

# Education Revision Notes 2012



Sociology Department

Greenhead College

SCLY 2 Education and Methods in Context

# Education and Methods in Context

## The Education specification

### **1 The role and purpose of education, including vocational education and training, in contemporary society**

- Functionalist and New Right views of the role and purpose of education: transmission of values, training workforce
- Marxist and other conflict views of the role and purpose of education: social control, ideology, hegemony; 'deschoolers' (Illich, Friere): socialisation into conformity by coercion
- Vocational education and training: the relationship between school and work: human capital, training schemes, correspondence theory.

### **2 Differential educational achievement of social groups by social class, gender and ethnicity in contemporary society**

- Statistics on educational achievement by class, gender and ethnicity; trends over time
- Social class and educational achievement: home environment; cultural capital, material deprivation; language (Bernstein); school factors, relationship between achievement by class in education and social mobility
- Gender and educational achievement: feminist accounts of gender-biased schooling; the concern over boys' 'underachievement' and suggested reasons; subject choice; gender identities and schooling
- Ethnicity and educational achievement: patterns; reasons for variations; multicultural schools, the relationship between class, gender and ethnicity
- The effects of changes on differential achievement by social class, gender and ethnicity.

### **3 Relationships and processes within schools, with particular reference to teacher/pupil relationships, pupil subcultures, the hidden curriculum, and the organisation of teaching and learning**

- School processes and the organisation of teaching and learning: school ethos;
- streaming and setting; mixed ability teaching; the curriculum; overt and hidden
- The 'ideal pupil'; labelling; self-fulfilling prophecy
- School subcultures (eg as described by Willis, Mac an Ghail) related to class, gender and ethnicity
- Teachers and the teaching hierarchy; teaching styles
- The curriculum, including student choice.

### **4 The significance of educational policies, including selection, comprehensivisation and marketisation, for an understanding of the structure, role, impact and experience of education**

- Independent schools
- Selection; the tripartite system: reasons for its introduction, forms of selection, entrance exams
- Comprehensivisation: reasons for its introduction, debates as to its success
- Marketisation: the 1988 reforms – competition and choice; new types of schools (CTCs, academies, specialist schools, growth of faith schools)
- Recent policies in relation to the curriculum, testing and exam reforms, league tables, selection, Special Educational Needs (SEN), etc
- Recent policies and trends in pre-school education and higher education.

# 1. The Role of Education

## (1) Functionalism and the New Right

### Functionalist theories of education

**Functionalism** is a consensus theory which sees society as being essentially harmonious. It argues that:

- Society has basic needs, including the need for social order. To survive, society needs social solidarity through everyone sharing the same norms and values. Otherwise, society would fall apart.
- Social institutions such as education perform positive functions for both society and for individuals, by socializing new members of society and by helping create and sustain social solidarity.
- Functionalism is a conservative view of society. Functionalists tend to focus on the positive contribution education makes to society.

**Comment [NM1]:** Application:  
A very effective way to start an answer on the role of education is to outline the main assumptions of the theory under consideration

### Functionalists ask two key questions about education:

1. What are the functions of education for society as a whole
2. What are the functional relationships between education and other parts of the social system?

### Durkheim - education and solidarity

Durkheim identifies two main functions of the education system:

- creating social solidarity
- teaching specialist skills

Social solidarity

- Durkheim saw the major function of education as the transmission of society's norms and values from one generation to the next.
- This is necessary in order to produce **social solidarity**. This is where individual members of society feel that they belong to a community that is much bigger than they are.
- The school is a society in miniature. In school the child learns to interact with other members of the school community and to follow a fixed set of rules. This experience prepares the child for interacting with members of society as an adult and accepting social rules.

**Comment [NM2]:** Analysis:  
Whenever you use an important concept for the first time always explain what it means.

### Teaching specialist skills

- Durkheim argues that individuals must be taught specialist skills so that they can take their place within a highly complex division of labour in which people have to co-operate to produce items.

## Criticisms of Durkheim

- Marxists argue that educational institutions tend to transmit a dominant culture which serves the interest of the ruling class rather than those of society as a whole.
- Studies by Willis and Hargreaves, for example, show that the transmission of norms and values is not always successful. Some students openly reject the values of the school and form anti-school sub-cultures. Willis's lads openly embraced values which were the opposite to those of the school and conformist students.

**Comment [NM3]:** Evaluation:  
It is more effective to make evaluative points throughout your answer, rather than leaving them all to the end.

**Comment [NM4]:** Evaluation:  
It is always useful to evaluate from the point of view of an opposing theory or view.

## Parsons - education and universalistic values

Parsons argues that school performs two major functions for society:

1. Through the process of socialization, education acts as a bridge between the family and wider society.

- In the family, children are judged according to particularistic standards that apply only to them. Their status within the family is also ascribed.
- In wider society, the individual is judged against standards which apply equally to all members of society. For example, laws apply to all equally. Also, status is achieved through merit rather than ascribed.
- Education helps to ease these transitions. The exam system judges all pupils on merit, and school rules such as wearing uniform are applied to all pupils equally.

2. Education helps to socialise young people into the basic values of society.

- Schools transmit two major values:
  - The value of achievement – everyone achieves their own status through their own effort
  - The value of equality of opportunity for every student to achieve their full potential.

## Criticisms of Parsons

- Dennis Wrong argues that functionalists such as Parsons have an 'over-socialised view' of people as mere puppets of society. Functionalists wrongly imply that pupils passively accept all that they are taught and never reject the school's values.
- He assumes that Western education systems are meritocratic, i.e. they reward students primarily on the basis of objective criteria such as achievement, ability and intelligence. The existence of private education and inequalities tied to social class, gender and ethnicity challenges this view.

## Davis and Moore - education and role allocation

- Davis and Moore see education as a means of role allocation. The education system sifts and sorts people according to their abilities.
- The most talented gain high qualifications which lead to functionally important jobs with high rewards.
- This will lead to inequalities in society, but this is quite natural and even desirable in capitalist societies because there is only a limited amount of talent. These talented few need to be persuaded to make a sacrifice (by staying on in education rather than earning a wage) and society therefore offers incentives through the promise of greater rewards, such as higher salaries.

## Criticisms of Davis and Moore

- Intelligence and ability have only a limited influence on educational achievement. Research indicates that achievement is closely tied to issues of social class, gender and ethnicity. For example, Bourdieu argues that middle class students possess more cultural and social capital and therefore are able to gain more qualifications than working class students.
- Similarly, Bowles and Gintis reject the functionalist view that capitalist societies are **meritocratic**. The children of the wealthy and powerful obtain high qualifications and well-rewarded jobs irrespective of their abilities. The education system disguises this with its myth of meritocracy. Those denied success blame themselves rather than the system. Inequality in society is thus **legitimated**: it is made to appear fair.
- Furthermore, the range of class differences in educational achievement suggest that not everyone actually has the same chance in education.

## The New Right Perspective on Education

The New Right is more of a political than sociological perspective. However, the New Right is of interest to sociologists because:

- It is a more recent conservative view than functionalism.
- It has influenced educational policy in Britain and elsewhere.

## Functionalism and the New Right compared

New Right ideas are **similar** to those of functionalists:

- They believe that some people are naturally more talented than others.

**Comment [NM5]:** Application: When dealing with a question on functionalist views of the role of education, bring in the New Right too. Their arguments are in some ways an extension of the functionalists.

- They agree with functionalists that education should be run on meritocratic principles of open competition.
- They believe that education should socialise students into shared values and provide a sense of national identity.

In addition, the New Right believe that older industrial societies such as Britain are in decline, partly as a result of increased global competition.

## The market versus the state

### The effects of state control

- A key feature of New Right thinking (**not found in functionalism**) is that too much state control of education (as well as other areas of social and economic life) has resulted in inefficiency, national economic decline and a lack of personal and business initiative. A culture of welfare dependency has developed, the cost of which has reduced investment in industry.

**Comment [NM6]:** Evaluation:  
One major difference with functionalism is that the New Right doesn't believe that the state can run an efficient education system.

### One size fits all

- New Right arguments are based on the belief that the state cannot meet people's needs. In a state-run education system, education inevitably ends up as 'one size fits all' that does not meet individual and community needs, or the needs of employers for skilled and motivated employees.

### Lower standards

- State-run schools are not accountable to those who use them – students, parents and employers. Schools that get poor results do not change because they are not answerable to their consumers. The result is lower standards and a less qualified workforce.

## The solution: marketisation

- For the New Right, the issue is how to make schools more responsive to their 'consumers'. In their view, the solution is the marketisation of education. Marketisation is the introduction of market forces of consumer choice and competition between suppliers (schools) into areas run by the state (such as education and health).
- The New Right argue that creating an 'education market' forces schools to respond to the demands of students, parents and employers. For example, competition with other schools means that teachers have to be more efficient. A school's survival depends on its ability to raise the achievement levels of its students.

## Chubb and Moe: giving the consumer choice

- Chubb and Moe compared the achievement of 60000 students from low-income families in 1015 state and private high schools in the USA. The data shows that students from low-income families do 5% better in private schools. This suggests that state education is not meritocratic.
- State education had failed to create equal opportunity because it does not have to respond to students' needs. Parents and communities cannot do anything about failing schools while the schools are controlled by the state. Private schools produce higher quality education because they are answerable to paying consumers – the parents.

### The solution

- Chubb and Moe's answer to the supposed inefficiency of state schools is to introduce a market system in state education – that is, give control to consumers (parents and local communities). This should be done by a voucher system in which each family would given a voucher to spend on buying education from a school of their choice.

## Evaluation

- Although school standards – as measured by exam results – seem to have risen, there are other possible reasons for this improvement apart from the introduction of a market.
- Critics argue that low standards in some state schools are the result of inadequate funding rather than state control of education.
- Gerwitz argues that competition between schools benefits the middle class, who can get their children into more desirable schools.
- Marxists argue that education imposes the culture of a ruling class, not a shared culture or 'national identity' as the New Right claim.

**Comment [NM7]:** Evaluation:  
The New Right view rests on their claim that state control is the cause of education's problems. If other factors are the real cause, then the New Right argument falls apart.

# 1. The Role of Education

## (2) Marxist explanations

### What is Marxism ?

Marxism is a conflict view that sees society as being based on class divisions and exploitation. Marxists argue that:

- In capitalist society there are two classes – the ruling class (capitalists, or bourgeoisie) and the subject class (working class, or proletariat)
- The capitalist class own the means of production (land, factories etc) and make their profits by exploiting the labour of the working class.
- This creates class conflict that could threaten the stability of capitalism or even result in a revolution to overthrow it.
- Social institutions (such as the education system) reproduce class inequalities and play an ideological role by persuading exploited workers that inequality is justified and acceptable.
- Marxists argue that the main function of the education system is to reproduce the inequalities of the capitalist economic system.

**Comment [NM8]:** Analysis:

When you present your account of Marxist views of education, begin by briefly explaining the basic assumptions Marxism makes about capitalist society.

### Louis Althusser – the role of ideology

- Althusser sees the education system as part of the ideological state apparatus. He claims that education, along with other ideological state apparatuses such as the family and the mass media, reproduce class-based inequalities by creating the belief that capitalism is somehow 'normal', 'natural' and 'just'.
- The effect of all this is that is the reproduction of the class system in that the sons and daughters of the working class tend to remain working class

**Comment [NM9]:** Analysis:

Explain the difference between *reproducing* inequality (by failing working class students) and *legitimizing* or justifying inequality (convincing them of the fairness of capitalism). Reproduction affects students' life chances, while legitimization affects what they believe and how they respond to capitalism.

### Bourdieu - cultural capital

- Like other Marxists, Bourdieu argues that the main function of education is to reproduce and legitimize ruling class culture and power. Another important function of education is to socialize the working class into a 'culture of failure' so that they take up, without question, routine and dull work.

### Bowles and Gintis - schooling in capitalist America

- Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that there is a close relationship between social relationships in the workplace and in education.
- This correspondence principle operates through the **hidden curriculum** and it shapes the workforce in the following ways:
  - It helps to produce a **subservient** workforce.
  - The hidden curriculum encourages an **acceptance of hierarchy**.

**Comment [NM10]:** Analysis:

Explain *why* an obedient workforce is so important to capitalism – what would happen if they were not obedient ?

- Pupils learn to be motivated by **external rewards** rather than the love of education itself.
- School subjects are **fragmented** in the same way that routine work is.
- The end-product of this is the production of a hard-working, docile, obedient workforce which is too divided to challenge the authority of management.

## Evaluation of Bowles and Gintis

- Giroux argues that working class students do not accept the legitimacy of school. Many resist the influence of the hidden curriculum and the history of trade unionism and industrial action in the UK does not support the idea of worker conformity.

## Willis - Learning to Labour

- Willis challenges the over-deterministic nature of much of Bowles and Gintis's work, which sees schools producing docile and compliant workers
- He argues that working class 'lads' **see through the smokescreen of meritocracy** that tries to legitimate (justify) inequality. They create a counter-school culture that challenges the schools dominant values.
- However, Willis accepts that the outcome is similar to that suggested by Bowles and Gintis, as their anti-school behaviour guarantees that they end up in dead-end jobs.

## Evaluation of Willis

- Blackledge and Hunt (1985) put forward some criticisms of Willis:
  - His sample is inadequate for generalizing about the role of education in society. His sample contained 12 pupils, all of them male, who were by no means typical of the children at the school
  - Willis largely ignores the full range of subcultures within schools. Many pupils fall somewhere in between total conformity and total rejection.

**Comment [NM11]:** Analysis:  
Although Willis is a Marxist, his view on how the education system reproduces inequality differs from Bowles and Gintis'. It's important to point out the differences among Marxists as well as those between Marxism and theories like functionalism.

**Comment [NM12]:** Evaluation:  
Rather than leaving all your evaluation points until the end, its more effective to make them throughout your answer. As you explain part of the theory, add a critical point – so you pick up evaluation marks throughout.

## 2. Social Class and Achievement

### Trends in Class and Achievement

- Children from working class backgrounds underachieve compared with their middle class peers. Jeffries (2002) studied 11000 children born in 1958 and noted that, by the age of seven, those who experienced childhood poverty had significantly fallen behind children from middle class backgrounds in mathematics, reading and other ability tests. The research also found that the gap in educational attainment between individuals from higher and lower social classes widened as time went on and was greatest by the age of 33.
- The Institute of Education (2000) found that more children were born to educated parents in 1970 than in 1958, but those born into poverty persistently underachieve. The research concludes that childhood poverty makes educational attainment more difficult, even for children with similar test scores.
- In 2003, the National Children's Bureau noted that children from poor backgrounds (i.e. from families living on state benefits) were two-thirds less likely to gain at least 5 GCSEs graded from A\*-C than those from affluent backgrounds.
- Joan Payne's (2001) research into participation in further education (16-19) showed that differences in home background influence staying-on rates. For example, 82% of children of professionals and managers were in further education in 2000, compared with only 60% of children of semi/unskilled workers.
- Connor and Dewson's (2001) study of students in higher education found that fewer than one in five young people from lower social class groups participate in higher education.

# External Explanations for the Class Gap

The main external (outside school factors) explanations for the class gap in achievement are:

1. Cultural deprivation – these include class differences in norms and values acquired through socialisation, attitudes to education, speech patterns etc
2. Material deprivation – these are the physical necessities of life, such as adequate housing, diet and income.
3. Cultural capital – the values and attitudes needed to be successful at school.

**Comment [NM13]:** Interpretation:  
Be very clear about these terms, because short answer questions sometimes ask you to define or give examples of one or other of them.

## 1. Cultural deprivation theories

- A number of studies have argued that the values, attitudes and aspirations of parents have an important effect on their children's education. It is argued that working class parents tend to value education less than middle class parents, and this has a negative effect on working class students in terms of their poorer performance.
- Leon Feinstein argues that the main reason for working class children underachieving was their parents lack of interest in their children's education. Working class parents are unlikely to give their children educational toys and activities that will stimulate their thinking and reasoning skills, and less likely to read to them. This affects their intellectual development so that when they begin school they are at a disadvantage compared to middle class children.
- Basil Bernstein distinguishes between elaborated and restricted speech codes. Working class children tend to use a restricted code which is less analytic and more descriptive. It is particularistic – it assumes that the listener shares the particular meanings that the speaker holds, so does not spell them out. Middle class children use an elaborate code which is more analytic in which speakers spell out exactly what they mean. Crucially, the elaborate code is the one used in the education system, giving middle class children an advantage over working class children. This could partly explain the class gap in achievement.

**Comment [a14]:** Evaluation:  
This may be more to do with material factors such as a lack of sufficient income to spend on books etc, rather than an indication that working class parents are less interested in their children's education.

**Comment [a15]:** Analysis:  
Explain the meaning of the two speech codes, then explain why the elaborate code is used in education – e.g. 'Textbooks use it because they don't know who their readers are, so they have to spell everything out very explicitly in a way that can be understood by everyone.'

## Evaluation

- Nell Keddie describes this cultural deprivation as a myth and sees it as a victim-blaming explanation. She argues that working class kids are culturally different not culturally deprived. They fail because they are disadvantaged by an education system that is dominated by middle class values.

## 2. Material deprivation factors:

- Material deprivation refers to the lack of physical resources such as money, room, equipment etc which may have an adverse effect on the educational achievement of working class children.

**Comment [a16]:** Evaluation:  
Not all poor children fail – those with supportive parents may have high levels of motivation. Material deprivation theory also ignores factors in schools such as teacher labelling and streaming, which may cause underachievement.

- Smith and Noble point out the importance of material factors in influencing class differences in educational achievement. For example, having money allows parents to provide educational toys, books, a healthy diet, more space in the home to do homework, greater opportunities for travel and private tuition.
- Research by Warwick University found that many students face **selection or admission by mortgage** whereby wealthier middle class parents can move into the catchment area of good schools, leaving less successful schools full of working class students.
- Similarly, Gerwitz found that differences in economic and cultural capital lead to class differences in how far parents can exercise choice of secondary school. Professional middle class parents tend to be **privileged skilled choosers** who understand how the schools admissions procedures work and can use this **'hot' knowledge** to access the best schools.

### 3. Cultural capital

- Pierre Bourdieu uses the concept of **cultural capital** to explain why middle class students are more successful. He uses the term cultural capital to refer to the knowledge, attitudes, values, language, tastes and abilities of the middle class.
- Bourdieu sees middle class culture as capital because it can be translated into wealth and power, and gives an advantage to those who have it.
- This is because the culture, knowledge and language of the school fits more closely to middle class culture, therefore middle class students have an in-built advantage.
- On the other hand, the children of working class parents experience a cultural deficit. They soon realize that the school and teachers attach little importance to their experiences and values. As such they may lack the cultural capital necessary for educational success.

**Comment [a17]:** Analysis:

You can make the point that Bourdieu shows how material factors (economic capital) and cultural factors (cultural capital) link together to produce class inequalities in achievement (educational capital).

# Internal Explanations for the Class Gap

The main internal (inside school) explanations for the class gap in achievement are:

1. Labelling
2. Banding, setting and streaming,
3. Marketisation and selection policies

## 1. Labelling

- One of the most important aspects of the interactionist approach to education concerns the ways in which teachers make sense of and respond to the behaviour of their pupils.
- In a study of an American kindergarten Rist found that it was not ability which determined where each child was seated, but the degree to which the children conformed to the teacher's own middle class standards. In other words, the kindergarten teacher was evaluating and labelling pupils on the basis of their social class, not on the abilities they demonstrated in class.
- Gillborn and Youdell found that teachers are more likely to see middle class students as having the ability to enter higher level exams. This is based more on the teachers' perceptions of what counts as ability rather than the students' actual ability. The result is discrimination against many working class students who are denied the opportunity to attempt to obtain the higher grades.
- As such, all this research suggests that teachers tend to expect more from middle class students, and are more likely to convey their expectations to them and act in terms of it. The result is a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby teachers expectations of students future behaviour and attainment will tend to come true.

## Evaluation:

- Cruder versions of labelling theory are rather deterministic in suggesting the inevitability of failure for those with negative labels attached to them. For example, Margaret Fuller found that the black girls in her study resisted the attempt to label them as failures by devoting themselves to school work in order to be successful.
- Marxists also criticise labelling theory for ignoring the wider structures of power within which labelling takes place. They argue that labels are not merely the result of teachers' individual prejudices, but stem from the fact that teachers work in a system that reproduces class divisions.

## 2. Banding, Setting and Streaming

- A number of studies by Ball, Hargreaves and Lacey have looked at the effects of **ability grouping** in secondary schools. In general they found a tendency for middle class students to be placed in higher groups and for working class students to be placed in the lower groups.

**Comment [a18]:** Application:  
In questions on differences in achievement, you need to apply this noting that working class students end up in lower streams and sets and middle class students end up in higher ones because of teacher labelling, thus widening the achievement gap between the classes.

- They found that teachers tend to have lower expectations of working class students, deny them access to higher level knowledge and tend to enter them for lower level examination tiers.
- Campbell (2001) argues that subject setting advantages middle class students in the top sets because research evidence suggests their attainment increases, while working class students in the bottom sets do not increase their attainment at the same rate or to the same level.
- Stephen Ball (2003) refers to setting as **social barbarism** because it allows well-off parents to separate their children from 'others' whom they consider socially and intellectually inferior. He points to overwhelming research evidence that shows that grouping by ability leads to greater social class inequalities between children.

### 3. Marketisation and selection policies

- **Marketisation** policies and greater use of selection have created a much more competitive climate among schools. In this light, middle class students are seen as more desirable recruits as they achieve better exam results. Conversely, working class students are seen as 'liability students' which are barriers to efforts by schools to climb the league tables.
- According to Bartlett, marketisation leads popular schools to 'cream-skim' higher ability students and 'silt-shift' lower ability students from disadvantaged backgrounds into unpopular schools who are obliged to take them for funding reasons.
- Gilborn and Youdell argue that the publication of school league tables creates what they call the 'A\*-C economy, in which schools channel most of their efforts into those students who are likely to get 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C. This produces a system of educational triage in which working class students are seen being lower ability and therefore 'hopeless cases'. This produces a self-fulfilling prophecy and failure.

**Comment [a19]:** Interpretation: If a question asks about factors in *schools*, focus on labelling, the self-fulfilling prophecy and streaming. If it asks about factors in *the educational system*, discuss policies as well.

### 3. Gender and Achievement

**Comment [a20]:** Application:  
Always make sure the material you are using applies to the question set. Is it just about girls' (or boys') achievement? Or is it about gender differences in achievement (in which case, make sure you write about *both* sexes)? Avoid writing an all-purpose 'everything I know about gender' answer.

#### Some patterns and trends

1. Both girls and boys are doing better. Over the last 50 years the educational performance of boys has steadily improved. The performance of girls has risen at a faster rate at some levels and in some subjects. As Coffey (2000) suggests, this hardly justifies labelling all boys as underachievers.
2. Only some boys are failing. There is a close link between boys underachievement and social class. Epstein et al show that, compared to other groups, a high proportion of working class boys are failing.
3. Hiding girls' failure. The pre-occupation with so-called failing boys' diverts attention from underachieving girls. Research by Plummer suggests that a high proportion of working class girls are failing in the school system.
4. Not just gender. Gender is one of a range of factors which contribute to underachievement. It is important to note the dynamic influence of class and ethnicity.

# Explanations for girls' improvement in achievement

## 1. External factors

External (outside school) factors which may explain the improvement in girls' achievement include:

1. The impact of feminism
2. Changes in the family
3. Changes in women's employment
4. Girls' changing ambitions and perceptions

### 1. The impact of feminism

- Since the 1960's feminism has challenged the traditional stereotypes of a woman's role as mother and housewife within a patriarchal family. More broadly, feminism has raised girls' expectations and ambitions with regard to careers and family.
- These changes are partly reflected in media images and messages. A good illustration of this is McRobbie's comparison of girls magazines in the 1970s and 1990s. In the 1970s girls' magazines stressed the importance of getting married, whereas in the 1990s they emphasised career and independence.

### 2. Changes in the family

- There have been a number of major changes to the family in the last 30 years. Some of these include an increase in the divorce rate, an increase in cohabitation, and an increase in the number of lone-parent families (mainly female headed).
- These changes are affecting girls' attitudes towards education in a number of ways. For example, increased numbers of female-headed lone-parent families may mean more women need to take on the major income-earner role. This then creates a new financially independent, career-minded role model for girls. The need for good qualifications is made very clear.

### 3. Changes in women's employment

- There have been some important changes to women's jobs in recent years. The proportion of women in employment has risen from under 50% in 1959 to over 70% in 2007. Some women are breaking through the invisible barrier of the 'glass ceiling' to high level professional jobs previously denied them. These greater opportunities provide an incentive for girls to take education seriously.

## 4. Girls' changing ambitions

- The view that changes in the family and employment are producing changes in girls' ambitions is supported by research.
- For example, Sue Sharpe compared the results of interviews she carried out with girls in the 1970s and girls in the 1990s. In the 1970s girls had low aspirations, saw educational success as unfeminine and gave their priorities as love, marriage, husbands and children before careers. In the 1990s, however, girls were more likely to see their future as independent women with a career, rather than being dependent on a husband and his income.

## 2. Internal factors

While factors outside the school may play an important part in explaining gender differences in achievement, factors within the education system itself are also important. These include:

1. Equal opportunities policies
2. Positive role models in schools
3. GCSE and coursework
4. Teacher attention
5. Challenging stereotypes in the curriculum
6. Selection and league tables

### 1. Equal opportunities policies

- The belief that boys and girls should have the same opportunities in school are now part of mainstream thinking. Policies such as GIST and WISE encourage girls to pursue careers in non-traditional areas. Similarly, the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 meant that boys and girls had to study the same things.
- Jo Boaler argues that equal opportunities policies are a key factor in the improvement of girls educational performance. Schools have become more meritocratic which means that because girls in general work harder than boys, they achieve more.

### 2. Positive role models in schools

- In recent years, the proportion of female teachers and female headteachers has increased. As such, women in positions of power and authority have acted as important role models for girls because they show girls that it is possible for them to achieve important positions. This then reinforces the importance of education in gaining such positions.

### 3. GCSE and Coursework

- Some sociologists have argued that changes in the way students are examined have favoured girls and disadvantaged boys. The gender-gap in achievement increased after the introduction of GCSEs and coursework in 1988.

- Mitsos and Browne argue that girls are more successful in **coursework** because they are better organised and more conscientious than boys. They found that girls tend to spend more time on their work, take more care on its presentation, and are better at keeping to deadlines. All of this helps girls to benefit from the introduction of coursework in GCSE, AS and A level.

**Comment [a21]:** Evaluation:  
Although coursework has some impact on results, Elwood notes that exams have more influence on final grades, the introduction of coursework had only a limited effect on gender differences in achievement.

#### 4. teacher attention

- Research suggests that teachers respond more positively to girls than boys. This is because teachers see girls as more co-operative and boys as more disruptive. This may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy in which positive interactions raise girls' self-esteem and levels of achievement
- Barber found that teacher-pupil interactions were very significant. For girls, feedback from teachers focused more on their work rather than their behaviour; for boys the reverse was true. Research by Abraham (1995) suggests that teachers perceive boys as being more badly behaved than girls in the classroom, and as such expect bad behaviour.

#### 5. Challenging stereotypes in the curriculum

- Some sociologists argue that removing **gender stereotypes** from teaching schemes, textbooks and other learning materials has removed a barrier to girls' achievement.
- Gaby Weiner argues that since the 1980s, teachers have challenged gender stereotypes. Also, in general, sexist images have been removed from teaching materials. This may have helped to raise girls' achievement by presenting more positive images of what women are capable of.

**Comment [a22]:** Analysis:  
Link ideas together – e.g. you can connect the removal of stereotypes to equal opportunities policies and the impact of feminist ideas on education.

#### 6. Selection and league tables

- Marketisation policies and greater use of selection have created a much more competitive climate among schools. In this light, girls are seen as more desirable recruits as they achieve better exam results. Conversely, boys are seen as 'liability students' which are barriers to efforts by schools to climb the league tables.
- David Jackson found that the introduction of exam league tables, which place a high value on academic achievement, has improved opportunities for girls. This tends to produce a self-fulfilling prophecy in which **girls are more likely to be recruited by good schools** and are therefore more likely to do well.

**Comment [a23]:** Evaluation:  
Girls are now achieving more, but radical feminists argue that the education system remains patriarchal e.g. sexual harassment of girls' continues at school; education limits their subject choices and careers; secondary school heads are still more likely to be men.

## Explanations for the underachievement of boys

- Mitsos and Browne (1998) believe that boys are under-achieving in education, **although they also believe girls are disadvantaged.**
- The evidence of boys' under-achievement, according to Mitsos and Browne, is that:
  - Girls do better than boys in every stage of National Curriculum SAT [Standard Assessment Tests] results in English, maths and science, and they are now more successful than boys at every level in CCSE, outperforming boys in every major subject ... except physics.
- Atkinson and Wilson's (2003) research shows that the gap between boys' and girls' achievement at school grows between 7 and 16. Their study of 500,000 children shows that despite boys outperforming girls in maths and science in early schooling, by the age of 16 girls were achieving higher results in both subjects.

There are a range of reasons why boys are underachieving compared to girls:

### 1. External factors (outside-school)

- Boys' poorer literacy skills
- The decline of 'traditional' male jobs
- Unrealistic expectations

### 2. Internal factors (inside-school)

- The feminisation of education
- Teacher interaction
- 'Laddish' subcultures

## External factors

### 1. Boys' poorer literacy skills

- Some evidence suggests that girls are more likely to spend their leisure time in ways which compliment their education and contribute to educational achievements. Mitsos and Browne place considerable emphasis on reading. Women are more likely to read than men, and mothers are more likely than fathers to read to their children. Girls are therefore more likely to have same-sex role models to encourage them to read.
- As such, poor language and literacy skills are likely to affect boys' performance across a wide range of subjects

## 2. The decline of traditional male jobs

- The decline in male manual work may result in working class boys lacking motivation. Mitsos and Browne argue that this decline in male employment opportunities has led to a **crisis of masculinity**. Many boys now believe that they have little chance of getting a proper job. This undermines their self-esteem and motivation and so they give up trying to gain qualifications.
- However, while there may be some truth in these claims, it should be noted that the decline has largely been in traditional manual working class jobs, many of them unskilled or semi-skilled. Traditionally, many of these jobs would have been filled by working class boys with few if any qualifications. It therefore seems unlikely that the disappearance of such jobs would have much of an impact on boys' motivation to gain qualifications.

## 3. Unrealistic expectations

- Research indicates that boys are often surprised when they fail exams and tend to put their failure down to bad luck rather than lack of effort.
- Becky Francis points out that boys are more likely to have career aspirations that are not only unrealistic but often require few formal qualifications, e.g. professional footballer. Girls' aspirations, however, tend to require academic effort, e.g. doctor, and therefore they have a commitment to schoolwork.

## Internal factors

### 1. The feminization of education

- According to Tony Sewell boys fall behind in education because schools have become feminised. This means that schools tend to emphasise feminine traits such as methodical working and attentiveness, which disadvantages boys.
- Sewell sees coursework as a major cause of gender differences in achievement. He argues that some coursework should be replaced with final exams and a greater emphasis should be put on outdoor adventure in the curriculum.

### 2. Teacher interaction

- Teacher-pupil interactions were identified by Barber as being very significant. For girls, feedback from teachers focused more on their work rather than their behaviour; for boys the reverse was true. The low expectations of girls in science reinforced their own self-images; boys frequently overestimated their abilities.

- Negative teacher labelling for some boys undermined their confidence and interest in school. For both boys and girls, where motivation in a subject is low, achievement tends to be low.
- Teachers may tend to be less strict with boys, giving them more leeway with deadlines and expecting a lower standard of work than they get from girls. This can allow boys to under-achieve by failing to push them to achieve their potential

### 3. Laddish subcultures

- Some sociologists argue that the growth of 'laddish' subcultures has contributed to boys' underachievement.
- Mac an Ghaill examines the relationship between schooling, work, masculinity and sexuality. He identifies a particular pupil subculture, the 'macho lads' which could help to explain why some boys underachieve in education.
- This group was hostile to school authority and learning, not unlike the lads in Willis's study. Willis had argued that work especially physical work - was essential to the development of a sense of identity. By the mid-1980s much of this kind of work was gone. Instead, a spell in youth training, followed very often by unemployment, became the norm for many working-class boys.
- Jackson found that laddish behaviour was based on the idea that it is uncool to work hard at school. She found that boys based their laddish behaviour on the dominant view of masculinity – they acted tough, messed around, disrupted lessons and rejected schoolwork as 'feminine'.

**Comment [a24]:** Evaluation:  
Are 'laddish' subcultures and 'internal' factor or an 'external' factor? You could make the point that they operate both inside and outside the school.

### Evaluation

- **Weiner, Arnot and David(1997)** are somewhat sceptical about the sudden discovery of male underachievement. They argue that the media have created a misleading **moral panic** which exaggerates and distorts the extent and nature of any problem.
- They argue that although the media are also interested in the underachievement of white, middle class boys they see black and working class underachievement as a particular problem because it is likely to lead to unqualified, unemployable black and working class men turning to crime.
- **Cohen** (1999) argues that the question is not 'why are boys underachieving', but 'why boys' underachievement has now become an object of concern?'
- Her answer is that it is not just the destruction of the industrial base of Britain; nor is it the result of pressure put on men by feminism, or by girls' superior achievement in recent years.
- It is because discussions about achievement, academic success and attainment all have boys as their main object. The call for a new focus on boys is not new, but merely perpetuates the historical process which has always assumed boys to have special potential which has not been fully developed. Their underachievement has always been protected from scrutiny.

## Explanations of gender differences in subject choice

Sociologists have put forward a number of reasons for gender differences in subject choice:

### 1. Early socialization:

- Murphy and Elwood argue that early difference in gender socialization leads to boys and girls having different tastes in reading and these can lead to differences in subject choice. Boys tend to read hobby books which develops an interest in the sciences, whereas girls tend to read stories about people which leads to interests in English.

### 2. Gender domains:

- According to Browne and Ross, gender domains are the tasks and activities that children see as male or female territory. Children tend to be more confident in engaging in tasks which they see as part of their gender domain. For example, in a maths task, boys will be more confident tackling a problem related to cars, whereas girls might prefer a task related to health or nutrition.
- This could explain why girls are attracted to arts and humanities subjects and boys prefer sciences.

### 3. Gendered subject images

- Alison Kelly identifies two main reasons why science tends to be seen as masculine. The way science subjects are packaged makes them appear to be 'boys' subjects. The examples used in textbooks and by teachers tend to be linked to boys' experiences such as football and cars
- Students themselves make the greatest contribution to turning science into a boys' subject. Boys dominate classrooms, shouting out answers and grabbing apparatus first.

### 4. Peer pressure

- Peer pressure can influence subject choice in terms of gender domains. For example, boys tend to opt out of dance and music because others will perceive these subjects to be outside the male gender domain and apply negative pressure.
- Similarly, Paetcher points out that pupils see sport as being firmly inside the male gender domain and will therefore label girls as 'butch' or even 'gay' if they show too much interest in sports.

**Comment [a25]:** Interpretation: Some questions are about gender *experiences* in school (achievement, subject choice and identity), while others limit you in some way – e.g. to just achievement or just subject choice. Only use material that is specific to the question.

**Comment [a26]:** Evaluation: Pupils in single-sex schools make less traditional subject choices. This might be because there is no opposite-sex peer pressure to conform to gender-stereotypical subject choices.

## Education and gender identities

Pupils' experiences of school can affect their gender identities through:

1. verbal abuse
2. male peer groups
3. teachers and discipline
4. the male gaze

These experiences help to reinforce what Connell calls 'hegemonic masculinity' – the dominance of heterosexual masculine identity and the subordination of female and gay identities.

### 1. Verbal abuse

- According to Connell boys use name-calling to put girls down if they behave in certain ways.
- Paetcher found that name-calling helps to shape gender identities and male dominance. The use of **negative labels** such as 'gay' and 'queer' are ways in which pupils can control each others sexual identities.

### 2. Male peer groups

- Mac an Ghail shows how peer groups reproduce a range of different working class masculine identities. For example, the 'macho lads' in his study were dismissive of other working class boys who worked hard and achieved.

### 3. Teachers and discipline

- Hayward found that male teachers told boys off for 'behaving like girls' and teased them when they achieved lower marks than female students.

### 4. The male gaze

- Mac an Ghail refers to the 'male gaze' as a way of looking girls up and down and seeing them as sexual objects. he argues that the male gaze is a form of surveillance through which dominant masculinity is reinforced and femininity devalued. This is achieved, for example, through telling stories of sexual conquest

**Comment [a27]:** Analysis:  
These labels often do not reflect actual behaviour; they reinforce gender norms – e.g. boys may be called 'gay' simply for having female friends.

## 4. Ethnicity and Achievement

### Some patterns and trends

Patterns of ethnic achievement are complex, cross-cut by gender and class. For example,

- Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi students do worst, Indians and Chinese do best.
- White students are very close to the national average, but this is because they the great majority of the school population.
- Among black and working class students, girls do better than boys, but among Asians, boys do better than girls.
- Working class black girls do better than working class white girls.

**Comment [a28]:** Application: When answering essay questions on ethnicity and achievement, refer to the achievement patterns of a range of different ethnic groups.

### External (outside school) explanations

#### 1. Cultural factors and attainment

##### a) Language

- In some Asian households English is not the first language used. The PSI study found that lack of fluency in English was a significant problem for some groups. Amongst men nearly everyone spoke English fluently. Amongst women about a fifth of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were not fluent.
- However, Gillborn and Mirza (2000) point out that the very high attainment of Indian pupils suggests that having English as an Additional Language is not a barrier to success

##### b) Family life

- A number of writers suggest that the nature of family life affects levels of attainment among ethnic minorities.
- Driver and Ballard found that South Asian parents have high aspirations for their children's education despite having little formal education themselves.
- Pilkington believes that there is strong evidence that the cohesiveness of Asian families may assist in the high educational achievement of some Asian groups, and that African Caribbeans may have family cultures that are not as conducive to educational support.
- However, Gillborn and Mirza (2000) argue that research shows that African-Caribbean pupils receive greater encouragement to pursue further education than other ethnic groups.
- Recent research has suggested that white working class students are among the lowest achievers with very low aspirations. Lupton (2004) found that teachers

**Comment [a29]:** Interpretation: When answering a question on ethnicity and achievement, don't just refer to non-white students. Referring to white working class under-achievement provides balance in your answer.

reported poorer levels of behaviour and discipline in white working class schools. Teachers blamed this on lower levels of parental support and the negative attitude white working class parents have towards education. By contrast, many ethnic minority parents see education as a route to upward social mobility.

## Internal (inside school) factors

### 1. Racism and under-achievement

- Recent research by Gillborn and Youdell (2000) has argued that racism continues to play an important part in disadvantaging ethnic minorities in the educational system.
- They argue that the expectations held of black students were comparatively low and through a system of 'educational triage' they were systematically denied access to the sets, groups and exams that would give them the best chance of success.
- Blair et al show that there is a marked lack of black role models in British schools and a specific lack of head teachers from ethnic minority groups.
- However, Smith and Tomlinson found schools to be tolerant of all ethnic groups, with a lack of antagonism between students from different ethnic groups. OFSTED showed that exclusion for Indian, Bagladeshi and Chinese students is lower than for white students, per thousand people.

### 2. Teacher perceptions and expectations

- Much research has indicated that teachers have lower expectations of black boys than they have of other students. These students tend to be labelled as troublemakers and seen as disruptive. Gillborn argues that this labelling is likely to result in a self-fulfilling prophecy in which black students become disruptive and low-achieving.
- However, Mac an Ghail (1992) found that there was not a direct relationship between teacher expectation and achievement. In his ethnographic study of a Midlands sixth form college he found that the way that students perceived and responded to schooling varied considerably and was influenced by the ethnic group to which they belonged, their gender, and the class composition of their former secondary school.

### 3. Curriculum bias and ethnocentrism

- Subjects such as English Literature, history and religious education have been accused of being ethnocentric. The focus of these subjects have tended to be the achievements of white European Christian peoples. The national Curriculum does not include the history of black people, and foreign languages taught in schools are primarily European. Where other languages are taught these tend to be extra-curricular

**Comment [a30]:** Evaluation: Although the school curriculum largely ignores Asian culture, Indian and Chinese students' achievement is still above average. Also, Stone argues that there is no evidence that black students actually suffer from low self-esteem.

## 5. Processes Within Schools

### A. Labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy:

- Howard Becker found that teachers tend to classify and evaluate students in terms of a standard 'ideal pupil'. Teachers perceived students from non-manual backgrounds as closest to this ideal; those from lower working class origins as furthest from this ideal. He concludes that the meanings in terms of which students are assessed and evaluated can have significant effects on interaction in the classroom and attainment levels in general.
- In terms of ethnicity, much research has indicated that teachers have lower expectations of black boys than they have of other students. These students tend to be labelled as troublemakers and seen as disruptive. Gillborn argues that this labelling is likely to result in a self-fulfilling prophecy in which black students become disruptive and low-achieving.
- Similarly in terms of gender, negative teacher labelling for some boys has undermined their confidence and interest in school. For both boys and girls, where motivation in a subject is low, achievement tends to be low.
- 

### Evaluation:

- Cruder versions of labelling theory are rather deterministic in suggesting the inevitability of failure for those with negative labels attached to them. For example, Margaret Fuller found that the black girls in her study resisted the attempt to label them as failures by devoting themselves to school work in order to be successful.
- Marxists also criticise labelling theory for ignoring the wider structures of power within which labelling takes place. They argue that labels are not merely the result of teachers' individual prejudices, but stem from the fact that teachers work in a system that reproduces class divisions

### B. The organisation of schooling - banding and streaming:

- A number of studies by Ball, Hargreaves and Lacey have looked at the effects of ability grouping in secondary schools. In general they found a tendency for middle class students to be placed in higher groups and for working class students to be placed in the lower groups.
- They found that teachers tend to have lower expectations of working class students, deny them access to higher level knowledge and tend to enter them for lower level examination tiers.
- Recent research by Gillborn and Youdell (2000) has argued that racism continues to play an important part in disadvantaging ethnic minorities in the educational system. They argue that the expectations held of black students were comparatively low and

through a system of 'educational triage' they were systematically denied access to the sets, groups and exams that would give them the best chance of success.

- Stephen Ball (2003) refers to setting as **social barbarism** because it allows well-off parents to separate their children from 'others' whom they consider socially and intellectually inferior. He points to overwhelming research evidence that shows that grouping by ability leads to greater inequalities between children.

## Evaluation

- Marxists argue that labelling theory is vague in its explanations of the criteria that underpin teacher judgements. Marxists like Althusser would argue that labelling is part of an 'ideological' process aimed at ensuring the social reproduction of class inequality, i.e. capitalism's need for a conformist manual labour force.
- Peter Woods argues that schools are more complex than labelling theory acknowledges. Many students adopt 'work avoidance strategies' without attracting negative teacher judgements.

## C. Pupil sub-cultures

### Class subcultures

#### 1. Paul Willis - "Learning to Labour"

- The main focus of Willis' study was a group of 12 working class boys in their last 18 months at school and their first few months at work. The 'lads' (as Willis refers to them) formed a friendship grouping which was part of a "*counter-school culture*" opposed to the values espoused by the school.
- Willis argues that it is the rejection of school which prepares the 'lads' for their role in the workforce. Working class pupils are not forced into manual labour but they are able to recognise that their own opportunities are limited. They know that school work will not prepare them for the types of occupations they are likely to get.
- Willis claims that the lads realise they are being exploited but see little opportunity for changing this situation and, ironically, their own choices mean that they become trapped in some of the most exploitative jobs that capitalism has to offer.

#### Evaluation

- Willis' study has been criticised for having a sample which is far too small to form the basis for generalising about working class experiences in education. By choosing to study only 12 students, all of them male, his study can't even be seen as representative of the school he studied, let alone all school pupils.

## 2. Mairtin Mac an Ghaill – ‘The Making of Men’

- Mac an Ghaill illustrates the complexity of subcultural responses by examining the relationship between schooling, class, masculinity and sexuality. He identifies a range of school subcultures.
  - 1.The 'macho lads'
    - This group was hostile to school authority and learning, not unlike the lads in Willis's study.
  - 2.The academic achievers
    - This group, who were from mostly skilled manual working-class backgrounds, adopted a more traditional upwardly mobile route via academic success. They would counter accusations of effeminacy either by confusing those who bullied them, by deliberately behaving in an effeminate way, or simply by having the confidence to cope with the jibes.
  - 3.The 'new enterprisers'
    - This group was identified as a new successful pro-school subculture, who embraced the 'new vocationalism' of the 1980s and 1990s. They rejected the traditional academic curriculum, which they saw as a waste of time.

### Evaluation

- All of Mac an Ghaill's studies are small-scale ethnographic accounts. Therefore, they may provide a detailed picture of those being studied but they are not necessarily representative of all school students and it is difficult to generalise the findings to the rest of the population. However, it could be argued that the combination of a number of studies produces a more representative picture.

## Gender and sub-cultures

- Research by Scott Davies shows how girls' resistance to schooling is less aggressive and confrontational than male anti-school behaviour. Where the 'lads' display an 'exaggerated masculinity', the girls in Davies's study adopted an 'exaggerated femininity'.
- They expressed their opposition to school by focusing on traditional feminine roles. They were overly concerned with 'romance' and prioritised domestic roles such as marriage, child-rearing and household duties over education.
- John Abraham's study of an English comprehensive school shows a different strategy of resistance to school. The girls pushed the school rules to the limit and responded to discipline by suggesting that it prevented them from getting on with their work.. Teachers' objections to their behaviour were rejected as a waste of their time.

## Ethnicity and sub-cultures

- Tony Sewell's study of African-Caribbean students suggests a range of identities are found among these students:
  1. Conformists who accept the value of education and see good behaviour as the key to academic success.
  2. Innovators, who accept the value of education and wanted academic success but rejected the school system.
  3. Retreatists who made themselves as invisible as possible.
  4. Rebels who rejected the school and projected an image of aggressive masculinity.
- Sewell's study is important because it shows the variety of African-Caribbean sub-cultures rather than just anti-school ones. It also suggests that pupil sub-cultures are influenced by what goes on outside school as well as inside it. For example, the Rebels drew heavily on Black street culture by having patterned hair, despite it being banned in school.
- Mirza and Gillborn found that, in general, African-Caribbean girls are ambitious, determined to succeed and have high status aspirations. However, they tend not to identify with their teachers or school. This is partly due to the open racism of a minority of teachers and the clumsy, well-meaning but often unhelpful 'help' offered by many teachers in response to the girls' ethnicity.

## 6. Education and Social Policy

**Comment [a31]:** Analysis:

Two issues run through questions on policy: selection and inequality. Focus on these as you cover each policy – does it reduce or increase inequality and how does it affect selection ?

### The Tripartite System

- Up until the end of the Second World War, it was clear that those with the most access to education and the opportunities it provided were the sons and daughters of the middle and upper classes.
- As part of the aim to create a 'land fit for heroes' after the Second World War, **Butler's Education Act of 1944** introduced **secondary education** for all pupils, providing free education for all up to the age of 15.
- This Act introduced the Tripartite System of secondary education (as it consisted of three different types of school, each catering for different aptitudes) and made secondary education free for all pupils.
  1. Grammar schools offered an academic curriculum and access to higher education. They were for academic students who passed the 11+ exam.
  2. Secondary modern schools offered a more practical curriculum and access to manual work for those who failed the 11+.
  3. Technical schools existed in some areas to provide explicitly vocational education for those who failed the 11+.
- Rather than promoting meritocracy, the tripartite system and the 11+ reproduced class inequality by channelling the two social classes into different types of school that offered unequal opportunities.
- The system also discriminated against girls, often requiring them to gain higher marks than boys on the 11+ to gain a place at a grammar school.
- The tripartite system also justified inequality through the ideology that ability is inborn rather than the product of a child's upbringing and environment. It was argued that ability could be identified early on in life through the 11+ exam. In reality, however, a child's social class background greatly affects their chances at school.
- However, the system still had its supporters:
  - It served many middle-class families very well, such that even today it survives in a few areas of the country.
  - It must also be remembered that it did provide almost guaranteed social mobility for those working-class pupils who made it to grammar schools.
  - Some recent research has gone so far as to suggest the system gave working-class pupils more chances than they have.

## The Comprehensive System

- During the 1950s, discontent grew with the way in which the tripartite system limited the opportunities available to many students.
- The tripartite system had not succeeded in creating equality of opportunity. What might bring that ideal closer was to abolish selection at 11 and educate all children in the same school, regardless of their class, ethnicity, gender or ability.
- In 1965, the Labour government instructed all local authorities to submit plans for comprehensive reorganization.
- Facilities were upgraded so that the new comprehensive schools could provide a broad curriculum and more sporting and recreational activities.
  
- However, although there is evidence that comprehensives helped to reduce the class gap in achievement, the system continued to reproduce class inequality for two reasons:
  1. Streaming – many comprehensives were streamed into ability groups, with middle class pupils placed in higher streams and working class pupils placed in lower streams.
  2. Labelling – Ball and others have shown that even where streaming is not present, teachers may continue to label working class pupils negatively and restrict their opportunities.
  
- Also, comprehensives legitimated inequality, especially through the 'myth' of meritocracy. Now that all pupils went to the same school it made it appear that they all had an equal opportunity regardless of social class background.

## Marketisation and Parentocracy

- The 1988 Education Reforms Act (ERA), introduced by the then Conservative government of Thatcher, established the principle of marketisation in education favoured by the New Right. From 1997 the New Labour government of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown followed similar policies, emphasizing standards, diversity and choice.
- Marketisation refers to the process of introducing market forces of consumer choice and competition between suppliers into areas run by the state, such as education or the NHS.
- ERA created an 'education market' by:
  - reducing direct state control over education
  - increasing both competition between schools and parental choice of school
- Miriam Davies class describes this parental choice agenda as 'parentocracy' because power has been moved away from the producers (schools and teachers) to the consumers (Parents). It is claimed that this encourages diversity among schools, gives parents more choice, and drives up standards.

Policies to promote marketisation include:

- Publication of league tables and Ofsted inspection reports to give parents the information they need to choose the right school.
- Business sponsorship of schools, or what Rikowski calls 'the business takeover of schools'.
- Formula funding, where schools receive the same amount of funding for each pupil.
- Schools being able to opt-out of LEA control
- Schools having to compete with each other to attract pupils

**Comment [a32]:** Analysis:  
Show analysis by explaining how each policy creates a market – e.g. 'Publishing schools' exam results means parents can make an informed choice about where to send their children.

## The reproduction of inequality

- Critics of marketisation argue that it has increased inequalities between pupils, for example middle class parents are better placed to take advantage of the available choices.
  - Similarly, Ball and Whitty argue that marketisation reproduces and legitimates inequality through exam league tables and the funding formula
1. Exam league tables
    - These ensure that schools that achieve good results are in more demand, because parents are attracted to those with good league table rankings. This allows these schools to be more selective and to recruit high achieving, mainly middle class pupils.
    - As a result, middle class pupils get the best education.
    - The opposite occurs for less successful schools. These are unable to select and tend to be full of less able, mainly working class pupils. The overall effect of league tables is to produce unequal schools that reproduce social class inequalities.
  2. The funding formula
    - Funding is determined by pupil numbers. The more popular a school is, the higher their funding. These schools can afford to attract better-qualified teachers and better facilities.
    - Unpopular schools lose income and find it difficult to match the teacher skills and facilities of their more successful rivals.

**Comment [a33]:** Application:  
Link marketisation to inequality and selection – e.g, 'Because middle class parents know how the system works, they can give their children a better chance of getting into a good school.'

## The myth of parentocracy

- Some sociologists argue that marketisation reproduces inequality and also legitimates it by concealing its true causes and by justifying its existence.
- Stephen Ball says that marketisation gives the appearance of creating a parentocracy where parents have free choice over which schools they send their children to. However, this is really a myth because not all parents have the same freedom of choice.
- Gerwitz argues that middle class parents have more economic and cultural capital and so are better able to take advantage of the choice available, e.g by moving house into areas with better schools.
- By disguising the fact that schooling continues to reproduce class inequality in this way, the 'myth' of parentocracy' makes inequality in education appear to be fair and inevitable.

## New Labour Policies Since 1997

Labour governments since 1997 have sought to reduce inequality of achievement and promote greater diversity, choice and competition.

### Policies designed to reduce inequality:

- In 1998, the government introduced Education Action Zones (now known as Excellence in Cities Zones). It was intended that partnerships between local education authorities and local businesses would focus on a cluster of schools (usually an under-performing secondary school and its feeder primary schools in a deprived inner-city area) and raise cash for IT equipment or the hire of better qualified teachers, for instance.
- This was designed to raise standards and enrich children's educational experience. However, it is intended that this scheme will end after the schools' 5 year contracts end, although some parts of it will be amalgamated into the EIC scheme
- In 1999 the government launched Excellence in Cities (EiC) which, through a combination of initiatives, aimed to:
  - raise the aspirations and achievement of students
  - tackle disaffection, social exclusion, truancy and indiscipline
  - improve parents' confidence in schools in inner-city areas characterised by social deprivation
- Introduced EMA payments to students from low-income backgrounds to encourage them to stay in post-16 education
- A proposal to raise the school leaving age to 18 by 2015 so that no 16-17 year olds could become a 'Neet' (not in education, employment or training).

### Policies designed to increase diversity and choice:

- Secondary schools were encouraged to apply for specialist status in particular curriculum areas. By 2007, about 85% of all secondary schools had become specialist schools.
- It is argued that this offers parents increased choice and raises standards by letting schools build on their strengths.
- Labour has also promoted academies as a policy for raising achievement and plans to have 200 academies by 2010. Most academies were formerly under-performing

**Comment [a34]:** Evaluation: Point out the contradiction – how can competition work without producing inequality? All markets produce winners and losers.

schools with largely working class pupils. It is claimed that academy status will raise the achievement of working class pupils.

## Evaluation of New Labour policies

Geoff Whitty (2003) identifies a number of criticisms of New Labour's policies:

- Many of New Labour's changes to the Conservative agenda were merely cosmetic. He gives a number of examples to support these claims:
  - There was increased privatisation of educational services such as school meals
  - an expansion of specialist schools in which some selection was allowed
  - a continuing emphasis on competition to drive up standards
  - Grammar schools were allowed to remain unless there was a vote of parents to turn them into comprehensives
- Whitty believes all these measures allowed the middle class to manipulate markets in education to benefit their children.
- Selection by interest in and aptitude in music and dance is already being used by some schools to enhance the entry of academically able students from middle class families.
- Whitty is also critical of New Labour's policies relating to the curriculum. According to him, Labour governments have not only stuck to a highly traditional curriculum content, they have also narrowed the curriculum and introduced prescriptive approaches to the teaching of literacy and numeracy (i.e. telling teachers how to teach).

Update with all the new Coalition Government policies.