1 EDUCATION



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CHAPTER 2	Class and educational achievement	000
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AQA Specification Candidates should examine:	Chapters	Pages
The role and functions of the education system, including its relationship to the economy and to class structure.	Chapter 1 covers the key theoretical approaches. Chapter 2 deals specifically with class. Chapter 6 looks at how these issues play out in relation to contemporary policies.	000
Differential educational achievement of social groups by social class, gender and ethnicity in contemporary society.	Chapters 2, 3 and 4 deal in detail with these issues.	000
Relationships and processes within schools, with particular reference to teacher/pupil relationships, pupil identities and subcultures, the hidden curriculum, and the organisation of teaching and learning.	Chapter 5 covers these aspects in detail.	000
The significance of educational policies, including policies of selection, marketisation and privatisation, and policies to achieve greater equality of opportunity or outcome, for an understanding of the structure, role, impact and experience of and access to education; the impact of globalisation on educational policy.	Chapters 2, 3 and 4 consider the effects of policies on access to education. Chapter 6 deals specifically with policy issues, but there are important links with the theories discussed in Chapter 1.	000

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1.1 THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SOCIETY

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand Marxist, functionalist, social democratic and neoliberal perspectives on the roles and functions of education (AO1).
- Apply these perspectives to contemporary British education (AO2).
- Analyse the relationship between the education system, the economy and the class structure (AO3).
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Marxist, functionalist social democratic and neoliberal perspectives on education (AO3).



INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

In England, for anyone born after 1 September 1997 it is now compulsory to stay on at school until the age of 18. But why is such a long (and expensive) education thought necessary? It is widely believed that all the time and effort devoted to education is good for individual pupils and equally good for the well-being of society as a whole. For example, for the individual it might open up opportunities and lead to higher pay, while for society it can help the economy to grow. Functionalist sociologists have a very positive view of education, in line with these widely shared beliefs. Marxists, however, have a very different view, seeing education as serving the interests of a small, higher-class minority and not those of society as a whole. This Chapter will examine the ideas and the evidence to see which view is more credible.

The education system is one of the most influential institutions in society. It takes individuals from the age of 4 or 5, or even younger, for six or so hours per day, over a period of at least 13 years in England. It bombards them with a vast amount of knowledge, attitudes and skills.

These are acquired either formally through set lessons, or informally through the hidden curriculum – the processes involved in being 'schooled' and the various interactions that take place while in school (for more on the hidden curriculum, see the section below on the Marxist approach). By the time they finish compulsory education, most pupils will have spent well over 15,000 hours in lessons.

What have you really learned at school/college this week? Who will gain from your acquiring this knowledge, set of attitudes or skills?

COMPULSORY EDUCATION FOR ALL

It may seem normal today that all children are entitled to lengthy and free state education, this has not always been the case. Private schooling was always available for the upper and middle classes who could afford it, but it was not until 1880 that education was available to everyone up to the age of 10.

Forster's 1870 Education Act declared that school boards could be set up in districts where school places were inadequate. Between 1870 and 1880, about 4000 schools were started or taken over by boards. The school boards were replaced with around 300 Local Education Authorities in 1902, by which time about 20,000 board and voluntary schools served 5.6 million pupils. The Fisher Education Act of 1918 made the state responsible for secondary education, and attendance was made compulsory up to the age of 14. The school-leaving age was raised to 15 in 1947, then to 16 in 1972, and for everyone born after 1997 it is now 18.

One of the main reasons for the rapid expansion of state education in Britain has been a belief that improved education was necessary for economic success. There was concern in the late 19th century that Britain was falling behind competitors such as Germany in manufacturing industries. Improving education would ensure that Britain had the skilled workers necessary to compete effectively. Education was also thought by some to have an important civilising role. This was seen as important as voting rights were extended to the majority of men in 1884, and all men over 21 in 1918 (plus women over 30). People hoped that if the mass of the population was better educated, they would make better-informed decisions about who to vote for. The state education system would also teach values and beliefs, which would help to ensure that they were shared by the population as a whole.

The expansion of education was supported by reformers who campaigned for the poor. They saw education as an escape route from poverty, so they believed that state education could help to produce a fairer society in which everybody had opportunities to succeed.

Different groups put the emphasis on different reasons for spending more on state education. These long-standing differences over the purpose of education still exist today.

Since the 1960s, post-16 education to age 18 in school sixth forms and further education colleges has expanded dramatically, as has higher education (see Chapter 6). By 2011/12, UK government expenditure by the Department for Education amounted to over £56 billion or about 8% of government spending (Rogers, 2012).

Do you agree that making education compulsory up to 18 will benefit the individual and society (for example by boosting the economy)? Give reasons to support your answer.

So why do modern societies invest so much in schooling the next generation? Sociologists are divided in their views about this. Most agree that education is important, both in teaching skills and in encouraging certain attitudes and values, but they disagree about why this occurs and who benefits from it.

Functionalist approach

Functionalism was the first sociological perspective to be developed, starting in the 19th century. The initial work of French sociologists such as August Comte (1798–1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was then developed in the 20th century in the USA by Talcott Parsons (1902–79) and others. Using different approaches, they examined:

- how societies managed to stick together and work successfully without falling apart;
- how shared values and beliefs (for example about right and wrong) helped members of society to work together;
- how institutions such as the family and the education system worked to create predictable and orderly societies.

Some functionalists, such as Durkheim, recognised that things could go wrong with social order, but they stressed that institutions were generally positive, and usually 'functioned' to meet the 'needs' of society. They paid less attention to inequality, conflict and social divisions than most other sociologists.

Functionalists argue that education has three broad functions:

1. Socialisation – Education helps to maintain society by socialising young people into key cultural values such as achievement, competition, equality of opportunity, social solidarity, democracy, religion and morality. Writing in the late 19th and early 20th century in France, Durkheim was particularly concerned that education should emphasise the moral responsibilities that members of society have towards each other and the wider society. For example, he believed that the teaching of history is crucial in developing a sense of loyalty to your own society. It

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encourages pride in the achievements of your nation and a sense of shared identity with those who are citizens of the same nation-state. In Durkheim's view, the increasing tendency towards individualism in modern society could lead to too little social solidarity and possibly anomie (a state of normlessness or lack of shared norms). This emphasis can be seen today through the introduction of Citizenship and the maintenance of Religious Education as compulsory subjects.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Socialisation – Socialisation is the process through which individuals learn the norms, values and culture of their society; that is, they learn how to behave in order to fit in with their society. Primary socialisation – the earliest stage – usually takes place in families. Education is one of the most important agencies of secondary socialisation.

Parsons, discussing the US education system in the mid-20th century, also recognised the social significance of education. He suggested that it forms a bridge between the family and the wider society by socialising children to adapt to a **meritocratic** view of achievement. In the family, particularistic standards apply – a child's social status is accorded by its parents and other family members. However, in wider society, universalistic standards apply – the individual is judged by criteria that apply to all of society's members. Education helps ease this transition and instil the major value of achievement through merit. According to Parsons, education therefore helps to produce a value consensus – a general agreement about basic values in society. The value consensus helps to produce order and predictability in social life, ensuring that members of society share the same basic goals.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Meritocracy – A meritocracy is a society or system in which success or failure is based on merit. Merit is seen as resulting from a combination of ability and effort or hard work. In principle, this could be seen as a fair system but it is difficult to define and measure merit, and the prior existence of inequality makes it very difficult to have a system which genuinely rewards merit.

2. Skills provision – Education teaches the skills required by a modern industrial society. These may be general skills that everyone needs, such as literacy and numeracy, or the specific skills needed for particular occupations. As the division of labour increases in complexity and occupational roles become more specialised, increasingly longer periods in education become necessary.

Functionalist theory ties in closely with human capital theory, an economic theory which claims that investment in humans through education and training acts very much like investment in new machinery. Just as new machines may be able to produce a higher quantity of better quality products, so better educated and more highly skilled people can create more wealth through their work.

3. Role allocation – The functionalists Davis and Moore (1945) argue that education allocates people to the most appropriate job for their talents, using examinations and qualifications. Their argument is based on the principle of meritocracy. Davis and Moore argue that some jobs are more important to society than others. For example, those taking key decisions such as chief executives of large corporations play a crucial role in society. Education helps to identify those capable of doing such jobs. The examination system encourages competition, individual achievement and hard work. It is closely linked to a rewards system that ensures those doing the most important jobs get the highest pay. The high rewards for some jobs are justified because the system is based on merit and it benefits society as a whole to have the most capable people in the most important jobs. This is seen to be fair because there is equality of opportunity – everyone has the chance to achieve success in society on the basis of their ability.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Role allocation – This is the process of deciding who does what within a society or a smaller social setting. The examination system plays a part in this, and the whole process of interviewing or direct recruiting of individuals for jobs is there to vet and select people for particular roles.

Criticisms of the functionalist approach

In general terms, the functionalist perspective on education has been criticised for emphasising the positive effects of the education system and ignoring the negative aspects. Functionalists tend to ignore aspects of education that may be dysfunctional (harmful to society)

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and that may benefit some social groups more than others, and to ignore conflict in the education system and wider society.

In terms of socialisation, the functionalist view seems most applicable in societies where there is a single dominant and shared culture. In multicultural societies where, for example, different ethnic groups have different cultures and values, it may be hard to reconcile differences through education.

Furthermore, functionalists tend to assume that education succeeds in socialising individuals in the system. A number of studies suggest that not all pupils conform to the values promoted at school (see for example the discussion of Paul Willis in Topic X Chapter X).

In terms of skills provision, there has been a long-running debate in Britain about whether British education teaches pupils the right skills, and how successful it is in getting pupils the learn skills at all. It has often been argued that vocational education has low status in Britain, with the result that the education system does not produce the skills needed for the economy.

Many sociologists argue that globalisation is increasingly significant. In a globalised economy, British companies and workers have to compete with companies and workers around the globe, yet critics argue that Britain lags far behind some other countries in training workers. For example, 2012 research (Pisa) placed the UK 26th out of 65 countries in terms of maths ability among 15-year-olds, 23rd for reading and 20th for science. Even if societies need the education system to provide the workforce with skills, that does not always mean that it will succeed in doing this.

The functionalist claim that education successfully allocates individuals to roles in a fair and meritocratic way has been very strongly disputed. This view ignores various ways in which social divisions such as those based on gender and ethnicity might affect educational achievement (see Chapter 1, Topic X). It assumes that all individuals have the same opportunity to receive high-quality education and ignores the existence of private education, which gives the wealthy more opportunity to select schools for their children. As we will see later (see Chapter X, Topic X) social class has a strong effect on educational opportunity – a point strongly supported by Marxists. They dismiss the view that education or indeed role allocation in general is meritocratic.

Marxist approach

Marxist ideas originated in the 19th century with the German revolutionary communist Karl Marx (1818–83), but his ideas have influenced generations of social scientists since then. Those who have largely followed his ideas are known as Marxists, while those who have been influenced by his work but have then developed somewhat different ideas are known as neo-Marxists.

Marxists see capitalist societies, such as Britain today, as dominated by a ruling class. The ruling class consists of the wealthy who own what Marx called the means of production (the things needed to produce other things such as land, capital, machinery and labour power). The wealth of the ruling class enables them to dominate and control the non-economic parts of society – what Marxists call the superstructure.

For Marxists, education is seen as an important part of the superstructure of society. Along with other institutions (such as the mass media, family, religion and the legal system), it serves the needs of the ruling class who control the economic base. This base shapes the superstructure, while the superstructure maintains and justifies the base (see Figure 6.1).

For Marxists then, education performs two main functions in capitalist society:

1. It reproduces the inequalities and social relations of production of capitalist society. For example, it generally trains pupils from working class backgrounds to do working class jobs while providing elite education for the children of the wealthy, preparing them to take up positions of power in society.
2. It serves to **legitimate** (justify) these inequalities through the myth of meritocracy. It persuades members of society that their positions (particularly their jobs) reflect their ability, while in reality they largely reflect class background. (See Topic 1, Chapter 2 for a discussion of class inequalities in achievement).

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Legitimation – Legitimation is the process of justifying or gaining support for an idea, a policy, and institution or a social group. It often involves justifying an inequality or a form of exploitation, perhaps by portraying it as natural (for example, saying men are naturally stronger than women) or as fair (for example, claiming that it is always the most able who get the best-paid jobs).

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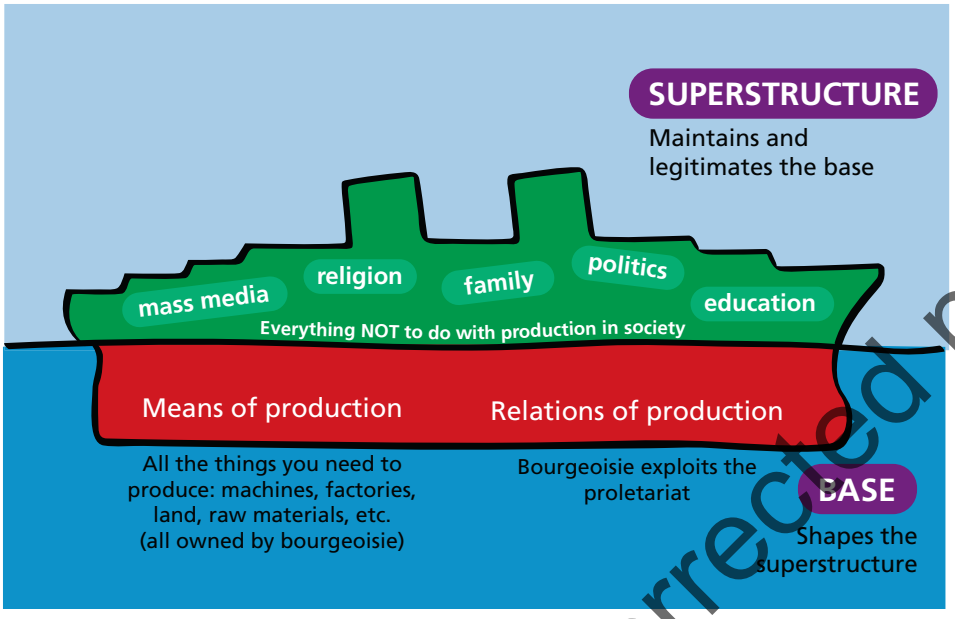

Figure 6.1 *Marxist view of the superstructure of society*

The Marxist Althusser (1971) disagrees with functionalists that the main function of education is the transmission of common values.

He argues that education is an ideological state apparatus (ISA). Its main function is to maintain, legitimate and reproduce, generation by generation, class inequalities in wealth and power. It does this by transmitting ruling-class or capitalist values disguised as common values. For example, in Britain and other capitalist countries, pupils are encouraged to accept the benefits of private enterprise and individual competition without question. To Marxists, these parts of the capitalist system provide much greater benefit to the ruling class than to other members of society. Along with other ISAs, such as the media and the legal system, education reproduces the conditions needed for capitalism to flourish without having to use force, which would expose it as oppressive. Instead, **ideology** gets the same results by exerting its influence subconsciously.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that the working classes are effectively duped into accepting their failure and limited social mobility as justified. The education system tends to value the culture of middle and upper classes much more than that of the working class (for example classical music and 'serious' literature rather than popular culture). The cultural attributes of the working class are rejected because the system is defined by, and for, the middle classes who, in turn, succeed by default rather than greater ability. Their cultural assets are seen as worthy of investment and reward and hence have greater value as cultural capital. A process of cultural reproduction takes place in which the culture of the middle class is reproduced and given higher status than working class culture through the education system (This is discussed more fully in the next Chapter). Bourdieu sees this as a form of 'symbolic violence' against the working class.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Ideology – An ideology is a set of beliefs that promotes the interests of one group (for example one class) at the expense of others. For example, if the working class are persuaded by ideology that they only deserve very low wages, then this serves the interests of the ruling class.

Do you agree that the curriculum content in the British education system devalues the culture of the working class in particular and less powerful groups in general? Use examples in your answer.

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Correspondence theory

Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that education is controlled by capitalists and serves their interests. From a study of high school children in the USA they argue that there is a close relationship between schooling and work, because schooling is used to prepare children to work in capitalist businesses. The correspondence principle states that education corresponds to employment.

Capitalism requires a hardworking, docile and obedient workforce which will not challenge the decisions of management. Bowles and Gintis believes that education prepares such a workforce through the hidden curriculum, or the hidden, informal messages and lessons that come from the way schooling is organised. It works in the following ways:

- Conformist pupils are awarded higher grades than those who challenge authority or think creatively.
- Schools teach acceptance of hierarchy since teachers give the orders and pupils obey, just as workers obey managers in the workplace.
- Pupils are motivated by the external rewards of exam success just as workers are motivated by wages, since neither pupils nor workers experience satisfaction in learning or work because it is directed by others and they have little control over it.
- Both work and education are fragmented, or broken into small pieces, so that workers and pupils have little overall understanding of production or society. This keeps them divided and, in the case of workers, prevents them from setting up their own businesses in competition with their employers.

Like Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis see the idea of meritocracy as a myth – people are conned into believing that success or failure is based on merit, whereas in reality their class background determines how well they do in education.

Criticisms of the Marxist perspective

Marxism in general, and Bowles and Gintis in particular, have been criticised a number of ways. They tend to emphasise class inequality in education and pay little or no attention to inequality based on gender or ethnicity. The idea that education corresponds to work has been criticised by Brown *et al.* (1997), who believe that much work now requires teamwork rather than obedience of authority. Reynolds (1984) believes some education encourages critical thinking, for example, Sociology. Some neo-Marxists such as Willis believe that the hidden curriculum is not always accepted (see below). They claim that it is debatable whether education is really controlled by the ruling class. Elected local education authorities and teachers have some independence and do not have to follow the wishes of capitalists all the time. Some of the evidence used to support Marxism is dated and may not be representative. For example, Bowles and Gintis conducted their research in 1976 in the USA, and it may not be applicable in Britain in the 21st century.

BUILD CONNECTIONS

The question of whether education provides a route for greater social mobility and therefore leads to a more open class system is crucial in a number of debates around class stratification. The easier it is to move up the class system through success in education the more open and meritocratic the system is.

Partly as a result of such criticisms, a variety of neo-Marxist (or new Marxist) approaches to education have been developed.

Neo-Marxist perspectives on education

An example of neo-Marxism applied to education is the work of Henry Giroux (1984). He disagrees with the conventional Marxist approach of Bowles and Gintis because he does not believe that working-class pupils passively accept everything they are taught, but actively shape their own education and sometimes resist the discipline imposed on them by the school. Schools are sites of ideological struggle by different classes and by different ethnic, religious and cultural groups struggling to ensure that education provides the things they wish for.

Capitalists have more power than any other single group but they don't have all the power. The most influential neo-Marxist study of education is a study of a group of boys (or 'lads') in a Midlands comprehensive school in the 1970s. Paul Willis (1977) conducted the study using interviews and participant observation in the school. The group of boys studied formed a group that took up an anti-school stance, which opposed the norms and values supported by the school. The 'lads' saw themselves as superior to teachers and conformist pupils who they called 'ear 'oles'.They were not interested in getting academic qualifications. At school their main aim was to do as little work as possible while entertaining themselves by 'having a laff' through bad behaviour. Their anti-school culture was sexist (looking down on women) and racist (looking down on ethnic minorities). They valued traditional working-class masculinity, which emphasised toughness and saw manual work as more valuable than non-manual

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work such as office work. Willis followed the lads into their first jobs which were overwhelmingly unskilled manual jobs, often in factories. He found that in these jobs there was a shop-floor culture which was a very similar to the counter-school culture. They both involved lack of respect for authority and 'havin a laff' to cope with boring and tedious work over which they had little control. However, it was clear that although the 'lads' rejected aspects of ruling class ideology, their rebellion against school meant that they still ended up reproducing class inequality since they ended up in working-class jobs.

Neo-Marxist perspectives suggest that the hidden curriculum is not always accepted and that education does not always succeed in socialising pupils into dominant values. It suggests that both functionalism and Marxism exaggerate conformity in education. Furthermore it is clearly the case that not all pupils conform at school. However, Willis's study is small-scale and dated. Working class pupils may not reject school as often today.

Comparing Marxism and neo-Marxism with functionalism

Despite the criticisms of both Marxism and neo-Marxism, it can be argued that these perspectives are just as relevant today as they were in the past. The influence of business on education may be stronger than ever. For example, local authorities have lost some of their power over education because they no longer run colleges, Free Schools or Academies. The Marxist Glenn Rikowski (2002, 2005) argues that there has been a 'business takeover' of schools. In the UK, this has involved businesses sponsoring Academies, the subcontracting of many school services (for example educational psychology services) to private businesses and an ever-growing emphasis on competition between schools. In terms of the curriculum, there is more emphasis on NVQs and BTECs in schools. (This is more fully discussed in Chapter 6).

However, Marxists and neo-Marxists may exaggerate the harmful effects of education as much as functionalists exaggerate the beneficial effects. Like functionalists, they also take an extreme view on the hidden curriculum, seeing it as entirely benefiting capitalism (while functionalists see it as entirely benefiting society as a whole). Neither Marxists and neo-Marxists nor functionalists base their ideas on detailed research into the content of schooling today, nor do they acknowledge that education may have different effects for different groups at different times (see Chapter 5 on processes in schools). Marxists and neo-Marxists emphasise class above gender and ethnicity, while functionalists ignore social divisions altogether. Like functionalists, Marxists and neo-Marxists tend not to put forward suggestions for improving the education system. Functionalists tend to assume that education already functions well, while Marxists assume that education could only become fair and just if capitalist society were overthrown and replaced by a communist society. Neither therefore suggests how education could be improved in existing societies. Other perspectives on education do make more concrete suggestions for how education could be improved, and these alternative perspectives will be discussed next.

Social democratic perspectives on education

Functionalism and Marxism are quite extreme views of education, but many sociologists and educationalists take a more moderate view, arguing that education does need to be changed to improve, but that this does not require a revolutionary change in society. However, they disagree over the direction of change.

Social democratic perspectives are associated with educationalists and politicians who would like to see greater equality resulting from the education system. An example of this is the British Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s, who introduced and expanded comprehensive schools (see Topic X, Chapter X). Social Democratic perspectives continue to influence those educationalists, sociologists and politicians who stress that schools must give extra help to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Social democratic perspectives believe that as well as promoting economic growth, education is essential to promoting equality of opportunity in a meritocracy. However, they believe that education is not automatically meritocratic and that governments need to intervene to ensure that people from all social classes have the same chance to fulfil their potential in the education system. To achieve this, the government may need to make some changes in society as well as in the education system. From this viewpoint, a society that has too much inequality can never provide equal opportunities – the richest will always use their wealth to gain advantage (for example by buying private education). To some extent though, this can be counteracted. By taxing the wealthy more and spending the revenue on state education, it is possible to give those from working-class backgrounds a good chance to succeed.

They believe this can be achieved, for example, by expanding higher education to give more places for working-class pupils, by introducing comprehensive schools (so middle-class pupils can't gain an advantage

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FOCUS ON RESEARCH: RESEARCH METHODS

The British Cohort Study and the Millennium Cohort Study – evidence on education and social mobility

The British Cohort Study is a longitudinal piece of research that takes as its subjects all those living in England, Scotland and Wales who were born in one particular week in April 1970. Data were collected about the births and families of just under 17,200 babies; since then, there have been five more attempts to gather information from this group. With each successive 'sweep', the scope of enquiry has broadened and it now covers physical, educational, social and economic development. In 2000, a new cohort study (The Millennium Cohort Study) was started, which initially collected data on 19,000 children born in 2000/1. This study has conducted interviews with the parents, cognitive tests on the children and interviews with their class teachers. By 2012, there had already been five sweeps of data collection when the children were different ages.

Data have been collected in a variety of ways. In the British Cohort Study's 1986 research, 16 separate methods were used including parental questionnaires, class teacher and head-teacher questionnaires, and medical examinations. The sample completed questionnaires, kept two diaries and undertook some educational assessments. The Millennium Cohort Study used interviews with parents, cognitive tests on children and interviews with class teachers.

Over the period of the research, the sample for the British Cohort Study reduced to 15,500, while the 2012 research for the Millennium Cohort Study involved a sample of just over 12,000.

Jo Blanden, Paul Gregg and Steve Machin have used data from The British Cohort Study to compare the life chances of British children with those in other advanced countries, and the results are disturbing. In a comparison of eight European and North American countries, Britain and the United States have the lowest social mobility (movement between classes).

Social mobility in Britain has declined, whereas in the USA it is stable. Part of the reason for Britain's decline has been that the better off have benefited disproportionately from increased educational opportunity.

Comparing surveys of children born in the 1950s and the 1970s, the researchers went on to examine the reason for Britain's low, and declining, mobility. They found that it is partly due to the strong and increasing relationship between family income and educational attainment.

For these children, additional opportunities to stay in education at age 16 and age 18 disproportionately benefited those from better-off backgrounds. For a more recent group born in the early 1980s, the gap between those staying on in education at age 16 narrowed, but inequality of access to higher education has widened further: while the proportion of people from the poorest fifth of families obtaining a degree has increased from 6 per cent to 9 per cent, the graduation rates for the richest fifth have risen from 20 to 47 per cent.

Analysis of children in the Millennium Cohort Study at age 7 suggested that class inequality was continuing to have a major effect on educational achievement (Sullivan, *et al.* 2013). Even at such an early age there were marked class differences in children's cognitive scores and analysis of the statistics suggested that these were very largely determined by the income, social class and previous education of parents. On the other hand, the parenting style of parents made little difference to test scores.

Sources: Blanden, *et al.* (2005); Sullivan, *et al.* (2013)

The Centre for Longitudinal Studies (www.cls.ioe.ac.uk)

Questions

1. **Explain.** Explain how the British Cohort Study and The Millennium Cohort Studies are longitudinal pieces of research.
2. **Evaluate.** These studies both used large samples. Identify an advantage and a disadvantage of having a large sample.
3. **Analysis.** It is sometimes claimed that longitudinal research is very useful for understanding changes over time. Identify two reasons why this may be the case.
4. **Analysis and evaluation.** Could taking part in a study such as this affect the way participants behave, and therefore affect the results? Give reasons for your answer.
5. **Analysis.** What do these studies suggest about the functionalist view that education is meritocratic and allocates roles efficiently in modern societies?

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by going to selective state schools), and by providing extra educational help for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Social democrats such as Halsey and Floud (1961) were very influential in the 1960s and 1970s when Labour governments followed some of these policies, but they have also continued to have some influence on Labour governments and the Coalition government since then.

Critics have argued that social democratic policies have not been particularly successful in helping the working class to do better in education. Despite many new policies being introduced to achieve this, the gap in attainment between classes remains large (see Chapter 2).

Woolf (2002) questions whether more and more government spending on education will automatically lead to economic growth. For example Switzerland has relatively low education spending but high economic growth.

The strongest critics of social democratic viewpoints have probably been neoliberals (see Topic X, Chapter X). According to many neoliberals, greater equality in education can lead to standards being undermined; education becomes levelled down, and the most able students (for example, in mixed-ability classes that progress at the pace of the slowest learners) are not given the chance to reach their full potential.

Social democratic views are also criticised by some feminists, who believe they concentrate too much on class inequalities and not enough on gender inequalities.

Neoliberal/New Right perspectives on education

Neoliberal (also sometimes called New Right) perspectives have probably had the most influence on British education in recent years. Neoliberal views are very much in favour of private business and the **free market** because they believe that competition between companies drives innovation and encourages success. Like functionalists and social democrats, they see education as important for a successful economy, but they think that state education can be inefficient and a drain on a country's resources. High government spending on education and other services is seen as undesirable because it requires high taxes**.** These taxes ultimately come from company profits, and high taxation therefore makes companies less competitive.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Free market – The free market refers to a system in which people are free to buy and sell what they wish. In the free market, producers have to provide what consumers want or they will not be able to sell their products. Firms compete with one another to attract customers so, at least in theory, consumers get the products or services (including education) they want, and the quality continually improves.

Chubb and Moe (1988) believe that state education is unresponsive to the needs of pupils and parents and tends to have low standards. In contrast, private education has to please its customers in order to survive and therefore standards are high and there is constant pressure for them to improve further.

Market liberals believe that rising standards are essential as a result of **globalisation**. If countries are going to compete in an increasingly global economy, workers lacking high levels of skills will lose their jobs to more skilled workers in other countries.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Globalisation – Globalisation involves all parts of the world becoming increasingly interconnected, so that national boundaries become less and less important. Information, ideas, goods and people flow more easily around the world. If the economy is becoming more global, then British companies have to compete not just with other British companies but with companies from around the world. The same applies to educational institutions. For example, British private schools and universities compete with countries around the world (including the USA, Europe and China) to attract pupils or students.

These views have influenced all British governments to a greater or lesser extent since 1979.

Neoliberals take a less positive view of education than functionalists, believing that education needs to be run

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more as a business. However, their views are strongly opposed by both Marxists and social democrats, who both see state education as the only way to provide opportunities for pupils from all classes. From their point of view, private education puts profit before the well-being of pupils and will always favour the rich above the poor. Furthermore, this will tend to waste working class talent and therefore harm the economy.

Postmodernism and education

Despite their differences, the perspectives examined in this section so far (functionalism, Marxism, social democratic perspectives and neoliberalism) all agree that there is a single, best, direction for the education system. All can therefore be seen as 'modern' approaches to education. Modern perspectives see human problems as being able to be solved by rational planning and thought. They believe that scientific methods and the development of clear theories can analyse problems and come up with solutions. They therefore tend to argue that there is one single true or best way to develop education. Postmodern perspectives, on the other hand, deny that there is any single, best, way of tackling problems. They see societies as developing greater variety and pluralism, and they question whether any single, planned approach to education and other issues is desirable. (For more discussion of postmodernism, see Topic X, Chapter X).

This perspective has been applied to education by Robin Usher, Ian Bryant and Rennie Johnston (1997) in the context of adult education.

Education for adults has been particularly responsive to the need for greater choice and diversity, for example by the use of flexible and distance learning. No single curriculum is assumed to be useful for all learners. As a result, a vast range of courses is provided by educational institutions such as FE colleges, The Open University and Adult Education colleges. This allows learners to pick and mix different combinations of courses to suit their own objectives and lifestyles. Furthermore, education is no longer separate from other areas of life. It has become integrated into leisure and work. It can therefore have many different meanings to those who take up adult education. In these respects, adult education is typical of postmodern society, which is characterised by a blurring of the boundaries between different areas of life, greater choice and variety and the rejection of any kind of plan imposed from the centre on individuals.

Postmodern views can be criticised for exaggerating the changes in education. For example, Mike Haralambos and Martin Holborn (2013) point out that there is actually a greater centralisation in some aspects of education, particularly the national curriculum, rather than greater diversity and choice. The budget for adult education in the UK has been cut and, for example, the range of evening classes available for adult students has declined. They also criticise postmodernists for ignoring the way in which education may be shaped more by big business than by the needs and wishes of individual learners.

Keeping in mind neoliberal, Marxist, functionalist, social democratic and postmodern arguments, identify advantages and disadvantages of business leaders having direct involvement in state education. Do you think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages or vice versa? Give reasons for your conclusion.

FOCUS ON SKILLS



Eton College in Berkshire



Barrowford Primary School in Lancashire

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Competition, exams and the purpose of education

In August 2014 Tony Little, headmaster of Eton, Britain's most prestigious private school, attacked England's exam system saying that it was 'unimaginative' and claiming it was not succeeding in preparing pupils for working in the modern world. He argued that it was too much like the exam system in Victorian times and focused too much upon test scores and too little on the content of education itself. Tony Little said that education needed to be about more than 'jostling for position in a league table' which could lead to schools putting too much emphasis upon test scores, which were in any case not always a reliable guide to the quality of the education that pupils had received. He argued that the exam system 'obliges students to sit alone at their desks in preparation for a world in which, for much of the time, they will need to work collaboratively'. Little supported the head of a primary school at Barrowford in Lancashire who had sent out a letter to all Year 6 pupils telling them not to worry about their SATs results because the tests couldn't assess what made them 'special and unique' as individuals.

Michael Gove (a former education secretary) supported more traditional exams with less use of coursework. He justified this in terms of Britain falling behind the highest achieving places in the international Pisa tests, which placed England some way down the international rankings for essential skills such as literacy and numeracy. Shanghai, in China, topped the tables. However, Tony Little argued that the Chinese themselves were concerned that their education was too narrow and that, ironically, they were trying to learn from Britain and develop a more 'all-round education' rather than focusing too much on literacy, numeracy and science.

Questions

1. **Identify** the central differences between the views of Michael Gove and Tony Little.
2. **Explain** the similarities and differences between Tony Little's views and the neoliberal perspective on education.
3. **Apply** Marxist perspectives to the differences between working-class and elite education suggested by this article.
4. **Evaluate.** Do you agree with the claim that the exam system in England does not prepare pupils for work in the modern world? Justify your answer.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Which act made state education compulsory up to the age of 14?
2. Give three of the main reasons why education was first made compulsory in Britain.
3. According to functionalists, what are the three main functions of schools?
4. What does Althusser consider to be the main purpose of education, and how is it achieved?
5. Why, according to Bowles and Gintis, do white, middle-class pupils do better?
6. How does Willis's work appear to support the views of Bowles and Gintis?
7. Give three reasons why what goes on in schools would appear to contradict the view of Bowles and Gintis that there is a correspondence between school and work
8. Suggest two similarities and two differences between neoliberal and functionalist perspectives on education.
9. Analyse how functionalists and Marxists differ in their views on the relationship between education and the economy.
10. Evaluate Marxist and functionalist theories by identifying two strengths and two weaknesses of each theory.

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TAKE IT FURTHER

1. Interview a range of your teachers. Ask them to explain the values which they consider are encouraged by the following aspects of school organisation and routine: assemblies, speech days, sports days, school uniform, registration, house competitions, school rules, prefects, detention.

   Evaluate the extent to which their responses subscribe to functionalist, Marxist, social democratic or neoliberal views of education.

   When conducting the interview, try to make sure that you do not lead the teacher in any way. Keep your questions neutral and don't express support or criticism of their responses.

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1.2 CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand the patterns of achievement in relation to social class in Britain (AO1).
- Apply theories of differential achievement to class differences in Britain (AO2).
- Analyse and evaluate competing theories of social class differences in achievement (AO3).



INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

Although some sociologists have argued that ability and effort determine how well people do in the education system, there is much evidence to show that social class exerts a strong influence too. Those from higher-class backgrounds tend to do better than those from lower-class backgrounds even when you factor in such things as measured intelligence or previous qualifications.

Despite efforts by governments to reduce the inequalities over many years, they remained stubbornly large. Sociologists have therefore analysed the factors which link social class and educational achievement. Some emphasise factors outside school such as the income and lifestyle of the families to which children belong. Others emphasise factors in schools such as the content of the curriculum and the way teachers treat pupils from different class backgrounds. In this topic, you need to evaluate the strength of these different arguments based upon the evidence.

CLASS: PATTERNS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Differential educational attainment refers to the tendency for some groups to do better or worse than others in terms of educational success. Social class differences were the first to be investigated by sociologists, perhaps because these differences have been very noticeable for many decades. Differences between different ethnic groups and between females and males are a more recent focus, and these are explored in Topics 1.3 and 1.4.

Government educational policy over recent decades has largely focused on raising the standards of teaching and learning in schools, and there is research that suggests that the quality of a school does have an impact on achievement across all social classes. Such research, however, needs to be put into context.

Large-scale statistical research by Webber and Butler (2007), involving more than a million students, found that the best predictor of achievement was the type of neighbourhood that pupils lived in. The more middle class

and affluent the area, the more successful the school tended to be. More than half of the school's performance could be explained by the type of pupils who attended.

John Jerrim (2013) analysed government statistical data on class and test results. He found in his research that even the most talented were being left behind in education if they came from a lower-class background. He concluded that in terms of reading ability, 'High achieving boys from the most advantaged family backgrounds in England are roughly two and a half years ahead of their counterparts in the least advantaged households by the age of 15' (Jerrim 2013, p.3). This suggests that, without class advantages, talent is often not enough to succeed.

Material deprivation

Although state education is technically free in Britain, **material deprivation** can still have a significant impact on educational achievement.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Material deprivation – This refers to a lack of resources and a lack of the ability to purchase goods and services, compared with other members of society. In an educational context, this includes:

- resources that can directly help students to succeed in the education system (for example, materials for school, private education and private tuition)
- resources that make it easier to achieve success indirectly (for example, high quality and spacious housing and a good diet).

Material deprivation can also affect the ability of parents to provide a cultural environment that is helpful to their children's educational success. For example, if parents have to work long hours due to low wages, they may be less able to spend time reading to young children.

Many sociologists have identified ways in which material deprivation can have a negative impact on educational success. For example, in a study of the effects of poverty on schooling, Smith and Noble (1995) list the 'barriers to learning' that can result from low income. These include the following:

- If families are unable to afford school uniforms, school trips, transport to and from school, classroom materials and, in some cases, school textbooks, this can lead to students being isolated, bullied and stigmatised. As a result, they may fall behind in their school work. State education itself may be free, but supplementary costs can be considerable.
- Low income reduces the likelihood of a computer with internet access, a desk, educational toys, books, space to do homework and a comfortable well-heated home.
- The marketisation (see Social policy and social class) of schools means that there will be better resourced, oversubscribed schools in more affluent areas, while socially disadvantaged students are concentrated in a limited number of increasingly unpopular schools.

Furthermore, older working-class students are more likely to have to work part-time to support their studies, or to have to care for younger siblings if informal childcare networks break down, affecting their attendance at school. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, can more easily afford to pay for childcare.

Research by Elizabeth Washbrook and Jane Waldfogel (2010) for The Sutton Trust looked at the impact of material deprivation on the scores of five-year-olds in vocabulary tests. They found that 31 per cent of the difference in scores between children from middle-income and low-income families was explained by material deprivation.

Donald Hirsch (2007), in a review of research, found that students from better-off backgrounds had a variety of advantages:

- They were more likely to have structured out-of-school activities such as playing organised sports, having music lessons and going to theatre groups.
- These activities (which are often costly) helped students from better-off backgrounds to learn particular skills. They also gave them greater confidence in school, helping them to achieve higher grades.
- They had more space (such as their own bedroom), making it easier for better-off students to do homework successfully.
- They were more likely to benefit from private education.

Hirsch discusses research by Sutton *et al.* (2007) in which students between the ages of 8 and 13 were interviewed about their experiences of education. One group of students lived on a disadvantaged housing estate, while the other group went to private school. Hirsch summarises the findings: 'The more advantaged children described a much richer set of experiences in school, inside and outside the curriculum, while for the disadvantaged children issues such as discipline and detention were more apparent' (Hirsch, 2007, p.4).

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The quality of housing stock and the class make-up of an area have a significant effect on achievement in local schools.

The quality of the school, according to Hirsch, only explained about 14 per cent of class differences in achievement. Material inequality outside school, however, also impacted on the students' experiences and confidence inside the school. Based on material inequality, the students in the study had already developed stereotypes of 'chavs' and 'posh kids'. Those who thought they were seen as 'chavs' did not expect to do well.

Whatever the general significance of schools for class differences in education, there is no doubt that being able to afford a private education greatly increases your chances of an elite university education. One of the most direct ways in which material advantage can affect educational opportunity is through private education. Only about 7 per cent of pupils in Britain attend private schools (Kynaston, 2014) and for most parents the fees are unaffordable. Kynaston points out that around a third of these pupils do get reduced fees, and some schools do provide free places based upon academic ability rather than ability to pay. Only about one in twelve receives a means-tested bursary and most of those still have to pay more than half the fees. Fewer than 1 per cent pay no fees at all and get a free place provided by scholarships. According to Kynaston, with most boarding schools charging some £20,000 or more, private schools remain accessible only to the very well off.

Between 1980 and 1997 Conservative governments In the UK offered an Assisted Places Scheme to help some high-performing students whose parents could not afford the fees to attend private schools, and in total 75,000 pupils benefited from this scheme (Whitty, Power and Sims, 2013). A study by the Sutton Trust (Whitty, Power and Sims, 2013) compared students who took places on the scheme with similar students who went to state schools. They found that students attending a private school did gain better results at GCSE and A Level, and were likely to be accepted into Oxford or Cambridge with lower grades than students from state schools. Being able to afford private education does therefore seem to offer significant advantages, and this is reflected in research by the Sutton Trust (2010), which found that private school students were 55 times more likely to get into Oxford or Cambridge and 22 times more likely to get into a high-ranked university than state-school students entitled to free school meals (Sutton Trust, 2010). Referring to this research, Kynaston (2014) notes however the Sutton Trust finding that once they get to university former state school pupils tend to do better than former private school pupils. He argues that private school pupils are often over-promoted within education because of the advantages their better resources give them. In effect then, Britain has two school systems, one very largely reserved for the wealthy, educating 7% of pupils, and one for the remaining 93%. Many sociologists argue that as a result class inequalities are entrenched within a dual system of schooling.

According to a questionnaire by Reay *et al.* (2005) many working-class students intended to apply to their nearest university because they felt they could not afford the costs of travel and accommodation away from home.

For middle-class parents who cannot afford private school fees, an alternative is to pay private tutors. According to Mike Britland (2013) the use of private tutors is booming in Britain. They are increasingly used not just for exam preparation, but also during the summer holidays to ensure that children do not slip backwards educationally during the long break. Parents may also be able to buy a house in the catchment area for a very successful state school (see Social policy and social class).

Material deprivation has an impact at every level in the education system and in part explains the class differences in achievement. However, it interacts with other factors outside and inside the education

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system in shaping the educational chances of different classes. These factors will be examined in the sections that follow.

'Money alone can't guarantee educational success, but it is very hard for poor families to get a high-quality education'. How far would you agree with this statement? Justify your answer.

Cultural deprivation theories

As an alternative to explaining differences in educational achievement in terms of material differences, one can explain them in terms of cultural differences. Some cultural theories see working-class culture as failing to provide the culture necessary for educational success and therefore argue that the working class are culturally deprived.

The idea of **cultural deprivation** is based on the view that different classes have different cultures. These alleged cultural differences suggest that the working class place too much emphasis on enjoying themselves and living in the moment rather than on putting in the hard work and making the sacrifices necessary for educational success. According to Barry Sugarman (1970):

- People in the working class are oriented towards the present time, and are unable to defer gratification. As a result they are unlikely to sacrifice immediate income by staying on in education in order to can gain higher wages and a better job in the long term.
- The fatalism of the working class means they do not believe that they can improve their prospects through their own hard work.
- Their collectivist approach makes it less likely that they will pursue individual success through the education system; instead they will seek it through collective action, for example through trades unions.

Early research by sociologists such as David Lockwood (1966) claim to identify distinctive **subcultures** associated with the middle class and the working class. Some of the main features of the subcultures are outlined in the table below.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Cultural deprivation – is being deprived of cultural attributes necessary for educational success. For example, the working class may lack attitudes and values necessary for success in education. They may also lack the knowledge to succeed because they have not benefited from the same informal education from their parents.

They may even lack the ability to speak, read, write and think in ways which will help them in education because of the way they have been brought up. Unlike theories of material deprivation, the crucial factor here is not lack of money and material resources, but lack of the necessary cultural knowledge, aptitudes, attitudes and values.

A number of research projects have supported cultural deprivation theory.

	Working class	Middle class
Time orientation	**Present-time orientation**, live life in the moment rather than worrying about the future.	**Future-time orientation**, think ahead rather than living in the moment.
Attitude to gratification	Seek **immediate gratification**, enjoy yourself now; for example, spend your wage packet as soon as you get it.	Accept **deferred gratification**: content to put off pleasure now in order to achieve greater pleasure in the future, for example, saving for a deposit on a house.
Collectivism versus **individualism**	Success achieved through collective action, for example, a union going on strike.	Success achieved through individual action, for example, studying or working hard.
Attitudes to luck	Your chances in life are based upon luck or fate (**fatalism**)	Your chances in life are based upon your ability and hard work, you make your own luck.

Table 1.2.1 *Social class subcultures*

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Feinstein (2003) used data from the National Child Development Study to examine the effects of cultural and other factors in shaping educational achievement. Feinstein found that financial deprivation (having poorer parents) had some effect on achievement, but that cultural deprivation was much more important. The crucial factor was the extent to which parents encouraged and supported their children. This largely determined how well they did.



Feinstein found that supportive parents have a much greater effect than financial deprivation on children's educational achievement.

Research by Alissa Goodman and Paul Gregg (2010) for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation used data from four longitudinal studies (The Millennium Cohort Study, the Avon Longitudinal study of Parents and Children, the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England and the Children of the British Cohort Study) to investigate the link between poverty and low attainment in children from birth through secondary school years. They identified a number of cultural factors that helped explain low educational achievement among poor children. They included:

- the quality of mother-child interactions and the amount of time parents spent with children
- how often parents read books to young children
- attitudes to education (for example whether parents encouraged their children to aspire to higher education)
- the overall value placed on education by the parent
- the extent of negative behaviour by the children (for example truancy, antisocial behaviour, smoking) as opposed to positive behaviour (such as participation in sport and in clubs and reading for pleasure)
- parental involvement in schooling (for example, by attending schools, helping with homework and discussing school reports).

The report did not attribute low achievement entirely to cultural factors, but identified material deprivation (for example lack of educational resources, lack of private tuition) and child–teacher relationships as important too. However, it did see cultural factors as the most important of all.

Basil Bernstein (1972) believes that a particular aspect of culture – speech – shapes educational achievement. He distinguishes two types of speech pattern: **restricted codes**, which involve simpler use of language, and **elaborated codes**, which involve more complex use of language.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Restricted codes – These are used in a type of shorthand speech where meanings are not made fully explicit. They use short, simple and often unfinished sentences. The listener has to fill in some meanings and these codes are not well suited to expressing complex ideas. This type of speech code is more typical of the working-class who are more likely than the middle class to communicate verbally in their jobs and less likely to need to write reports.

Elaborated codes – In this type of speech, the meanings are filled in and made explicit; sentences tend to be longer and more complex. They are more likely to be used in middle-class jobs where there is more need to write reports and produce documents. According to Bernstein, this type of speech code encourages more developed and more sophisticated reasoning.

In education, elaborated codes are necessary for exam success in many subjects, and as teachers are themselves middle-class they are more likely to use elaborated codes. Being socialised in households that largely use restricted codes holds back working-class children in the education system, making it more difficult for them to achieve academic success. The lack of these skills, which are vital for educational success, may make working-class children feel less confident than middle-class children in a school environment.

Criticisms of cultural deprivation theory

Cultural deprivation theory has been heavily criticised. Critics have questioned whether there really are such big cultural differences between social classes in the contemporary world. Furthermore, the validity of some of the research has been questioned. Blackstone and

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Mortimore (1994) argue that research has not measured parental interest in education adequately, teacher assessments have often been used and these may not reflect the real level of interest of parents. Furthermore, working-class parents may feel less able to visit school because they feel uncomfortable interacting with middle-class teachers, and schools with more middle-class students tend to have more organised systems for parent-school contact.

Qualitative research by Gillian Evans (2007) who carried out observations and interviews on a working-class council estate in London found that most working-class parents placed a very high value on education and did encourage their children to do well. As a middle-class parent herself, she found no difference in positive attitudes to education among mothers in different social classes.

Bernstein has been criticised by Gaine and George (1999) who argue that he oversimplifies the difference between middle-class and working-class speech patterns, and they claim that class differences in speech patterns have declined since Bernstein did his research. Also, they found that many other factors apart from speech affect educational attainment.

Cultural conflicts and cultural capital

The cultural deprivation theory has also been heavily criticised by those who believe that it blames the working class for their own failure in a society and educational system that is stacked against them. From this point of view, the working class and the middle class may have different cultures, but that does not mean that working-class culture is inferior, it is simply different. The problem for the working classes is that the education system largely operates in terms of the culture of the middle and upper classes. Working-class skills, knowledge, ways of speaking and behaving are devalued by the education system, which gives them less chance of success. So, they lack the necessary **cultural capital** to succeed.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Cultural capital – This involves the possession of cultural characteristics that can give you advantages in life. Educational qualifications are an obvious example, but cultural capital can also take less obvious forms. Your accent, the way you walk, your vocabulary, your knowledge of arts, fashions and cultural trends can all help you fit in with those in elite positions, to gain access to elite schools and universities. It might help you succeed at a job interview or in running a business and this in turn can help you gain access to another type of capital – economic capital.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) believes that the possession or lack of possession of different types of **capital** shapes opportunity in society. Capital can be defined as any assets that can improve your chances in life, and all types of capital can certainly affect your achievement in the education system. As such he adopts a Marxist approach but extends it to include several different types of capital, not just economic capital, which Marx himself saw as the key to understanding society.

Bourdieu identifies four types of capital summarised in Table 1.2.2.

All these types of capital can help in education and all reflect class inequalities in society. However, cultural capital is particularly useful. The education system is biased towards the culture of higher social classes. Students from these classes have an advantage because they have been socialised into the dominant culture. They therefore possess more of the cultural capital useful for



A parent's response to a problem at school may depend on the type of capital they possess.

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Type of capital	Definition	Example	Role in education
Economic capital	Ownership of wealth.	Owning valuable houses, shares, having an income.	Paying for private education or additional tuition.
Cultural capital	Having the educational qualifications, lifestyles and knowledge of arts and literature that are valued in society.	Having a degree level qualification or higher, enjoying educational holidays, having a knowledge of classical art and literature.	Parents have knowledge and experience to help their children in education. They can provide an educationally stimulating home environment, so children become familiar with knowledge that is valued at school.
Social capital	Possession of valuable social contacts.	Knowing teachers, head teachers, professors.	May know how to help gain admission to the best educational institutions or to find expert help.
Symbolic capital	Possession of status.	Being seen as respectable by the community.	Could help with admission to private or selective schools.

Table 1.2.2 *Bourdieu's types of capital and education*

success in the education system. This view is supported by a variety of research.

Research by Gillian Evans (2007) found that middle-class mothers were able to use their cultural capital to give their children a head start. The mothers tended to have high-level educational qualifications themselves and a good understanding of how children could be stimulated to learn in pre-school years. They used their own educational knowledge to incorporate more learning activities into their children's play.

Ball *et al.* (1994) showed how middle-class parents are able to use their cultural capital to play the system so as to ensure that their children are accepted into the schools of their choice. The strategies used include attempting to make an impression with the headteacher on open day, and knowing how to mount an appeal if their child is unsuccessful in their application to a particular school. However, these researchers accept that material advantages are also important and both cultural and material factors interact with factors inside schools (for more discussion of this research, see Focus on skills: Educational choice and markets).

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital was tested in research by Alice Sullivan (2001). She carried out a survey on students approaching school-leaving age in four schools in England and received questionnaire data from a total of 465 pupils. The occupation of the parent in the highest-status job was used to determine the class of the children, and parents' educational qualifications were used to measure their cultural capital. A number of measures of pupils' cultural capital were used.

Pupils were asked about books they read, television programmes they watched, music they listened to, whether they played a musical instrument, and attendance at art galleries, theatres and concerts; they were also tested on their knowledge of cultural figures and on their vocabulary.

Sullivan then examined which of these factors affected educational performance in GCSEs and identified that pupils were more likely to be successful if they:

- read more complex fiction;
- watched TV programmes such as arts, science and current affairs documentaries and more sophisticated drama.

Both of these activities helped students develop wider vocabularies and greater knowledge of cultural figures, and this was reflected in exam performance.

Some cultural activities were not helpful in exam performance:

- Watching programmes such as soap operas and game shows did not improve GCSE results;
- Attending cultural events and involvement in music had no significant effect, suggesting that these should not be considered important aspects of cultural capital.

Sullivan found that pupils' cultural capital was strongly correlated with parental cultural capital (that is, their educational qualifications), which in turn was closely linked to their social class. Graduate parents in higher professions had children with the most cultural capital and these were most successful in exams.

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Evaluation of cultural capital theories

Unlike cultural deprivation theories, cultural capital theories do not assume that working-class culture is inferior. They also identify ways in which the education system may be biased against working-class culture and they therefore link factors inside and outside educational institutions. They also make some valuable links between factors inside and outside the education system itself, for example by looking at how schools value or devalue different cultures.

However, they still have their limitations.

They fail fully to acknowledge the importance of factors inside school and the way that different groups are treated once they enter the schooling system. They also generally ignore or underestimate the direct influence of material factors in education.

With the exception of Bourdieu, they fail to acknowledge the way that material factors shape different cultures. Material inequalities are perhaps the main reason that different class-based cultures develop. For example, an inability to defer gratification might reflect lack of well-paid secure employment. If working-class parents don't have the same skills as middle-class parents to help their children, they don't have the money to compensate for this by paying for private tuition, a comfortable spacious home, educational trips and so on. Furthermore, the extra power that comes with greater resources helps to explain why education might have a middle-class bias. Therefore cultural differences and cultural capital reflect the underlying material differences between classes.

Do you think material or cultural deprivation is the main factor affecting educational achievement, or are they equally important? Explain and justify your answer.

Factors inside the education system

The importance of schools

Both cultural and material explanations of the way different classes achieve in education see factors outside the education system as responsible for class differences. However, a number of researchers have argued that processes within school may be just as important. These factors include the quality of education provided in predominantly working-class areas, the organisation of education and way that working-class pupils are treated in the education system by teachers.

There is some evidence that schools can make a difference to working-class achievement, and governments have tried to address underachievement in working-class areas. Emma Perry and Becky Francis (2010) reviewed the literature that looks at explanations for the achievement gap between the working and middle classes. They note that a lot of emphasis has been placed by the government and organisations such as Ofsted on improving 'failing schools', particularly those in working-class areas. From the viewpoint of Ofsted, well organised schools with high-quality teachers who motivate students successfully can make all the difference and provide real opportunities for working-class students. Schools deemed to be ailing can be placed under 'special measures' and given 'notice to improve'. However, in 2013 Sir Michael Wilshaw (Chief Schools Inspector in England) made a speech accepting that schools were still failing poor students in many areas (Adams, 2013). According to Wilshaw, there had been improvements in some large cities, but poor students in schools in affluent areas and in smaller towns were being left behind. He said 'These poor, unseen children can be found in mediocre schools the length and breadth of our country. They are labelled, buried in lower sets, consigned as often as not to indifferent teaching.' Wilshaw also thought that there was a problem in attracting the best teachers to schools in disadvantaged areas; if this issue were tackled, this could help to increase achievement for the poor. Another solution was to partner weaker schools with more successful establishments.



Ofsted believe that high-quality teachers are vital to the success of poorer students.

Certainly there have been a number of government initiatives to address underachievement in schools but some sociologists have seen general government education policies in recent years as likely to increase educational inequality, not reduce it (see Chapter 1.6).

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Interactionist perspectives on education

The interactionist perspective focuses on processes within schools and other educational institutions to explain differential achievement. It examines how pupils and teachers react to one another in the education system and argues that these interactions hold the key to understanding educational achievement.

From this perspective, small-scale interaction between individuals shapes people's behaviour. While interacting with others, people interpret behaviour and attach meanings to the behaviour of those around them. This in turn affects people's image of themselves (their **self-concept)**, and self-concept in turn shapes behaviour. For example, if pupils are labelled as deviants (people who contravene social norms or break rules) their behaviour will tend to be seen as deliberate attempts to cause trouble. The reaction of teachers will lead to the pupils seeing themselves as deviants and because of this they will tend to act in more deviant ways.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Self-concept – Your self-concept is simply the sort of person you think you are lazy or hard-working, successful or a failure and so on. To interactionists, your self-concept is strongly influenced by what others think of you (or at least what you believe they think of you). You might not always accept other peoples' view, but it is difficult, for example, to think of yourself as clever or hard-working if people keep telling you otherwise.

According to the interactionist perspective, teachers may **label** pupils (that is they classify pupils into different types and then act towards them on the basis of this classification).

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Labelling – Particular characteristics are ascribed to individuals on the basis of descriptions, names or labels. These labels are simplified descriptions and often draw
upon common stereotypes about certain types of people, usually negative ones (for example scrounger, delinquent, chav and so on). Labels may be expressed publicly or become public knowledge, which leads to other people making assumptions about individuals. For a variety of reasons, the labelled individuals tend to then live up to their label. Their behaviour is often interpreted negatively and their low status makes it more difficult to conform.

A variety of studies have found that labelling can have a negative impact on the educational progress of pupils. For example, Hargreaves, Hester and Mellor (1975) found that factors such as pupils' appearance, how they respond to discipline, how likeable they are, their personality and whether they are deviant leads to teachers attaching labels to pupils as 'good' or 'bad' pupils. These labels are associated with class, and working-class pupils are more likely to fit the stereotype of the 'bad' pupil. Once a student has a label, teachers tend to interpret that student's behaviour in terms of the label, and the student tends to live up to the label they have been given.

This results in a **self-fulfilling-prophecy**, in which the label results in the behaviour predicted by the teacher. This is illustrated in the figure below.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

The **self-fulfilling prophecy** – Is when something happens because people expect it to happen. Sometimes prophecies (or predictions) can change the course of events. For example, predicting that a pupil will succeed in education may give them self-confidence and enhanced motivation, making their success all the more likely.

Class and labelling

Many interactionists claim that social class background affects the way that teachers label pupils. Middle-class pupils fit the teacher's stereotype of the ideal pupil better than working-class pupils, and therefore working-class pupils are more likely to be labelled as deviant or lazy. Labelling is often based on factors such as appearance and attitude as much as actual behaviour.

Labelling can lead to pupils being placed in different ability groupings within school. Working-class pupils may be more likely to be placed in lower sets, bands or streams. Lower groupings are likely to be seen as less able and as more likely to be disruptive. This can lead to the formation of pupil subcultures, with lower streams or sets more likely to form anti-school

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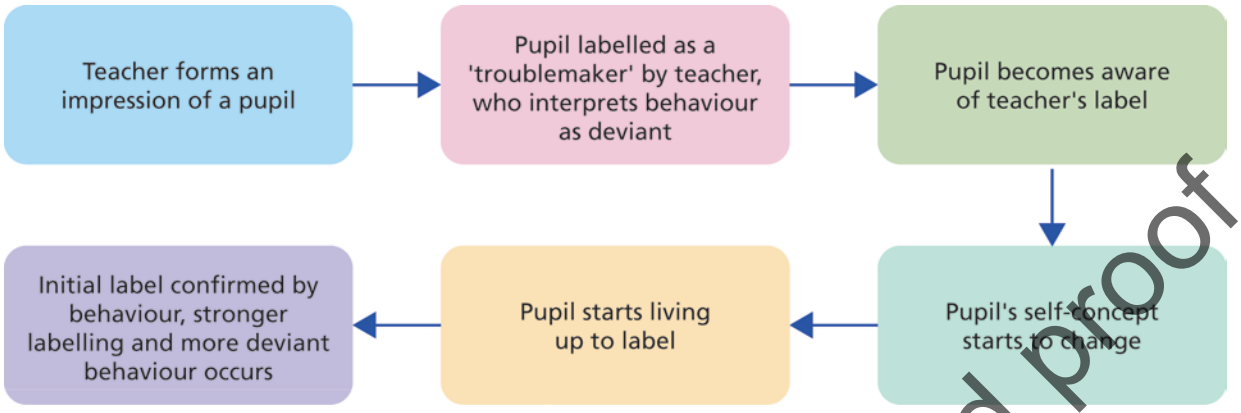

Figure 1.2.1 *The self-fulfilling prophecy*

subcultures. Amongst these pupils, academic work is not valued and peer groups encourage deviant behaviour and discourage hard work. This is illustrated in a number of studies.

BUILD CONNECTIONS

Labelling is perhaps an even more important issue in the study of crime and deviance (covered in the second year of this course). A number of sociologists argue that many people commit crimes but only the few who are caught and labelled are likely to become long-term and serious criminals because they lose opportunities to succeed in society and end up seeing themselves as criminals and deviants. They therefore live up to the identity and expectations society has given them.

Teacher expectations

In a famous study, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) gave false information to primary school teachers in the USA about the IQ of pupils. Teachers were told that some pupils who recorded low IQ scores had a high IQ and vice versa. The progress of the pupils was then measured. This study therefore took the form of a field experiment in which researchers deliberately manipulated a real-life situation to see what the results would be. The researchers found that pupils who teachers believed to have a high IQ made greater progress than those who were believed to have a low IQ, regardless of what their actual IQ was. This suggested that a **self-fulfilling prophecy** can occur. Those predicted to do well make good progress because teachers give them more encouragement or have higher expectations of them than those expected to do poorly.

In another experimental study, Harvey and Slatin (1976) used photographs of children from different social classes and asked teachers to rate their likely performance in education. Pupils from higher classes were seen as more likely to be successful than pupils from lower social classes, suggesting that labelling on the basis of appearance may take place. Teachers can make judgements on the basis of the most flimsy (and possibly irrelevant) information about pupils.



Most labelling is more subtle than this today, but it still may have significant effects.

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Streaming and setting

Dividing pupils and students by ability level can create or reinforce labels and have significant effects on their achievement. In an early study, Stephen Ball (1981) studied the banding system in a comprehensive school. Pupils were placed in one of three bands based upon reports from their primary school. However, working-class pupils were more likely to be placed in lower bands than middle-class pupils even when their measured ability at primary school was the same. The behaviour of pupils in lower bands deteriorated quickly once they started secondary school. Teachers had low expectations of the lower bands and directed them towards practical subjects and lower level exams. Expectations of those in higher bands were much greater and they were encouraged more towards academic success.

More recent research by Judith Ireson and Susan Hallam (2009) measured how likely it was for students in different sets to have a positive self-concept (or opinion of themselves). They used questionnaires to study students aged 14 and 15 in 23 secondary schools. They found that those in higher sets were more likely to have a positive academic self-concept (for example believing that they could learn things quickly). This also made them more likely to look positively on staying on in education. A mixture of case studies and survey evidence found that sometimes extra resources (such as a better staff to student ratios) were given to lower sets to compensate for problems they might face. Furthermore, most staff insisted that academic criteria were used to allocate pupils to sets. However, the survey research found that it was often not the students with the lowest prior attainment who were in the lowest sets and they argue that 'The mismatch between prior attainment and attainment group suggests that in practice there is strong social interference in teacher judgement and the school processes of set allocation' (Dunne *et al.*, 2011, p. 505). Indeed those eligible for free school meals (and therefore from low-income, usually working-class households) were significantly more likely to be placed in lower sets than those who were not eligible. According to this research, class still plays a major role in allocation to sets.

Knowledge and streaming

Streaming and setting can also affect the type of knowledge that students can gain access to, and can result in working-class pupils being denied the chance to gain the knowledge that makes educational success possible. Nell Keddie (1971) observed classes from different streams studying the same humanities subjects in a London secondary school. In the lower streams, teachers simplified the content to the extent that learning was largely based on common-sense ideas. Higher streams were taught more in terms of abstract concepts, giving them much more opportunity to develop their understanding. Questions from pupils in higher sets were taken seriously and answered in detail, but in lower streams those asking questions were often misinterpreted and their questions were seen as an attempt to disrupt the class. They were often ignored or dismissed as irrelevant.

Similarly, research by David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell (2000) in two London secondary schools found that working-class and black students were more likely to be placed in lower sets than middle-class and white students even when they had been gaining similar results. The pupils in lower sets were often denied the chance to sit higher-tier GCSE exams, meaning they could not get GCSE grades above a C grade, so it would be more difficult for them to progress on to some higher-level courses.

For more on streaming and setting, see 1.5, section on 'The organisation of teaching and learning'.

Pupil subcultures and social class

In early research, David Hargreaves (1967) studied streams in a secondary school and found that students in lower streams who had been labelled as more likely to be troublemakers rebelled against the values of the school and developed a non-conformist delinquent subculture in which getting into trouble was valued by their peer group and doing homework and conforming in class was looked down on. There was a clear polarisation of pupils according to his research, with pupils tending to divide themselves into two camps with opposite views.

Similarly Paul Willis (1977) found in the Midlands secondary school he studied (see Chapter 1.5, Pupil subcultures) that an anti-school peer group developed, which rejected the values of the school. Arguing from a neo-Marxist viewpoint, Willis found that there were pronounced class divisions in the school and these were closely linked to wider inequalities of opportunity for those from different backgrounds. The 'lads', who were largely from unskilled backgrounds, were hostile to the 'ear 'oles', who were more likely to be from middle-class backgrounds. The 'lads' saw little point in school work when they expected to take manual labouring jobs. They saw manual jobs as proper work, and middle-class jobs as 'pen pushing' so they had little time for academic work or the values of their school. Willis argued that labelling and streaming made little difference. It was the position of the boys from different class backgrounds in the class structure that shaped their attitudes to schooling and the formation of subcultures, not the way teachers treated them or the way schools were organised.

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FOCUS ON RESEARCH: CHAVS, CHARVERS AND TOWNIES



Research by Sumi Hollingsworth and Katya Williams (2009) examined the way in which some working-class pupils were labelled and devalued as 'chavs' by their middle-class peers. The study involved interviews with white, urban middle-class families whose students went to one of three inner-city comprehensive school 'Norton' (in north east England) 'Riverton' (in south-west England) and a London school.

They interviewed 124 families with parents and children together, 180 mothers or fathers individually and 68 students individually. The students were aged between 12 and 25, and those who had left school talked about their previous school experience. In all the schools the students could identify distinct subcultures which were 'hippies' or 'poshies' (Norton), 'goths' and 'emos' (Norton and Riverton) 'skaters' or 'jitters' (Norton and Riverton), 'rockers' and 'gangsters' (London) and 'townies' or 'chavs' or 'charvers' (predominantly Norton and Riverton)' (Hollingsworth and Williams, 2009, p. 470). Most of these groups were predominantly middle-class, but those seen as chavs, charvers or townies were invariably working-class. None of the working-class pupils gave themselves these labels – they were imposed on them by others from non-working-class backgrounds, and the middle-class students were keen to emphasise that they did not belong to these three groups. Indeed they looked down on what they saw as their immoral, anti-social behaviour and their poor taste. They saw them arrogant, flashy, loud, uninterested in learning and lacking in self-control. While the middle-class students saw themselves as investing in their educational future, they saw the working-class pupils who were chavs, charvers or townies as lacking in desire to succeed and therefore likely to fail.

Questions

1. Examine the subcultures (if there are any) in your own school or college. What are the similarities and differences compared to the subcultures found in this research?
2. Evaluate whether the type of school used in the research (inner-city comprehensives) could explain the similarities and differences you discussed in answering question 1.
3. Identify the possible advantages and disadvantages of using interviews to study subcultures?
4. Suggest an alternative research method for this type of research and explain why it might be useful.
5. On the basis of this research, explain the view that it is not just teachers who can give pupils negative labels.
6. Applying this research, analyse how the labels attached to some working class pupils might affect their educational progress.

Research by Mairtan Mac an Ghaill (1994) examined working-class students in a Midlands comprehensive. Because the school divided pupils into three sets, three distinct male, working-class peer groups developed rather than two:

- In the lowest set the main subculture was that of the 'macho lads'. They were academic failures who became hostile to the school, showed little interest in school work, and were usually from less skilled working-class backgrounds.
- In the highest set, the predominant subculture was of the 'academic achievers'. They were academic 'successes' usually from more skilled working-class backgrounds. They tried hard at school and were aiming to progress to higher level study.
- The middle set was dominated by the 'new enterprisers'. They had a positive attitude to school and school work, but they saw the vocational curriculum as a route to career success rather than academic subjects.

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Think about relationships and peer groups in the school or college where you study. Are there distinct peer groups? Do they tend to be based on streams or sets and are they linked to social class? Are there more than two or three subcultures? What do your observations suggest about interactionist theories of class and achievement?

Evaluation of interactionist perspectives

Although interactionist perspectives have been very influential, and they show that factors operating within school can have a significant impact upon educational achievement, they have been criticised in a number of ways.

First, by concentrating on processes within the education system, they fail to explain where wider class inequalities come from. They tend not to look at the wider context that gives rise to stereotypes of the working class, inequality in access to successful schools and so on. They therefore ignore or downplay factors outside the schools. (Paul Willis, who combines the study of interaction in school with Marxist analysis is an exception here.)

Second, labelling theory sometimes sounds **deterministic**: success and failure seems to be entirely determined by the attitudes of pupils, which gives pupils little apparent control over their own achievement. It is clear that not all pupils live up to labelling by teachers. For example, a study by Margaret Fuller (1984) found that a group of black working-class girls who were labelled as likely failures responded by working harder to achieve success. Rather than a self-fulfilling prophecy taking place, they rebelled against the low expectations of their teachers.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Deterministic – Most people feel that most of the time they can choose how they behave. However, sociologists tend to claim that to some extent social factors can explain behaviour. If that is the case, then it suggests that people don't have a free choice but instead their behaviour is shaped by outside forces. Deterministic theories take this view to some extreme, and don't acknowledge that individuals have any choice about how they behave – circumstances shape what they do. For some, labelling is a deterministic theory which claims that people will always live up to a label imposed on them by other people. However, most labelling theorists recognise that sometimes individuals will refuse to live up to their labels. These labelling theorists do not therefore support a deterministic version of labelling theory.

Third, some interactionists may also have simplified models of pupil subcultures and do not identify the full range of responses to school. By identifying just two or three subcultures, they ignore groups and individuals who don't fall neatly into one category. However, not all interactionists fall into this trap. For example, Peter Woods (1983) identified eight different groups in school. 'Opportunists' for example, fluctuated between trying to gain the approval of their teachers and of their peer group.

Fourth, many of the studies have been based on male peer groups, and are less useful for understanding female groups (see Chapter 1.4 for more discussion on gender differences in education).

Finally, interactionist approaches also tend not to look at the effect of social policies in any detail, yet these too can have a major impact on whether factors in the education system promote greater equality of opportunity or make class differences in achievement more pronounced. These are discussed in the following section, Social policy and social class.

Social policy and social class

Educational policies relating to class can be divided into two main types:

- those specifically aimed at reducing class inequalities
- more general policies that have had an impact on class inequalities in education even though this is not their main aim.

Many policies aimed directly at reducing class inequality have been based upon cultural deprivation theory (which sees working-class culture as lacking the necessary attributes to promote success in education). These policies have led to the idea of positive discrimination in the form of **compensatory education** – the working class are given extra help in the education system to compensate for the supposed inadequacy of their socialisation. A variety of schemes have aimed at providing extra help for the working class such as Sure Start, launched In 1998. Sure Start has provided additional pre-school education to try to compensate for any lack of educational stimulation from parents.

However, critics such as Whitty (2002) believe that all these schemes tend to place blame for failure on the

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child and their background and ignore the effects of inequality in society as a whole. Many schemes have lacked resources and have failed to tackle the poverty which is the underlying cause of educational inequality. (See Chapter 1.6 for more discussion of these and related policies).

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Compensatory education – This is additional educational provision that is intended to fill gaps or put right weaknesses in the knowledge and skills that the working class are seen as having.

From the time the Conservative government came into office in 1979, the education policies of successive British governments have been influenced by neoliberal perspectives more than by any other set of ideas (see Chapter 1.1). These have involved increased **marketisation** and greater competition between schools, colleges and universities. Since educational institutions are funded according to how many pupils or students they can attract, they have to act like businesses and try to offer the most attractive 'product' to 'consumers' (pupils, students and their parents/guardians). The consumers of education do not directly pay for most state school and college education, but they have been encouraged to exercise choice, making them more like the customers of businesses. The consumers are assisted in choosing schools by information such as inspection reports and league table standings.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Marketisation – This involves trying to get state-run services to be organised more like private companies in which good or services are bought and sold in a market. Individuals don't pay for state education but if learners can choose which institutions (schools, colleges, universities) they attend, and the government rules that money follows the learners, then the institutions will be forced to act like businesses. They will have to compete with each other to attract 'customers' (learners) just as private businesses do. In theory, they will have to constantly improve to keep ahead of or catch up with the opposition, driving up standards.

These policies encourage educational institutions to try to attract the 'best' students who will do most to boost their league table results. The process of attracting the most able students has been called 'cream-skimming' (Bartlett and Le Grand, 1993). Middle-class and upper-class students are generally seen as more desirable to attract than working-class pupils. At the same time, marketisation encourages pupils, students and their parents to try to get places in the most successful institutions. Middle-class parents have more resources to manipulate the system to give their children the best possible chance of getting into the 'best schools'. This tends to create a polarised school system with successful schools, often over-subscribed and therefore well-funded with largely middle-class students, and less successful schools, undersubscribed and largely working-class. A number of studies suggest that these policies can lead to greater inequality in the education system, particularly between social classes.Recent research by Lloyds (discussed in Meyer, 2013) found clear evidence that well-off parents were paying extra to live in the catchment areas for the most successful state schools. Houses near the best-performing state secondary schools cost an average of £31,000 more than houses in neighbouring areas outside the school catchment area.

Research by Gillborn and Youdell (2000) found that one result of increased competition was a tendency to neglect the education of the largely working-class pupils who were seen as having little chance of getting C or higher in 5 GCSEs (a crucial measure of school performance used in league tables). Instead schools concentrated on those who were just below this level of achievement in order to bring them up to the C level and maximise their league-table performance. (This process is known as educational triage – students are divided into groups and some are prioritised. Resources are concentrated on the pupils where the institution has the best chance of improving its league-table standing, while others are neglected, for example because they are unlikely to achieve five Cs even with extra help). As a consequence, there was little attempt to boost the performance of lower sets. Working-class and ethnic minority pupils were more likely to be allocated to lower sets than white, middle-class children, further increasing their educational disadvantages.

Based on the evidence provided in this section, suggest two ways in which the educational achievement of working-class pupils could be increased. What problems might there be in getting the policies to succeed?

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FOCUS ON SKILLS: EDUCATIONAL CHOICE AND MARKETS



Stephen Ball *et al.* (1994) conducted studies of the effects of educational reform introduced by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher. They found that some groups took more advantage of the introduction of markets than others. Some parents were more likely to get their children into the school of their choice.

Middle-class parents were usually **privileged/skilled choosers**. They had the time and social contacts to make informed choices about which were the best schools. Many had the money to pay for private education if necessary or to move home to be in the catchment area for the most successful state schools. (Catchment areas are the geographical area from which individual schools allow applications to attend the school).

Working-class parents were usually **disconnected choosers**. They had much less opportunity to get children into the school of their choice. For example, they often had limited access to private cars, so it was harder for them to get their children to a non-local school. They also sometimes lacked the knowledge of admission policies to manipulate the situation to get their children into the 'best schools'. Usually, they couldn't afford to buy a house in the catchment area for a good school, where housing was more expensive. As a result, they often chose the local school for their children and based their decisions on the happiness of their children rather than on the academic reputation of the school. They assumed that children would feel more comfortable studying with friends, living close to schoolmates and attending a school mainly populated by children from a similar background.

Ball *et al.* found the new policies had a number of negative effects upon the education system. All schools tried hard to attract the most academically able students to boost league table results. Less attention was paid to students with special educational needs. Time and resources were devoted to improving school image to attract pupils rather than to helping the most educationally disadvantaged. Cooperation between neighbouring schools became less common. Most schools tried to portray a traditional academic image, for example by enforcing rules about school uniform, so there was in fact little real choice for parents. In addition, because the capacity of individual schools is limited, many parents, particularly from the working class, did not get their first choice of school.

Questions

1. **Examine** what factors made it more difficult for working-class parents to get their children into the highest performing schools.
2. **Examine** why working-class parents usually ended up sending their children to a local school?
3. **Analyse** ways in which marketisation might lead to a more divided education system. (Are there winners and losers in competitive systems? How could this affect schools?)
4. **Analyse** the reasons why educational policies might lead to working class pupils falling further behind middle-class pupils in education. (Think about whether the middle class have more opportunity to manipulate the system.)
5. **Evaluate** the view that marketisation disadvantages working-class pupils. Are there any ways in which it could help to improve the standard of the education they receive? (Supporters of the system suggest it drives up standards for everyone. Is this a credible argument and why?)

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Class and educational achievement: Conclusion

Despite all the attempts to reduce differential achievement based on social class it remains stubbornly high. In part this may be because it is impossible to eliminate inequality of opportunity in a society which is very unequal. Factors outside the education system (material and cultural factors) interact with factors inside (such as labelling, setting, the curriculum and the development of subcultures) to mean that the odds are stacked against working-class success. While some individuals can certainly break through the barriers and succeed, the overall pattern of class differences has not changed very significantly in recent decades. Some policies aimed at reducing class inequalities may have made some difference, but the general trend towards competition and marketisation has, if anything, made things worse.

Social class alone does not shape educational attainment; it interacts with other social divisions, particularly gender (see pp 000-00) and ethnicity (see pp. 000-00).However, it is probably the most important single factor. Gillborn and Mirza (2000) have estimated that class has twice the effect on educational achievement of ethnicity and five times the effect of gender.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Briefly explain what is meant by material deprivation.
2. Suggest two ways in which material deprivation might hold back educational progress for children even before they start school.
3. Identify and briefly explain three ways in which some sociologists see the working class as culturally deprived.
4. What two types of speech code are distinguished by Basil Bernstein ? Briefly explain each speech code.
5. Suggest three possible criticisms of cultural deprivation theory.
6. Explain how Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital differs from the idea of cultural deprivation.
7. Explain three ways in which interaction within schools may lead to differences in educational achievement.
8. Identify and explain two policies designed to reduce inequality in educational achievement.
9. Analyse the differences and similarities between cultural and material explanations of differential achievement.
10. Evaluate the claim that factors inside education largely determine achievement by identifying two arguments in favour of this view and two arguments against.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Identify a popular and oversubscribed school and a relatively unpopular secondary school close to where you live. Use a website such as Zoopla or Right Move to compare property prices in the two areas. Does your research suggest it is more expensive to live in areas close to popular secondary schools? How could this be linked to theories of material deprivation?

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1.3 ETHNICITY AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand differential educational achievement by ethnicity (A01).
- Apply this understanding to contemporary Britain (A02).
- Analyse the factors contributing to differences in achievement by ethnicity (A03).
- Evaluate competing explanations for differences in achievement by ethnicity (A03).



INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

Social class is not the only social division that has an impact on educational achievement; **ethnicity** is also important. Britain has an ethnically diverse population with some large minority ethnic groups, such as those of Indian and Pakistani origin and Black Caribbean groups, and smaller minority ethnic groups such as the Chinese. Some minority ethnic groups outperform White British ethnic groups in education, others do less well. Some long-established minority ethnic groups have become more and more successful in education while others have made less progress.

The patterns and trends are complicated but sociologists have sought to understand and explain them in terms of the differences between ethnic groups. As in the case of social class, cultural differences or material inequality could be important, but so could racism both inside and outside the education system. Many of the explanations put forward to explain differences in achievement therefore parallel those used in explaining class differences, but the particular factors that affect ethnicity and educational achievement are not necessarily the same as those shaping class inequalities.

INTRODUCTION

Some minority ethnic groups continue to have lower levels of achievement than the average, while others have above levels of achievement. This is not always consistent at all levels of education. For example, many minority ethnic groups have high levels of participation in higher education. However, inequalities can be measured in different ways and the evidence suggests that those from minority ethnic groups have lower than average chances of studying at the more prestigious universities. The patterns are further complicated by the intersection (or overlaps) of different types of inequality with ethnicity, particularly gender and social class. For example, there is

evidence that boys from African Caribbean backgrounds have lower levels of achievement than girls from African Caribbean backgrounds.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Ethnicity – This refers to groups within a population regarded by themselves or by others as culturally distinctive; they usually see themselves as having a common origin. This could be linked to nationality or supposed 'racial' differences between groups of people, but ethnicity is a distinct concept in its own right. Ethnic groups may share some practices or beliefs (for example, religious beliefs). Minority ethnic groups are the smaller ethnic groups in a society while a majority ethnic group is the largest grouping (for example, White British in the UK). The ethnicity of majority groups may be taken for granted, but ethnicity is just as important for these groups as for minorities.

MATERIAL FACTORS AFFECTING UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Although ethnic groups are characterised by cultural differences, there are also differences in the material position of different ethnic groups. Those from different ethnic groups may have an above average chance of living in poverty or having working-class rather than middle-class jobs. So rather than differences in achievement being directly caused by cultural differences between ethnic groups, they could be caused by some ethnic groups being, on average, better off than others. In other words, material inequality or class differences could be the main factor underlying differences in achievement by ethnic group.

According to Lina Platt (2011, p.85) the highest hourly rates of pay for male full-time employees in the UK were for Chinese ethnic groups, followed by Indian, White British, Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups. This is quite similar to patterns of educational achievement, and suggests that some groups do better simply as a result of living in higher-income families. However the patterns do not fit exactly. For example, you might expect Black Caribbean males to do better in education given their income.

These inequalities in income reflect differences in entitlement to free school meals (FSM) as shown in Table 1.3.1.

Ethnic group	per cent entitled to FSM
White British	12.8
Mixed heritage	25.2
Indian	13.7
Pakistani	38.2
Bangladeshi	58.5
African-Caribbean	26.2
Black African	41.4
Any other group	29.6

Table 1.3.1 *Ethnicity and entitlement to Free School Meals (FSM)*
Source: Strand, S. (2007)

To analyse the relationship further, one can examine how eligibility for free school meals interacts with ethnicity and achievement – how do low-income families from each ethnic group perform in the education system? Figure 1.3.1 shows that in all ethnic groups, the poorer pupils who are eligible for free school meals do less well than the better-off pupils who are not eligible for them. This helps to explain differences in ethnicity and educational achievement. Whatever their ethnicity, children from poorer backgrounds do less well, and some ethnic groups (particularly Bangladeshis and Pakistanis) tend to have lower than average wages. However, it is also clear that low income affects some groups more than others. In particular, it affects White British pupils more than other groups because the gap between FSM and non-FSM children is much bigger than in other groups. This can't be explained simply in terms of material factors. Other factors, perhaps cultural ones, seem to counteract low income at least to some extent among ethnic minorities. Some cultures might compensate for the negative effects of low income more than others.

A similar pattern was demonstrated in research by Gillborn and Mirza (2000) that looked directly at the effects of social class on ethnic groups in the education system. The data from Youth Cohort Studies between 1998 and 1997 showed that there was a strong relationship between social class and achievement in all ethnic groups. In all groups, children from middle-class backgrounds did better than those from working-class backgrounds. However, African Caribbean pupils (particularly boys) did less well than their peers in other ethnic groups even when class was taken into account, while those from Indian, Pakistani and Bangledshi pupils groups did better.

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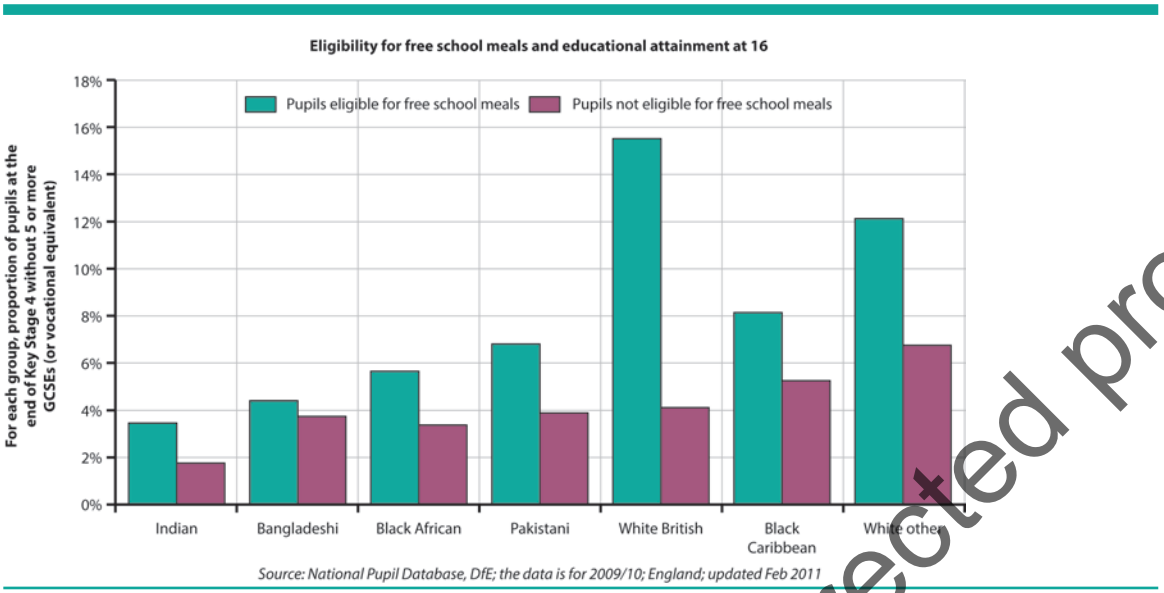

Figure 1.3.1 *Achievement at GCSE of students eligible for free school meals, analysed by ethnic group.*

Source: The Poverty Site, Educational Attainment at 16

The relative success of pupils from some ethnic minority groups could be explained in terms of **cultural capital**. Tariq Modood (2004) argues that many ethnic minority parents have more cultural capital than is typical for their income or class position. If they are recent migrants to the UK, they may have been downwardly mobile or they may not be able to get jobs in line with their skills, experience and qualifications due to discrimination, or because they lack familiarity with British culture. As a result, they may be better educated than most white British parents from the same class background and can therefore provide more help for their children in education. Other factors might explain the relative underachievement of African Caribbean pupils, including processes in the education system itself, and these will be examined in later sections.

Would you agree that coming from a low-income family disadvantages children from all ethnic groups, but some more than others? What evidence is there to support or contradict this claim?

CULTURAL FACTORS, ETHNICITY AND ACHIEVEMENT

A number of cultural factors, it has been suggested, are important in explaining the relationship between ethnicity and educational achievement. It is suggested that minority ethnic groups may be either deprived or advantaged educationally as a result of distinctive features of the culture of their ethnic group. However, all these views should be treated with some caution. It shouldn't be assumed that all members of an ethnic group share exactly the same culture and there may be differences between males and females in each group. Nevertheless, there may be some broad cultural differences that have some impact.

Parental attitudes toward education could be one important factor. British Chinese pupils and students are more successful than any other ethnic group in the British education system, and there is some evidence that this could be due, at least partly, to support that they get from their families. Research by Archer and Francis (2007) found that the parents of Chinese pupils placed an exceptionally high value on education.

Research conducted by Themina Basit (2013) found that cultural factors had an impact on educational achievement in British Asian communities (of both Pakistani and Indian origin and Muslim and Hindu faiths). Basit studied three generations: grandparents, parents and children. She collected data on attitudes to education among British Asians in the West Midlands. She used **focus groups** for her research with the children (who were aged 15–16) and in-depth interviews with the older generations. All the participants placed a high value on education and saw free state education as a 'blessing' because it generally offered more opportunities than were available in their countries of origin. They therefore tended to put in considerable effort and resources in helping their children.

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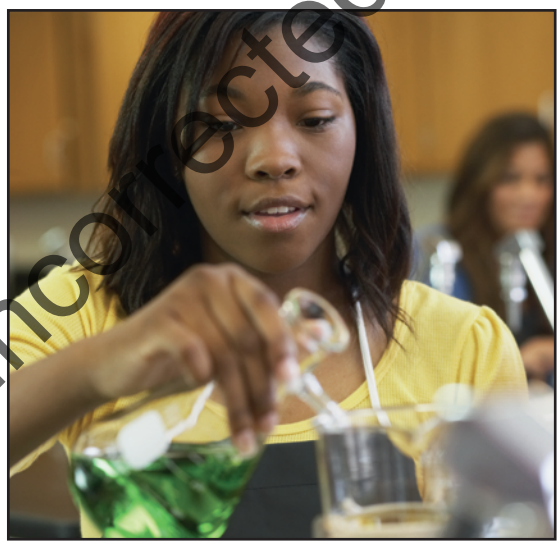
Even the relatively poor parents had managed to provide space to study, desks, computer and internet access for their children, and most of the children had their own rooms. Parents expected their children to work hard and, being often well qualified themselves, actively helped their children with their studies.

Basit comments that 'It was strikingly clear that education was viewed as capital that would transform the lives of the younger generation. This educational capital was believed to be the most significant asset a young person could acquire and the families provided a range of support mechanisms to enable the young people to realise this aspiration' (p. 719). While all the grandparents were from working-class backgrounds, some of the parents had gained middle-class jobs (albeit usually modestly paid ones) via educational success, and they wanted, and expected, their children to be at least as successful. Although the parents could not afford to move to expensive areas to gain access to the best schools, they did try to help their children get into selective schools, sometimes by arranging private tuition.

The research on British Chinese and British Asian families suggests that stable, supportive families who are very keen on educational success may be the key to understanding the relative success of some minority ethnic groups in education. However, some research suggests that all ethnic minority groups are enthusiastic about education compared to the White British ethnic majority. Research by Connor et al. (2004) found that among year 13 students positive attitudes to education were strongest among Black African students planning to go on to higher education.



Despite the apparently strong encouragement from families, African Caribbean pupils and students have tended to do less well in education than pupils and students of Indian origin. According to a DfE report (Wanless Report, 2007) Black pupils, (particularly boys):

- are significantly more likely to be permanently excluded from school than other ethnic groups
- are 1.5 times as likely as White British pupils to be identified with behaviour-related special needs
- are disproportionately put in bottom sets even though this does not reflect ability
- are much less likely than the average to be identified as gifted and talented.

Some sociologists have attributed these problems partly to cultural factors outside schools. Tony Sewell (2007) argues that they are related to the relatively high proportion of Black African pupils raised in lone-parent families (see Chapter 1.5 for details). Basing his ideas on research with 11–16 year old pupils in a London school,

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Focus groups – Focus groups are a type of group interview in which a carefully selected group of people are asked to discuss particular issues. They allow a more in-depth exploration of group attitudes than individual interviews and they reflect the way in which interaction with others affects opinions in actual social life.

BUILD CONNECTIONS

Changes in family life will clearly have an impact on the relationship between family and education. The increased diversity of families (see Chapter 4.5) has been most discussed in relation to White British families, but there is also some evidence that diversity is increasing within minority ethnic groups as well. For example, there may have been some increase in divorce and lone parenthood among British Asian families and this could affect the relationship between family life, culture, ethnicity and educational achievement. There is family diversity within, as well as between, ethnic groups, and this illustrates the danger of making generalisations about culture and education.

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he claims that being brought up by a lone mother can lead to some boys lacking male role models and the discipline provided by a father figure. As a result, they may be attracted to gangs that encourage an aggressive and macho form of masculinity which does not value respect for authority. These attitudes tend to result in a lack of concern with academic achievement and a rejection of the values of school. Although this only affects a minority of Black pupils, it depresses the overall performance of Black minority ethnic groups.

Sewell's research neatly links factors external to the education system, such as family life and gang culture, with the education system itself (see Labelling, stereotyping and subcultures below for more details on subcultures he studied within schools). However, Sewell has been strongly criticised for blaming Black Caribbeans for their underachievement rather than concentrating on the inadequacies of the education system itself, and for allowing his work to divert attention away from racism. These views will be explored in the next section (Labelling, racism and pupil responses).

Evaluate the view that 'blaming lone parenthood for the underperformance of some African Caribbean boys in education is blaming the victims of an unequal and racist society'. You could consider whether coming from a lone-parent family necessarily disadvantages children in education.

Certainly the apparent underperformance of Black Caribbean children in education should not be exaggerated. Compared to Whites, minority ethnic groups have a larger proportion of members with working-class backgrounds in higher education. This is particularly true for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis – nearly two-thirds of the entrants to higher education from these groups came from households headed by manual workers or the unemployed (Modood 2004). Furthermore, some African-Caribbean pupils have very high attainment and make excellent progress.

On the other hand, some White British pupils have extremely low attainment, particularly those from economically disadvantaged groups, and make poor progress. For example, national statistics highlight the fact that only 24 per cent of White British boys entitled to FSM achieved 5 or more GCSE grades at A* to C, even lower than the 27 per cent of African-Caribbean boys entitled to FSM who achieve this (DfE 2007). Also, White British working-class pupils in inner-city areas have recently emerged as the group making the least progress over the secondary phase.

FACTORS INTERNAL TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Labelling, racism and pupil responses

While some differences in the educational achievement of ethnic groups can be attributed to factors outside the education system, factors within the system clearly play a part as well. This section examines these factors.

Unequal outcomes and institutional racism

Some researchers have suggested that pupils from different ethnic minorities are treated differently by both teachers and other pupils. A range of research suggests that this may have a particularly negative impact on boys of African Caribbean origin. Research by Steve Strand (2012) using data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England found that in Britain, African Caribbean pupils did significantly less well in education than White-British peers at the age of 14. This held true even when allowances were made for differences in social class background, family, school and neighbourhood factors. The study also found that African Caribbean pupils were less likely to be entered for higher level GCSEs than their White British counterparts.

A number of factors may have accounted for this. African Caribbean pupils were more likely to have been excluded from school and to have had a statement of special educational needs. But even taking these factors into account, for every three White British pupils entered for higher-tier exams in Maths and Science, only two African Caribbean pupils were. This seemed to provide evidence of teacher bias in decisions about exam entries.

Some sociologists attribute such findings to **institutional racism**. David Gillborn (2002) argues that schools are institutionally racist, as teachers interpret policy in a way that disadvantages Black pupils. For example, setting, schemes for gifted and talented pupils, and vocational schemes for the less academic all underrate the abilities of Black children, relegating them to low-ability groups, a restricted curriculum and entry for lower-level exams. The increased marketisation of schools (see Topic 1.6) has led to what some writers have called an 'A to C economy'. According to Gillborn and Youdell (1999) this creates a rationing of education: teachers are forced to focus on those in danger of not realising their potential and fostering them to enable them to achieve a C grade or above. They therefore neglect both the 'no-hopers' and 'high achievers', leaving them to their own devices. Many Black pupils are judged, often unfairly, to belong to be 'no hopers'.

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David Gillborn (2008) argues that racism affects some ethnic minorities much more than others. Thus 'model minorities' - such as Chinese and Indian pupils, who are seen as having positive attitudes to education, are treated differently from minorities who are seen as a potential problem. Institutional racism may, furthermore, be entrenched in the organisation of schools and the way that power is distributed within them. For example, Ranson (2005) highlights the unrepresentativeness of school governing bodies, which are 'disproportionately White, middle-aged, middle-class, middle-income, public/community service workers'. For these reasons, ethnic inequalities in education are often given a low priority.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Institutional racism – This is a form of discrimination within organisations that unfairly disadvantages those from relatively powerless and disadvantaged ethnic groups. Institutional racism occurs not because of the attitudes of individuals, but because of the systems, cultures, policies and/or structures of the organisations themselves. This results in organisations (such as schools, universities, corporations or hospitals) failing to provide the same quality of service and opportunity to ethnic groups. For example, a school that failed to deal effectively with complaints of racist bullying, or failed to provide a curriculum equally suitable for all ethnic groups, could be seen as institutionally racist.

Labelling, stereotyping and subcultures

Possible reasons for apparent underperformance by some African Caribbean pupils can be found in studies which suggest that these pupils (especially boys) are often given negative labels such as 'unruly', 'disrespectful' and 'difficult to control'. Gillborn (1990) found that African-Caribbean pupils were more likely to be given detentions than other pupils. This was because the teachers interpreted (or misinterpreted) the dress and manner of speech of African-Caribbean pupils as representing a challenge to their authority. In perceiving their treatment to be unfair, the pupils responded, understandably, in accordance with their labels.

Jasper (2002) goes further, and suggests that the expectations that White female teachers have of Black boys' behaviour dictate the form and style of the teaching that they offer them, a style less conducive to learning than they offer to other groups. O'Donnell (1991) showed how the various ethnic subcultures have distinctive reactions to racism, prejudice and discrimination, which may have different effects on educational performance. African-Caribbean males often react angrily to and reject the White-dominated education system, gaining status and recognition through other means. Indians show their anger, but do not tend to reject the education system. Instead, they succeed because they use the education system to their advantage.

According to O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000), in responding to teacher's labels, racism and poor economic prospects, Black males construct a form of masculinity that earns respect from peers and females. This macho response may have little relevance for males in general with the decline in manual work and increasing opportunities within the service sector. However, for young Black men, with more limited employment prospects, opposition to schooling still has some relevance in highlighting their masculinity and alternative attributes of success. Despite the fact of their relatively high academic self-concept (Strand 2007), educational success is seen as a feminine thing. The way for them to get respect is through the credibility of the street. In Sewell's words, the young man wants to be a 'street hood'. Success in the school room marks the Black boy out from his peers or classmates and is likely to make him the target of ridicule or bullying. According to Sewell, educational failure becomes a badge to wear with pride. Aspects of this view have been reflected in concerns about the development of 'gangsta' culture and the absence of positive Black male role-models at home as well as in schools.

A similar response has been identified among some Asian youths – in particular, Bangladeshi boys, whose economic prospects once they leave school are generally bleaker than those of other Asian groups. O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) recognised that this macho 'warrior' perception by peers existed alongside perceptions of other Asian youths as 'weaklings' who conformed to demands of the school or 'patriarchs' and whose loyalty lay with the prescriptions of the male-dominated Asian family.

Connolly (1998) also examined the treatment in school of boys of South Asian origin. He found that teachers tended to see some South Asian boys as immature rather than as seriously deviant. Much of their bad behaviour went unnoticed by teachers and was not punished to the same extent as that of Black boys. The South Asian boys, therefore, had difficulty in gaining status as males, which made it more difficult for them to enjoy school and feel confident. However, teachers did have high expectations

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FOCUS ON SKILLS: INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND HISTORY TEACHING



Only three black people who want to be history teachers were accepted for postgraduate teacher-training courses last year, according to damning statistics that critics claim expose 'institutional racism' in the British education system.

The figures are part of a wider picture in which just 17.2% of black African applicants and 28.7% of black Caribbean applicants were taken on by teacher training institutions across all subjects, against 46.7% of white applicants.

The revelation provoked claims of racism in the system, with one of Britain's first black professors calling for the government to do some 'soul searching' over the state of the profession.

According to the annual statistical report by the Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR) published last week, 30 black Caribbean, African or mixed-race people applied to read for a postgraduate certificate in education in history in 2013. One mixed-race applicant was accepted as were up to two black Caribbean or black African applicants – at best a 10% success rate. This stands in stark contrast to the 506 white people accepted for history teacher-training courses from the 1,937 who applied – a 26% success rate. A further 19 applicants from other ethnic minority groups, including Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, were awarded places. The ethnicity of 17 successful applicants was unknown.

Professor Heidi Mirza, who is of Caribbean origin, said that the government should be concerned by both the low number of black applicants and the lack of the success of those that apply. Nationally, while 17% of pupils in the UK are from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds, only about 7% of teachers are.

Mirza, author of *Respecting Difference: Race, Faith and Culture for Teacher Educators*, said: 'Diversity in our teacher workforce is crucial if British children are to be well prepared to be global citizens and successfully compete on the world stage.

'We need to do some soul searching in our teacher education provision and look at the insidious ways institutional racism keeps potential black, minority ethnic and refugee teachers from getting on and through their courses. I do think there is a hidden crisis in teacher education, which has slipped under the wire of Gove's reforms in education.'

Professor John Howson, blogger and a former government adviser on teacher recruitment, said he was particularly concerned by the lack of black history teachers because it limited the variety of perspectives being heard in classrooms on Britain's colonial heritage. A poem from John Agard, "Checking out me history", about the dominance of the history of white males in classrooms resonates deeply with many in the black community.

Mirza said there was significant evidence that discrimination was a major factor. She cited a survey on 'Leadership aspirations and careers of black and minority teachers' in which more than half of the sample reported some sort of discrimination. Another survey found that black and Asian teachers were half as likely to be head teachers and deputy head teachers as white teachers.

Source: Boffey, D. (2014) Institutional racism and history teaching, The Observer, 22 March 2014

Questions

1. **Identify** and summarise evidence in this article that suggests there may be institutional racism in teacher recruitment, training and career progression..
2. **Analyse** the effects that this might have on different ethnic groups in the education system. (Do you think, for example, that other ethnic minorities are likely to become history teachers?)
3. **Analyse** what effect this might have on the curriculum. (For example, is the history of other minority groups prominent In the history curriculum?)
4. **Evaluate** the strength of the evidence of racism in schools, based on this article. (How convincing and how broad is the evidence?)

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of their academic potential and they were often praised and encouraged.

Although much of the research focus has been on ethnic minority boys in the education system, the position of girls has also been studied. Connolly (1998) found in his investigation of three classes of 5 to 6 year olds in a multi-ethnic, inner-city primary school that some negative stereotypes are not just confined to boys. Like Black boys, girls were perceived by teachers as potentially disruptive but likely to be good at sports. The teachers in one school tended to 'underplay the Black girls' educational achievements and focus on their social behaviour'. Like their male counterparts, they were quite likely to be disciplined and punished, even though their behaviour did not always seem to justify it.

While few would argue that teachers display overt racism, Wright (1992) found considerable discrimination in the classroom. She observed Asian and African-Caribbean children in primary schools and found that teachers paid Asian pupils, especially girls, less attention. They involved them less in discussion and used simplistic language, assuming that they had a poor command of English. Teachers also lacked sensitivity towards aspects of their culture and displayed open disapproval of their customs and traditions. This had the effect of making the girls feel less positive towards the school. It also attracted hostility from other pupils, who picked up on the teachers' comments and attitude towards the Asian pupils.



Despite this, teachers did have high expectations of Asian pupils with regard to academic success. According to Connolly (1998), South Asian girls, though generally successful in the education system, may be overlooked because of their perceived passivity, or they may feel marginalised and left out of discourses relating to intimacy, love and marriage because of stereotypical assumptions about Asian family life. Connolly also challenged the stereotypical assumptions many teachers made, noting that the behaviour of South Asian girls pointed towards a similar mix of work and avoidance of work and obedience and disruption, making their behaviour largely indistinguishable from that of their female peers. It would appear, therefore, that high expectations may to some extent be responsible for creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in terms of Asian girls' relative success.

Some evidence indicates that many Black girls are anti-school, but pro-education. They resent low teacher expectations and labelling, but are more determined to succeed than many other groups, especially Black boys. Mirza (1992) notes how some Black girls respond to the failure of the school to address their needs by rejecting the help of teachers, which they regard as patronising and, though sometimes well-meaning, misguided. For example, the girls were entered for fewer subjects 'to take the pressure off' or given ill-informed, often stereotypical careers advice. The girls respond outwardly by appearing to reject the values of the school through their dress, attitudes and behaviour. In terms of academic achievement, however, in Mirza's study, the rejection of teachers' help and limited involvement in lessons were seen to place them at a disadvantage academically, even though they preserved high self-esteem. They were not victims of overt racism or labelling, they were simply held back by the well-meaning but misguided behaviour of most of their teachers.

However, research by Margaret Fuller (1984) found that there could sometimes be a positive reaction to negative labelling. The group of Black girls in her study managed to use their rejection by the school to motivate them to be successful, and they were able to overcome the barriers put in their path to achieve high grades.

While teachers may have certain expectations of ethnic minority groups, some of which may have been detrimental to their success, pupils of both Asian and African-Caribbean origin are, according to Connolly (1998), often victims of racism from White pupils. The impact of this on educational commitment and performance is inevitably negative.

Other authors argue that racism, at least in the overt sense, cannot be a complete explanation for ethnic group differences in attainment. Modood (2003) argues: 'If racism leads to the victim being turned off school and dropping out, why do Asian men and women have such high staying-on rates and make academic progress?' This does not discount the possibility of social stereotyping or institutional racism against some ethnic groups, but does highlight the importance of being sceptical with regard to generalised explanations.

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FOCUS ON RESEARCH: AIMING HIGH (TIKLY *ET AL.*, 2006)



In 2003, the government set up a programme called 'Aiming High' to help raise the achievement of African-Caribbean pupils. It provided extra resources to 30 schools where African and Caribbean pupils were performing below the average for all pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. In 2006, a team of sociologists led by Leon Tikly evaluated the success of the project.

Tikly's team used postal questionnaires to produce quantitative information about setting, examination tiers and rates of exclusion. The questionnaires were returned by only 18 schools at the start of the project and 11 at the end. One third of the sample (10 schools) were subsequently involved in semi-structured interviews with, for example, governors, headteachers, pupils, parents and teachers. These produced qualitative data about the extent to which schools recognised and valued ethnic diversity and the ways they treated ethnic minority pupils in relation to behaviour and discipline. Those that were most focused on these issues appeared to have fewer behavioural problems and lower exclusion rates.

Tikly, L. *et al.* (2006) *Evaluation of Aiming High: African Caribbean Achievement Project*, Bristol: University of Bristol

Questions

1. **Identify** the quantitative and qualitative methods used in this research.
2. **Analyse** the advantages and disadvantages of using postal questionnaires for this type of research.
3. **Evaluate** to what extent do you think the results of this research can be generalised to other schools. (Is a sample of 10 schools sufficient to make generalisations?)
4. **Evaluate** the benefit of undertaking the programme for the schools who valued ethnic diversity.
5. **Analyse** the reasons why their policies made a difference? How could extra resources help?

The curriculum

Some sociologists have argued that the curriculum – what is taught in schools – actually disadvantages ethnic minorities. The knowledge that they encounter at school may not connect with their own cultural experience, while ethnocentrism, resulting from the use of out-of-date material, could be potentially offensive by reflecting old colonial values and racial stereotypes. In pioneering research, Coard (1971) showed how the content of education also ignored Black people. The people who are acclaimed tend to be White, while Black culture, music and art are largely ignored. Coard argued that this led to low self-esteem among Black pupils. However, this assertion was refuted by both the Swann Report (1985) and Stone (1981), who noted that, despite feeling discriminated against by some teachers, African-Caribbean children had been able to maintain an extremely positive self-image.

More recently, efforts have been made to address the neglect of other cultures in the curriculum. Multicultural education, which acknowledges the contribution of all of the world's cultures, has become more common, although it has been criticised for focusing only on external factors ('saris and samosas') and failing to address the real problem of racism. Ethnic-minority languages still do not have the same status as European languages.

The National Curriculum itself has also been criticised for being ethnocentric – especially in its focus on British history and literature. Geography also emphasises Britain's positive contribution to the rest of the world, rather than the negative consequences of unfair trade and employment practices. Changes introduced by the Coalition government in 2014 marked a renewed emphasis on a traditional curriculum (for example, studying Shakespeare and British literature in English) making even less room for a **multicultural** curriculum.

Tikly *et al.* (2006), in their study of 30 comprehensive schools, found that a significant number of African-Caribbean pupils noted their invisibility in the curriculum and were exasperated by the White European

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focus. Moreover, when Black history was acknowledged within the curriculum, many pupils reported their frustration with the tendency to focus on slavery.

However, while the curriculum may be ethnocentric, it is unlikely that this, in isolation, is a major factor in the underachievement of ethnic minorities, as it is not the case that all pupils from ethnic-minority backgrounds underachieve to similar degrees. Indian and Chinese pupils' achievement, for example, is above the national average.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Multiculturalism – Multiculturalism sees ethnic diversity as a positive aspect of society. It encourages the celebration of cultural diversity and believes that a society should adapt to accommodate the cultures and lifestyles of different groups. For example, schools should embrace the variety of diets, religions, festivals and so on characteristic of major ethnic groups. Multiculturalism has been criticised for paying too little attention to inequality and racism. From a very different viewpoint, David Cameron criticised multiculturalism in 2011 for discouraging the integration of different ethnic groups into British society and culture and therefore causing social divisions (Pilkington, 2011).

To what extent should the content of the curriculum in British schools reflect the ethnic diversity of Britain? For example, how far should pupils concentrate on British history and 'classic' English literature (largely written by dead White men)?

CONCLUSION

Although ethnicity may be less important than social class in influencing patterns of educational achievement, it remains a significant factor. The evidence suggests that material differences between ethnic groups partly, but not wholly, explain differences in achievement. Other factors outside the education system, such as cultural factors, may partly explain differential achievement by ethnic group, but they interact with factors inside the education system including institutional racism. Ethnicity also interacts with both gender and social class in affecting achievement. To complicate matters further, there can be diversity within ethnic groups, and the dividing lines between ethnic groups are not always clear-cut. For example, an increasing number of households are headed by parents from different ethnic backgrounds.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Identify one ethnic group that does better than average at GCSE and one group that does less well than average at this level.
2. Identify the ethnic group least likely to be entitled to free school meals and the ethnic group most likely to be entitled to them.
3. Briefly define 'ethnicity'.
4. Explain what is meant by 'institutional racism'.
5. Outline the attitudes of Chinese parents towards the education of their children based upon the research of Archer and Francis.
6. Explain the link between family life and low achievement among male Black African pupils suggested by Tony Sewell.
7. Identify and briefly explain four factors internal to the education system that might shape patterns of educational achievement within different minority ethnic groups.
8. Explain three ways in which African Caribbean pupils may be disadvantaged by the operation of the educational system in Britain.
9. Explain two reasons why the relationship between ethnicity and educational achievement is far from straightforward and needs to take account of other social differences.
10. Evaluate the claim that factors internal to education largely determine the success of different ethnic groups within the education system, identifying two strengths and two weaknesses of this claim.

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TAKE IT FURTHER

Analyse the content of a sample of text books at your school or college. Focus on visual images, examples and case studies. To what extent do they recognise the variety and contribution of ethnic groups in contemporary Britain? Is there any evidence of an ethnocentric (pro-White British) bias in the curriculum?

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1.4 GENDER, EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND SUBJECT CHOICE

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Understand gender and educational achievement (AO1).
- Understand gender and subject choice (AO1).
- Apply this understanding to contemporary Britain (A02)
- Analyse the reasons for gender differences in achievement and in subject choice (A03)
- Evaluate competing views on these differences (A03)



INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

In the 1980s, **feminists** argued that the education systematically discriminated against females, leading to their doing less well in higher levels of education (A-level and above) than males. Since then, the position has changed, so that females outperform males in most (but not all) aspects of education in Britain. However, that raises two questions – why the change and why are females, in general, more successful? Plenty of explanations have been put forward, and you can probably think of some common-sense ideas yourself, but that doesn't mean that the research will support these explanations, or that the reasons are straightforward. Furthermore, while gendered inequalities in achievement are relatively small, differences in subject choice remain very significant.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Feminism – This theory of society claims that women are disadvantaged and exploited by men, while men are dominant and run society in their own interests. Gender inequality is seen as the central feature of society rather than, for example, class differences. There are different types of feminism. For example, Liberal feminism is a version of feminism which is relatively moderate and believes that the position of women in society can be improved through reform rather than radical or revolutionary change. (For example, this might involve schemes to encourage girls to study scientific, mathematical or engineering subjects in higher education). On the other hand, radical feminism believes that the dominance of men in society is so well-established that revolutionary change is needed to make a real difference.

TRENDS IN GENDER AND ACHIEVEMENT

According to Michele Cohen (1998), girls have educationally outperformed boys in the early years of schooling since mass education was introduced in the UK. However, girls have not always had the same opportunities to progress to higher levels of education. Before 1877, no British university accepted female students. Women were only allowed to attend university lectures at the discretion of lecturers. Women were first awarded degrees in 1920 at Oxford and 1921 at Cambridge.

Even in secondary education, opportunities for women were still somewhat limited after the Second World War. For example, under the **tripartite system** that dominated British education between 1947 and 1964 girls tended to do better in the entry exam for Grammar Schools (the 11+) than boys, but there were no more places for girls than boys, so girls often had to achieve higher marks than boys in order to be accepted. One justification for this deliberate discrimination was that boys 'mature later'. Another was the view that women's careers were seen as secondary to their role as housewives and mothers once they married and had children.



Margaret Thatcher, later Prime Minister, graduated in Chemistry from Oxford in 1943 – just 23 years after women were first granted degrees from Oxford.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

The tripartite system – A form of secondary education introduced by the 1944 Education Act. It involved taking an IQ test at the age of 11 (the 11+). Those who did well in this test were admitted to a grammar school, in which they received an academic education and had the opportunity of gaining formal qualifications. Those who did reasonably well and who were technically minded or creative were admitted to a technical schools (although not many of these were actually built). Those who did less well were admitted to a secondary modern school in which they received a vocational certificate. Most of the pupils in secondary moderns left school at 15 with few qualifications. The tripartite system began to be replaced in the 1960s by the comprehensive system.

Despite the limited opportunities for women in the past, since the early 1990s, the official statistics have shown that girls outperform boys at most levels of the education system and as more opportunities for progression by girls have opened up, the gender balance in educational achievement has shifted. Nevertheless, the situation is complicated and it isn't as straightforward as one sex outperforming the other.

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For example, as Table 1.4.2 shows, in 2011 at Key Stage 2 girls did better than boys in reading and writing, although there was no difference in the percentage achieving level 4 at Maths.

	English	Reading	Writing	Maths
Girls	86%	87%	81&	80%
Boys	77%	80%	68%	80%

Table 1.4.2 *SATS: Level 4 achievement by gender at KS2 in 2011*

Source: DfE, Interim results for key stage 2 and 3 national curriculum assessments in England: academic year 2010 to 2011

In 2013 girls did better than boys at GCSE level (in terms of achieving A* to C) in every subject – often by a significant margin – other than maths. For the same year, table 1.4.2 shows that at A-level, girls were more likely to get A* to C in every subject other than French (boys had a slight advantage here). Girls were also more likely to pass every subject apart from economics and media and film. However, it should be noted that many of the differences in rates of achievement are quite small at A-level.

In terms of A-level, if we examine performance across grades A* to E, there are only three subjects in which there is more than a 1% gap between boys' and girls' overall A-level achievement. Moreover, both 2012 and 2013 saw boys gaining slightly more A* grades at A-level than girls. It is therefore dangerous to exaggerate the problem of underperformance by boys at this level.

In 2010/11, there were more female (55%) than male (45%) fulltime undergraduates enrolled at university. In 2012, women were a third more likely to start a degree than their male counterparts. Moreover, female undergraduates consistently perform better than males at this level, as Table 1.4.3 clearly shows.

	First-class	Upper 2nd	Lower 2nd	Third	% First & Upper 2nd
Male	27385	72490	45985	12130	63%
Female	34220	105935	54330	11800	68%

Table 1.4.3 *Class of degree achieved by gender 2012*

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

With regard to the number achieving first-class and second-class degrees, the gender gap has remained consistent, with women outperforming men by about 5 percentage points.

Again though, the significance of these differences can be overestimated. As Haralambos and Holborn (2013) point out, the performance of boys and young men in education has been steadily improving and at some levels, specifically GCSE and A-level, the gender gap narrowed in the first decade of the 21st century, with boys making up ground on girls. McDonald *et al.* (1999) argue that the generalisation that girls outperform boys applies most strongly to working-class children; among the middle classes the gender gap in achievement is either very small or non-existent. Moreover, the gender gap is wider in comprehensive schools than in selective schools.

Similar gender gaps can also be seen between ethnic groups. The difference in achievement between boys and girls is far wider among African-Caribbeans than among other ethnic groups, such as Indians.

Recent results at KS2, GCSE and A-level suggest that boys' underachievement is not the problem it once was. The gap between male and female achievement is narrowing. Furthermore, gender is only one of three key social influences on achievement – the evidence with regard to boys suggests that their social class and their ethnicity are just as important. The international evidence suggests the UK's record with regard to gender equality in education is better than many other countries. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests in 2013, the gender gap in achievement (with girls outperforming boys) was lower than in most other countries. But there are still some significant differences and the reasons for these will now be explored.

GENDER AND ACHIEVEMENT

This section examines reasons for differences in achievement between males and females. As in the case of class and ethnicity, factors influencing achievement may be external or internal to the education system itself, or a combination of the two. However, both inside and outside education the behaviour of boys and girls is **gendered** as a result of differences in the socialisation of girls and boys. The next section examines the way in which gender socialisation underlies gender differences in education.

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UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Gendered – If an area of social life is gendered, then it is experienced differently by males and females – it differentiates between males and females and gives different advantages/disadvantages to males and females. For example, work is gendered if the expectations of male and female workers are different, or if different jobs are thought suitable for males and females. To say something is gendered does not necessarily imply that one gender is always advantaged at the expense of the other; but it does imply that there is systematic inequality and difference.

Gender role socialisation

Early socialisation (primary socialisation in the family) takes place before a child enters education, but socialisation continues inside and outside school for older age groups and it impacts on and interacts with factors internal to schools.

Factors linked to socialisation that influence gender differences in educational achievement start from birth. Edwards and David (2000) suggest that gender-differentiated primary socialisation gives girls an initial advantage in both primary and secondary schools, but this can still tend to create a male-dominated or **patriarchal** society. (For example, the willingness of boys to break rules can lead to their dominating classrooms). Girls may have better language skills than boys because mothers talk to baby girls more frequently than baby boys. Edwards and David suggest that there is some evidence that girls are taught by their parents to conform to more formal standards of behaviour than boys, which familiarises them with what is expected in the classroom. For example, at home, they are taught to sit still, to be quiet, to read and to listen.



UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Patriarchy – This means, 'literally, rule by the father', but it is usually used by feminists to refer to a system in which men have more power than women and shape how societies run. Patriarchy does not just operate through having political or economic control, but also through culture, so that both men and women may come to see male dominance as natural. Patriarchal power has been analysed and challenged by feminists who seek to undermine patriarchy both in education and in society as a whole.

Consequently, by the age of seven, girls within the education system are more likely than boys to pay attention in class and to be self-disciplined in supervised play. By the time they enter secondary school, girls have often developed a compliant motivational style which means they are prepared to conform to classroom rules and to get on with their work independently. Moreover, they are experienced in listening and speaking, which puts them at an advantage because the classroom is essentially a linguistic environment.

Early socialisation appears to be reflected in attitudes and behaviour as girls progress through school:

- Research by Burns and Bracey (2001) found that secondary schools girls generally work harder and are more motivated than boys.
- On average, girls put more effort into their work and spend more time on homework. They take more care with the presentation of their work. They are better organised, and they consequently meet deadlines more successfully than boys.
- Research shows that, from the age of 6, girls read more books than boys, and this trend continues through their lives.

It is not just primary socialisation in families that influences gender roles in education; **peer groups** can also have a significant influence. These influences occur both inside and outside the education system. Hannan (2000) shows that girls spend their leisure time differently from boys. Whereas boys relate to their peers by doing (that is, by being active in a range of ways), girls relate to one another by talking. This puts girls at an advantage, because most subjects require good levels of comprehension and writing skills. Girls are also happy to help each other. It is an acceptable part of being female.

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The socialisation of boys is significantly different from that of girls.

- Edwards and David (2000) found that at home, parents allowed boys to be noisier and to be more attention-seeking than girls. They found that this mode of socialisation often translated into primary school boys being more likely to break rules and being less bothered than girls when being told off by teachers.
- Edwards and David also found that by the time they started secondary school boys often had trouble sitting still and concentrating. They were only able to deal with short-term tasks and were far less prepared to get on with their schoolwork than were girls.
- Many boys believed school work should be done at school and, unlike girls, were not prepared to draft and redraft assignments.
- There was also some evidence that boys' behaviour was often shaped and policed by their peer group. The culture of such groups tends to be organised around masculine or 'macho' values. These set out rules of behaviour for boys that mean they are subject to social controls from other boys. For example, this may mean not showing emotion or talking about personal feelings.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Peer group – The peer group refers to friends and fellow pupils. The concept of 'social control' refers to the penalties that the peer group can impose on boys or girls who do not conform to their expectations about how males and females should behave at school and in the classroom. For example, they may be negatively labelled, shunned or bullied.

Evidence from Frosh *et al.* (2001) suggests that boys who are members of these cultures regard schoolwork as 'feminine' and 'unmanly' and have a tendency to engage in hyper-masculine behaviour such as back-chatting teachers, being disruptive in class and bullying the more academic boys. Showing an interest in school work was deemed silly, soft and weak. Bright diligent boys were often subjected to homophobic abuse. On the other hand, masculine status was associated with being sporty, funny and 'up for a laugh'. Kirby (2000) argues that it is noticeable from research that boys who do well at school are often helped at home, away from the view of the peer group. Boys often consider it weak to request help from a teacher and it is also especially difficult for a boy to accept help from another boy.

Some research indicates boys' overconfidence may blind them to what is actually required for educational success. Research by Kindling and Thompson (1999) indicates that boys interrupt more frequently and answer more often, even when they do not know the answer. Moreover, boys are surprised when they fail exams and tend to put their failure down to bad luck rather than lack of effort. On the other hand, girls are more realistic, even self-doubting, and try that much harder in order to ensure success. However, according to Francis (2000), boys are no longer likely to consider themselves more able than girls, as was the case in the 1970s and 1980s. Francis also notes that boys are more likely to have career aspirations that are not only unrealistic but less likely to require academic success, such as professional footballer, whereas girls' career ambitions more often require academic success, such as doctor, which drives their commitment to schoolwork.

Studies of working-class boys in school by Hargreaves (1967) and Willis (1977) showed how such boys were fatalistic in accepting school failure as inevitable. Some of them developed anti-educational coping strategies, such as setting up anti-school subcultures or having a laugh at the expense of teachers and more academic boys.

BUILD CONNECTIONS

There is evidence that some of these anti-school cultures inside school may develop into street gangs involved in territorial street violence, drug-dealing and mugging. Evidence from a variety of studies of juvenile gangs in London by Kintrea and from the profiles of those convicted for their parts in the 2011 London riots and looting (Lewis et al., 2011) overwhelmingly show participation by males who had left school with few or no qualifications.

Kirby (2000) has suggested that communicative play through organised social games has been replaced with TV, DVD and computer games. In addition, there has been a decline in family discussion time, through occasions such as mealtimes. Both changes have reduced opportunities for boys to catch up with girls in terms of language development. He points out that while modern computer games (more popular with boys than girls) may exercise already advanced spatial and visual abilities, they do little to address language deficiency.

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Is talking at family mealtimes in decline in most families?

SOCIAL CHANGE AND PATTERNS OF ACHIEVEMENT

A number of factors have been suggested as the possible causes of changes in the relationship between gender and achievement. Many of these are linked to broad social, economic or cultural changes in the UK.

Social change and the effects on girls

Some feminist sociologists, such as Helen Wilkinson, relate girls' relative success in the past thirty years to post-industrialisation, which has transformed the attitudes of young women and depressed the expectations of males.

The last thirty years have seen a feminisation of the economy and the workforce. Jobs for women in the service sector of the economy (financial services, retail, mass media, health, welfare and education) have expanded. As a result, girls may believe that the future offers them more choices – they are provided with the incentive to seek economic independence, and careers are now a real possibility.

Wilkinson's argument is that female aspirations underwent a radical transformation in the last two decades of the 20th century. She suggests that young women experienced a '**genderquake**' in terms of profound changes in their attitudes and expectations about their futures compared with those of their mothers and grandmothers. Their aspirations are no longer restricted to family life. Rather, most teenage girls are committed to education and qualifications and aspire to careers and economic independence.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Genderquake – Wilkinson uses this word to refer to the dramatic change in attitudes towards work and careers experienced by females over the course of three generations. She argued that young females at the start of the 21st century have radically different attitudes towards education, work and family compared with their grandmothers and mothers.

Sharpe's surveys of young working-class females in London support Wilkinson. Her study of working-class girls in London (*Just Like a Girl*, 1976) found that most girls held very traditional ideas about womanhood and prioritised 'love, marriage, husbands, children, jobs and careers, more or less in that order'. When the research was repeated in 1994, she found that the priorities had changed to 'job, career and being able to support themselves' above all other priorities. Studies of girls in primary and secondary schools also illustrate this change in emphasis.

According to Francis and Skelton (2005), 'The majority (of primary and secondary school female pupils) appear to see their chosen career as reflecting their identity and as a vehicle for future fulfilment, rather than as simply a stopgap before marriage'. The growth in employment opportunities and the rise in young women's occupational ambitions have increased their incentives to gain educational qualifications. Studies of both primary and secondary school pupils show that many girls are now looking forward towards jobs that require degree-level qualifications (Francis and Skelton 2005).

Both Wilkinson and Sharpe noted that feminist ideas were filtering down through the media and education system and ultimately into family life, so that these movements (although not always recognised and supported by young women in the early 21st century) were partly responsible for increased opportunities for females in education and work. The work of feminist sociologists in the 1970s and 1980s led to a significantly greater emphasis on equal opportunities in schools than there had been before (see below).

Changes in employment and the attitudes of girls and women have been accompanied by changes in the family, such as:

- long-term increases in divorce
- increased age at first marriage

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- increased age at birth of their first child for women
- the growth of lone parenthood
- more individuals living alone.

Ulrich Beck (1992) sees these changes as part of the growth of risk and uncertainty, which leads to greater insecurity for males and females alike. Both relationships and jobs are insecure and cannot be relied on to last long-term. According to Beck, this creates a more **individualised** society in which individuals have to be self-reliant and to a greater extent financially independent. This further increases the incentives for girls to achieve educational qualifications so that they don't risk reliance upon a husband and are sufficiently well qualified to cope with the uncertainties of the labour market.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Individualisation – This involves a process in which group membership and collective identities (based, for example, on class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion or region) become less important. Individuals have more freedom to pick different lifestyles and they tend to have less loyalty to the social groups they belong to. This does not necessarily mean that collective identities are no longer of any importance, but it does suggest that people will feel the need to be more self-reliant and they will think more about the choices they have in deciding how to live. It is associated with the ideas of sociologists such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH: GIRLS AND THEIR AMBITIONS – CAROL FULLER (2009)



Carol Fuller conducted an in-depth study of a single-sex girls' school in the south-east of England with a high proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and a largely working-class intake. The school was in a pocket with high levels of deprivation and the school had been deemed to be unsatisfactory by Ofsted. Fuller's study focused on year 10 and year 12 pupils and she used participant observation, focus groups and both structured and semi-structured interviews. She said that 'This multi-method approach was adopted with the view that it would produce much richer data than using one method alone' (Fuller, 2009, p.3). The participant observation was conducted in student common rooms, the staff room assemblies, lunch areas and in tutor groups. The focus groups helped Fuller to devise questions for the 'in-depth, semi-structured interviews with students' (p.3). The interviews themselves focused on 'the value placed on education, students' expectations for themselves in terms of achievement and their life course, and how these views impact on students' perceptions of themselves' (p.4).

The school organised pupils into five sets. Fuller found that it was possible to identify three groups of girls. The **low aspirers** wanted to leave school at 16, they were generally in the bottom two sets, and they thought that much of what they learned in school was not directly relevant to them. Although they thought it was risky not to have qualifications, they found school work, especially coursework, stressful and they lacked confidence in their ability to succeed. They expected to work in jobs such as shop work, or as a nursery nurse assistant, and these sorts of jobs were typical of their work placements (which Fuller describes as being both gendered and classed). Some of the girls hoped to achieve fame, for example, by becoming singers. However, relationships were more important to them than careers and their boyfriends and the prospect of eventually becoming a mother gave many their sense of future direction.

The **middle aspirers** intended to continue in education after 16 but not to continue to higher education. Most opted to do vocational rather than academic courses, but some chose A-levels. All felt that they needed further qualifications to give themselves a strong enough position in the labour market. This group

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mainly came from the second and third sets and were lacking in confidence that they could do well enough to continue on to do degrees. They aspired to steady jobs with a measure of job security, for example, as hairdressers, as qualified nursery nurses or as chefs. Some who had chosen A-levels were thinking more in terms administrative roles, for example, as bank workers or receptionists. Friendship networks were important to these students, and whether they stayed on at the same school, or moved elsewhere to study, was influenced by their peers.

The **high aspirers** were defined as those who wanted to progress to higher education. They were mainly but not exclusively in the top set and they were generally confident in their own ability. While those with less ambitious aspirations largely accepted teachers' judgements about their ability, the high aspirers believed they could succeed even when teachers were less positive about their progress. These students were the most individualised group, willing to move to a different institution for A-level study if they thought it would improve their chances of success. Many of them had quite vague career plans but they were certainly aiming for professional jobs of one sort or another. While friendships and relationships were important to them, self-reliance and financial independence were higher priorities. Fuller therefore supports Beck's view that society has become more individualised (see Social change and the effects on girls).

Because all the sample were female, and from broadly working-class backgrounds, Fuller argues that the differences cannot be explained simply in terms of class and gender. Many of the aspirations, especially for low and middle aspirers were gendered, but different groups were making different choices about how they wanted and expected their lives to progress. They were reacting to their position as girls from working class backgrounds in an economy dominated by the service sector, but in in different ways. Fuller's research suggested that two key factors explained differences in aspirations. The first was the amount of emotional support (or emotional capital) provided by their families. The second was the girls' perceptions of themselves and particularly the amount of self-esteem and self-confidence they had in school settings. This in turn was connected to relationships with teachers. Thus factors both inside and outside school, along with structural changes in the labour market, helped explain why some girls, but not all, had high aspirations and were focused on educational success.

Questions

1. **Identify** the particular contribution made by each research method (participant observation, focus groups and interviews) to the research.
2. **Explain** the claim that 'This multi-method approach was adopted with the view that it would produce much richer data than using one method alone'. (What might have been overlooked by using only one method?)
3. **Analyse** ways in which this research could explain improvements in the educational performance of girls.
4. **Evaluate**, on the basis of this research, the view that the aspirations of girls remain highly gendered.
5. **Evaluate** Fuller's view that factors inside and outside school help to explain the achievements and aspirations of girls.

SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE EFFECTS ON BOYS

There is some evidence that social changes associated with a more individualised and post-industrial society have lowered the expectations of boys, and that boys in the early 21st century consequently lack confidence in themselves and experience low levels of self-esteem. Some commentators, notably Mac an Ghaill (1994),

suggest that working-class boys are experiencing a 'crisis of masculinity'. They are socialised into seeing their future male identity and role in terms of having a job and being a 'breadwinner', but the landscape has changed:

- The decline of manufacturing industry and the rise in long-term unemployment make it increasingly unlikely that males will be main earners.
- New jobs in the service sector are often part-time, desk-based, and suited to the skills and lifestyles of women.
- In some families, females may be the primary breadwinners.

Consequently, traditional masculine roles are under threat.

Wragg (1997) believed that pessimism about the world of work, induced by declining job prospects for males, has filtered down to primary school boys and undermines their desire to work hard. Jackson (2006)

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believes that working-class male adolescents may conclude that education and qualifications are irrelevant because they can see that the jobs they will end up doing are unskilled or semi-skilled at best and not very well paid. Such boys are likely to look for alternative sources of status. This may be achieved by exaggerating their masculinity through involvement in delinquent anti-school subcultures. Street credibility is gained by not subscribing to an academic ethos, and even for getting excluded from school.

Jackson's research found evidence that these changes had a particularly strong effect on working-class boys. She used interviews and questionnaires to study masculinity and femininity in eight schools. She found that the schools were dominated by a culture of **hegemonic** (or dominant) **masculinity** that valued toughness, power and competitiveness. Academic work was seen as being essentially feminine and therefore 'uncool' by boys. Boys tended to mess around to impress their peer group rather than concentrate on the work – acting out a culture of laddish masculinity. Some boys did want to succeed but to avoid being seen as 'uncool' they worked mainly at home. This disadvantaged working-class boys who had poorer facilities at home, for example, less space or poorer computing facilities and Internet access. Working-class boys were particularly affected by changes in the labour market. Lacking the prospect of employment to give them a sense of identity, they used laddish behaviour to restore a sense of masculine pride.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Hegemonic masculinity – This is the dominant version of what it means to be masculine in a particular culture. In contemporary Britain it might be seen as involving rationality, heterosexuality, competitiveness and a desire for control over others. It emphasises strength over weakness. It is not the only version of masculinity, and many men do not conform to these ideas – for example, the cultures of gay men might offer an alternative, as might those of peace-loving vegetarian men – but the alternative forms of masculinity tend have lower status than hegemonic masculinity in education and society as a whole.

Francis and Skelton (2005) argue that these underachieving boys are often vulnerable, confused and insecure. They suggest that while the underachieving boy may appear tough on the outside, seeking to impress and boost his self-image, on the inside he is insecure and has low self-esteem. This can be reinforced by a lack of educational success.

FACTORS WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The 1980s saw a greater emphasis on equal opportunities in schools, which resulted in the monitoring of teaching practices and resources for sex-bias in order to ensure more girl-friendly schooling. This was the direct result of the work of feminist sociologists such as Stanworth (1990) and Spender (1983), who carried out observation-based research of teacher–pupil interaction in the late 1970s and 1980s, and concluded that schools reinforced gender inequalities in wider society because teacher expectations and the resulting labelling led teachers to discriminate against females. This discrimination took many forms:

- Spender found that when boys questioned or challenged a teacher they were often met with respect whereas girls were criticised as being too assertive and 'unladylike'.
- Spender also claimed that boys' and girls' work was often judged by different standards. The same work got better marks when teachers were told a boy had written it.
- Stanworth found teachers gave more time and attention to boys and expected more of them.

These feminist studies were influential in terms of social policy and led to schools and colleges introducing equal opportunities policies aimed at being more sensitive to the educational needs of females. Weiner (1995) has argued that teachers have more forcefully challenged stereotypes since the 1980s and many sexist images have been removed from learning materials. Consequently boys, especially in mixed schools, are also more aware of equal opportunities and of the unacceptability of sexist behaviour.

PEDAGOGY

The school environment

Research by Rothermel (1999) has found that, among home-educated children, boys are as successful as girls. This suggests that what goes on inside schools plays a crucial role in boys' underachievement.

Epstein (1998) identifies a 'poor boys' discourse that blames schools for failing to cater for boys. Teachers, the exam system, and female concerns and interests ignore boys' learning needs and fail to appreciate and

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understand their masculinity, especially during primary school. To resolve this, proponents argue that schools should be made more 'masculine', and attention and resources should be directed from girls to boys.

Some sociologists have suggested that the school environment has become feminised. Some research suggests that primary-school environments, which are female-dominated and may have an emphasis on neatness and tidiness, exert a less positive influence on boys, and may even be alienating to them. However, recent research by Carrington *et al.* (2007) suggests that the gender of the teacher has little or no impact on boys' or girls' learning.

Sukhnanda *et al.* (2000) reports that boys generally feel they receive less support, encouragement and guidance from teachers. They feel that teachers have higher expectations of girls and that teachers are more critical of boys for non-academic reasons such as bad behaviour and scruffy presentation. Consequently they view schools as alien places.

Abraham (1995) argues that schools fail to confront traditional notions of masculinity and that teachers may even collude with pupils in traditional gender stereotyping. In Abraham's study deviant boys were more popular with some of the teachers than academic boys and girls. According to Mitsos and Browne (1998), teachers are not as critical with boys as with girls. They may have lower expectations of boys, expecting work to be late, rushed and untidy, and expecting boys to be disruptive. These expectations may have a self-fulfilling effect, depressing the achievement of boys.

However, not all sociologists see the school environment as favouring girls. Coffey and Delamont (2000) argue that schools have always been patriarchal. In 2014, most senior staff in schools and colleges were male, the discourse of education remained fundamentally male – hierarchical and competitive – and the ethos of most schools, especially secondary schools, was still resolutely masculine – authoritarian, regulatory and sexist. For example, there are still schools that will not allow girls to wear trousers.

Some sociologists suggest that although girls are doing better in exams, they may not be getting the best education. Myhill (2000) argues that girls' success may be down to their being passive and compliant learners, but that boys may be getting the better education because teachers interact more frequently with them. Moreover, girls' greater conformity in the classroom may be a positive attribute in the school but may be a barrier in the workplace because, as Myhill points out, 'few company executives, politicians and lawyers would be described as compliant and conformist'.

Moreover the evidence suggests that the experience of school may be more negative for girls. Girls may be doing better in most tests but they are more at risk of sexual abuse, depression, self-harm and eating disorders.

THE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

Some sociologists have highlighted the role of the curriculum in shaping the learning outcomes of boys and girls. Some significant changes that may have had an impact include the move from O-levels to GCSEs in 1988, and subsequent changes in the balance between exams and coursework. Initially GCSEs increased the proportion of marks that could be gained through coursework in many subjects, but more recently the coursework component has been reduced both in GCSEs and A-levels. In 2013 the Coalition government announced changes to A-levels: limits were imposed on opportunities for resits, and the exam system was shifted towards end-of-course exams in both GCSEs and A-levels. There were parallel changes in the curriculum, with some moves towards a less traditionally academic curriculum. However, the Coalition government of 2010 to 2015 subsequently reasserted the importance of traditional academic subjects and subject content. These changes may have had different impacts on boys and girls.

Pirie (2001) has argued that the pre-1988 O-level was an exam geared to boys, with its 'high-risk, swot it all up for the final throw' approach to assessment. By contrast, the coursework involved in GCSE and some A-levels requires organisational skills and sustained motivation – skills that girls seem to be better at than boys. This could help to explain why the performance of girls improved more rapidly than that of boys in the years following the change in the exam system. Reviewing the research, Machin and McNally (2006) comment that the change to GCSE did coincide with improvements in the performance of girls relative to boys. Furthermore, they cite research which suggests that girls do tend to do better in coursework while boys are better at doing end of course exams. They suggest therefore that this shift may have been key to changing patterns of gender and achievement in GCSE. The return towards more emphasis on exams may partially explain the narrowing of the gender gap under the 2010–15 Coalition government. Greg Hurst (2014) notes research that suggests boys overtook girls in GCSE maths performance following a change in emphasis towards end-of-course exams in maths from 2009.

It is suggested that curriculum changes in terms of subject content may have been more to the taste of girls than boys. Discussing English, Bleach (1998), for example,

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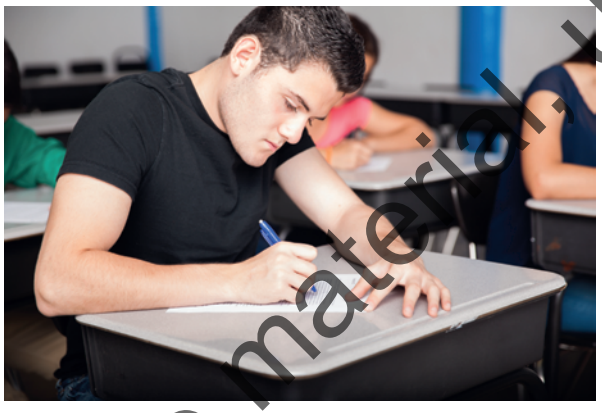
observes that girls tend to favour fiction over non-fiction and creative writing over factual writing, whereas boys are more likely to prefer reading non-fiction and writing factual responses. Boys dislike lengthy fiction, especially the pre-20th century texts that are an essential part of the national curriculum at GCSE and A-level. Bleach concludes that that the English curriculum in schools, on balance, favours girls' strengths over boys. Since reforms introduced by Education Secretary Michael Gove in 2014 required more study of classic English literature such as Shakespeare, it seems likely that this imbalance may increase.

Arnot (1998) argues that most girls prefer tasks which are sustained, open-ended, process-based and realistic rather than abstract. Project and source-based work, which have become more prominent in Humanities, are therefore ideally suited to girls' preferences. In contrast boys prefer to give brief, commentary-type answers to clear questions. Moreover, girls like tasks which require extended responses, such as investigations. Tasks such as these have become more commonplace in mathematics and the sciences in the early 21st century. Boys generally prefer memorising unambiguous facts and giving 'correct' answers at speed. Boys perform significantly better on multiple choice tests than girls.



Boys generally achieve higher marks on multiple choice tests than girls.

The literacy hour (which was introduced nationally in 1998) and the numeracy hour (1999) may have had some impact on the achievement of boys and girls in primary schools. According to Machin and McNally (2006) the evidence suggests that these initiatives had a bigger positive impact on the gender which had been less successful in the relevant subjects. Thus the literacy of boys improved faster than that of girls, while girls made more progress than boys in maths, contributing to a narrowing of the gender gap.

Based on the evidence in this chapter and your own experience, do the current curriculum and the associated assessment methods unfairly favour boys, girls or neither? What changes, if any would you introduce to make them fairer in terms of gender differences?

SUBJECT CHOICES

Patterns of subject choice

Despite relatively narrow gaps between boys and girls in terms of achievement, very considerable differences in subject choice remain. Skelton, Francis and Valkanova (2007) comment that 'at the moment that subject choice is introduced (be it as particular subject options in addition to the National Curriculum at Key Stage 4, or at post-16) the statistics continue to show highly stereotypical trends for young men to pursue certain subjects (typically technical and science-oriented subjects) and young women others (typically caring, or arts/humanities/social science subjects)' (p.20). Feminists such as Colley (1998) see this as a significant problem. For example, when girls select their A-level subjects, this affects their choice of university degree and may lead to different career paths compared to boys. Colley argues that such choices mean that females more often end up in low-status and relatively low-paid professions compared with males. Certainly an examination of A-level exam entries in Table 1.4.4 confirms the first part of Colley's hypothesis: there are significant differences in subject choice: males are particularly likely to choose Physics, Economics and Maths, while females predominate in Biology, English and Sociology. In other subjects the gender differences are less marked but still significant, with more males than females doing Chemistry, Business Studies, and Design and Technology.

	Biology	Physics	Chemistry	Business Studies	Economics	Design & Technology	Maths	English	Sociology
Males	26988	28190	26988	16270	17464	9031	63305	25196	7561
Females	33195	7379	24830	11403	8675	6610	38576	64246	23127

Table 1.4.4 *- 2013 A-level – Number of Exam Entries by Gender*

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications

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Similar patterns are found at university: more young men study Engineering, Architecture and Computer Science at undergraduate level, while young women are a big majority among students of subjects allied to Medicine (e.g. nursing and physiotherapy), Education, Creative Arts and Design, and Languages. The differences don't always lead men towards the more prestigious and highly paid jobs (there are now more women than men studying Medicine, Dentistry and Law for example), but they are clearly likely to contribute to significant differences in the careers of men and women.

Anne Colley (1998), argues that factors influencing subject choice are partly outside the education system. She stresses the influence of the family, and of influential peers who also subscribe to gender stereotypes, over subject choices at GCSE and A-level. For example, research indicates that parents still believe that certain toys and games are suitable only for one gender or the other. This may result in females in mixed comprehensive schools being 'steered away' from courses traditionally dominated by males and vice versa.

The education system itself, however, may well reinforce gender differences in subject choice. Colley also argues that although the national curriculum reduced gender differences in subject choice, traditional cultural beliefs about femininity and masculinity may still be held by teachers, lecturers and career advisors, especially in mixed schools. These cultural beliefs may be passed on to pupils via teaching styles. For example, the subjects to which girls tend to be drawn are taught mostly by women in secondary school. These female teachers may use the discursive teaching styles that girls may prefer. In contrast, the teachers of subjects more popular with boys are more likely to be men, who may be more reliant on formal teaching styles because of the nature of the subjects they teach. Colley notes that girls in single-sex schools are twice as likely to study mathematics at university because these cultural pressures are likely to be compensated for by positive female role models offered by teachers and peers.

The combined influence of factors inside and outside school leads to subjects being gendered – they develop an identity as essentially male or female subjects that is hard to change and makes it problematic either for boys to choose 'feminine' subjects or for girls to choose 'masculine' ones. However, Colley believes that subjects may shift gender identity if the curriculum changes. For example, the increased use of technology in music has meant it has come to seen as more 'masculine' than it was previously.



Is music becoming a more 'masculine' subject with greater use of technology?

Skelton, Francis and Valkanova (2007), reviewing research in the area, argued that 'gender stereotyping' and 'differential constructions of gender among pupils and teachers' (p.20) are probably the most significant factors. They cite research by Lucey (Lucey, 2001, cited in Skelton, Francis and Valkanova, 2007) that English is often socially constructed as being more 'naturally' female than male. They say, the 'gender discourse is so subtle that behavioural characteristics become taken for granted and naturalised' (p.20). Rolfe (1999, cited in Skelton, Francis and Valkanova, 2007) found this was reinforced by unconscious stereotyping in careers advice, and some evidence of this was also found in Fuller's research (Fuller, 2009) into a single-sex girl's school in the south-east of England (see Focus on Research: Girls and their ambitions).

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FOCUS ON SKILLS: GIRLS AND PHYSICS

Half of mixed-sex state schools have no girls choosing physics as an A-level subject, research shows.

The report by the Institute of Physics reveals that no 16-year-old female GCSE pupils, from 49 per cent of co-educational state schools, went on to take the subject at A-level.

Girls at single-sex schools were nearly two-and-a-half times more likely to take physics A-level.

The lowest figures were for schools without a sixth-form, whose pupils were the least likely to take the subject when beginning their A-level studies elsewhere.

The institute used records of A-level exams sat last year, and tracked back to find out what type of school candidates attended at GCSE level.

In the Institute's report, *It's Different for Girls*, Prof Sir Peter Knight, president of the institute, said: 'Physics is a subject that opens doors to exciting higher education and career opportunities. This research shows that half of England's co-ed comprehensives are keeping these doors firmly shut to girls.

'Perceptions of physics are formed well beyond the physics classroom: the English teacher who looks askance at the girl who takes an interest in physics or the lack of female physicists on television, for example, can play a part in forming girls' perceptions of the subject.'

The proportion of girls choosing A-level physics has been consistent, at about 20 per cent, for more than 20 years, but the report said that evidence from the database helped to confirm the source of the problem.

Clare Thomson, curriculum and diversity Manager at the institute, said: 'The importance of having a sixth form in your school for uptake of physics is related to the availability of specialist physics teachers – a factor we know contributes to enjoyment of and engagement with the subject across both sexes.

'Schools that have a sixth form are more likely to have specialist physics teachers on their staff and these teachers' confident and enthusiastic teaching of the subject inspires a greater number of students to progress on to A-level physics and beyond.'

The institute makes a series of recommendations, including that gender equity in subjects should be part of Ofsted inspection criteria.

Caroline Jordan, the head of Headington School in Oxford and chair of the Girls' Schools Association education committee, said: 'In single-sex schools you simply do not see girls making choices that are gender biased and this is particularly so in physics, where girls get to tackle everything.

'In co-ed schools boys can grab all the equipment and give the impression of being in charge, while girls find themselves consigned to writing down results.'

Helen Fraser, chief executive of the Girls' Day School Trust, said: 'For a girl to choose physics in a co-ed school is often viewed as a brave choice or a risky move. Teenage girls (and boys for that matter) are often desperate to fit in with their peer group, and can be concerned at the prospect of doing anything that might make them stand out from the crowd, which makes a girl studying a subject which some might view as "unfeminine" much more of a social risk.

'The key ages for this sort of self-consciousness are the years from age 13 to 16, just when pupils are choosing which subjects they want to take for their GCSEs and A-levels.'

Woolcock, N. 'Half of co-ed schools have no girls studying A-level physics', *The Times*, 4 October 2012



Some feminists claim boys dominate science classrooms.

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Questions

1. **Assess** what evidence there is here that the choice of physics as an A-level subject is strongly gendered.
2. **Evaluate** the extent to which the type of school or college where physics is studied affects gender differences in the take-up of the subject.
3. **Analyse** two possible factors inside the education system that may affect the chances of girls studying physics. (The answers are contained in the extract).
4. **Analyse** two possible factors outside the education system that may affect the chances of girls studying physics. (There are answers given in the description of the research).
5. **Apply** the evidence and arguments in this chapter to evaluate how successful the proposals put forward by the Institute of Physics would be likely to be if implemented. (You can think about whether they have taken account of all the possible factors)
6. **Evaluate** the view that gender differences in subject choice are unlikely to be significantly reduced until gender differences in employment have ended; changes in the education system will never be enough on their own. (You can think about how far subject choice is affected by factors other than career opportunities for males and females.)

CONCLUSION

Many feminists believe that the current concern about boys and achievement is simply a **'moral panic'** that distracts from female achievement. Weiner *et al.* suggest that newspaper reports about 'failing boys' reflect a middle-class concern that working-class black and white boys are leaving education with few or no qualifications and consequently may develop into a potentially socially disruptive underclass. These concerns were aired again after the 2011 London riots and looting.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Moral panic – The concept of 'moral panic' refers to public anxiety that is usually generated by mass media reports. It involves an exaggerated and usually somewhat irrational fear about a phenomenon that is portrayed as new or growing (even if it is neither). It usually links in with widespread anxieties about social changes, for example, the changing roles of men and women in society or NEETS (young people not in education, employment or training).

Some critics have argued that the whole question of equality of educational opportunity has now been largely reduced to gender and the focus on boys. However, as noted earlier, class has over five times more effect on educational attainment than gender, and ethnicity has twice the effect (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). According to some researchers, the focus on boys has diverted attention not only from underachieving girls but also from pupils disadvantaged by their class and/or ethnic background. For example, Osler (2006) argues that a more important issue is reducing the number of school exclusions among working-class boys and certain ethnic minorities.

Moreover, Osler also argues that the current focus on boys' underachievement is hiding a serious problem of exclusion and underachievement among girls, which is increasing at a faster rate than that of boys. For example, African-Caribbean girls are often hailed as one of education's success stories. Yet girls classified as African-Caribbean are more vulnerable to disciplinary exclusion than their White female peers.

Do you think concern about 'underachievement' by boys in general can be seen as a moral panic which takes attention away from problems for girls and other types of educational inequality? Justify your answer with reference to appropriate evidence.

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CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. When were women first admitted to a British university?
2. Are males of females more likely to achieve First or Upper Second class degrees?
3. What do the most recent statistics suggest about changing patterns of gender and achievement?
4. Identify and briefly explain three ways in which socialisation might prepare girls better for primary education than boys.
5. Identify and explain two ways in which peer pressure might hinder the educational progress of boys.
6. Explain what is meant by individualisation and suggest one way in which it might explain the increasing success of girls in education.
7. Using material from Carol Fuller's study, explain how factors inside and outside education can interact in shaping the aspirations of different groups of girls.
8. Explain how changes in the use of coursework in British school education might help to explain changing patterns of achievement.
9. Identify one subject that is predominantly studied by girls and explain two sociological reasons why it might be more attractive to girls than boys.
10. Give three arguments against and three arguments in favour of the view that education is no longer significantly gendered.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Find a boy in your school or college who takes a subject usually regarded as 'feminine' and a girl who takes what is usually seen as a 'masculine' subject. Ask them why they take the subject, how difficult they find it and whether the gender balance or image of the subject put them off at all. Compare your findings with other class members and discuss whether subject choice has become less gendered over time. You may wish to use semi-structured interviews for this research.

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1.5 RELATIONSHIPS AND PROCESSES IN SCHOOLS

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand relationships and processes in schools (AO1).
- Apply this understanding to contemporary Britain (AO2).
- Analyse the impact of these processes on schooling and pupils (A03).
- Evaluate competing views on these processes (A03).



INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

The preceding three sections of this chapter on class, ethnicity and gender have shown that some sociologists see relationships and processes within school as playing a significant role in explaining differential achievement. The first section showed that the hidden curriculum can play a role in the values that pupils learn in school. This section returns to these issues and develops your understanding of them in greater depth. It examines how the experience of schooling for pupils, involving interaction between pupils and between pupils and teachers, can have a significant impact not just on achievement but also on the development of different subcultures and identities. Pupils spend many years attending schools, so schools are an essential part of growing up, and they help to shape the adults that pupils become. However, this is not just a passive process of socialisation: pupils play an active role in the processes too.

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Chapter 1.1 showed us that a 'hidden curriculum' exists in which children are socialised into various norms and values. This Chapter explores in more detail how the hidden curriculum is transmitted, the messages it conveys and how different groups of pupils respond to it. Some pupils accept it unquestioningly, while others, like the girls of St Trinian's, (or the 'lads' in the Paul Willis study discussed in Chapter 1.2) may reject it and gain pleasure from disrupting the school's attempts to socialise them.

The hidden curriculum involves messages and ideas that schools do not directly teach, but which children learn, and which are part and parcel of the normal routines and procedures of the organisation. It concerns unpublicised features of school life, and involves norms, values, beliefs and practices that are taken for granted. These may appear to be common sense, and they can be part of the overall ethos of a school, which could be reinforced by the school's managers, its teachers and its processes.

We saw in Chapter 1.1 that functionalists value not only the *formal* curriculum that develops the skills and

knowledge needed by modern industrial society, but also the *hidden* curriculum, because, at least in theory, it helps foster cooperation, healthy competition (but not at the expense of solidarity) and the spirit of meritocracy. Marxists and feminists, and **anti-racists**, are critical of many aspects of the school curriculum for the way it legitimates (or justifies) ruling-class, male or White dominance, and helps maintain and reproduce dominance by these groups.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Anti-racists – Those who believe that racism remains very significant in societies such as Britain, and emphasise the importance of revealing and challenging racist practices. These racist practises may be hidden, denied by those in authority and be unintentional. They may be the result of institutional racism (see Chapter 1.3, Factors internal to the education system, Labelling, racism and pupil responses) as well as individual racism. Anti-racism plays a similar role in challenging ethnic inequality as feminism does in challenging gender inequality.

Debbie Cotton, Jennie Winter and Ian Bailey (2013) argue that the hidden curriculum in contemporary education places the highest value on *efficiency* and *value for money* rather than the promotion of greater *equality* and *opportunity*. Educational institutions may make only token attempts to promote equality, while the endlessly repeated messages and continual emphasis on the importance of hard work, discipline and being successful reveal the real underlying message of education. Many of these messages emphasise inequality and hierarchy.

How is the hidden curriculum transmitted?

This occurs through the standard, everyday aspects of school life, such as:

- the hierarchy of management that places mostly White, generally male headteachers at the top, female classroom practitioners in the middle and Black, working-class service workers, such as kitchen staff and cleaners, near the bottom (and pupils at the very bottom!)
- an insistence on punctuality at key points within the rigid pattern of the day
- wearing a uniform, which imposes the identity of the school over that of the individual
- the various sets and levels defined by age and ability
- elements of the curriculum and the school's pastoral system
- the organisation of the classroom, for example, with the teacher at the front for pupils to look up to, with teacher in turn looking down on them
- the expectations teachers bring with them about particular categories of pupils.

The hidden curriculum can even be detected in the organisation of services within the school and the physical layout of the school. Cotton, Winter and Bailey (2013) have discussed these types of process in relation to university geography courses (although it can just as easily be applied to schools). They found that while undergraduate courses in geography placed a strong emphasis on sustainability, the way waste and energy was managed in many universities gave it a relatively low priority, in comparison with their concern about cost and convenience.



Taken together, the various elements of the hidden curriculum shape pupils' experiences, producing particular outcomes which are positive for some, while being negative for, and often challenged by, others. They encourage certain values and beliefs and discourage others.

However, it should not be assumed that the hidden curriculum always gives a single, unambiguous message. From a neo-Marxist perspective (see Chapter 1.1, neo-Marxism), Henry Giroux (1984) argues that schools are **sites of ideological struggle**. That is, they are places where different political and moral views may co-exist and be in competition. Thus, whatever the overall ethos of the school, individual teachers may have different views and give different informal messages about what is important in education. For example, some teachers may value punctuality and conformity less than others, some may place more emphasis on equal opportunities than competition and some may even criticise or flout school rules.

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From your own experience of schooling, evaluate the view that there is a single, consistent, hidden curriculum in schools. Can you think of examples to contradict this? What are some of the different messages you get from schooling?

PUPIL SUBCULTURES

Some groups in schools accept the rules and the authority of teachers without question, while others may devote much of their energy to rule-breaking and avoiding work. You have probably encountered examples of both during your compulsory education. Sociologists are interested in these **subcultures**. Why do they form, and what effect do they have on their members, other pupils, teachers and schools?

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Subcultures – Groups within wider social groups (for example within British society) whose attitudes, lifestyles and values are shared by the subculture members, and are significantly different from those in wider society. This might include, for example, different tastes in music, leisure activities and clothing or different attitudes towards groups in authority. Of course, they will also share much in common with others in the wider society/culture but they are sufficiently different to be seen by themselves and/or others to be a separate subculture.

On a general level, all subcultures have things in common: their members gain status, mutual support and a sense of belonging from the subculture. According to Hargreaves (1967), anti-school working-class subcultures are predominantly found in the bottom streams of secondary schools. In fact, he argued, they are caused by the

Ingratiation	Pupils who try hard to win the favour of teachers and have very favourable attitudes to the school.
Compliance	Pupils who accept school rules and discipline and see the school as a useful way to achieve qualifications but who do not have wholly positive attitudes to the school. Typical of first year pupils.
Opportunism	Pupils who fluctuate between seeking approval from teachers and from their peer group. This may be a temporary adaptation before a more settled attitude develops.
Ritualism	Pupils who go through the motions of attending school but without great enthusiasm and without much concern for academic success or gaining the approval of teachers.
Retreatism	This is a deviant adaptation in which pupils reject the values of school and 'mess around' at school but without wanting to directly challenge the authority of teachers.
Colonisation	Common in later years of schooling, this adaptation involves trying to get away with as much as possible without getting into too much trouble.
Intransigence	This involves the rejection of academic success as being important and a rejection of accepted standards of behaviour at the school.
Rebellion	The goals of the school are rejected and pupils devote their efforts to achieving different goals (for example escaping school, or attracting boyfriends/girlfriends.

Table 1.5.1 *Peter Woods: Eight ways of adapting to school*

Source: P. Woods (1983) Sociology and the School: An Interactionist Viewpoint, London, RKP.

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labelling of some pupils as 'low-stream failures'. Unable to achieve status in terms of the mainstream values of the school, these pupils substitute their own set of delinquent values, by which they can achieve success in the eyes of their peers. They do this by, for example, not respecting teachers, messing about, arriving late, having fights, building up a reputation with the opposite sex, and so on.

Writers such as Hargreaves and Willis refer to the pro- and anti-school cultures as homogeneous, coherent groups that share their own uniform sets of values. Peter Woods (1983), however, argues that this is too simplistic. He argues that pupils use a variety of adaptations, depending upon the ways in which the values of the school are accepted or rejected. Some pupils may partially accept aspects of the school's values but reject others. It is now recognised that responses will also differ within and between the different categories of pupils, and in different school situations. The study of school subcultures is therefore a lot more complex than it used to be.

BUILD CONNECTIONS

The idea of adaptations was first developed by the American functionalist sociologist Robert Merton in studying crime and deviance. He believed that there were various ways of adapting to a situation in the USA in which everybody started out wanting success, but only a few achieved it and those from working-class backgrounds had less chance to do well than others. The situation is similar in schools. Not everyone is going to be near the top academically, the most popular or the best at sports, so there are likely to be different ways to adapt to school life depending on how successful you are in different spheres.

MALE SUBCULTURES

The anti-school male subcultures of the early 1970s (see Chapter 1.2, Pupil subcultures and social class) made a degree of sense in that their members nearly all got jobs, despite their lack of qualifications. Their coping strategies – what the 'lads' in Willis's study called 'having a laff' – also equipped them for the monotony of the work they were destined for.

The economy has changed, however, and relatively few working-class jobs remain in manufacturing. Has this changed the anti-school subculture of the 'lads'? There is certainly evidence of some changes, but also some continuities and anti-school subcultures continue to exist.

Research by Hollingsworth and Williams (2009) (Chapter 1.2, Focus on research: Chavs, Charvers and Townies) suggests that working-class peer groups with anti-school attitudes still exist, though they are now seen as 'chavs' rather than 'lads'. The research also suggests that there is a greater variety of middle-class subcultures within schools, based upon different types of consumption and leisure (for example, listening to different types of music). Thus middle-class groups included 'skaters', 'posh ies', 'hippies', 'emos' and 'goths'. There was also some regional variation in the subcultures, although all the middle-class groups had at least reasonably positive attitudes to the value of education.

Studies of subcultures have increasingly emphasised their complexity rather than simply seeing them as working-class or middle-class, pro or anti-school. For example they have added in the issues of sexuality and have paid more attention to issues of identity (see below).



School subcultures may be becoming more diverse that they were in the past.

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Mac an Ghaill (1994) illustrated the complexity of subcultural responses by examining the relationship between schooling, work, masculinity and sexuality. He identified the following range of school subcultures.

The 'macho lads'

This group was hostile to school authority and learning, not unlike the 'lads' in Willis's study. Willis had argued that work – especially physical work – was essential to the development of a sense of identity. By the mid-1980s, much of this kind of work was gone. Instead, a spell in youth training, followed very often by unemployment, became the norm for many working-class boys.

The academic achievers

This group, who were from mostly skilled manual working-class backgrounds, adopted a more traditional upwardly mobile route via academic success. However, they had to develop ways of coping with the stereotyping and accusations of effeminacy from the 'macho lads'.

The 'new enterprisers'

This group was identified as a new successful pro-school subculture, who embraced the 'new vocationalism' of the 1980s and 1990s (see Chapter 1.6). They rejected the traditional academic curriculum, which they saw as a waste of time, but accepted the new vocational ethos, with the help and support of the new breed of teachers and their industrial contacts. In studying subjects such as business studies and computing, they were able to achieve upward mobility and employment by exploiting school-industry links to their advantage.

'Real Englishmen'

These were a small group of middle-class pupils, usually from a liberal professional background. They rejected what teachers had to offer, seeing their own culture and knowledge as superior. They also saw the motivations of the 'achievers' and 'enterprisers' as shallow. While their own values did not fit with doing well at school, they did aspire to university and a professional career. They resolved this dilemma by achieving academic success in a way that appeared effortless (whether it was or not).

Gay students

Finally, Mac an Ghaill looked at the experience of a group neglected entirely by most writers – gay students. These students commented on the heterosexist and homophobic nature of schools, which took for granted the naturalness of heterosexual relationships and the two-parent nuclear family.



School pupils being educated by Sir Ian McKellen on tackling homophobic bullying.

FEMALE SUBCULTURES

Mac an Ghaill refers to the remasculinisation of the vocational curriculum. By this he means the higher-status vocational subjects such as business studies, technology and computing, which have come to be dominated by males. Girls are more often on lower-level courses – doing stereotypical work experience in retail or community placements, for example. In Mac an Ghaill's study, although girls disliked the masculinity of the 'macho males', most sought boyfriends. Lower-class girls, in particular, even saw work as a potential marriage market. More upwardly mobile girls saw careers more in terms of independence and achievement.

Griffin (1985) studied young White working-class women during their first two years in employment. Rather than forming a large anti-authority grouping, they created small friendship groups. Their deviance was defined by their sexual behaviour rather than 'trouble-making'. Most importantly, there was not the same continuity between the school's culture and that of their future workplace as there had been for the lads in Willis's study. Instead, there were three possible routes for the girls, which they could follow all at the same time:

- the labour market – securing a job
- the marriage market – acquiring a permanent male partner
- the sexual market – having sexual relationships, while at the same time maintaining their reputation so as to not damage the prospects of finding a suitable husband.

However, it is also clear that many female pupils have positive attitudes towards schools and their subcultural affiliations reflect this. For example, Heidi Mirza (1992) in a

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study of 62 Black women aged 15 to 19 in two secondary schools found that they had very positive attitudes towards achieving success although many thought that some teachers were racist. They sometimes therefore formed subcultures based on their ethnicity which valued education but had less respect for schools as an institution.

ETHNIC SUBCULTURES

As the study by Mirza discussed above demonstrates, ethnicity interacts with other social divisions such as gender and social class in shaping the formation of subcultures. Ethnic-minority subcultures were also discussed in Chapter 1.3. However, it is worth reiterating here some of the key issues. For both males and females, their subcultural responses to school reflect a rejection of differential treatment on the basis of their ethnicity and gender. Such responses enable them to cope with and counter the negative experiences they suffer, and to redeem themselves, sometimes to their educational cost.

Some black boys reject school and education in favour of a culture of conspicuous consumption and street credibility, while black girls may strive to achieve in alternative ways, as they reject their teachers' low expectations of them.

In some cases members of other ethnic groups, such as Bangladeshi males, have adopted aspects of black subcultural responses. For example, Louise Archer (2003) found that Muslim boys in four schools in North West England sometimes drew upon African American 'gangsta' culture, which valued talking tough and having a macho identity. However, they were also affected by ideas on masculinity which emphasised the importance of the breadwinner role within families. Therefore, even though they sometimes felt that they were victimised and even subject to racism by some teachers, they were generally still keen to achieve academic success.

All groups have substantial numbers of conformists who attract little attention. However, it is clearly the case that the actual or perceived membership of subcultures in school has an impact on pupils' experience of schooling and their achievement, in a variety of ways. But the situation can be highly complex and it is difficult to generalise. There is considerable evidence, however, that teachers do respond to groups of students differently, whether they project a particular identity or not. Teachers bring with them certain expectations about particular groups and they may ascribe characteristics erroneously, which in turn can have particular consequences.

LABELLING AND THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

As we saw earlier in Chapter 1.2, teachers' expectations can have the effect of creating a **self-fulfilling prophecy**, whereby whatever they anticipate (or predict) comes true because it is what they expect. This happens in one of two ways:

- Pupils accept the label teachers give them as being true and internalise it as part of their self-concept, seeing themselves as, for example, having low ability.
- They react against the **labelling** process and thus conform to negative assumptions, by exhibiting poor behaviour and/or underachievement.

The self-fulfilling prophecy was a very influential concept throughout the 1970s and 80s, and led to considerable educational reform. Educationalists began to acknowledge that placing pupils in different classes or schools on the basis of ability could damage the prospects of the less able considerably. Since the 1990s, these concerns have been given a much lower priority as the quest for higher grades and league table positions has become more important (see Chapter 6).

TEACHER–PUPIL RELATIONSHIPS

As the section on pupil subcultures showed, teachers' perceptions and subsequent interactions with students have a significant impact on pupils' educational experiences.

Teachers prefer to teach pupils whom they perceive to be well behaved, well motivated, well mannered, reserved and compliant. They tend to reward such pupils with praise and with good marks and subsequent placement in higher sets. Such pupils tend to be middle-class and White, not because of overt prejudice but because teachers tend to judge them by their own cultural standards, being generally members of the White middle classes themselves.

We saw in Chapter 1.2 how interactionist sociologists identified teachers' perceptions of the 'ideal pupil' as one who conforms to middle-class standards of behaviour. However, this earlier research (Becker, 1971) noted that teachers did not consciously ascribe low ability to working-class pupils. Rather, as is also confirmed by more recent research, teachers have a 'common-sense understanding of ability' which they think to be fair and without particular bias. Gillborn and Youdell (1999) suggest that teachers

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systematically discriminate against working-class pupils by failing to recognise their intelligence because they do not exhibit it in the right way. Instead, they use their blinkered judgement to allocate working-class pupils to lower sets and foundation-tier examinations. Such pupils may respond with resentment, perceiving their treatment to be unfair. This may cause hostility, discipline problems and reduced motivation, impacting negatively on achievement and their relationship with their teachers.

We also saw in Chapter 1.3 how differential treatment by teachers of particular ethnic-minority pupils can have negative consequences for the teacher–pupil relationship and for learning. Many, in particular, feel angry at the way they tend to be singled out for punishment when White pupils are often just as guilty. This too may lead to anti-school sentiments and negative subcultural responses that make interaction with teachers even more confrontational. Many Black pupils, particularly boys, get drawn into this downward spiral of disengagement from schooling (Connolly, 1998).

There has been extensive research on whether teachers' expectations affect school performance, particularly in the USA. This research has been reviewed by Nicole Sorhagen (2013).

The review found that inaccurate teacher expectations (where they thought the pupils were more, or less, able than they were) did lead to long-tern effects and a self-fulfilling prophecy for many children. The effects were greater for children from low-income families than those from high-income families, and greater with respect to maths than reading.

However, such labelling does not always have an impact, as various studies suggest that some children become all the more determined to do well in order to prove wrong the teachers who have labelled them negatively.

THE ORGANISATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The way pupils are allocated to teaching groups – on the basis of sometimes unfair judgements made by teachers – shapes what pupils are taught and their ultimate success, both in terms of the qualifications that they achieve and their subsequent progression opportunities. These groupings can in themselves involve labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecies. The main methods of grouping are as follows:

- Mixed ability – where pupils of all abilities are taught together. Teaching tends to be differentiated to allow weaker pupils to engage, while stretching and challenging the more able. Proponents feel that there are both social and educational benefits. This approach allows for a broader social mix, reducing conflict in society and ensures that labelling on the basis of behaviour does not affect attainment. It also recognises the fact that ability is not fixed, as children develop in spurts rather than all at the same rate.
- Streaming – where pupils are grouped by ability for most or all of their lessons. The top stream is the most academic group; the bottom streams the lowest achievers. Supporters believe that this ensures that the most able are not held back and the least able can be given the extra support they need.
- Setting – where pupils are placed in ability groups for particular subjects and so may be in the top set for one subject and a lower set in another. This is the most common form of ability grouping in secondary schools England and Wales, especially as pupils approach GCSE, as it helps teachers to prepare pupils for a particular examination tier.
- Within-class grouping – where the teacher makes ability groups within the class – is more common in primary than in secondary schools. However, research into primary schools has shown that pupils are aware of which ability group or table they have been put with, and this does impact on motivation and self-esteem.



Although within-class grouping is common in primary schools, it has been shown to have an effect on pupils' motivation levels.

Numerous writers have suggested that the influence of league tables has increased the tendency for schools to separate pupils on the basis of ability. Ireson *et al.* (2002) notes that such grouping is not always based on attainment within specific subjects – it has also been based on behaviour and used as a means of socially

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controlling particular groups of pupils. Ireson's research survey indicates that setting tends to be beneficial for the more able pupils in the top groups, while those in bottom sets generally receive little challenge or stimulation, and so can easily become demoralised, disruptive and disaffected.

Evidence from the Evaluation of the DfE African Caribbean Achievement Project (Aiming High) (Tikly *et al.*, 2006, p.217) does appear to indicate that African-Caribbean pupils are underrepresented in higher-ability sets, higher test and examination tiers, and in gifted and talented cohorts.

Although there has been a lot of research on the academic, social and personal outcomes of grouping pupils by ability, there has been little from the pupils' perspective. Research by Hallam *et al.* (2004) illustrates the impact of ability grouping as pupils perceive it. Six pupils, of high, moderate or low ability, mixed in gender, in each Key Stage 2 class were interviewed in each of six primary schools adopting different combinations of grouping practices, including streaming, setting, within-class ability and mixed-ability grouping.

At primary level, the authors found the following:

- In reading, most pupils wished to be in the top group because it gave them status and a feeling of superiority. However, most pupils (excluding the top groups) preferred whole-class or individual work because they didn't like to feel left out.
- Social adjustment, social attitudes and attitudes to peers of different ability were 'healthier' among children in non-streamed classes.
- The more streams there were, the more negative were the attitudes of those in the lower streams.
- Pupils of below-average ability who were taught by teachers who believed in streaming could become friendless or neglected by others.

According to the authors, what research there is on ability grouping in secondary schools suggests the following:

- Streaming may play a major role in polarising pro- and anti-school attitudes among pupils (with higher-level students being pro and lower ones anti).
- Setting may produce more negative than positive consequences among mathematics students, with a high proportion of students wanting to move sets or change to mixed-ability teaching.
- Ability grouping – when it involves setting – is the preferred form of grouping among secondary pupils, but the greater the level of mixed-ability teaching in the school, the more it is the preferred option among students.

The research on ability grouping does suggest that, overall, it has relatively little impact on school achievement levels, but that those in the top sets do a little better than they otherwise might, while those in the bottom sets do a little worse. The winners tend to be the White middle classes; the losers, working-class and ethnic-minority pupils. Streaming and setting had been in decline throughout the 1970s and 1980s. As Chapter 1.6 shows, however, since results were first published in league tables for secondary schools in 1992 and for primary schools in 1997, many schools have felt obliged to return to various systems of ability grouping. This is because schools now operate in a marketplace where they compete for pupils and resources.

IDENTITY

Identity is concerned with how individuals see themselves and how they are seen by others. This is closely related to membership of social groups. For example, we have identities in terms of our gender (masculine or feminine), ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, social class, religion and so on. Identities partly flow from how others see us, but our own sense of identity may not always coincide with the views of others. Identities can be quite complex and changeable as our view of ourselves interacts with the views of others.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Identity – Kath Woodward (2000) sees identity as based upon the similarities individuals feel they have with other individuals, but also differences. Your identity is often defined in opposition to groups with which you do not identify as well as in terms of a sense of similarity with groups that you do identify with. Because of this, identity is not just a psychological phenomenon, it is also social. Many aspects of identity only have meaning because they involve belonging to particular social groups (for example ethnic groups or supporters of a particular football team). Furthermore, as Richard Jenkins (1996) claims, identity is not purely personal but also depends upon how other people think of us. This inevitably has some influence on how we see ourselves. Therefore the social identity given by others is linked to the personal identity, the way in which we see ourselves.

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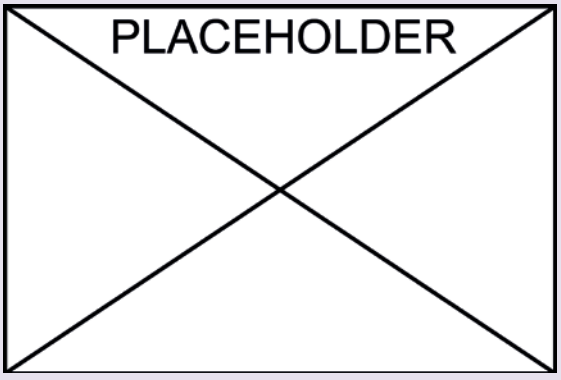
FOCUS ON RESEARCH: BLACK MASCULINITIES AND SCHOOLING



Tony Sewell (1996) conducted research in comprehensive schools in London. The bulk of the study took place in what Sewell refers to as 'Township School'. This school was a boys' comprehensive for children aged 11 to 16. There were 61 students of Asian origin, 63 of African origin, 140 of African-Caribbean origin, 31 mixed race students, 127 White boys and 23 'others'.

Sewell gathered his material through an ethnographic approach using semi-structured interviews and observation. At the time, he was in his early 30s and describes himself as Black. He is careful to point out that he was able to make very good relationships with the boys and was able to mix with them socially. He describes this process as being able to 'chill'.

Sewell found that some Black pupils were disciplined excessively by teachers who were socialised into racist attitudes and who felt threatened by these students' masculinity, sexuality and physical skills. Furthermore, the boys felt that their culture received little or no positive recognition (see Chapter 1.3, Cultural factors, ethnicity and achievement for more details of this study and its findings).

Questions

1. **Explain** why sociologists such as Sewell often change the names of the schools in which they conduct research.
2. **Outline** and **explain** two reasons why it was important for Sewell to make good relationships and 'chill' with the boys.
3. **Assess** to what extent Sewell's own social identity may have helped his relationships with the boys.
4. **To what extent** do you think the boys would have been completely honest with Sewell? Explain your answer.
5. **Analyse** the potential dangers for a researcher in identifying too strongly with the group being studied.

Identity can be linked to differential achievement, for example in terms of whether individual pupils identify themselves as being academic or non-academic. However, it extends to much more than this and is linked to many other issues in education, such as the friendship groupings that children form and how education influences ideas of masculinity and femininity. Some researchers on education have moved away from looking at narrower issues of, for example, pupil-teacher interaction and labelling, and have instead studied how different identities are formed in a school setting.

An example is a study conducted by Robert Young (2012) of 'Neds'. The word 'Ned' is short for Non-Educated Delinquent and is used in Glasgow and other parts of Scotland to refer to a young 'thug' or 'layabout' and has a similar meaning to the word 'Chav' in Britain.

Young says that explanations for the existence of 'Chavs' and 'Neds' tend to fall into two types.

Structural accounts emphasise the importance of social structures, such as class structures, for explaining the existence of these groups. From this point of view, social changes such as the decline in unskilled and semi-skilled work are largely responsible for the contemporary male working-class subcultures that reject the values of school and wider society.

Agency-based theories emphasise the active choices made by individuals as they form social groups and develop their own subcultures and identities. From this point of view identities are more creative and individual.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Structure/agency – There is a long debate in sociology about whether social life can be explained in terms of structure or agency, or a combination of the two. Structures involve relatively large-scale features of society, which are hard for individuals to change and

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which constrain peoples' choices and options. For example, feminists believe that patriarchal structures shape the lives of women, and Marxists believe that class structures limit opportunities for the working class. Agency refers to the (apparent) ability of individuals to act how they choose, change their behaviour and sometimes change society. Interactionist sociologists tend to emphasise agency. Many sociologists now accept that structure and agency are both important. People make choices, but those are limited by their circumstances (for example how much money they have), and these circumstances are shaped by structures.

Young conducted a survey of 22 Scottish schools to examine which of these approaches was more plausible. Pupils were asked about a range of youth styles such as whether they read books, thought schools were a waste of time, liked hip hop music, skipped school, hung around on streets or drank Buckfast. They were also asked about family life, the class of their parents or guardians and where they lived. Young found that those with 'Ned' characteristics were more likely to be boys and to come from deprived areas. However, this was not always the case: a significant number were girls and were from more affluent backgrounds. Some pupils seemed to be choosing 'Ned' identity even though they did not come from the typical background because being a 'Ned' was thought by some respondents to give you 'respect' from your peer group and was considered, at least to some extent, to be 'cool'. Therefore Young concluded that while structural factors were important, some pupils actively chose a Ned identity. This affected the peer groups they associated with and their relationships inside and outside education.



Young found that some pupils seemed to choose the 'Ned' identity as a way to gain respect from their peer group.

An emphasis upon identity is also found in the work of Mac an Ghaill (See Male subcultures and Female subcultures) and in the work of Connolly which is discussed below as well as in Chapter 1.3.

FOCUS ON SKILLS: CONNOLLY – RACISM, GENDER IDENTITIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN



Connolly's study (1998) of young children in a multi-ethnic inner-city primary school emphasises the diverse influences on the way that gender and ethnic identities are formed by factors inside and outside school. The research was based on the study of three classes of 5–6 year olds in a multi-ethnic inner-city primary school. It used observation, interviews with parents, staff and governors, and group interviews with the children. Connolly looked at how factors both inside and outside schools helped to shape the identities of girls and boys from different ethnic groups.

Black boys

Teachers were more willing to criticise the behaviour of black boys than that of other groups. They felt that some of the black males in the school were in danger of growing up to be violent criminals, and they saw them as a threat to school discipline. However, they also took positive steps to encourage them to participate in school activities such as football.

The boys also brought their own values and attitudes to school, for example those relating to masculinity. These contributed to their sense of identity and helped build a sense of loyalty to their peer groups.

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Black girls

Black girls were also perceived by teachers as potentially disruptive but likely to be good at sports, music and dancing. Boys in the school tended to regard girls as being quite passive, including black girls. However, the girls themselves were not always passive in accepting these characterisations of them. For example, on one occasion a group of black girls 'captured' a white boy they found annoying and paraded their captive around the school.

South Asian boys

In the local community and in the school, non-Asians tended to see the Asian community as having a more distinctive lifestyle than the black community, but as being more law abiding and conformist than other ethnic minorities. Some teachers contrasted what they saw as the close and supportive Asian families with the high rates of single parenthood amongst other groups in the area. Partly for these reasons South Asian boys tended to be seen as immature rather than seriously deviant by teachers.

There was a tendency for other boys who wanted to assert their masculinity to pick on South Asian boys. The South Asian boys had difficulty in gaining status as males. This made it difficult for them to feel confident at school.

South Asian girls

South Asian girls were seen to be even more obedient and hard-working than South Asian boys by other pupils, although Connolly's observations showed that their attitude to work was not significantly different from that of other female groups. Some were diligent and hard-working while others were less conscientious and some were quite disruptive and uncooperative.

South Asian girls had a relatively low status among their peers. They were seen as feminine in terms of their passivity and obedience, but they were not seen as potential girlfriends by black and white boys because their culture was considered too alien. However, they enjoyed high status for their academic ability.

Questions

1. **Explain,** using an example, how factors inside and outside school influenced identity formation in this study.
2. Using one example from the study, **explain** how gender and ethnicity interact in forming identities.
3. **Analyse** how the identities of these groups may have affected their academic progress. (Consider the ways in which you see yourself and are seen by others and how this influences educational achievement).
4. **Evaluate** the usefulness of focusing on identities rather than relying on a more straightforward labelling theory of schooling.

A focus on identity can be helpful as an alternative to the narrower processes of labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy and the formation of subcultures. It can help:

- to link factors inside and outside schooling
- to move beyond the assumption that children are neatly divided into specific subcultures
- to show how different social divisions (e.g. class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity) interact within schools
- to link together pupil interaction with family, peer groups and teachers in helping to understand how different individuals and groups negotiate life in school.

However, the greater complexity of this approach might make it more difficult to identify and acknowledge some of the direct ways that discrimination and labelling limit the achievement of some groups in the education system.

Do you agree that gender and ethnicity are two of the most significant factors shaping the identity of school pupils? How far do these identities in turn shape attitudes to school work?

CONCLUSION

The research discussed in this chapter demonstrates that factors inside schools can have a significant impact upon the way that pupils perceive their own schooling and their own ability, and ultimately upon their achievement. Pupils form their identities in interaction with other pupils, with teachers and in the context of school organisation. This inevitably shapes their experience of schooling and the levels of achievement that they attain. As the previous three chapters in this topic have demonstrated, this can have an effect upon the relationship between social class and attainment, gender and attainment and ethnicity and attainment.

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However, there is a danger in some of this research that the influence of factors within schools can be exaggerated. Factors external to the education system, particularly material inequality and cultural differences, also have a significant impact upon achievement. Interactionist approaches that concentrate upon interaction within schools may pay too little attention to wider power structures (linked to social class, patriarchy and ethnic inequality) that help to explain the patterns of achievement found within the education system. While schools may be able to go some way towards reducing the effects of these wider social inequalities, they cannot eradicate them entirely and social class in particular continues to have a strong influence upon achievement regardless of how schools themselves may be organised or may help teachers interact with their pupils.

Some versions of labelling theory may also be too deterministic (that is, they assume that achievement will be determined by the labels given to pupils). As we have seen, not all pupils accept and live up to the labels attached to them. Some challenge these labels and some of those who have been negatively stereotyped may try particularly hard to succeed.

The most credible attempts to explain patterns of behaviour and patterns of achievement within the education system acknowledge that factors inside and outside the system interact with one another to shape the outcomes. Research founded on the concept of identity can help to illustrate and understand the complex processes involved in explaining the way pupils experience and react to education.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What two things do Cotton, Winter and Bailey claim are the main values taught by the hidden curriculum in British schools?
2. How does Henry Giroux characterise schools? Briefly explain the implications of this for the hidden curriculum.
3. Briefly explain the meaning of the word 'subculture'.
4. Outline and briefly explain three adaptations to schooling suggested by Peter Woods.
5. Explain how class might be linked to any two school subcultures.
6. Explain two ways in which subculture formation might be shaped by factors outside school as well as inside schools.
7. Give a short summary of any one piece of research which suggests that streaming or setting might affect achievement.
8. Explain what is meant by identity.
9. Using the research of Connolly, explain how identity formation was linked to gender and ethnicity in any two groups of pupils.
10. Evaluate why processes within school should not be examined in isolation from factors outside school when studying education.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Visit the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk and find the latest full inspection report for your school or college. Identify and summarise its findings on relationships within the school/college, particularly between pupils and between pupils and teachers. Evaluate its findings and write your own response to the Ofsted report explaining how far your own experience of the school fits with their assessment. Briefly suggest reasons why your 'insider' view might be different to their 'outsider' view. Compare your findings with those of classmates.

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1.6 SOCIAL POLICY AND EDUCATION

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand educational policies, including policies of selection, marketisation and privatisation, and policies to achieve greater equality of opportunity or outcome (AO1).
- Understand the impact of globalisation on education policy (AO1).
- Apply this understanding to contemporary Britain (AO2).
- Analyse the impact of these policies to the structure, role, impact and experience of and access to education (AO3).
- Evaluate competing views on the advantages and disadvantages of these policies (AO3).



INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

An enormous amount of public money (and a lot of private money too) is spent on education and children now have to spend at least thirteen years in education or training. Since state education started in the 19th century educational policies have been frequently revised, but have all this money and all these changes actually improved British education? This chapter examines changes in policies and evaluates how effective they have been. In particular, it looks at the increasing influence of neoliberal ideas that support greater competition in and privatisation of education and considers whether this shift has led to more equal or less equal opportunities and whether it has improved the quality of the education provided in Britain. Is Britain's education system up to the job of educating its citizens for life in a globalised twenty-first century world?

1944 TO 1965

The 1944 Education Act marked the beginning of the modern state education system in the UK with the introduction of compulsory state education up to the age of 14. This opened up secondary education to all social classes, rather than restricting it to those who could afford to pay for it privately. Up until the end of the Second World War, those with the most access to education and the opportunities it provided were the sons and daughters of the middle and upper classes. The policy was part of the establishment of the Welfare State, following a

report by William Beveridge in 1944. Beveridge argued that the state needed to tackle five Giant Evils and one of these was 'ignorance'. Ignorance resulted from the lack of secondary education for many, leading to a lack of opportunity for these children. As part of the new educational policies, The tripartite system was established, which provided the cornerstone of state secondary education for several decades.

The tripartite system

As part of the aim to create a 'land fit for heroes' after the Second World War, Butler's Education Act of 1944 introduced secondary education for all pupils. The act may have had no effect on the public schools, but it did aim to abolish class-based inequalities within state education. A tripartite system was to be introduced, providing three types of secondary school, each suited to one of three supposed types of ability:

- grammar schools for academically able pupils
- technical schools
- secondary modern schools for everyone else.

Underpinning this system, at least in theory, was the idea of equality of opportunity. All children would take an IQ test at the age of 11 in order to discover which kind of school most suited their abilities. The government accepted the view that intelligence was innate (in-born) and could be scientifically measured. While only those who passed the 11+ test went to grammar or technical schools, each of the three types of school was supposed to have similar standards of provision and be considered as equal ('parity of esteem'), as each school would provide the most suitable education for the development of each type of learner, irrespective of their background.

Problems of the tripartite system

1. For most pupils only two types of school were available – grammar and secondary moderns. Few technical schools were built because of the cost of equipping them.
2. Grammar schools, attended by around 20 per cent of pupils, were seen as the most prestigious type of state secondary school. They specialised in academic subjects that led to university and a well-paid job. The 75 per cent of pupils who attended secondary moderns were seen as 'failures'. Some were not allowed to take exams, so were denied opportunities to progress. There was no 'parity of esteem', but instead a huge wastage of talent.
3. Some pupils ended up in secondary modern schools irrespective of their ability. Girls generally achieved better marks than boys in the 11+, yet the pass mark for girls was set higher as there were fewer girls' grammar school places available (many grammar schools being single-sex). In some parts of the country as few as 12% of pupils could get Grammar School places, while in South Wales there were places for 40% (Ball, 2008).
4. The social class divide remained intact. Most grammar school places were taken by middle-class pupils. The mainly working-class pupils in secondary moderns were effectively labelled 'failures' and so lacked the means and motivation to succeed. Consequently a number of reports (for example, the 1959 Crowther Report) suggested that a lot of working class talent was being wasted and the system was producing too few skilled workers.

The system still had its supporters. It served many middle-class families very well, so that even today it survives in some areas of the country. In 2011, there were still 161 grammar schools educating 158,000 pupils or 5% of secondary school children (Chitty, 2014). The Conservative Party has toyed with the idea of opening new Grammar Schools at various times, but the number has not expanded. Grammar Schools did provide some opportunities for social mobility for those working-class pupils who made it to grammar schools. Some recent research has gone so far as to suggest the system gave working-class pupils more chances than they have today, although this claim is controversial.



Grammar schools followed a traditional academic curriculum including Latin.

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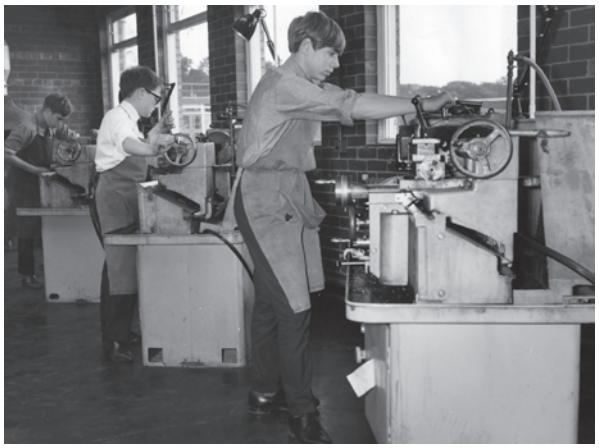

Secondary modern schools offered a more vocational curriculum for those who had failed the 11+.

Discuss whether there is any justification for keeping grammar schools today.

1965 TO 1979

Comprehensive schools

The tripartite system had not succeeded in creating equality of opportunity. Social Democratic perspectives (see Chapter 1.1) were very critical of what they saw as the highly divisive tripartite system. Sociologists such as A.H. Halsey (Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980, and Halsey, Floud and Anderson, 1961), conducted research suggesting that social mobility had stalled. From this perspective, it was thought that what might bring meritocratic ideals deal closer was to abolish selection at 11 and educate all children in the same school, regardless of their class, ethnicity, gender or ability. These views influenced the Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s, and in 1965 a Labour government instructed all local authorities to submit plans for comprehensive reorganisation. Facilities were upgraded so that the new comprehensive schools could provide a broad curriculum and more sporting and recreational activities. Comprehensive schools were introduced gradually depending on the individual local authority, and as we have seen, in some authorities selective grammar schools were retained.

Problems of comprehensive schools

1 In practice, comprehensive schools did not live up to all their ideals. Admissions were largely based on geographical catchment areas, often inhabited mainly by one social class, so social mixing at school was limited. Also, the tripartite system continued in some areas and independent education remained an option for the most wealthy.

2 Most comprehensive schools organised their classes by ability, for example by streaming. Because of the links between social class and achievement, this meant that higher streams were dominated by middle-class pupils and lower streams by working-class. Sociological studies by writers such as Hargreaves (1967) and Ball (1981) showed that the class divide that existed between grammar and secondary modern schools was reappearing within comprehensives (see Chapter 1.2, Factors inside the education system, for more detail on the effects of streaming and setting).

During the 1970s, comprehensive schools came under increasing attack. From the social democratic perspective, class differences were not budging, so equality of opportunity still remained some distance away.

But the loudest criticisms came from what has become known as the Neoliberal/New Right (see Chapter 1.1, Neoliberal/New Right perspectives on education). They criticised comprehensive schools for alleged lack of discipline, poor results, large classes and failure to prepare pupils for the world of work. It was claimed that mixed-ability schools dragged down the performance of the most able and that lack of parental choice was a problem. If all children went to the same type of school, then there was no opportunity to choose a type of school that would be particularly suited to the individual child. In line with New Right/neoliberal thinking, state schools had a **monopoly** and therefore had no incentive to compete with one another and improve. Teachers effectively had a job for life, with a guaranteed stream of pupils fed to them by the local authority, and therefore they had no incentive to improve. It did not matter that there seemed little evidence to support some of these criticisms (for example, exam results were improving during this period), momentum grew for change. In 1979, the Conservative Party won the general election, and Margaret Thatcher became prime minister.

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UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Monopoly – This is when there is only one provider of specific goods or of a service that purchasers or consumers can choose. In theory, in these circumstances, the provider can put up charges and/or lower the quality of the product or service, and if consumers need it, they will have no choice but to use it anyway. Parents don't pay fees for state education but if there is only one state school their children can go to then they have to accept this (unless they move or can afford to pay for private education). This means that the school can provide an inferior education without risking losing jobs or being closed down through shortage of pupils.

1979 TO 1997

Education and the New Right

New Right policies became increasingly influential during the Conservative governments of 1979 to 1997. New Right policies favour the use of market forces as a method of distributing resources. In a free market, consumers have choice and choose among a range of products. Producers compete to produce the best product at the best price. In this way, schools compete to attract pupils and educational standards improve.

Their first actions, though, involved trying to tackle the growing problem of youth unemployment.

Vocational education and training

The Conservatives felt that youth unemployment was the result of schools' failure to teach appropriate work skills. This 'skills crisis' was to blame for Britain's economic decline. A number of schemes were developed that aimed to reduce youth unemployment, increase young people's skill levels and make them more aware of the world of work. For example, Apprenticeships and Training Schemes combine 'on the job' training alongside part-time study with the aim of achieving National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and possibly other accreditations and skills. These became known as the '**new vocationalism**'.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

New vocationalism – This term was applied to new attitudes and policies regarding vocational education introduced by Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997. It was 'new' because it was not based upon apprenticeship type systems designed to give high-quality on-the-job training for skilled manual jobs (for example, electricians or plumbers) but to deal with high unemployment among low-skilled school-leavers. The thinking behind it was that some school-leavers were unemployable because they lacked the most basic skills and even a desire to work.

Criticisms of the new vocationalism

Vocational education and training have had many critics, particularly from neo-Marxist writers. Finn (1987) argued that there was a hidden political agenda to vocational training in this period:

- It provides cheap labour for employers and keeps the pay rates of young workers low.
- It undermines the bargaining power of the unions (because only permanent workers can be members).
- It reduces politically embarrassing unemployment statistics.
- It may also be intended to reduce crime by removing young people from the streets.

Critics such as Phil Cohen (1984) argued that the real purpose of vocational training is to create 'good' attitudes and work discipline rather than actual job skills. In this way, young people come to accept a likely future of low-paid and unskilled work. Those young unemployed who view training schemes as cheap labour, and refuse to join them, are defined as irresponsible and idle, and are 'punished' by the withdrawal of benefits.



It was argued that vocational training led to a low-paid workforce.

According to Cohen, It was not proven that young people lack job skills. Many had already gained a lot of work experience from part-time jobs. Youth unemployment

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was the result not of a shortage of skills, but of a shortage of jobs. Critics also pointed out that the sorts of skills taught to Youth Training Scheme (YTS) trainees were only appropriate for jobs in the secondary labour market, that is, jobs that are unskilled, insecure, and pay low wages. Such jobs offer little chance of promotion, employer investment is very low, and labour turnover is consequently very high.

In practice, it is lower-ability students who tend to be channelled into vocational courses. The new vocationalism thus introduced another form of selection, with working-class and ethnic-minority students being disproportionately represented on these courses.

Training schemes were also criticised for failing to break down traditional patterns of sex stereotyping found in employment and education; nor were they encouraging girls to move into non-traditional areas. In fact, according to Buswell (1987), they were structured so as to reproduce gender inequality. She pointed out that the types of schemes into which girls were channelled, such as retail work, led to occupations where they were low paid when young, and would work part-time when older, reflecting women's position in the labour market. This problem has persisted up to the present day. For example, according to figures from the DfE, 6 per cent of Apprenticeships in hairdressing in 2006 were taken up by males compared with 94 per cent by females. Retail fares slightly better with a 38/62 split, whereas in construction crafts, the male-to-female ratio is 99 to 1.

THE 1988 EDUCATION REFORM ACT AND OTHER REFORMS

The influence of the New Right is clearly seen in this Act, the most influential in education since 1944. It introduced a new emphasis on competition and choice in education. It had six key elements.

Marketisation

Competition between schools was to be encouraged. The greater the competition, the greater the incentive for schools to improve. Successful schools could expand; unsuccessful schools would have to improve or face the possibility of funding cuts and, ultimately, closure. Parents would, in theory, be given a real choice between schools. These aims would be achieved through **open enrolment** (which allowed successful schools to expand to the limit of their physical capacity) and **formula funding** so that the money given to schools was based on the number of pupils they attracted.

Testing

Parents would need a way of judging the quality of schools. It was decided that all pupils would sit national tests at the ages of 7, 11 and 14. These, along with GCSE and A-level results, would be used to draw up league tables so that parents could make an informed choice of school.

The National Curriculum

In order to develop meaningful standards for comparison and to ensure that all pupils received teaching in appropriate knowledge and skills, a National Curriculum was introduced. This prescribed knowledge in a range of subjects that every school would have to teach. In addition, the influence of local authorities on education was reduced. Schools could decide how to manage their own budgets and even opt out of local authority control altogether, enabling them to make their own decisions about which pupils to admit, even introducing selection if they wished.

League tables

A significant reform introduced after the Act was the introduction of league tables. These were designed to provide better information to parents (along with regular school inspection reports) so that they could choose the best schools for their children. It also put pressure on schools to improve their performance to attract pupils. A crucial measure of success was the achievement of 5 or more GCSEs at C or above for secondary school pupils.

Diversifying school choice

In order to give parents more choice of school (and to reduce local authority control of schooling) a greater variety of schools began to be introduced. Existing schools could opt out of local authority control and become grant maintained (these schools were funded directly by central government). City technology colleges were introduced in some inner-city areas to try to improve educational standards and offer choice. These institutions concentrated on maths, science and technology and were partly funded by the private sector (which helped start the process of **privatising** educational services).

Private education

The government was supportive of private education and thought that it would be useful if some talented children who would otherwise go to state school were given the opportunity to attend private school. To this end they introduced an Assisted Places scheme in 1980 (it ran until

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1997) which helped pay the fees for these children out of state funds. This gave a boost to the private school sector (for more discussion see Chapter 1.2, Material deprivation).



UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Privatisation – This involves moving functions previously provided by government into the private sector to be run by businesses for profit. The most obvious privatisations in the UK have involved the selling of utilities (such as gas, electricity, the post office and water) to shareholders, and the privatisation of companies such as British Airways (BA). Many of these privatisations took place under Margaret Thatcher's government in the 1980s. However, schools increasingly buy services (for example counselling, catering and Educational Psychology services) from private providers. Private companies are increasingly involved in running schools (see Multinational companies and education).

Criticisms of New Right policies on schooling

1. Concerns were expressed over the damaging, stressful effects of testing children so often – also, that testing could distort what was taught so that schools would 'teach to the test'.
2. The whole system could not operate like a true market because parents were not paying for education and could not select schools on price. Instead it was an artificial market (or **quasi market**). League tables in particular gave incentives to manipulate the rules to get the best possible results. For example, schools could try not to take on weak pupils, not to enter some pupils for exams, to concentrate on the 5 GCSEs at C measure to the exclusion of other aims, and to expel difficult pupils to improve the image of the school. Competition might also force schools to spend large amounts of money on marketing rather than on the education of pupils.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Quasi-markets – These are artificial or pretend markets used to try to make state-run services run like businesses even when their 'products' are not bought and sold. For example, schools are funded as if parents were consumers, so that each school gets a sum of money when parents agree to send a child there. One problem is that the price paid for the service is fixed – however much children and parents like or dislike the school the school gets the same amount of money. Schools can't compete on price and it is difficult to change schools because the alternatives might be full or too far away.

3. Some critics felt that the Act was motivated by the Conservative government's desire to reduce the power of Labour-controlled local authorities rather than to improve education.
4. Very few extra places were available in popular schools, so in practice many parents had very little or no choice of school.
5. It has been argued that class differences were reinforced by the Act. Middle-class parents were able to use their cultural capital (see Chapter 1.2) to make sure that their children got into the best schools. Research by Stephen Ball et al. (1994) showed that middle-class parents were better able to impress at interview, write convincing letters and manipulate the system, for example by making multiple applications to schools. They could also use their economic capital (money) to pay transport costs if better schools were further away, and even move nearer their favoured school if necessary. With their emphasis on standards rather than equality of opportunity, there were few attempts to address such class or other social divisions which contributed to inequality of opportunity.

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6. Competition and increased emphasis on school diversity reintroduced a divisive education system which the comprehensive system had tried to eradicate. A certain amount of selection was introduced in some schools and oversubscribed schools were sometimes able to engage in **cream skimming** (selecting the best pupils), leaving other schools with fewer well-motivated and academically able pupils. As a result some schools went into a spiral of decline while other became ever more successful.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Cream skimming – This refers to selecting the best while leaving the rest behind. Just as you might want the cream from a pint of milk, leaving the skimmed milk behind, you might try to choose the most able pupils for your school, leaving other schools with pupils less likely to do well. This loads the dice in league tables in favour of the schools that can do this, and against those that can't.

1997 TO 2015

In the period between 1997 and 2015 there were two different governments both of which were influenced by New Right/neoliberal thinking and policies but without embracing them fully.

1. Between 1997 and 2010 there was a Labour government. However, the leaders (Tony Blair and, from 2007, Gordon Brown) described the government as 'New Labour' suggesting that they were no longer going to follow completely social democratic policies alone but would combine them with elements of New Right or neoliberal policies as well.
2. From 2010 to 2015 a Coalition government was in power. It was led by the Conservatives (David Cameron was Prime Minister) but had the support of the Liberal Democrats (Nick Clegg was the Deputy Prime Minister). It largely followed Conservative neoliberal policies but with some concessions to the Liberal Democrats, so some policies were influenced by more social democratic thinking as well.



David Cameron and Nick Clegg announcing their Coalition agreement In Downing Street in 2010

NEW LABOUR: NEW RIGHT/NEOLIBERAL INFLUENCES

New Right/neoliberal thinking continued to influence the New Labour government elected in 1997. Many of the policies begun by the Conservatives were continued and developed. One example was the expansion of specialist schools.

Specialist schools

Schools have been encouraged to specialise in particular subjects. The aim has been to increase choice, encourage competition, raise standards and allow schools to excel at their specialisms. No longer do school pupils have to attend what Tony Blair's Press Secretary (Alastair Campbell) referred to as the 'bog standard' local comprehensive school.

State secondary schools could apply to become a specialist school in one of ten specialisms – art, business and enterprise, engineering, humanities, languages, mathematics and computing, music, science, sports and technology. They had to raise £50,000 from sponsors, which was matched by government funding. Once a specialist school, they could select up to 10 per cent of their pupils from those who showed an aptitude for their specialism.

In 1997, New Labour inherited 196 specialist schools from the Conservatives. Ten years later, there were 2500 – about 80 per cent of all secondary schools in England.

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Increased choice

Along with specialist schools, academies were introduced in 2001 and community schools and foundation schools were allowed greater control over their own affairs than other types. Chitty (2014) comments that by the time New Labour left power in 2010, there was a very complex secondary education system with nearly twenty different types of school.

Work-related learning and vocational education

Another strand of policy inherited from the Conservatives was a focus on work-related learning and training. A number of initiatives illustrate New Labour's continued commitment to the aim of improving the skills of the workforce in order for Britain to remain competitive in the global marketplace. One way of trying to ensure that Britain had a suitably skilled workforce was to enact legislation that raised the age at which children were allowed to leave education or training to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015. This brought with it various initiatives to allow schools and colleges more options in providing vocational education and training (see Table 1.6.1).



Labour's education secretary David Blunkett

New Deal for Young People (NDYP)	In 1998, Labour introduced the DNYP with the aim of reducing youth unemployment. The programme was designed for 18 to 24 year olds who had been unemployed and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for six months. They were provided with Personal Advisors to guide them through the various options involving education, training, voluntary work or a subsidised job. They lost benefits If they refused all options.
Apprenticeships	Labour also expanded the Apprenticeship scheme and young apprenticeships at Level 1 for 14 to 16 year olds in schools and colleges were also introduced.
Vocational GCSEs/AVCEs	These replaced GNVQs in an attempt to create parity of esteem with academic courses.
Increased Flexibility programme	Pupils at Key stage 4 (14 to 16) were allowed to attend college for one or two days per week to follow vocational qualifications not available at school.
Diplomas (formerly Specialist diplomas)	A combination of vocational and academic learning studied alongside other complementary qualifications and embedded skills. The Diplomas were discontinued in 2010.

Table 1.6.1 *Labour's work-based education and training initiatives*

PRIVATISATION OF EDUCATION

Perhaps the most obvious New Right influence on New Labour education policies was a move towards privatising aspects of education. Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997 introduced greater private sector involvement into some aspects of education. For example, city technology colleges allowed businesses to set up and run some state schools, and academies also allowed state involvement. OFTSED school inspections were also contracted out to private companies (Ball, 2013). But **marketisation** gathered pace under New Labour.

A programme of new buildings for schools and colleges was partly financed by the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Private companies did the building, but in return were given contracts to repay the investment and provide maintenance for 25 to 35 years. The colleges, schools or local education authorities (LEAs) had to pay the ongoing costs. The academies programme, which was started in March 2000, allowed greater business involvement in running schools than ever before. Furthermore, some companies were given contracts to run aspects of the education system. The private company Capita was given a contact in 2004 to manage the strategy to improve

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literacy and numeracy and an American firm (Educational Testing Service, ETS) was given a contract to manage Standard Achievement Tests (SATs) testing for pupils aged 11 and 14. From the perspective of New Labour, these marketisation measures offered the promise of greater efficiency because companies could compete to be given contracts. The PFI promised extra investment in education beyond what the government felt it could afford to invest at the time.

NEW LABOUR: SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC INFLUENCES

By no means all New Labour's educational policies have reflected New Right thinking, however. The influence of social democratic viewpoints has also been apparent. Here are some examples of policies that aimed to reduce social exclusion and promote equality of opportunity.

Academies

In 2001, it was proposed that academies should be established in partnership with employers and other sponsors to replace failing schools and provide high-quality education for all in deprived areas. The best teachers would be encouraged to work in these schools and there would be a high level of resourcing. Sponsors would be able to have a say in how the school was run and what curriculum was on offer. In the sense that academies represent private companies becoming involved in state education, and therefore a degree of privatisation, so there is also a neoliberal influence visible in this policy.

Sure Start

This term describes a wide range of programmes targeted at giving young children a better start in life. Free nursery education was made available, and Sure Start children's centres would bring together a range of educational and other support services in disadvantaged communities. The intention was to tackle cultural deprivation and counteract the material deprivation which placed working-class children at a disadvantage before they even started school.

Education Action Zones

These were established in some of the lowest-performing inner-city areas and involved cooperation between a variety of groups (including schools, the LEA, businesses and parents) to try to raise standards.

Private schools

The government was hostile to private education and ended the Assisted Places scheme shortly after coming to power. Although there was some discussion about removing charitable status from private schools, this never happened but private schools were encouraged to provide expertise to help state schools to improve.

Nursery education

In another attempt to ensure a good start in education for all social groups, government support for pre-school nursery education was increased.

Educational Maintenance Allowances

Students between the ages of 16 and 19 in full-time education and training could apply for Educational Maintenance Allowances of up to £30 a week. These were available to families on lower incomes and aimed to encourage young people to stay in education.

In terms of vocational education, there was a greater emphasis upon breaking down the divide between the academic and vocational so that vocational qualifications (traditionally more likely to be undertaken by working-class pupils) gained in status and became a route to university. This was particularly evident in the introduction of Diploma qualifications towards the end of New Labour's time in power.

Higher education

A stated aim of the government was to increase the numbers of students in higher education. The target was that 50 per cent of young people would be entering higher education by 2010. To meet this target, university facilities were expanded, funded by the replacement of student grants with loans, to be repaid once the graduate's salary had reached a certain level. Also, students had to meet some of the cost of their tuition fees. Financial support for less affluent applicants was available.



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So, was the government's plan to encourage a wider range of young people to apply to university working? In one sense it was: the percentage of young people from manual working-class backgrounds going to university increased from 11 per cent in 1991/2 to 19 per cent in 2001/2 (*Social Trends 34*). However, over the same period, the percentage from middle-class backgrounds increased from 35 to 50 per cent. Statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency show that by 2004/5 only 28.7 per cent of young entrants to university came from lower socio-economic groups. If anything, overall, class inequalities in higher education were increasing (McNight, Glennerster and Lupton, 2005).

What is more, a range of research evidence shows that university students from a working-class background are more likely to:

- study at local institutions with limited course options
- live at home while studying
- study part time
- have family or work commitments
- incur high levels of student debt
- drop out from their initial choice of course.

Evaluation of New Labour policies

The influence of New Right/neoliberal ideas on government thinking has meant that competition and choice was seen as the key way to improve educational standards. However, as Sally Tomlinson has pointed out, in practice, the middle classes have gained most from these policies (Tomlinson, 2005). They were best placed to ensure that their children attended the best performing schools and continued to do well. In addition, the focus on exams and league tables meant that much education had become, as she put it, 'examination techniques, rote learning and revision'.

New Labour has also been criticised for introducing greater privatisation of education. Critics have argued that this removes democratic accountability. Unlike LEAs, private companies are accountable to their shareholders rather than the local electorate. Companies, unlike LEAs and central government, have to make a profit, so private provision can in fact work out more expensive. Chitty (2014) suggests that the long-term costs of PFI have created financial difficulties for parts of the education system. He also questions the efficiency of some private providers. For example, ETS failed to deliver accurate marking or to deliver marks on time. The ETS contract was cancelled as a result.

In terms of vocational education, there were positive policies to expand apprenticeships, and the NDYP had some success in getting the unemployed into work (although still fewer than 50% and in many cases the jobs did not last). Attempts to overcome the divide between vocational and academic qualifications were not successful: small numbers took up the new Diplomas, which were in any case scrapped by the Coalition government after 2010. It continues to be difficult to get places in more prestigious universities with vocational qualifications.

Social democratic influences on educational policy have resulted in the directing of resources towards deprived groups and areas. This may have resulted in some improvements although these have been in some areas more than others (McNight *et al.*, 2005). Data discussed by Ball (2013) suggests that under New Labour there were overall increases in the proportion of students getting five or more GCSEs at grade C, and improvements in achievement for some ethnic minorities. However, the gender gap remained large, with boys still lagging well behind girls, and class differences were not significantly reduced. Ball suggests that whatever the direct effects of educational policy, continuing high levels of child poverty (though New Labour did reduce this somewhat) and of inequality meant that education could not compensate for the effects of low income on the educational performance of those from lower classes. So while New Labour had some success in raising achievement and tackling some forms of inequality of opportunity, their record was inconsistent.

The changes in higher education under New Labour reflect the overall pattern of their policies on education: opportunities increased for everybody, but class inequalities remain stubbornly present. Back in 1971, Basil Bernstein wrote that 'education cannot compensate for society' – in other words, education will tend to reflect social inequalities rather than eliminate them. That seems to be the story of education under New Labour.

Why do you think New Labour policies had only limited success in reducing inequality in education?

COALITION POLICIES

After the 2010 election, no single party had an overall majority and a coalition government was formed between the Conservatives (the dominant partners) and the Liberal

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Democrats. The education minister was a Conservative (Michael Gove) and many of the policies reflected New Right/neoliberal thinking.

New Right/neoliberal inclined Coalition policies

Academies and free schools

Michael Gove rapidly extended the academy programme, while changing the form it took. Under the New Labour government it had been aimed at failing inner city schools to help tackle deprivation and inequality of opportunity, but from 2010 academy status was opened up to all schools that had achieved an 'Outstanding' grade in Ofsted inspections. In addition, religious groups, parents' groups and teachers (among others) could set up new schools with approval. These were known as free schools. Academies were independent of local authority control, while free schools had a good deal of control over their ethos and curriculum. By August 2014, there were 331 free schools open or approved (Woolcock, 2014). Free schools were given scope to have distinctive content for some of their curriculum. The early schools included a school in West London opened by the journalist Toby Young with a grammar-school style of education; Jewish, Hindu, Muslim Sikh and Christian faith schools; and in Lancashire, the Maharishi School (based upon the teachings of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, where pupils learnt meditation and yoga alongside a more conventional curriculum) (Chitty, 2014). Both academies and free schools could have their own admissions policies (if approved by the Minister) and manage appeals procedures.

The growth of academies created opportunities for more privatisation of schooling, with some academies operating in chains run by businesses.

FOCUS ON SKILLS: FREE SCHOOLS ARE FAILING TO SERVE NEEDIEST



David Cameron opens a free school in Birmingham in 2013.

Free schools are opening in deprived areas, but their intake is better off than the average local child

Free schools are opening in disadvantaged areas but taking in fewer poor children than other local schools, according to a report by education experts.

It found that, while the state schools set up by parent, teacher or community groups were likely to open in places of deprivation, their intake was better off than the average local child.

Francis Green, professor of labour economics and skills development, said: 'It appears that, so far, the places in reception at free primary schools are being filled by children who are somewhat less disadvantaged and more advanced in their development than the average.

'This outcome may be disappointing for the government, which had hopes that its free schools policy would be a vehicle for delivering social justice.'

Today's report by the Institute of Education, based in London, also highlighted that children started at primary free schools ahead of their peers academically. This meant it would be important to judge the 'value added' by the schools as the children progress, academics said, rather than just looking at overall results.

It added, 'The government's anticipation that free schools would emerge in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is, on average, vindicated.

'Looking at the neighbourhoods of free schools, one can see that there is a slightly higher proportion of children entitled to free school meals when compared to the rest of England – 22 per cent compared with 17 per cent at secondary level, and 18 per cent compared with 16 per cent at primary.

'However critics' concerns that the schools might become socially selective are also supported. Within the neighbourhood, fewer pupils actually attending the free schools were eligible for free school meals – only 17.5 per cent for secondary schools and 13.5 per cent in primary schools.

'The net effect is that the free secondary school pupils themselves are close to average for all secondary schools, and the free primary school pupils very slightly better off.'

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The authors of the study, funded by the Economic Social Research Council, claim it is the first academic analysis of the social composition of all free schools over the first three years of the programme.

It used the national pupil database to examine data for 88 primary and 63 secondary free schools that had opened by September 2013.

The New Schools Network, the organisation that advises free school groups on their applications, criticised local authorities for failing to use their powers to set up new schools, despite the current shortage of primary school places.

Analysis by NSN has shown that a minority of local authorities has set up free schools or academies, compared with other groups.

Tristram Hunt, Labour's shadow education secretary, said: 'David Cameron's ideological free school programme is damaging our education system. By spending taxpayers' money setting up free schools in areas with surplus places – when we have huge pressures on primary school places – and presiding over a widening of the attainment gap between the poorest children and the rest, we are seeing school standards suffer under this Tory-led government.'

Martin Freedman, director of economic strategy at the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), said: 'Free schools have brought in selection by the back door and become the elite institutions we feared they would be, dominated by children with the pushiest parents.'

Nicola Woolcock, The Times, 7 August 2014

Questions

1. **Interpret** the meaning of the statistical evidence included here and summarise it.
2. **Interpret** what Martin Freedman might mean by 'selection by the back door'.
3. **Analyse** the differences between the arguments put forward by supporters and critics of free schools. (Look out for the key areas in which they do not agree in terms of the effects of free schools, particularly in terms of which pupils they are serving.)
4. **Evaluate** the view that on balance free schools might make little difference to opportunity, inequality and standards in education. (Consider, for example, whether they have become 'elite' institutions, whether they are really helping more disadvantaged children and whether they are improving results or just selecting relatively more 'able' pupils.)

Reforms to the curriculum

Gove also favoured a more traditional and rigorous curriculum. To this end he 'toughened up' A levels by removing opportunities to retake exams, making students sit all exams at the end of A level courses, revising the curriculum and separating AS from full A Levels so that students had to take a more difficult exam for their first year work if they wanted to gain a full A level.

In 2013 a new National Curriculum was introduced with a strong emphasis on traditional learning styles and content. For example, 5-year-olds had to study fractions, and in English there was more emphasis on grammar and spelling.

League tables were reformed for secondary schools. The English Baccalaureate (or EBac) was introduced. It stipulated that certain subjects, regarded as academic, had to be passed to gain the qualification. League tables were based on the percentage of pupils who attained CGSE A* to C in English, Maths, two sciences, a modern language (French or German, for example) and History or Geography.

Reforms to vocational education

Educational Maintenance Allowances (which gave money to students from poorer backgrounds to stay on in education) were scrapped. This was part of the austerity measures designed to shrink the size of the state and cut government spending.

Rather than trying to increase the status of vocational qualifications, the Coalition downgraded the value of many of them. For example, they decided that just 125 vocational qualifications could be counted as GCSE equivalent compared to the 3,175 that had previously been accepted. The emphasis in vocational education was on stopping schools and colleges using them as easy, less academically rigorous options to boost league table performance. The Diploma system, introduced towards the end of New Labour's time in government, was abruptly dropped.

Tuition fees in higher education

In higher education the most striking policy was the large rise in tuition fees from a maximum of £3,225 in England to a maximum of £9,000. (Scottish students studying in

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Students protest against EMA cuts.

Scotland, however, paid no fees). Students were able to take out loans to meet these fees (and could also borrow some money to meet living costs) but the loans had to be repaid (plus interest) once they started earning over £21,000 per year. Higher education became much more like any other market-based service, with individual students using their fees to fund the service rather than much of the cost being met out of government funding. In addition, rules on recruitment were relaxed so that by 2014 Universities were able to expand and take on more students if there was sufficient demand from well-qualified applicants.

Michael Gove: a controversial minister

Many of these policies were described by Michael Gove as an attack on an 'educational establishment' he characterised as 'the blob'. From this point of view, this establishment had failed to enforce rigorous standards and a rigorous curriculum making it too easy to get qualifications, many of which he saw as being of dubious value. To Gove, an apparent increase in the qualifications of the workforce hid declining standards and he was determined to reverse this. However, he was a controversial minister and many of his policies were strongly opposed by teachers unions and others. In 2014 he was moved from his education post and replaced by a less controversial minister, Nicky Morgan, although she largely continued his policies.

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FOCUS ON RESEARCH: THE EFFECTS OF UNDERGRADUATE FEE RISES

The following summary is taken from 2014 report of the Independent Commission on Fees which was set up in the aftermath of fee rises. The results are based upon statistics produced by the university admissions system UCAS and upon a survey using online questionnaires. The methodology of the survey is described as follows:

'Ipsos MORI surveyed a total of 1,728 adults aged 16–75 in England from 13th – 17th June 2014 via its Online Omnibus Survey. The survey data were weighted by age, gender, region, social grade, working status and main shopper to the known profile of the English population aged 16–75. Of the respondents, 889 were male and 839 were female, 1,009 were working and 719 were not working.'

The Independent Commission of Fees (2014) 'Analysis of trends in higher education applications, admissions, and enrolments'



Student protests against university fee rises

Executive Summary of the report

Application rates for 18 year olds in England have continued to recover from their depressed level in 2012,

with rates in 2014 1.9 percentage points above their 2010 levels.

The proportion of the 18-year-old population taking up places at university has also recovered in all countries of the UK.

Mature student numbers remain substantially depressed in terms of the take-up of university places. 18% fewer people aged 25+ took up places in 2013 than did in 2010.

Over 100,000 fewer students over the age of 25 started part-time higher education courses in 2012/13 than did in 2009/10 – a reduction of 43%.

This was part of a more general decline in part-time higher education, with 41% fewer part-time enrolments overall in 2012/13 than in 2009/10.

The gender gap in applications and acceptances has continued to increase. In 2013, 21% more female than male 18 year olds entered university. This gap is largest among disadvantaged applicants, meaning disadvantaged boys are particularly under-represented.

The gap in application and entry rates between advantaged and disadvantaged students has narrowed slightly, but remains unacceptably large – particularly for the most selective universities:

In 2010, English school-leavers from the least disadvantaged backgrounds were 3.2 times more likely to enter higher education than were those from the most disadvantaged. In 2013 this ratio was 2.8. In 2010, the number of English school-leavers from the least disadvantaged backgrounds entering the 30 most selective universities in the UK (the Sutton Trust 30) was 7.3 times higher than the number entering from the most disadvantaged areas. In 2013 this ratio had narrowed to 6.8. However, for the 13 most prestigious UK universities (the Sutton Trust 13) the ratio was 9.8 and remained at 9.5 in 2013.

Questions

1. **Outline and briefly explain** the type of sampling method that was used in this research.
2. **Analyse** the value of using the statistical data on background, university admissions and applications to examine the effects of fee rises on student applications. (Do you think, for example, these are the key variables likely to be linked to changes in applications? Can you think of others that might be relevant?)
3. **Evaluate** the sampling methods used in the opinion poll. (Consider how representative or 'typical' the sample was likely to be of all relevant students.)
4. **Evaluate** the view that fees rises have had little effect on class differences in higher education, but have increased age differences in opportunity. (You will need to look carefully at the statistics here.)

Social democratic inclined policies

Not all the policies adopted by the Coalition government reflected the New Right/neoliberal agenda of privatisation, a return to valuing a traditional curriculum above vocational education, cuts in spending, and greater choice and competition schooling. The Liberal Democratic partners in the government did get significant concessions in two main areas.

Compensating for disadvantage in schools

One important new policy was the pupil premium. This policy involved providing extra resources for schools related to the number of pupils and students who are on low income and therefore eligible for free school meals (FSM). The intention of this policy was to compensate children from low-income families for their educational disadvantage by providing extra educational resources. By 2013/14 the pupil premium amounted to a not insubstantial £900 per pupil (Education Journal, 2013). It was designed also to fit into a wider social mobility strategy in which it was hoped that there would be better opportunities for disadvantaged children to end up with middle-class jobs. Head teachers were given considerable choice as to how this money was spent so long as it was designed to boost the performance of children from relatively poor families.

Compensating for disadvantage in higher education

Arguably, the Liberal Democrats also had some influence in higher education despite the introduction of much higher fees. Children from families on low and medium incomes could get maintenance grants (which would not be repayable) to help cover the costs of living while at university and larger loans were also available for those from low-income families. Students were not required to

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repay anything until after they started earning £21,000 and all debts were wiped out after 30 years. Students who did not end up in well-paid jobs would therefore be unlikely to repay the full amount of the loan for tuition and maintenance loans. Some commentators, including the Liberal Democrat Minister who introduced the scheme (Vincent Cable) argued that it was like a graduate tax in many respects, ensuring that those who benefited from higher education with high wages paid for the privilege. Furthermore, the government also continued the policy started under the previous Labour government to widen access to higher education, requiring all universities charging fees above £6000 to implement schemes to encourage those from under-represented groups to go to university.

Evaluation of Coalition policies

The limited lifespan of the 2010 to 2015 Coalition government gave relatively little time for its policies to take effect and the effects to become clear. However, there was no shortage of critics of many of these policies.

- The National Union of Teachers (cited in Haralambos and Holborn, 2013) argued that free schools and academies tended to reduce the budget available for other schools, undermined democratic accountability (since they are not run by LEAs) and widen inequalities. They pointed to the Finnish educational system, which is widely seen as having some of the best schools in the world even though there is no competition in their system.
- Parental choice under the Coalition was limited in many areas and it remained difficult for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to get their children into some of the most popular and oversubscribed schools.
- The removal of Education Maintenance Allowances was criticised by Alan Milburn (the Coalition adviser on social mobility) for lowering staying-on rates in further education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Wintour, 2012, cited in Haralambos and Holborn, 2013). This outcome was unsurprising: eligible students lost financial support to help them pay for the costs of education and compensate for the lack of earnings.
- The effects of the pupil premium were also questioned. A report in 2014 (Ratcliffe, 2014) found that although 53 per cent of teachers in a survey said their school was using the money to raise the achievement of disadvantaged children, the remainder said it was being used for other purposes, such as helping to plug the funding gap left by reductions in government funding or to help all pupils regardless of their family income.

One way of measuring the effects of government policies on class inequalities is to look at the **attainment gap** between children who get free school meals (FSM) and those who do not (non-FSM).

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Attainment gap – This is a relatively simple measure of class inequalities in educational attainment at school. It is measured by looking at the difference in the percentage of non-FSM and FSM children achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or above. The bigger the gap, the greater the inequality. It does not measure class or income directly, but relies on the imperfect measure of entitlement to FSM. As not all those eligible claim FSM, and some poor families earn just too much to be eligible, it is a far from perfect measure.

The attainment gap stood at 26.7 per cent in 2012/13, down slightly from 27.5 per cent in 2010/11, suggesting the policy may have had some impact, though it may have been counteracted by other policies introducing more competition (Watt, 2014).

Why do you think the attainment gap changed little under the Coalition government? Can you suggest policies which might have reduced the gap more?

GLOBALISATION AND EDUCATION POLICY

The idea of globalisation has become increasingly influential in sociology and in many other fields. Globalisation refers to the idea that the world is becoming more interdependent and countries (or nation-states) less self-contained.

One of the most influential sociological definitions of globalisation was put forward by Roland Robertson in 1992 'Globalisation as a concept refers to both the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (Robertson, 1992, p.8). What Robertson is drawing attention to here is the idea that the world, at least from the viewpoint of humans, is becoming a smaller place. Individuals have become much more aware of areas beyond the local area in which they live, the borders between countries have become

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less significant as boundaries, and movements of people, ideas, products and cultures around the globe have become more common.



Impact on British society

There are many different theories of globalisation, but all agree that it is no longer adequate to analyse social life from the viewpoint of individual societies. For example, British society is not isolated and self-contained, but is heavily influenced by outside factors:

- politically, the EU shapes government policies and laws
- many residents are immigrants
- there are many foreign tourists in Britain
- produce, fashions, films, books, ideas and so on from other parts of the world influence people in Britain
- many companies operating in Britain are foreign-owned.

Therefore to understand what happens in Britain, you have to look beyond its shores and examine global influences as well. Similarly, what happens in Britain increasingly Influences other parts of the world too.

Globalisation and schools

The impact of globalisation is not as immediately obvious in education as in some other areas of social life. On the surface, education remains largely under the control of national governments in the UK and elsewhere, but there are a number of significant ways in which globalisation may have affected British education.

Some of these are identified by Anthony Kelly (2009), reviewing competing theories on the effects of globalisation on education policy.

- National governments, including the British government, feel increasingly obliged to tailor education policy to meet the needs of the economy. In particular, they increasingly feel that education has to produce workers who are able to compete in a global economy by having skills that will be valuable in a global market.
- This in turn, tends to produce less emphasis upon social (rather than economic) objectives. Social objectives would include, for example, a concern to produce a more integrated and cohesive society, to increase equality of opportunity, or to make individuals into good citizens. Similarly, concerns such as passing on important knowledge or appreciating culture may be marginalised in an education system geared to global economic competitiveness.
- There is the possibility that education systems throughout the world will become increasingly alike as all governments try to achieve the same objectives. Anthony Kelly argues that education systems have to vary to meet individual circumstances and cultures, but there is something of a worldwide trend towards privatisation, marketisation and competition in education systems (see The 1988 Education Reform Act and other reforms for a discussion of marketisation).
- Kelly also refers to the adoption of similar school improvement programmes in different parts of the world, often driven by large multinational corporations.
- These trends can lead to the professionalism of teachers being undermined, as managers and consultants are seen as having more expertise in these programmes than individual teachers. Similarly, local democratic accountability (for example through LEAs in the UK) will be seen as less important and less desirable since meeting local needs is secondary to competing globally.

Globalisation in higher education

In addition to the points identified by Kelly, it can also be argued that educational institutions increasingly have to run as businesses if they market their products (education) internationally or globally and aim to thrive and prosper. This may difficult for local state secondary or primary schools, but Stephen Ball (2012) points out that universities have increasingly marketed themselves to a global audience, often setting up overseas branches. Universities are particularly keen to attract overseas students because they pay high fees, while having branches overseas allows universities to expand. For example, Liverpool University has set up a joint venture in China near Shanghai, and Nottingham, Newcastle and Southampton have developed universities in Malaysia. Private schools may also have become increasingly reliant upon overseas pupils, particularly from China and Hong Kong. In this process, students can be viewed

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as commodities to be bought and sold to different educational institutions for profit.

Multinational companies and education

Most of the changes produced by globalisation in education policy are, according to Stephen Ball and others, closely linked to the dominance of neoliberal perspectives that increasingly treat education as a business. Indeed, Stephen Ball points out that there is increasing involvement by private companies in education, and that these companies are often multinational and operate across many different countries.

A British example of a multinational education company is Pearson education, which amongst other things owns Edexcel Exam Board, Pearson Educational Publishers, BTEC, and various consultancy companies that provide student information systems and training programmes. Ball says that Pearson also have a major role in trying to shape national policy, both in the UK and around the world, claiming to offer '"solutions" to the national policy problems of raising standards and achieving educational improvement linked to both individual opportunity and national competitiveness' (Ball, 2012, p.126). Very often their advice encourages governments to promote more privatisation of education, giving Pearson even more opportunities to profit from national education systems. They also have an influence on the curriculum in defining what counts as important and worthwhile knowledge through the ownership of exam boards. Although Pearson is a British-based educational multinational that influences policy both in Britain and abroad, educational multinationals in countries such as the United States similarly have an influence in Britain (see the discussion of privatisation below).

To Ball, national governments have less control over education than in the past, and instead education is run through networks which involve private companies as much as local and national governments.



Pearson Education

All these arguments suggest that one of the main effects of globalisation is to shift policies even further towards neoliberal perspectives, but this might not always be the case. For example, increased migration, which can be seen as part of globalisation, can lead to a more multicultural curriculum and understanding of different cultures in educational institutions, and can also lead to an increased emphasis upon equality of opportunity, fostering the talents of every individual in order to make the country more competitive. National governments can still decide how to respond to globalisation and choose a range of educational policies with different objectives. National politics and competing perspectives on education still matter and can make a difference to the sort of education system that is provided by the state in the UK and elsewhere.

BUILD CONNECTIONS

Globalisation has affected social life in many different ways, which will become evident whatever topics you cover. For example, some British families have extended families living around the globe, some crimes (such as computer fraud) are often carried out by criminals abroad against British people, and conflicts between members of different religions can have an impact on Britain (for example conflict in Syria, Israel/Palestine and Iraq).

CONCLUSION

British education has tended to suffer from frequent changes of direction and contradictory policies. While some policies have aimed to increase equality of opportunity, and may have had some success in helping those from less advantaged backgrounds by increasing opportunities, other policies have had the opposite effect and have tended to cancel out the more favourable ones. Similarly, the general direction of educational policy has often changed when there has been a change of party (or in the case of the Coalition, parties) in power. As chapters 1.2 to 1.4 have shown, there has been some progress in reducing inequalities based on gender and ethnicity, but rather less in reducing those based on social class, even though these have been a central focus for many policy changes. This was reflected in a Sutton Trust Report in 2011 (cited in Chitty, 2014) which showed that just five schools – the four private schools Eton, Westminster, St Paul's Boys and St Paul's Girls, and a state sixth form college in Cambridge – sent more

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pupils to Oxbridge than did 2000 other state schools and colleges in the UK combined.

Over recent decades, there has been a general increase in the number of pupils and students achieving various levels of qualification, suggesting that standards have been improving. However, whether this represents a real increase in the educational level of British pupils and students has been challenged by some, who think it merely reflects the 'dumbing down' of standards. Despite more than 50 years of educational change and innovation since the 1944 Education Act, the British education system nevertheless remains very hierarchical. The experience of those who attend private schools and gain places at Oxford or Cambridge is still rather different from that of pupils in even the most successful state schools in low-income areas. Furthermore, qualifications continue to have limited prestige.

Discuss the view that despite very many changes in the British education system, the outcomes have changed relatively little.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What were the three types of school under the tripartite system? Explain their differences.
2. Give three common criticisms of the tripartite system?
3. Briefly explain why supporters of Social Democratic perspectives saw comprehensives as an improvement on the tripartite system.
4. Identify three policies of the 1979–97 Conservative governments and briefly explain how they fitted New Right/neoliberal thinking.
5. Explain what is meant by privatisation and give an example of the privatisation of education.
6. Explain two changes to vocational education introduced by the New Labour government.
7. Suggest two criticisms and two strengths of the marketisation of British education.
8. Identify and briefly explain two effects of globalisation on the British education system.
9. Explain what free schools are, and give one argument against them and one argument for them.
10. Identify and briefly explain one way in which Coalition policies may have promoted equality of opportunity and one way in which they may have undermined it.

TAKING IT FURTHER

Carry out an interview with an experienced member of your school or college staff. Ask them to describe the impact that the following changes had upon their educational career and experiences: school/college inspections, league tables, competition between schools/colleges, the introduction of academies and free schools, parental choice, and the rise in tuition fees.

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