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Transmission of Capital through Language Teaching at Home

Abstract
Children from a very young age are thrust into the extremely competitive field of education in Singapore. To enable children to compete successfully in school, mothers play an important role in the preparation for their children to enter the arena by teaching them at home, often even before they are officially enrolled in a primary school. This paper applies Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, in particular the embodied state of cultural capital, to the study of two mothers’ explicit involvement in their children’s daily literacy practices. Both mothers, who are full-time homemakers, invest the bulk of their personal time and labour on their children. The data, which were collected through a series of participant observations in the two families as well as self-recordings by one of the mothers, show that the mothers’ possession of cultural capital is critical not only in the deliberate care and teaching of their young children, but also in the unconscious transmission of cultural capital. Focusing on the mother’s use of English Language at home with the children, the data provide evidence to show that the mother with a high volume of capital is able to transmit a wide range of capital as she interacts with her son, while the mother with a lower volume of capital is more restricted in her language and therefore has to resort to the exchange of economic capital for cultural capital in the form of tuition service for her daughter. The paper will show the different kinds of the embodied state of cultural capital that each child possesses at this early stage of their lives as a result of their mother’s investment.

Summary
This paper applies Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, in particular the concept of the embodied state of cultural capital, to show the important role mothers play in the preparing their children to compete in the field of education in Singapore. The data, which were collected through participant observations in the two families as well as self-recording by one of the mothers, show that the mothers’ possession of cultural capital is critical not only in the deliberate care and teaching of their young children, but also in the unconscious transmission of cultural capital.