

Education and methods

Teaching tips

Students will already have a certain amount of prior knowledge that will help them with the Education module. They will have some awareness of:

- differential attainment
- testing regimes
- ability groupings
- gendered subject choices
- vocational training
- teacher/pupil relationships
- pupil subcultures
- the formal and hidden curriculum
- specialist schools
- marketisation.

Teaching this module can tap into this knowledge and experience to help illuminate particular concepts and theories. For example, students will be aware of the various pupil subcultures in their school and they will have some knowledge about choosing secondary schools.

Education and methods

An important new feature of the 2008 specification is the requirement to integrate Research Methods and Education. More specifically, assessment of the Education module now includes a 20-mark question requiring students to apply their knowledge and understanding of sociological methods to a particular educational issue.

Teaching needs to reflect this requirement. One way of doing this is to ask students to conduct a short, simple research project on a topic from the Education module. The following example of gender and subject choice shows how student experience – of choosing their A-level subjects – and research methods can usefully be combined.

The technique

1. **Introduction:** Introduce the topic and, if necessary, provide some short stimulus material that illustrates the sociological questions surrounding gendered subject choice.
2. **Research:** Ask students to conduct their own research using a range of sociological methods and sampling techniques. Students could, for example, be asked to do things like:

- a. **Questionnaires/interviews:** Using these methods, discover the A-level subjects chosen by everyone in their Sociology class and explore people's reasons for choosing these subjects;
- b. **Snowball sampling (or other sampling techniques):** Use the questionnaire/interview as the basis for contacting and asking students in other A-level classes about their subject choices/reasons for choices.
- c. **Observation (participant/non-participant):** Students could, for example, observe and record the gender balance in different A-level classes.
- d. **Statistical analysis:** Get hold of school/college admission records that provide details of student subject choices. To avoid ethical problems, all personal details apart from gender should be removed before giving the statistics to the students to analyse.

Debrief

Once all the data has been collected and analysed, students should have a good idea about gendered subject choice in their school/college. The analysis of this data should focus on things like how subjects are gendered and the reasons students have given for their subject choices. This data can then be related to sociological explanations. If necessary, the exercise can also be used to demonstrate ideas about methodological pluralism and triangulation.

Finally, students should evaluate the strengths and limitations of the various methods and sampling techniques they used.

Revision

Given the new relationship between Education and Methods, the former is likely to be the final module studied before the summer exam session – and it's at this point that 'revision' is likely to feature heavily in student minds. While 'revision sessions' are useful, they can often be hard work – for both the teacher and student. One way to lighten the load is to convince students of the need for 'continual revision'; that is, to 'revise' during their course as well as at the end of it. A simple and fun technique for active revision (one that can also be applied to other modules) is to help students understand, for example, 'theories of education' by constructing poems.

Writing poems

As you cover each section of the Education module, various theories are introduced. Getting students to construct poems that summarise the essential aspects of a theory can be a stimulating and memorable way of understanding and recalling the theory. In this respect:

1. Identify the theories to be revised and, either individually or in small groups, ask your students to summarise a theory in a poem.
2. At the end of the session ask students to read their poems to the class. These can be photocopied/recorded and distributed to the whole class.

Here are a couple of examples to get you started:

Correspondence theory

Bowles and Gintis looked closely at schools,
Because they wanted to know how their rules
Taught children about work and its needs
And the correspondence on which it feeds.
The school bell rings like the time clock dings,
Better not be late 'cos the boss doesn't wait,
Keep your head down and don't play the clown,
Listen to the sages or you won't rake in the wages...

(Chris Livesey)

Theoretical perspectives

The functionalist view of school
Is that everything in it is cool.
All the things you do are for the best,
Which is why you have to take that test.
It's a chance to show just what you know
And probably determines just where you go...

Marxists on the other hand
Say you have to understand
That it's not a case of what you know
But more a case of the line you toe...

(Chris Livesey)