Collins

SOCIOLOGY

AQA A-level
Year 1 and AS
Student Book

Steve Chapman
Martin Holborn
Stephen Moore
Dave Aiken

CONTENTS

TO THE STUDENT

The aim of this book is to help make your study of AQA advanced Sociology interesting and successful.

Sociology is an attempt to understand how society works. Fortunately, there are some basic concepts that simplify this ambitious task but some of the sociological theories involved are often abstract and will be unfamiliar at first. Getting to grips with these ideas and applying them to problems can be daunting. There is no need to worry if you do not 'get it' straightaway. Discuss ideas with other students, and of course check with your teacher or tutor. Most important of all, keep asking questions.

There are a number of features in the book to help you learn:

- Each topic starts with an outline of the AQA specification points covered within the topic. This will tell you in which chapter you will find coverage of each point.

- Each chapter starts with a Learning Objectives box to show you what you will learn and the skills you will use throughout the chapter.

- Important words and phrases are given in bold when used for the first time, with their meaning explained in an *Understand the Concept* box. If you are still uncertain, ask your teacher or tutor because it is important that you understand these words.

- Throughout each chapter, you will find evaluation questions. They are written in bold and separated from the main text. You should use them as an opportunity to stop and evaluate what you have learned. These questions often make interesting discussion points.

- Throughout the book, you will find *Focus on Research* features that provide real-life sociological studies and questions to answer about each.

- You will also find *Focus on Skills* features which give you the opportunity to test your ability to pinpoint important information and use key words to inform your response.

- At the end of each chapter, you will find the *Check your Understanding* feature. This is a list of questions which enables you to consolidate your learning and check your knowledge of relevant sociological theories and issues.

- After each *Check your Understanding* feature, there is a *Take It Further* challenge. Here, you will have the chance to put your new-found skills and knowledge into practice.

- Each topic ends with a section called *Apply your Learning*. This is a chance for you to put your knowledge to the test with a mix of short information recall questions as well as longer, more involved ones.

Good luck and enjoy your studies. We hope this book will encourage you to study sociology further after you have completed your course.

1 EDUCATION

AQA Specification

Candidates should examine:

Candidates should examine	Chapters
The role and functions of the education system, including its relationship to the economy and to class structure.	Chapter 1 (pages 3–14) covers the key theoretical approaches. Chapter 2 (pages 15–30) deals specifically with class. Chapter 6 (pages 68–85) looks at how these issues play out in relation to contemporary policies.
Differential educational achievement of social groups by social class, ethnicity and gender in contemporary society.	Chapters 2 (pages 15–30), 3 (pages 31–40) and 4 (pages 41–55) deal in detail with these issues.
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 (pages 56–67) covers these aspects in detail.
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 (pages 15–30), 3 (pages 31–40) and 4 (pages 41–55) consider the effects of policies on access to education. Chapter 6 (pages 68–85) deals specifically with policy issues, but there are important links with the theories discussed in Chapter 1 (pages 3–14).

1.1 THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SOCIETY

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 in Britain (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 wellbeing 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 in this topic on the Marxist approach). By the time they finish compulsory education, most pupils will have spent well over 15,000 hours in lessons.

COMPULSORY EDUCATION FOR ALL

It may seem normal today that all children are entitled to lengthy and free state education, but 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 a key civilising role. This was seen as important, as voting rights were extended to the majority of men in 1884, and to all men over the age of 21 in 1918 (as well as 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 (DfE) amounted to over £56 billion or about 8% of government spending (Rogers, 2012).

Do you agree that making education compulsory up to the age of 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 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 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

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 the people 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 are awarded 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.

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) 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 Chapter 2).

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 to 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 its 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 Chapters 3 and 4). 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 in Chapter 2 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 1.1.1).

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

1. It reproduces the inequalities and social relations of production in 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 Chapter 2 for a discussion of class inequalities in achievement).

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Legitimation is the process of justifying or gaining support for an idea, policy, and institution or 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).

The Marxist Louis 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

SUPERSTRUCTURE
Maintains and legitimates the base

mass media   religion   family   politics   education

Everything NOT to do with production in society

Means of production   Relations of production

All the things you need to produce: machines, factories, land, raw materials, etc. (all owned by bourgeoisie)

Bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat

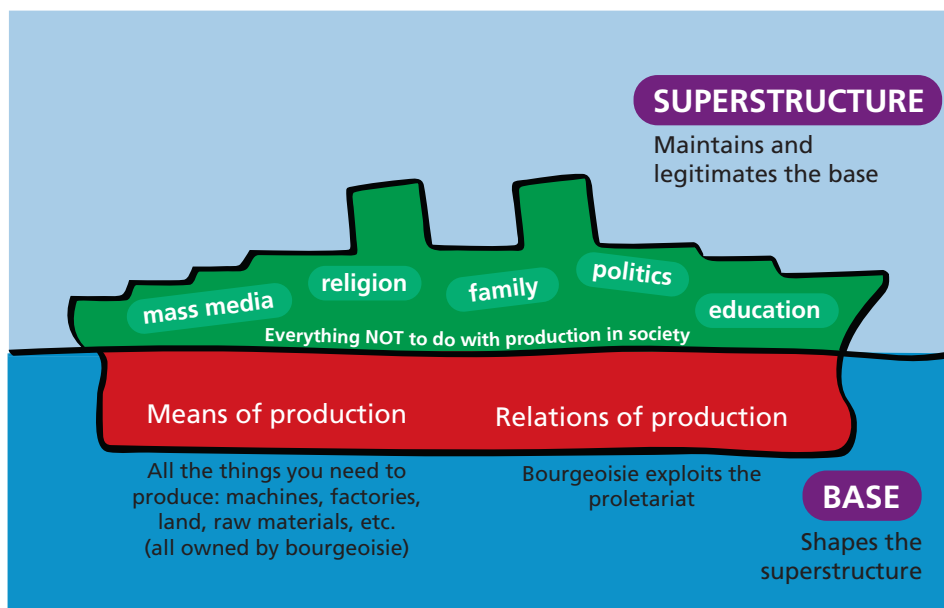**BASE**
Shapes the superstructure

Figure 1.1.1 *Marxist view of the superstructure of society*

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** achieves the same results by exerting its influence subconsciously.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

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.

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) argues that the working classes are effectively duped into accepting that their failure and limited social mobility are 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 in more detail in Chapter 2). Bourdieu sees this as a form of 'symbolic violence' against the working 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.

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 theory 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 believe 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 approach

Marxism in general, and Bowles and Gintis in particular, have been criticised in 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 (1997), who believes 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 'Neo-Marxist perspectives' in this chapter). 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 to 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 striving 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 boys studied formed a group that took up an anti-school stance, opposing 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 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 very similar to the counter-school culture. They both involved lack of respect for authority and 'having 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 moved on to 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 BTEC 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 for more 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

FOCUS ON RESEARCH: THE BRITISH COHORT STUDY AND THE MILLENNIUM COHORT STUDY

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) began, 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 participants 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 people who are better off financially 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 ages 16 and 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 who obtained 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 the parents. On the other hand, parenting style made little difference to test scores.

Based on Blanden *et al.* (2005); Sullivan *et al.* (2013)

Questions

1. Explain how the British Cohort Study and the Millennium Cohort Study are longitudinal pieces of research.

2. These studies both used large samples. Identify one advantage and one disadvantage of having a large sample.

3. 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. 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. What do these studies suggest about the functionalist view that education is meritocratic and allocates roles efficiently in modern societies?

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. They argue 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 Chapter 6). Social democratic perspectives continue to influence those educationalists, sociologists and politicians who stress that schools must give extra help to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Supporters of social democratic perspectives believe that in addition to 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 however, 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 make more places available for working-class pupils, by introducing comprehensive schools (so middle-class pupils can't gain an advantage by going to selective state schools), and by providing extra educational help for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Social democrats such as Halsey and Floud 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 the introduction of many new policies to achieve this, the gap in attainment between classes remains large (see Chapter 2).

Wolf (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. 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 (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

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 that, 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 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.

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 more as a business. However, their views are strongly opposed by both Marxists and social democrats, who 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 wellbeing 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, neo-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 Topics 3, 4 and 5).

This perspective has been applied to education by Usher, Bryant and 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, Haralambos and 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: COMPETITION, EXAMS AND THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Eton College in Berkshire

Barrowford Primary School in Lancashire

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 that 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. 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 Programme for International

Student Assessment (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 explain 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.

TAKE IT FURTHER

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

1.2 CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

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 remain 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 ways in which teachers treat pupils from different class backgrounds. In this topic, you need to evaluate the strength of these different arguments based upon the available 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 ethnic groups and between females and males are a more recent focus, and these are explored in Chapters 3 and 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 pupils, 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 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 pupils having access to 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.

› 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 Washbrook and 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 them to do homework successfully.

› They were more likely to benefit from private education.

Hirsch discusses research by Sutton *et al.* (2007) in which pupils between the ages of 8 and 13 were interviewed about their experiences of education. One group of pupils 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). The quality of the school, according to Hirsch, only explained about

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

14 per cent of class differences in achievement. Material inequality outside school, however, also impacted on the pupils' experiences and confidence inside the school. Based on material inequality, the pupils 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 the 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 private-school pupils do get reduced fees, and some schools provide free places based upon academic ability rather than ability to pay. However, 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 per annum, 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. 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). However, referring to this research, Kynaston (2014) notes 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 afford them. In effect then, Britain has two school systems, one very largely reserved for the wealthy, educating 7 per cent of pupils, and one for the remaining 93 per cent. 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 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 variation in educational achievement in terms of material differences, one can explain them in terms of cultural differences. Some theories see working-class culture as failing to provide the necessary attributes 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 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 trade 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 Table 1.2.1.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Cultural deprivation means 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*

Leon 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 Goodman and 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 to 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 parents

> 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 or 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 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.

In **elaborated codes** 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 sophisticated reasoning.

In education, elaborated codes are necessary for exam success in many subjects. As many 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

Mortimore (1994) argue that research has not measured parental interest in education adequately. Instead, 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 schools because they feel uncomfortable interacting with middle-class teachers, and schools with more middle-class pupils 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. 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

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 class 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 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, and your knowledge of arts, fashions and cultural trends can all help you to fit in with those in elite positions, in order 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 affect your achievement in the education system. As such, Bourdieu 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, which are 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
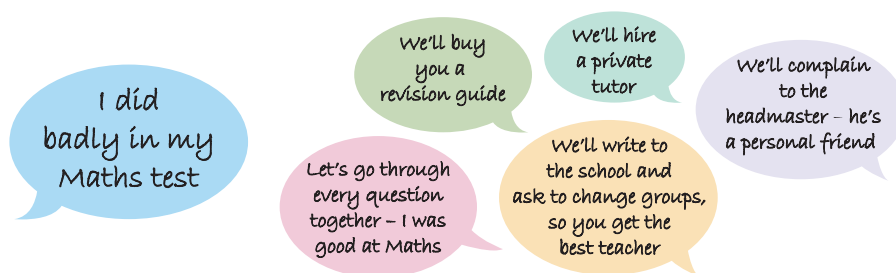

Figure 1.2.1 *A parent's response to a problem at school may depend on the type of capital they possess.*

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.	Parents 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 their role in 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 included attempting to make an impression with the headteacher on open day, and knowing how to mount an appeal if their child was 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 pupils 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 pupils 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 activities 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 children were most successful in exams.

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 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 to fully 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 the 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 the way that working-class pupils are treated by teachers in the education system.

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. Perry and 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 successfully motivate students 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 and head of Ofsted) 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.

While there have been a number of government initiatives to address underachievement in schools, some sociologists have seen general government education policies in recent years as likely to increase educational inequality, not reduce it (see Chapter 6).

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 a deliberate attempt 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

Your **self-concept** is the sort of person you think you are, whether 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).

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 labelling pupils as 'good' or 'bad'. These labels are associated with class, and working-class pupils are more likely to fit the stereotype of the 'bad' pupil. Once a pupil has a label, teachers tend to interpret that pupil's behaviour in terms of the label, and the pupil tends to live up to the label they have been given.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Labelling occurs when 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. These are 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.

This results in a **self-fulfilling-prophecy**, in which the label results in the behaviour predicted by the teacher. This is illustrated in Figure 1.2.2.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

A **self-fulfilling prophecy** occurs 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 ways in which teachers label pupils. Middle-class pupils tend to 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 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 subcultures.
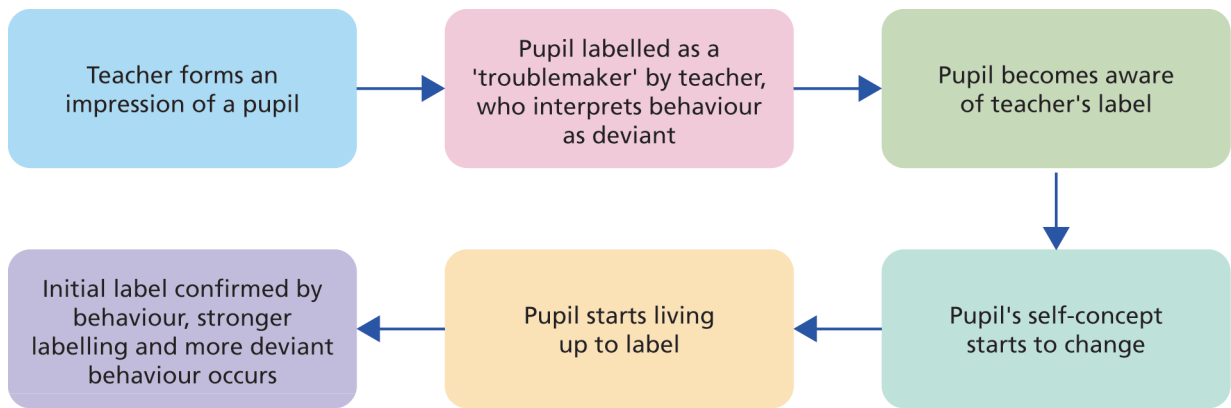
```
┌─────────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────────┐
│  Teacher forms an   │ ──▶ │  Pupil labelled as a │ ──▶ │  Pupil becomes aware │
│  impression of a    │     │  'troublemaker' by   │     │  of teacher's label  │
│  pupil              │     │  teacher, who        │     │                      │
│                     │     │  interprets behaviour│     │                      │
│                     │     │  as deviant          │     │                      │
└─────────────────────┘     └─────────────────────┘     └─────────────────────┘
                                                                    │
                                                                    ▼
┌─────────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────────┐
│  Initial label      │ ◀── │  Pupil starts living │ ◀── │  Pupil's self-concept│
│  confirmed by       │     │  up to label         │     │  starts to change    │
│  behaviour, stronger│     │                      │     │                      │
│  labelling and more │     │                      │     │                      │
│  deviant behaviour  │     │                      │     │                      │
│  occurs             │     │                      │     │                      │
└─────────────────────┘     └─────────────────────┘     └─────────────────────┘
```

Figure 1.2.1 *The self-fulfilling prophecy*

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. This is 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 intelligence quotient (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 social classes were seen as more likely to be successful than pupils from lower social classes, indicating that labelling on the basis of appearance may take place. This suggests that 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 may still have significant effects on pupils' achievement.

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 Ireson and Hallam (2009) measured how likely it was for pupils in different sets to have a positive self-concept (or opinion of themselves). They used questionnaires to study pupils 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 at staying on in education.

A mixture of case studies and survey evidence found that sometimes extra resources (such as 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 argued 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 a greater 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 seen as an attempt to disrupt the class. As a result, they were often ignored or dismissed as irrelevant.

Similarly, research by Gillborn and Youdell (1999) 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 Chapter 5, '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. They 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. According to his research, there was a clear polarisation of pupils, with pupils tending to divide themselves into two camps with opposite views.

Similarly Paul Willis (1977) found in the Midlands secondary school he studied 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.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH: CHAVS, CHARVERS AND TOWNIES

Research by Hollingworth and 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 schools: '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: '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) (Hollingworth 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 as 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 the 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 levels of 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.

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:

› 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 schools with Marxist analysis, is an exception here.)

› 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

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. This suggests that people don't have a free choice and that their behaviour is shaped by outside forces. **Deterministic** theories take this view to the extreme. They don't acknowledge that individuals have any choice about how they behave instead arguing that 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.

› Some interactionists may have simplified models of pupil subcultures and do not identify the full range of responses to schools. 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 schools. 'Opportunists', for example, fluctuated between trying to gain the approval of their teachers and of their peer group.

› Many of the studies have been based on male peer groups and are less useful for understanding female groups (see Chapter 4 for more discussion on gender differences in education).

› Interactionist approaches 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.

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?

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** – where 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 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 6 for more discussion of these and related policies).

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Compensatory education is additional educational provision that is intended to fill gaps or counter 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 more by neoliberal perspectives than by any other set of ideas (see Chapter 1). These policies 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 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 involves trying to get state-run services to be organised more like private companies, in which goods 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, therefore driving up standards.

These policies encourage educational institutions to try to attract the 'best' students who will do the 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 than working-class students. 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 a C grade or higher in five 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 C grade level and maximise their league-table performance. (This process is known as educational triage – pupils 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 C grades 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?

FOCUS ON SKILLS: EDUCATIONAL CHOICE AND MARKETS

Stephen Ball *et al*. (1994) conducted studies on the effects of educational reform introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. 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 areas from which individual schools allow applications from pupils 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. Some also lacked the knowledge of admission policies necessary to manipulate the situation to and 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.** Which 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?)

CONCLUSIONS

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 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 the situation worse.

Social class alone does not shape educational attainment; it interacts with other social divisions, particularly ethnicity (see Chapter 3) and gender (see Chapter 4). 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. Which 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?

1.3 ETHNICITY AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

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.

TRENDS IN ETHNICITY AND ACHIEVEMENT

Some minority ethnic groups continue to have lower levels of achievement than the average, while others have above average 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 overlap) 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.

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 African Caribbean males to do better in education given their relative 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	12.5
Mixed heritage	21.1
Indian	9.7
Pakistani	28.0
Bangladeshi	38.5
Black Caribbean	25.2
Black African	33.6
Any other group	30.8

Table 1.3.1 *Ethnicity and entitlement to Free School Meals (FSM) 2012–2013*
Source: Department for Education (2014)

To analyse the relationship further, one can examine how eligibility for FSM 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 FSM 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 1997 and 1998 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 pupils from Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups did better.
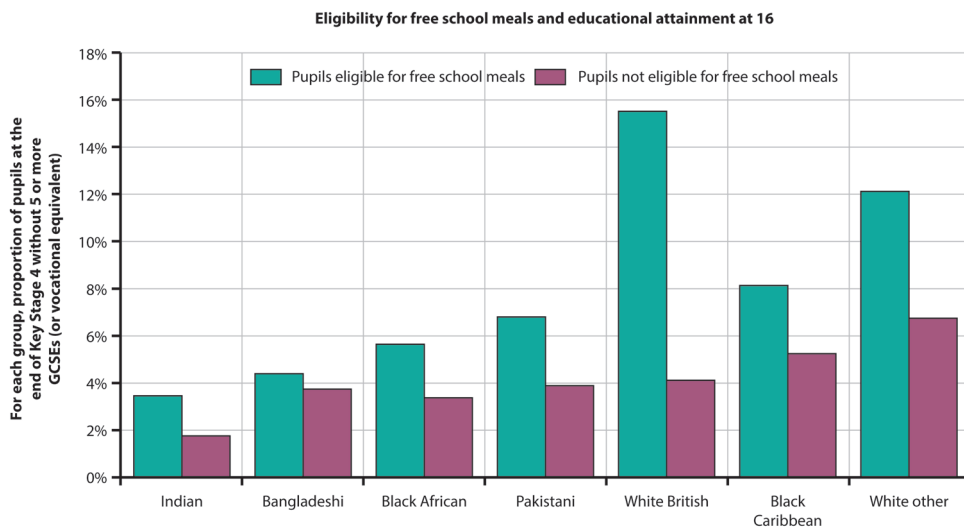
Eligibility for free school meals and educational attainment at 16

Figure 1.3.1 *Achievement at GCSE of students eligible for free school meals, analysed by ethnic group*
Source: National Pupil Database, DfE (2011)

The relative success of pupils from some minority ethnic 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 their 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. Some people believe

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, 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 an impact.

Parental attitudes towards 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 in part, to support that they receive 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 Tehmina 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 considerable effort and resources into helping their children. 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, many being 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

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

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 ways in which interaction with others affects opinions in 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 Topic 4, Chapter 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.

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 achievement may be the key to understanding the relative success of some minority ethnic groups in education. However, some research suggests that all minority ethnic 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 apparently strong encouragement from families, African Caribbean pupils and students have tended to do less well in education than those of Indian origin. According to a DfE report (Wanless Report, 1997) 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 average to be identified as gifted and talented.

Some sociologists have attributed these problems partly to cultural factors outside schools. Tony Sewell (1997) argues that they are related to the relatively high proportion of Black African pupils raised in lone-parent families (see Chapter 5 for details). Basing his ideas on research with 11–16-year-old pupils in a London school,

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 for academic achievement and a rejection of the values of school. Although this only affects a minority of Black African 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, in this chapter for more detail on the 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 White British people, 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 five 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 of education.

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 at the age of 14 than their White British peers. 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 entered. This seems 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 Chapter 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 the 'high achievers', leaving them to their own devices. Many Black pupils are judged, often unfairly, to be 'no hopers'.

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 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; 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 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 the demands of the school or 'patriarchs' 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

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 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 that 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. '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?)

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, Black 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.

Wright (1992) observed that primary school teachers often paid less attention to Asian girls.

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 the girls 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 minority ethnic 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 sociologists 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.

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 generate 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 generated qualitative data about the extent to which schools recognised and valued ethnic diversity and the ways in which 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.

Source: Tikly, L. *et al.* (2006)

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 the extent to which 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 benefits of participating in the programme for those schools that 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, Bernard 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.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

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 and festivals of major ethnic groups. Multiculturalism has been criticised for paying too little attention to inequality and racism. David Cameron criticised multiculturalism in 2011 for discouraging the integration of different ethnic groups into British society and culture, causing social divisions (Pilkington, 2011).

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) leaving 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 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 is the only 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.

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')?

CONCLUSIONS

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. "Factors internal to education largely determine the educational success of ethnic groups." Evaluate this claim.

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?

1.4 GENDER, EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND SUBJECT CHOICE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

› Understand gender and educational achievement (AO1).

› Understand gender and subject choice (AO1).

› Apply this understanding to contemporary Britain (AO2).

› Analyse the reasons for gender differences in achievement and in subject choice (AO3).

› Evaluate competing views on these differences (AO3).

INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

In the 1980s, **feminists** argued that 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, and 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.

The **feminist** 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. However, 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 University in 1943 – just 23 years after women were first granted degrees from Oxford.

The **tripartite system** is 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, where 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 technical schools (although not many of these were actually built). Those who did less well were admitted to a secondary modern school from which they received a vocational certificate. Most of the pupils in secondary moderns left school at the age of 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, 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.

For example, as Table 1.4.1 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 in Maths.

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

Table 1.4.1 *SATS: Level 4 achievement by gender at KS2 in 2011*
Source: DfE (2011)

In 2013, girls did better than boys at GCSE level (in terms of achieving A* to C grades) in every subject – often by a significant margin – other than Maths. For the same year, at A-level, girls were more likely to get A* to C grades 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 A* to E grades, there are only three subjects in which there is more than a 1 per cent gap between boys' and girls' overall 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 per cent) than male (45 per cent) full-time 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 shown in Table 1.4.2.

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

Table 1.4.2 *Class of degree achieved by gender in 2012*
Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (2013)

With regard to the number of students 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 Caribbean children 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 ethnicity are just as important. 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 the reasons for differences in educational 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 children's behaviour 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.

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 are present from birth. Edwards and David (2000) suggest that gender-differentiated primary socialisation gives girls an initial advantage in both primary and secondary schools, but still tends 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.

Consequently, by the age of 7, 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 girls at secondary schools generally work harder and are more motivated than boys.

› Research suggests that, 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 throughout 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.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

A **peer group** is a group of 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 group expectations about how males and females should behave at school and in the classroom. For example, they may be negatively labelled, shunned or bullied.

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 more attention-seeking than girls. They found that this mode of socialisation often translated into primary school boys more likely to break rules and less bothered than girls when 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 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.

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 Kindon 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 the 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 part 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.

Is talking at family mealtimes in decline in most families?

SOCIAL CHANGE AND PATTERNS OF ACHIEVEMENT

A number of factors have been suggested as 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 30 years to post-industrialisation, which has transformed the attitudes of young women and depressed the expectations of males.

The last 30 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. Instead, most teenage girls are committed to education and qualifications, and aspire to careers and economic independence.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Wilkinson uses the word 'genderquake' 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 women at the start of the 21st century have radically different attitudes towards education, work and family to those of their mothers and grandmothers.

Sue 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 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.

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

> increased age of women at birth of their first child

> 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 in the long-term. According to Beck, this creates a more **individualised** society in which both men and women 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 choose different lifestyles and tend to have less loyalty to the social groups to which they belong. 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 will think more about the choices they have in deciding how to live. This process is associated with the ideas of sociologists such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH: GIRLS AND THEIR AMBITIONS

Carol Fuller (2009) 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 an area with high levels of deprivation and 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 the age of 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 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, hairdressers, qualified nursery nurses or chefs. Some who had chosen A-levels were thinking more in terms of 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 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 the sample were all 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 their relationships with teachers. Thus factors both inside and outside school, along with structural changes in the labour market, helped to 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 the manufacturing industry and the rise in long-term unemployment make it increasingly unlikely that males will be the 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)

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 by boys as being essentially feminine and therefore 'uncool'. 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 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 to 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. They 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 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 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) report that boys generally feel they receive less support, encouragement and guidance from teachers. They feel that teachers have higher expectations of girls and 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 a barrier in the workplace because, as Myhill points out, 'few company executives, politicians and lawyers would be described as compliant and conformist'.

The evidence also 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 in both 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 same government 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 towards boys, with its 'high-risk, swot it all up for the final throw' approach to assessment. By contrast, the coursework involved in GCSEs 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 GCSEs 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 GCSEs. The return to a greater 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 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, 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-style 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.
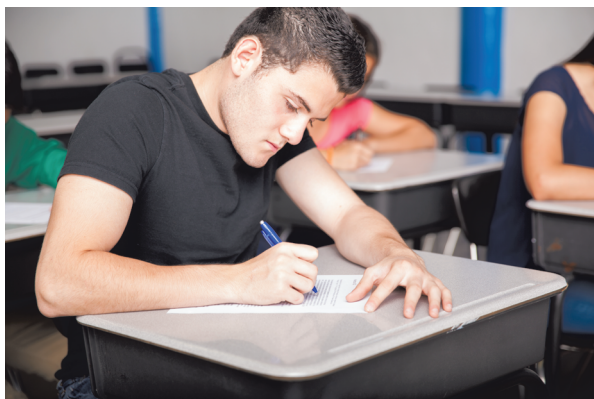
Boys generally achieve higher marks on multiple-choice tests than girls.

The literacy hour (which was introduced nationally in 1998) and the numeracy hour (introduced in 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 Anne 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. Anne 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, as shown in Table 1.4.3, 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	26,988	28,190	26,988	16,270	17,464	9,031	63,305	25,196	7,561
Females	33,195	7,379	24,830	11,403	8,675	6,610	38,576	64,246	23,127

Table 1.4.3 - *2013 A-level – Number of Exam Entries by Gender*

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications (2013)

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 likely to contribute to significant differences in the careers of men and women.

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 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 Maths at university because these cultural pressures are likely to be compensated for by the positive female role models offered by teachers and peers.

The combined influence of factors inside and outside school leads to subjects becoming gendered – they develop an identity as essentially male or female 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 be 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 (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).

FOCUS ON SKILLS: GIRLS AND PHYSICS

Some feminists claim boys dominate science classrooms.

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.'

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

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.)

CONCLUSIONS

Many feminists believe that the current concern about boys and achievement is simply a '**moral panic**' that distracts from female achievement. Weiner *et al.* (1997) 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 refers to public anxiety that is usually generated by mass media reports. It involves an exaggerated and often 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, social 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.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. When were women first admitted to a British university?

2. Are males or 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.