultural logics and ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau 2002, 2003), and ‘rational choice models of educational decisions’ (e.g. Erikson and Jonsson 1996) and test these with representative data on French secondary school students, the *panel d’élèves du second degré (recrutement 1995 - 1995-2006)*, which includes different measures of student school performance and concerted cultivation. I study parental involvement in grade 9, which is the last year of lower secondary school in France. This institutional context is interesting for the examination of parent-initiated contact with teachers because at the end of this grade, i.e. when students are around 14 years old, the school makes the important decision on which upper secondary school type a student will attend. In face of this decision some parents may be particularly interested in keeping in touch with the school.

In the following section I briefly outline the institutional setting of parents’ involvement in school in France. In section 3 I give an overview of the theoretical background and derive hypotheses. Section 4 describes the data, variables and statistical method. In section 5 I present the results of the analyses. In section 6 I provide a conclusion and discuss the findings.

The French institutional context

In the 1970s and 1980s the institutional procedures shaping students’ transition from lower to upper secondary education were modified to provide parents with more power. While the decision on which upper secondary school track a student should attend had been in the hands of the school up to then, parents were gradually involved in a formal ‘dialogue’ with school in order to have more influence on this decision. The educational system and notably the teachers’ selection procedures were made responsible for the social disparities and thus giving more attention to the family’s choices appeared to be a solution (Lapostolle 2005; Van Zanten 2002). Today the dialogue, which takes place at the end of grade 9, is a formal procedure that decides whether a student will stream into a general upper secondary school track – likely leading the student to higher education – or a vocational upper secondary school track. The first step of this institutionalised dialogue is a family’s school track request and the second step is a school track proposition by the staff meeting, which consists of the student’s teachers, the head teacher and parent representatives. In most cases, the staff meeting’s proposition determines the track a student attends since even though families have

the right to reject, only few do so (Barg 2015). Hence, the main decision-making power still lies in the hands of the school.

Legal regulations state that every school must make sure that all parents participate in school life (e.g. through invitations to *parents' evenings*) and that parent representatives speak for the students' and their parents' interests (Loi n°89-486 du 10 juillet 1989). At any time during the school year, parents can initiate individual meetings with teachers or be invited by a teacher. Like in most other countries, this setting gives parents opportunities to get in touch with the school if they want to. Given that teachers make a crucial decision such as the upper secondary school track proposition, one can assume that parents who intend to influence the teachers' decisions will make use of these opportunities. This setting also implies that the school expects parents to work closely with the school staff. While the transition from lower to upper secondary school in France appears to be very distinct from transitions in other educational systems, the theoretical assumptions of this paper can be applied to any other situation in which teachers, or other gatekeepers, have an important say in crucial decisions.

Theoretical background

To explain social class differentials in parental involvement scholars from different research disciplines have put forward a number of factors including cultural capital (Lareau 2002; Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lareau and Weininger 2003) or educational resources (Masson 1997), economic and time resources and psychological concepts such as role construction and self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1995; 1997). While all of these arguments increase the understanding of how family, student and school characteristics are related to broader groupings of involvement, I argue that two sets of arguments apply particularly well to the examination of how social class is related to parent-initiated involvement in school. Both Lareau's theory on 'concerted cultivation' and the rational choice models on educational decision-making aim to explain social phenomena such as social inequality in education by focussing on individual actors' decisions and their relation to socio-economic structure (Glaesser and Cooper 2014). Moreover, they entail arguments that help specifying the role of school performance in the decision-making process.

Cultural capital and cultural logics

An important part of the literature addressing class of origin differences in parental involvement relies on Bourdieu's work (e.g. 1966; 1970; Bourdieu and Passeron 1964). Even though this literature has also critical attitudes towards his approach, it sees potential in the use of the concept of cultural capital in investigations of family-school interactions (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lareau and Weininger 2003). Parents use cultural resources in order to meet institutionalized standards of evaluation and apply socially determined knowledge, skills and competences when communicating with the teachers in order to get preferable treatment for their children. Emphasizing Bourdieu's notion of the similarity of the culture of certain classes and school's culture, Lareau and Weininger (2003) further advance that certain classes impose evaluative criteria on the education system putting classes who do not have that power at disadvantage. Today the standard is that parents are 'active', 'involved', 'assertive', 'educated' and act as 'advocates' of their children (Lareau and Weininger 2003: 589). They are expected to actively contribute to the education of their children and to not leave the whole 'education job' to the school (Blackledge 2001; Lareau and McNamara Horvat 1999; Reay 2005).

In her seminal work on class and ethnic differences in parental child-rearing strategies, Lareau (2002, 2003) addresses parents' involvement in school as one of three dimensions along with parents' organization of their children's time outside school and their ways of talking and academically engaging with their children. She argues that class determines a *cultural logic* of parenting which for lower-class families corresponds to an *accomplishment of natural growth* while middle-class families engage in *concerted cultivation*. They are involved at all times and in various ways ranging from enrolment of their children in extra-curricular activities and help with homework to regularly seeking contact with the school and helping out at school events or in class. They have the ability and confidence to intervene on their child's behalf because they have the knowledge of education and of similar public situations (Vincent 2001). By contrast, Lareau's parenting-category of *accomplishment of natural growth* is characterized by parents' dependence on institutions, their sense of powerlessness and frustration, and conflicts between childrearing practices at home and in school. These parents report to feel uncomfortable in the school context, tend to trust the teachers more and therefore intervene considerably less or not at all (Vincent 2001).

Status maintenance motives

Parents' expectation and aspirations for their child's education are another factor that was found to affect their involvement in education (Bodovski and Farkas 2008; Cheadle and Amato 2011). The higher the educational level the parents expect or aspire for their child, the more they are involved. Expectations and aspirations are shaped by class (Dumais 2002; McClelland 1990) and the social network (Davies and Kandel 1981; Sewell, Haller and Portes 1969), and they can also be perceived as representing the product of parents' long-term rational formation of a plan for their child's educational career (Alexander and Cook 1979). The basic assumption that parents' decision to become involved is a rational choice is in line with economists' argument that parents invest more resources (e.g. time, money, energy) in the development of abilities and educational careers of their children because they see a utility in their educational attainment (see also Reay et al. 2011). This utility can be derived from children's future socio-economic status (Bisin and Verdier 2001; Patacchini and Zenou 2011), and social identity or self-image (Akerlof and Kranton 2000; 2002).

In keeping with these ideas, I suggest that a seminal rational choice model that has been applied to educational decisions (Boudon 1974; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Erikson and Jonsson 1996) can contribute to the explanation of parent-initiated contact with school. The model proposes that educational decisions – e.g. on a specific school track – depend on parents' and students' evaluation of three main factors: the likelihood that the child finishes that specific school track, the costs that will emerge through the student's attendance of the track and the benefit in terms of preservation of the family's social class position or, formulated as a negative term, the costs of status decline. This last parameter is based on the assumption that every family wants to preserve their social status and that social class differences in the choice of certain educational pathways occur because lower-class families do not need their children to attend a high school track in order to maintain their social status. Hence, given the same level of school performance middle-classes are more likely to choose higher educational tracks than lower-class families. Accordingly, one can assume that parents who need their children to achieve a high educational degree to preserve the family's social class position, are more likely to become involved in ways that increase their children's chances of achieving that high educational degree.

Hypotheses

Lareau (2002, 2003) argues that parents' social class determines the extent to which they are involved because class shapes their perceptions of the role parents should have in their children's life. These perceptions are cultural logics, which are 'deep seated, relatively stable childrearing dispositions' (Lareau and Weininger 2008: 120). Hence, it can be assumed that *the cultural logics 'concerted cultivation' versus 'natural growth' considerably influence parents' decision to initiate meetings with teachers (H1), and mediate the effects of social class on this decision (H2).*

Moreover, Lareau's theory yields a hypothesis on the interaction between social class effects and student school performance. Middle-class parents employ their cultural capital to meet the standards that are set by the education system and schools expect parents to be actively involved in their children's education, to be informed about what happens in school and to seek contact with the teachers when the child has difficulties. Hence, it can be assumed that middle-class parents increase their efforts to get in touch with the teachers when their children perform poorly in school, while working-class parents do less so. This yields the hypothesis that social class effects on initiation of meetings with teachers *are stronger when student's performance is low than when the level of performance is high (H3)* and that the relationship between social class and parents' initiation of meetings varies significantly by student's level of school performance.

The same hypothesis can be derived from status maintenance theory, which is rooted in the idea that parents act rationally and make more or less conscious cost-benefit calculations. At the transition from lower to upper secondary school in France they act in a way that maximises the chance that their children attend a school track that leads to an occupation that will preserve the family's social status. Hence, middle-class parents want their child to get access to the general upper secondary school track while working-class parents will be fine with their child attending 'only' the vocational upper secondary track. Given that the school staff typically makes the school track decision, parents will adapt their involvement when the teachers' decision appears to not be in line with their interests. Therefore, as predicted in hypothesis H3, if a child is poorly performing in school and risks to be denied access to the higher secondary school track, middle-class parents will increasingly initiate meetings with the teachers, while working-class parents will not initiate meetings because their class position will be maintained even when the teachers do not propose the general track.

Data, variables and method

I used data from the *panel d'élèves du second degré (recrutement 1995 - 1995-2006)* (IIL-0182, Ministère de l'Éducation, DEPP, ADISP-CMH) – a data set that was collected through a representative longitudinal study. The data set is particularly suitable due to the information on parental involvement and parents' attitudes that it provides. It observed 17,830 students who entered lower secondary education in 1995 during their secondary education. In 1995, head teachers reported students' nationality, gender and other socio-demographic background characteristics such as number of siblings, parents' professions, educational attainment, employment status and place of birth. In 1998, when students were in grade 9 and of age 14, parents responded to a postal survey and provided similar information on the family situation. They also answered a number of detailed questions on their opinion towards school issues, their involvement in their child's education and educational plans for their child. I used data gathered at these two time points. I first excluded 146 students whose families not receive the family questionnaire and 2,394 families who did not participate in the family survey. Students of non-French nationality were excluded from the sample as well (2,757) and finally 157 students were deleted since they did not live at least with one parent. Listwise deletion for variables included in the main analysis led to a sample size of 9,285.¹

The dependent variable in the analysis is *parent-initiated meeting with teachers*. The variable is based on a question that was asked to the parents in 1998. They were asked whether they have had the opportunity to meet their child's teacher since the beginning of the school year and whether this was (1) at a parent-teacher evening, (2) a meeting initiated by them, or (3) a meeting initiated by the teacher. The dependent variable used in this analysis is a variable indicating with '1' that parents answered that they initiated a meeting and denoting with '0' that they did not indicate this answering option. Table 1 presents means of the variables for the total sample and for each social class.

I construct a *class of origin* variable that corresponds to the EGP-class schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero 1979). Social classes group occupations that are similar regarding income, employment conditions, economic security and promotion prospects (Breen 2005: 36-37). Following the literature (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Ichou and Vallet 2011), I created six classes: (1) higher service-class (EGP I) and (2) lower service-class (EGP II), which together correspond to the 'middle-class', (3) routine non-manual workers of lower and higher grade, lower grade technicians and

supervisors of manual workers (EGP III, V), (4) the ‘working-class’ consisting of skilled manual workers and semi- or unskilled manual workers (EGPVI, VIIa), (5) class of farmers and agricultural workers (EGP IVc and EGP VIIb), and (6) the class containing (non-agricultural) self-employed and the petty bourgeoisie (EGP IVa and IVb).² International research finds the expected differentials in educational attainment (Ichou and Vallet 2011 as an example for France). This underlines the suitability of the schema for the analysis of educational choices such as the decision to actively support the school career of one’s child.

INSERT TABLE I HERE

As a main measure of students’ *school performance*, I use student’s average marks in grade 8 and 9 to construct a grade point average-variable (GPA). This information represents the mean of students’ results in French and mathematics. Marks range from 0, lowest mark, to 20, highest mark. I also use a subjective measure based on parents’ answers to the question whether they think that their child is (1) ‘a student that has a lot of difficulties’, (2) ‘a student that has some difficulties’, (3) ‘a good student’, or (4) ‘an excellent student’. The variable is operationalized as a categorical variable with category (1) being the reference category in the multivariate analyses.

To represent the cultural logics *concerted cultivation* and *natural growth*, I use a variable that is based on parents’ view on parent-teacher relationships. This measure was obtained through the 1998 family survey, which also asked parents about their involvement in their child’s education and assessment of their child’s school performance. The variable is based on the question: ‘Parents can have different views on parent-teacher relationships. Here are five views. Which of the following statements corresponds most to your own view?’ (DEPP 1998, own translation). From the original 5 items³, I built a variable that consists of three categories: (1) ‘Better not meet teachers’, (2) ‘meet teachers when there is a problem’, and (3) ‘meet teachers frequently’. Category (1) operationalises *natural growth* and category (3) *concerted cultivation*. Category (2) corresponds to an intermediary logic. As noted in previous quantitative studies examining concerted cultivation, there are ‘adaptive requirements needed to operationalize a complex, qualitatively derived theory so that it can be tested on a large and rich quantitative dataset’ (Henderson 2013: 549) and therefore employing such a variable is associated with limitations.

I included four control variables in the analysis. Two of these indicate what school type a student attended in 1998. One school-type variable denotes whether the student attends

a school in a ‘Zone d’Éducation Prioritaire – ZEP’ (‘education priority zone’); the other variable indicates whether the student is enrolled in a private school. School types should be considered because families’ relative freedom of school choice contributes to social segregation in schools as higher-class families try to enrol their children in schools with ‘favourable’ social compositions (e.g. Van Zanten 2002). Since one of families’ strategies is to send their children to private schools, more children of higher social origin tend to attend private schools than children of lower social background (Meuret, Broccolichi and Duru-Bellat 2001; Tavan 2004). Since ZEP-schools are located in districts with high rates of disadvantaged families, the average student social origin tends to be lower in ZEP-schools than in common public schools (Guillaume 2001). Schools’ social composition can be expected to affect parents’ involvement behaviour as in schools with high rates of higher class children, lower-class parents may feel more uncomfortable than in schools with more mixed social composition. Moreover, school staffs’ promotion of parental involvement could be different in ZEP-schools and private schools because teachers and headmasters have different interests than the school staff of common public schools (Van Zanten 2002). For instance, in private schools the staff may feel more obliged to act in the interests of the families because the families pay fees; in ZEP-schools teachers may actively try to reduce social inequality by seeking contact with parents. Further, it has to be considered that parents who enrol their children in private schools have higher educational aspirations (Caille 2004; Tavan 2004).

As a third control variable I include the size of the city, town or village where the student goes to school. The social class distribution is not the same in French urban and rural areas and people differ in terms of attitudes toward education and aspirations for their children (Roux and Davailon 2001). I control for urban-rural discrepancies with a variable of four categories: (i) rural to 5,000 inhabitants, (ii) 5,000 to 20,000 inhabitants, (iii) 20,000 to 200,000 inhabitants and (iv) 200,000 to 2,000,000 inhabitants and the city of Paris.

Finally, I take into account parents’ educational level. It can be assumed that this variable captures influences of parents’ cultural capital in terms of linguistic skills, confidence in dealing with school staff and familiarity with the education system (see e.g. Bourdieu 1966: 326). The variable has six categories: (1) ‘no education’ includes two parents with no attainment; (2) ‘primary education’ contains parents who only completed primary education; (3) ‘vocational qualification’ represents children whose both parents have a vocational qualification, or one parent has and the other parent has a lower or no qualification; (4)

‘vocational secondary degree’ consists of children with at least one parent having a vocational secondary degree and the other parent having a lower qualification, or one parent having a general secondary degree and one parent with no completed education; (5) ‘general secondary degree’ consists of children with at least one parent having a general secondary school qualification and one parent having a lower attainment; (6) ‘general/higher education’ includes children with both parents having at least a general secondary degree or a higher degree.

As the dependent variable is dummy-coded one would typically run binary logistic regressions. However, since I have to include interaction terms into the regression models and the consideration of interaction terms in non-linear regression models is known to be problematic (Ai and Norton 2003; Norton, Wang and Ai 2004), I run linear probability models. Another advantage of linear probability models is that their coefficients are easy to interpret. Interpretation examples are provided in the results-section. In order to take account of the nesting of students in schools the standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering using the Stata version 12 command ‘vce(cluster)’.

Results

Table 1 provides a basic bivariate test through illustrating the distribution of all variables by social class. As shown in other French research the class of farmers and agricultural workers (EGP IVc and VIIb) and the class of self-employed and the petty bourgeoisie (EGP IVa and IVb) show association patterns that are not in line with the hierarchical order of classes. For instance, while there is a clear positive relationship between class position and rate of parents who initiated meetings and school performance respectively, these two classes do not align with that relationship regarding at least one of these variables. The numbers presented in Table 1 also provide evidence supporting Lareau’s theory: the rates of parents believing that they should meet teachers frequently, which corresponds to the logic ‘concerted cultivation’, are higher for EGP I (53.8 per cent) and EGP II (58.5 per cent) than for the working-class (46.1 per cent). Regarding the logic ‘natural growth’, 17 per cent of the working-class parents (EGP VI, VIIa) think that they should ‘better not meet’ with the teachers and only around 10 percent of the higher service class parents (EGP I) share this opinion.

Table 2 presents results of the linear regressions on the dummy-variable parent-initiated meetings with teachers. The analysis consists of six regression models, which all include the control variables ZEP-school, private school, size of city or town where the school is located,

and parental education. The reference category for the class-variable is the working-class. Model 1 shows that there is a considerable relationship between social class and parents' initiation of meetings with teachers. In line with the theoretical predictions, the higher and lower service class are more likely to seek contact with the teachers. For instance, holding constant the control variables, the likelihood that parents from EGP I request a meeting with a teacher is around 6 percentage points higher, on average, than the likelihood that working-class parents do so. For EGP II-parents the corresponding difference is slightly higher with 7.5 percentage points. Parental education has a similar and independent effect indicating that parents' cultural capital influences their decision to contact the teachers. When school performance measures are included (Model 2), the effects of class and education increase. This is not surprising given the positive relationships of class and education with student performance and a negative association of performance and initiation of meetings with teachers. Parents are more likely to see contact when their children have low grades. It is interesting to note that both performance measures have independent statistically significant effects. As grade and subjective performance assessment are highly correlated, the net significant effect of parents' performance assessment could be capturing parents' motivation to meet the teachers because they perceive difficulties that go beyond what is measured through grades. This could be problems relating to the child's working habits or the child's relationship with a teacher. This result also shows that not only 'objective' performance indicators such as grades incite parents to contact the teachers, it seems further important that the parents have realised that their child has problems in school.

Model 3 additionally includes the measure of concerted cultivation. Supporting hypothesis H1, which predicts that cultural logics drive parents' involvement-decision, the effects are highly significant and show that parents who believe they should be meeting the teachers frequently or when there is a problem are more likely to initiate meetings than parents who think it is better to not meet the teachers. For instance, the likelihood of parents' initiation of a meeting with teachers is 23 percentage points higher when the parents haven an opinion corresponding to 'concerted cultivation' than when their cultural logic is 'natural growth'. Only weak evidence is found in favour of hypothesis H2, which assumes that cultural logics mediate the class effect: the coefficients of the class-variable are only slightly reduced when the cultural logics-variable is included in the model. While the coefficient of EGP I is 0.90 in Model 2, it is reduced by 4 percentage points only to 0.86 in Model 3. An increase of the R²-value across Model 1 (0.023), Model 2 (0.075) and Model 3 (0.108) reveals that taking into

account school performance and cultural logics improves the explanation of parent-initiated contact with school.

Model 4 examines the interaction between social class and grade point average and tests hypothesis H3, which assumes that social class differences decrease as student's performance increases. The coefficient of -0.026 for '#EGP I' (Model 4, Table 2), for instance, indicates that with every additional GPA-point the probability difference between EGP I and the reference category EGP VI, VIIa (working-class) decreases by 2.6 percentage points on average. Figure 1 further illustrates the results through plotting predicted probabilities. The results strongly support H3. This finding can be replicated with the variable representing parents' subjective assessment of their child's performance (Model 5). In the final model an interaction term for grade and cultural logic is included. The coefficients show that with increasing student performance the effect of cultural logic decreases. The pattern of this association is in line with the interactions between class and school performance (Model 4 and 5) indicating that cultural logics could be a mechanism underlying this interaction effect. In other words, one reason why middle-class parents increasingly seek contact with teachers when their children have difficulties could be that they believe that parents should meet teachers frequently and when there is a problem. This result provides support for the assumption that parents act according to their beliefs or cultural logics (H1).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Figure 1, 2 and 3 present predicted probabilities based on Model 4, 5 and 6 respectively. They illustrate the interaction effects. In Figure 1 and 2 the predicted probabilities are plotted only for the higher service-class (EGP I) and the lower service-class (EGP II) as compared to the reference category, which is the working-class (EGP VI, VIIa). The 95 per cent confidence intervals are included to show at which level of performance the social class differentials are statistically significant: when the line of a class does not overlap with the 0-line, this indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the likelihood of initiating a teacher meeting between parents from that specific class and the reference class, i.e. the working-class. In Figure 3 the probabilities are plotted for parents having the cultural logic 'concerted cultivation' and parents with the intermediate category 'parents should meet when there is a problem'. The reference category is the group of parents having the cultural logic 'natural growth'.

INSERT FIGURE 1 AND 2 HERE

Again, Figure 1 and 2 provide support in favour of hypothesis H3 as they show that the social class differences in initiating teacher contact are the strongest and statistically significant when children have low grades or when the parents think that their children have difficulties in school. For instance, when the child's grade is 5 the difference between EGP I and the working class in the predicted probabilities of seeking contact with the teacher is almost 30 percentage points, while there is no difference when the child's grade is 15. Similarly, when parents indicate their child has a lot of difficulties, the difference between the higher service class and the working class is around 21 percentage points. In terms of the interaction with parents' cultural logics, Figure 3 shows that the differences between parents thinking along the lines of 'concerted cultivation' and parents following the idea of 'natural growth' are larger and statistically significant when the child has relatively low grades. These differences then become smaller the better the grades get. Showing, again, that parents act indeed according to their cultural logics, the plot reveals that given a relatively high GPA of 15 the difference in the predicted probability of initiating a meeting with the teachers is still significant for parents thinking that parents and teachers should meet frequently while it is not for parents who believe that they should meet teachers only when there is a problem.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

Discussion and conclusion

This paper contributes to literature on social class differentials in parental involvement in school by analysing whether social class differentials in parent-initiated contact with teachers are mediated by cultural logics and whether middle class parents are more likely to seek a meeting than working class parents when their children face difficulties. I use quantitative data from a national study on French students traversing secondary school to examine social class differentials in parents' initiation of meetings with teachers in grade 9, which is the last grade before the school staff makes a crucial decision on which upper secondary school track a student will attend. I derive hypotheses from two seemingly opposing theories: Lareau's well-known work on the cultural logic 'concerted cultivation' and status maintenance theory on parents' rational decision-making.

I find that cultural logics measured through parents' opinion on parent-teacher relationships are significantly associated with parent-initiated contact in school and thereby show that parents act according to their class-shaped sets of beliefs. This result is in contrast to research

arguing that parents report attitudes towards education and involvement in their child's school that differ from their actual behaviour (Chin and Phillipps 2004; Reay et al. 2011). Other than theoretically predicted, I find that cultural logics mediate only little of the social class effects. This could be due to the narrow operationalization of the complex qualitatively derived concept cultural logics and the variable for parents' educational attainment capturing parts of its effects. Moreover, other class-related mechanisms such as status maintenance motives can be expected to influence parents' decision and to be mediating this remaining class-effect. The relatively low R^2 -value further indicates that the inclusion of more or richer variables in the analysis could improve the explanation of parents' contacting schools.

Supporting a hypothesis derived from both theories, this study finds that parents of higher social classes are more likely to initiate a meeting with teachers than working class parents when their children have difficulties in school. This interaction effect of social class and school performance could be indicating that parents who need their child to attend the higher secondary school track to maintain the family's social status seek contact with the teachers when the risk is high that their child may not get access to the higher track. Working-class parents do not contact the teachers in this situation because they do not see the same utility as the middle-class families in their child attending the higher track. At the same time, middle-class families appear to follow a set of beliefs corresponding to 'converted cultivation' and aim to meet the standards set by the school system. They believe their role as parents is to get particularly engaged when the child has difficulties in school thereby acting as 'risk managers' (Vincent 2001: 349). Working-class parents tend to be less confident in dealing with school-issues and feel they do not understand all processes (Crozier 1999). Therefore, they are less likely to have the opinion that parents and teachers should meet frequently and intervene when their children have difficulties in school. The present study's finding that grade point average and parents' assessment of their child's performance have independent negative effects further shows that parent's subjective perception of their children's school situation is important. Given the same low grade, only a parent who recognises that the child has difficulties will contact the school.

The findings contribute to research on social inequality in parent-school interactions in several ways. First, as this quantitative study focuses on one specific parent-directed involvement type instead of combining different more general involvement types, it is able to shed light on a detailed decision-making process. While most research tests 'broad' mechanisms by looking at effects of various family, student and school characteristics on

involvement patterns, the results of this study can tell a more in-depth story. The present analysis clearly shows that there is a negative relationship between school performance and parent-initiated contact with school and thereby provides a finding that is different from the literature that studies effects of combined involvement measures and detects positive or no associations with school achievement (see e.g. the overview by Desforges and Abouchar 2003). Its results are however in line with the research that looks at parent-school contact as a separate variable and finds a negative association with school success (Teachman, Paasch and Carver 1997; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996; see also McNeal 1999 for similar results for truancy). Beyond that, identifying a significant interaction effect of social class and school performance, this paper presents new, quantitative evidence on the social class gap in the extent to which parents intervene on behalf of their child.

Second, applying arguments from status maintenance theory to parental involvement decisions is new and links research on parental involvement-decisions to important research on school track choices, subject choices, higher education decisions and other well-studied decisions in educational pathways. It invites scholars to make use of status maintenance theory to explain other types of school-involvement that might be ‘beneficial’ for a student’s school career. In addition, through jointly drawing on Lareau’s theory of concerted cultivation this study shows how two seemingly conflicting theories on educational decision-making and research typically using either quantitative survey data or qualitative data from case studies can fruitfully be used together (Glaesser and Cooper 2014).

Third, this paper offers arguments on how institutional context can shape parents’ decision to become involved in school. Making use of the French example of secondary schooling where school staff makes important school track decisions, this study argues that social class differentials in involvement become even more apparent when parents can benefit from influencing the teachers. Typically, researchers study the impact of the school environment (e.g. teacher invitations) and of programmes to promote involvement to learn how institutions can be adjusted so as to increase involvement. This literature is highly relevant but often ignores that not all families react to interventions in the same way and that therefore certain institutional adjustments and interventions can lead to an increase of social inequality in involvement (Crozier 1999). The present paper offers some theoretical ideas on how and when the system promotes social inequality and motivates further research into the variation of social class differences in parental involvement over different education systems and institutional settings.

Endnotes

¹ The strong reduction of the sample is mainly due to high numbers of missing values on the grade point average (GPA) variable, which is not provided by the parents but by the schools. Comparisons of descriptive measures of the variables included in the analysis for this sample and a larger sample that is not excluding cases with missing information on the GPA-variable (N=11378) reveal differences between the samples are marginal.

² The theory suggests that social classes follow a hierarchical order. However, in France the families in the class including farmers and agricultural workers have distinct educational and occupation aspirations, and attitudes towards education (Ichou and Vallet 2011; Roux and Davaillon 2001). Therefore they should be observed outside the hierarchical order.

³ The five answering categories were (DEPP 1998, own translation): (1) 'the teachers have so much to do with their students that they cannot solve all problems. Meeting them does not change much', (2) 'it is better to let the teachers do their work and to inconvenience them as rarely as possible', (3) 'parents should meet the teachers as soon as there is a problem', (4) 'it is important for the parents that they build up a good communication with the teachers and meet them even when there is no problem', (5) 'teachers can do their work only in close collaboration with the parents'.

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Table 1: Descriptives of variables used in analysis, full sample and by social class (means)

	Total	EGP I	EGP II	EGP III, V	EGP VI, VIIa	EGP IVc, VIIb	EGP IVa, IVb
	mean	mean	mean	mean	mean	mean	mean
Parents' initiation of meetings with teachers	0.324	0.376	0.373	0.316	0.272	0.196	0.311
<i>Social class</i>							
EGPI	0.220						
EGPII	0.135						
EGPIII, V	0.326						
EGPIVc, VIIb	0.035						
EGPIVa, IVb	0.089						
EGPVI, VIIa	0.195						
GPA (0-20)	11.251 (2.75)	12.364 (2.54)	11.972 (2.58)	10.942 (2.71)	10.152 (2.66)	11.523 (2.69)	10.842 (2.61)
<i>Parents' performance assessment</i>							
'a lot of difficulties'	0.069	0.035	0.043	0.083	0.100	0.040	0.089
'some difficulties'	0.348	0.237	0.289	0.405	0.411	0.333	0.364
'good'	0.453	0.496	0.501	0.416	0.420	0.511	0.459
'excellent'	0.130	0.232	0.167	0.096	0.068	0.116	0.088
<i>Cultural logic</i>							
'better not meet'	0.120	0.098	0.093	0.115	0.169	0.153	0.120
'meet when there is a problem'	0.370	0.364	0.322	0.391	0.370	0.339	0.390
'meet frequently'	0.510	0.538	0.585	0.494	0.461	0.508	0.489
<i>Parental education</i>							
No education	0.069	0.003	0.003	0.054	0.227	0.049	0.051
Primary education	0.058	0.003	0.010	0.070	0.130	0.095	0.051
Vocational qualification	0.406	0.085	0.167	0.567	0.587	0.520	0.531
Vocational	0.096	0.079	0.125	0.123	0.029	0.147	0.115

secondary degree							
General secondary degree	0.168	0.254	0.353	0.134	0.023	0.104	0.141
General/higher education	0.203	0.576	0.342	0.051	0.004	0.086	0.111
ZEP-school	0.080	0.030	0.055	0.088	0.158	0.043	0.051
Private school	0.210	0.274	0.205	0.172	0.149	0.330	0.283
<i>Size of city or town (nb. of inhabitants)</i>							
< 5,000	0.208	0.121	0.203	0.200	0.249	0.550	0.235
5,000-20,000	0.183	0.124	0.177	0.194	0.203	0.260	0.218
20,000-200,000	0.266	0.251	0.299	0.268	0.281	0.153	0.254
>200,000, Paris	0.343	0.504	0.321	0.338	0.267	0.037	0.293
<i>N</i>	9285	2041	1251	3022	1814	327	830

Source: Panel d'élèves du second degré, recrutement 1995 - 1995-2006, Ministère de l'Éducation, DEPP, ADISP-CMH; own calculations.

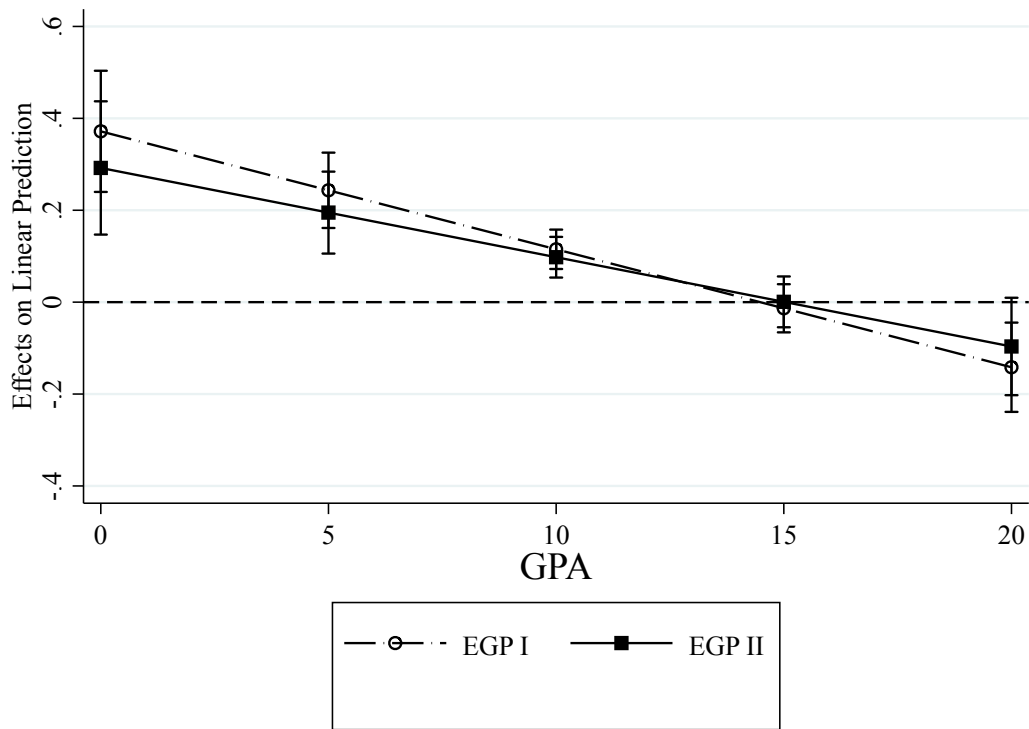
Table 2: Results from linear probability model on parents' initiation of meetings with teachers

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se
<i>Social class (Ref. VI, VIIa)</i>												
EGP I	0.057**	0.020	0.090***	0.020	0.086***	0.019	0.372***	0.067	0.221***	0.063	0.087***	0.019
EGP II	0.075***	0.020	0.097***	0.020	0.084***	0.020	0.292***	0.074	0.186*	0.075	0.085***	0.020
EGP III, V	0.027	0.014	0.034*	0.014	0.030*	0.014	0.139**	0.053	0.103*	0.047	0.030*	0.014
EGP IVc, VIIb	-0.090***	0.025	-0.059*	0.025	-0.059*	0.025	-0.192	0.100	0.120	0.139	-0.058*	0.025
EGP IVa, IVb	0.010	0.020	0.013	0.020	0.012	0.019	0.225**	0.078	-0.011	0.065	0.012	0.019
<i>Parental education (Ref. no education)</i>												
Primary education	0.033	0.026	0.040	0.026	0.032	0.025	0.030	0.025	0.034	0.025	0.032	0.025
Vocational qualification	0.052**	0.020	0.080***	0.020	0.063**	0.020	0.058**	0.020	0.064**	0.020	0.062**	0.020
Vocational secondary degree	0.044	0.025	0.101***	0.025	0.083***	0.025	0.076**	0.025	0.081**	0.025	0.082***	0.025
General secondary degree	0.049*	0.024	0.117***	0.024	0.091***	0.024	0.088***	0.024	0.090***	0.024	0.090***	0.024
General/higher education	0.060*	0.025	0.150***	0.025	0.126***	0.025	0.128***	0.025	0.131***	0.025	0.125***	0.025
GPA (1-20)			-0.022***	0.002	-0.022***	0.002	-0.010*	0.004	-0.022***	0.002	-0.008*	0.004
<i>Parents' performance assessment (Ref. 'a lot of difficulties')</i>												
'some difficulties'			-0.108***	0.021	-0.114***	0.021	-0.117***	0.021	-0.075	0.039	-0.116***	0.021
'good'			-0.204***	0.022	-0.212***	0.022	-0.214***	0.022	-0.141***	0.039	-0.214***	0.022
'excellent'			-0.240***	0.028	-0.247***	0.027	-0.236***	0.027	-0.142***	0.049	-0.246***	0.027
<i>Cultural logic (Ref. 'better not meet')</i>												
'meet when there is a problem'					0.093***	0.013	0.092***	0.013	0.093***	0.013	0.262***	0.054
'meet frequently'					0.231***	0.013	0.230***	0.013	0.231***	0.013	0.405***	0.052
<i>Interaction of social class #GPA</i>												
EGP I#							-0.026***	0.005				
EGP II#							-0.019**	0.006				
EGP III, V#							-0.011*	0.005				
EGP IVc, VIIb#							0.010	0.008				
EGP IVa, IVb#							-0.020**	0.007				

<i>Interaction of cultural logic #GPA</i>												
											-0.016***	0.005
											-0.016***	0.004
<i>Interaction of social class #parents' performance assessment</i>												
<i>EGP I#</i>												
											-0.093	0.068
											-0.155*	0.065
											-0.235***	0.071
<i>EGP II#</i>												
											-0.076	0.081
											-0.129	0.077
											-0.164	0.085
<i>EGP III, V#</i>												
											-0.067	0.052
											-0.098	0.050
											-0.084	0.060
<i>EGP IVc, VIb#</i>												
											-0.210	0.147
											-0.187	0.143
											-0.193	0.152
<i>EGP IVa, IVb#</i>												
											0.057	0.073
											-0.005	0.070
											0.010	0.085
Constant	0.259***	0.019	0.595***	0.032	0.480***	0.033	0.363***	0.047			0.336***	0.049
R2	0.023		0.075		0.108		0.111		0.110		0.109	
N	9285		9285		9285		9285				9285	

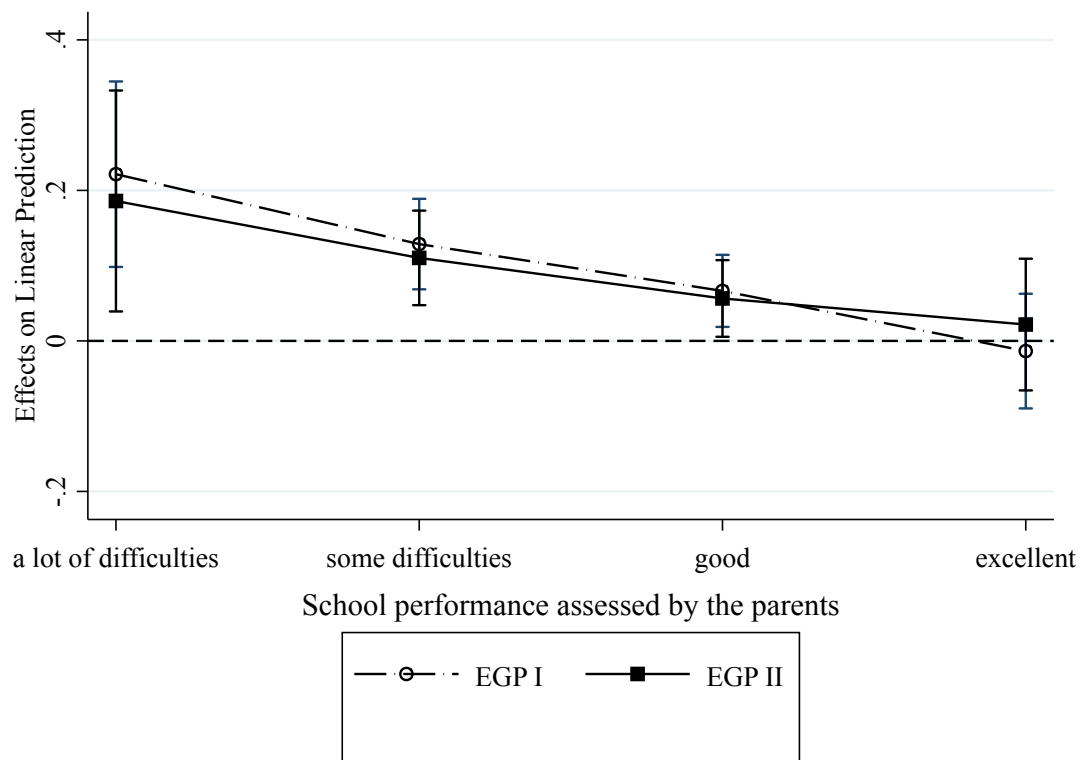
Note: Coefficients of control variables not shown, except for parental education; standard errors adjusted for school-level clustering; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. # indicates a multiplicative interaction term; e.g. '#GPA' and 'EGP I#' means that GPA and EGP I are included as a multiplicative interaction term. See text body for interpretation examples. Source: Panel d'élèves du second degré, recrutement 1995 - 1995-2006, Ministère de l'Éducation, DEPP, ADISP-CMH; own calculations.

Figure 1: Interaction of social class and GPA on parents' initiation of meetings with teachers (prediction from linear probability model)



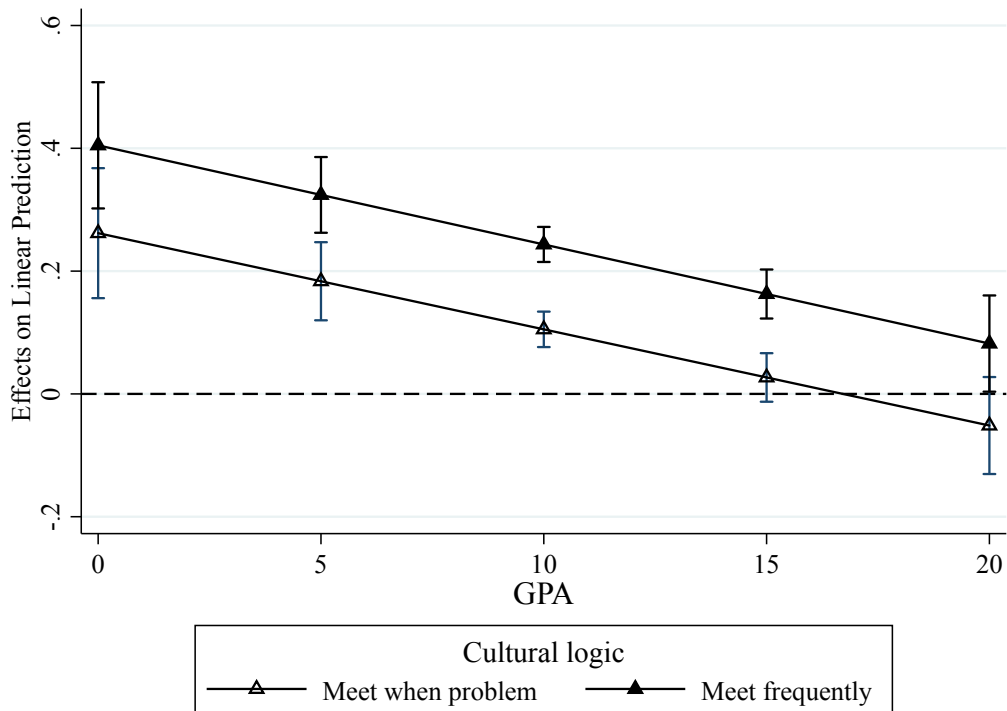
Note: reference category EGP VI, VIIa (working-class); 95%-confidence intervals displayed. *Source:* Panel d'élèves du second degré, recrutement 1995 - 1995-2006, Ministère de l'Éducation, DEPP, ADISP-CMH; predicted probabilities obtained from Model 4 in Table 2 ; own calculations.

Figure 2: Interaction of social class and parents' assessment of their child's performance on parents' initiation of meetings with teachers (prediction from linear probability model)



Note: reference category EGP VI, VIIa (working-class); 95%-confidence intervals displayed. *Source:* Panel d'élèves du second degré, recrutement 1995 - 1995-2006, Ministère de l'Éducation, DEPP, ADISP-CMH; predicted probabilities obtained from Model 5 in Table 2 ; own calculations.

Figure 3: Interaction of GPA and parents' cultural logics on parents' initiation of meetings with teachers (prediction from linear probability model)



Note: reference category 'never meet' corresponding to *natural growth*; 'meet frequently' corresponds to *concerted cultivation*; 95%-confidence intervals displayed. Source: Panel d'élèves du second degré, recrutement 1995 - 1995-2006, Ministère de l'Éducation, DEPP, ADISP-CMH; predicted probabilities obtained from Model 6 in Table 2, own calculations.