4. Education

INTRODUCTION

Whatever your personal view of school (the happiest days of your life or, in my case, a miserable battle against boredom, petty rivalries and having to get up way too early on cold winter days), there is little doubt education, as a social institution, has an important role to play in our society. Whether you view that role positively or negatively, we need to examine a range of perspectives (structuralist, interactionist, postmodern and New Right) that offer 'different explanations of the role of the education system'.

WARM UP: WHAT'S THE POINT OF EDUCATION?

Most of us spend at least 11 years in some sort of educational institution, so we should know something about what happens in schools. To get you thinking about the role of education therefore, identify as many things as you can relating to two types of learning:

- formal learning (the things schools are supposed to teach us) and
- informal learning (the things we learn that are not always openly taught).

I have identified one of each to get you started.

Formal Learning	Informal Learning
Curriculum subjects (English, Maths, etc.)	How to deal with people who are 'not family'

Structuralist perspectives

⚠ Preparing the ground

In this section we are going to examine three main structuralist perspectives on the role of education - functionalism, Marxism and feminism - and we can begin by identifying the major ideas that characterise each perspective.

Functionalism

Although this perspective has generally declined in sociological importance in the UK over the past 20 or so years, it's influence in shaping educational policy shouldn't be underestimated. This is partly because the basic ideas that sit at the heart of this perspective - ideas about consensus, competition and achievement through merit, for example - sit relatively comfortably with modern Conservative, Liberal and Labour

political ideas. For functionalists, arguments about the role of education focus on: institutional relationships and functional linkages with wider society. In particular, the focus here is on how education links to other social institutions, such as the family and the workplace. The complexity of modern social systems means the education system becomes, in effect, a bridge between these institutions in a couple of ways. Firstly, on an institutional level, social systems with a variety of different types of employment must develop ways of managing their human resources. While a society may need doctors, police officers and manual labourers, there's little point producing so many trained doctors they cannot get employment because there is no demand for their services. Secondly, on an individual level, the education system functions as an agency of secondary socialisation. In this respect, education is an institution that 'broadens the individual's experience' of the social world and, in so doing, prepares children for adult role relationships in the workplace and wider society.

For the education system to function properly on both the institutional and individual level it must, according to Functionalists, be meritocratic - a concept that reflects the idea that rewards (such as high pay, high status, jobs) are earned on the basis of our merits (things like skills, knowledge and effort) rather than simply allocated on the basis of who you know or how rich or poor your family is.

Education systems, in this respect, have to be competitive because children have to prove themselves willing to 'work to achieve'. For a merit-based system to function correctly, there must be equality of opportunity since if some are disadvantaged

(discriminated against or denied the opportunity to show their worth) society cannot be sure the best people occupy the most important adult roles.

As Parsons ('The School Class as a Social System', 1959) put it:

> . . . it is fair to give differential rewards for different levels of achievement, so long as there has been fair access to opportunity and fair that these rewards lead on to higher-order opportunities for the successful.

Marxism

Marxist perspectives haven't been particularly influential in terms of government policies (hardly surprising since they are highly critical of capitalist societies). However, ideas about the role of education have, arguably, filtered down into the teaching and learning process and some key ideas for Marxists include:

• Cultural reproduction: This concept involves the idea of secondary socialisation, but with a twist. Louis Althusser ('Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', 1971) argues that the economic system (capitalism) has to be reproduced from one generation to the next. In other words, each new generation has to be taught the skills, knowledge and ideas required for them to take up positions in the workplace. The twist, however, is schools don't just select, allocate and differentiate children (through testing and public examinations) in the interests of society as a whole - education is not meritocratic. Rather, the role of education is to ensure the sons - and increasingly daughters - of the powerful

achieve the levels of education required for them to follow in their fathers' - and mothers' - footsteps into professional employment. The trick, in other words, is to educate most people 'just enough' for them to be useful employees and a small number 'more than enough' to take up high-powered work roles.

- Hidden curriculum: This reflects the way ideas about the social world - and the individual's place in that world - are transmitted through the education system. Schools, as part of the daily teaching process, don't just teach formal subjects - they also teach 'hidden' values such as competition, individual learning and achievement, and qualifications as a way of measuring people's worth.

- Education and society: The link between the two is one where the education system responds to the demands of employers - there is a correspondence between what employers want (socialised workers differentiated through qualifications etc.) and what schools provide.

Feminism

Although the main focus of feminist educational research (gender inequality) has remained largely unchanged over the past 25 years, the emphasis of this research has moved from explaining why girls achieve less than boys (because, in the main, they don't anymore) to explaining how girls learn to cope with a range of school and workplace disadvantages.

Feminist research in the past shouldn't necessarily be dismissed as being outdated and irrelevant to our (present-day) understanding of the role of education. Although these studies originally focused on explanations for female underachievement they are, arguably, still relevant as explanations for differences in career choice and progress. In addition, these explanations assume a new relevance as political concerns about boys' underachievement have led to an educational focus on ways to help them 'overcome the gender gap' (usually involving a resurrection of ideas and practices criticised in feminist research over the past 25 years . . .). Broadly speaking, feminist explanations of female disadvantage, centre around the following ideas:

- Socialisation research. Eichler (The Double Standard, 1980) highlighted how differential socialisation experiences - and different social expectations - of males and females help to construct different gender identities and adult role expectations. In the past, for example, the education system contributed to the way women saw their primary adult role in terms of the private sphere of the family (as mother and housewife, for example) and, although female horizons have widened somewhat over the past 25 years, feminists have argued traditional assumptions about masculinity and femininity continue to influence both family and work relationships.

Norman (Just a Bunch of Girls, 1988), for example, argued teacher expectations, especially in early-years schooling, emphasised female roles related to the mother/carer axis and, while this may no longer automatically translate into women seeing their primary role in terms of caring for their family, it is clear - as we

will see when we dig a little deeper in a moment - female work roles continue to be framed around the basic idea of different male and female capabilities. Thus, although nearly 25 years ago, Stanworth (Gender and Schooling, 1981) found A-level pupils underestimated girls' academic performance and teachers saw female futures in terms of marriage, child rearing and domestic work (while future careers were stereotyped into 'caring' work such as secretarial, nursing and so forth) the question we have to consider is the extent to which, for all the evident changes in male and female educational performance, the general picture is still broadly similar in terms of the adult roles performed by women in our society.

• Identity: Following from the above, feminist research in the recent past focused on ideas like the gendering of the school curriculum, in terms of how pupils saw different subjects as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Such gendered perception, it was argued by writers such as Woods

('The myth of subject choice', 1976), helped to explain things like lower levels of female participation and general achievement in science subjects. Similarly, policy initiatives, such as Girls Into Science and Technology (GIST), explored why girls were underrepresented in science subjects (the basic reasons were science was seen as both difficult and demanding and, interestingly, the image of scientists was unflattering and unfeminine).

Despite the introduction, in 1988, of a National Curriculum that ensured all pupils studied subjects such as science and maths (traditionally perceived as masculine subjects) up to GCSE, the evidence from post-16 education suggests the type of gendered curriculum identified by Woods still exists, as table 4.1 demonstrates.

Thus, although the focus of feminist research in this particular area may have changed, over the years - from concerns about female underachievement to concerns about gendered participation - the post-16

Subject	% Males	% Females
Physics	78	12
Computer Studies	76	14
Economics	74	16
Mathematics	60	40
Biology	38	62
English Literature	25	75
Social Science	24	76
Home Economics	3	97

Table 4.1 United Kingdom GCE A level or equivalent entries for young people: by selected subject, 2001/02
[Source: Social Trends 34 (2004)]

evidence (where students are given a free choice of subjects to study) suggests participation levels are related to concepts of male and female identity. If this is the case, it seems unlikely the causes of this gendered participation only begin after the official school leaving age. Thus, past feminist research into the school curriculum still has both currency and usefulness. Spender ('Invisible Women', 1983), for example, argued that the curriculum was geared towards the needs and interests of boys, so as to render girls 'invisible' within the classroom. Similarly, Deem (Schooling for Women's Work, 1980) argued the school curriculum and subject choices were highly gendered and Mahony ('Schools for the Boys?' 1985) demonstrated how girls were frequently marginalised in the classroom by both boys and teachers. In addition, he pointed out how staffing structures reflected male importance in the workplace (the highest status teaching jobs were - and remain - occupied by men).

⚠ Digging deeper

Functionalism

We can expand the ideas we have just noted in the following way.

- Secondary socialisation: Talcott Parsons (1959) called this process the 'emancipation of the child from primary attachment to the family' and it involves:

  Instrumental relationships - or relationships based on what people can do for us in return for the things that we can do for them. Most of our adult relationships take this form (as opposed to the affective relationships experienced between people who share a close, personal, friendship). In school, instrumental relationships with teachers are different to affective relationships with friends.

- Social control: Two types are significant here: firstly, learning things like acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and, secondly, learning self-control - the child has to learn how to deal with things in an even-handed way. For example, by learning:

- Deferred gratification - we can't always have what we want when we want it (immediate gratification). In educational terms, successful students put up with things they may dislike (boring lessons, the lack of money . . .) in the expectation of passing exams and gaining access to high pay and high status occupations. This relates to a further function of education, the:

- Transmission of cultural values - or as Parsons (1959) puts it, the 'internalisation of a level of society's values and norms that is a step higher than those learnt within the family group'. Through interacting with others, children learn and internalise (adopt as part of their personality) wider cultural values. For example, they start to understand something of their history and geography as well as general cultural values (such as equality of opportunity, individual competition and so forth). This, in turn, is related to:

- Social solidarity - the idea that, as unique individuals, we have to establish things 'in common' with others if we are to live and work

together; we have, in short, to feel we belong to larger social groups (such as a school or a society). The promotion of social solidarity involves social integration - any institution, such as a school, has to develop mechanisms for helping people feel they belong.

⚠ 🌸 Growing it yourself: social integration

Draw a similar table to the one below and identify some of the ways schools try to promote social solidarity (school uniform is an example of a mechanism)

Integrating mechanism	How does it promote solidarity?
School uniform	Everyone looks the same . . .
Further examples?	

• The co-ordination of human resources relates to the school's links with wider society and it involves things like:

  • Role allocation - preparing children for their future adult roles, which is achieved by:

  • Social differentiation: Since work roles are clearly different (some require higher levels of skill and knowledge, others do not), pupils have to be 'made different'. One way the school does this, of course, is through testing and examinations - which have to be objective demonstrations of ability (everyone should have the same opportunity to take and pass such tests). This is because adult roles have to be achieved (on merit) rather than ascribed.

• Social stratification (groups occupying different levels in society) is the inevitable outcome of the process just described and the classic functionalist statement of the necessity for - and inevitability of - stratification is Davis and Moore's ('Some Principles of

Discussion questions: functionalism

To help you evaluate some of the ideas we have just examined, think about - and discuss - some or all of the following questions.

• **Merit**: Is educational achievement based on individual merit and do schools provide equality of opportunity? Or do factors such as parental income (buying private education, for example) give some children distinct advantages over others?

• **Role allocation**: If adult roles are allocated on merit - those who achieve the most in education receive the most in the workplace in terms of pay, conditions and status for example, why is it that women - who now generally out-perform men in the education system - rarely occupy the highest paid jobs in our society?

• **Intelligence, attainment** and **employment** are assumed to be closely related (the brightest achieve the most and get the best jobs). As with role allocation, however, why aren't women better represented in higher income professional work?

• **Functional importance**: Who is more functionally important to society - a road sweeper (£4-£6 per hour) or a financial accountant (£25-£35 per hour)?

Stratification', 1945) argument that stratification represents a mechanism through which those who are most able and talented intellectually are allocated work roles that offer the highest rewards in terms of income, power and status. As Davis argues: 'Education is the proving ground for ability and hence the selective agency for placing people in different statuses according to their abilities'.

Marxism

In developing these ideas further, we can note the following:

Cultural reproduction: For Althusser (1971), this involved:

• Formal education: Children have to learn the skills and knowledge (literacy and numeracy, for example) they will need in the workplace.

• Access to knowledge, is restricted through control of subjects appearing on the curriculum. The higher you go in the education system, the greater your access to knowledge. Restricting access is also useful as a way of limiting children's ambitions and expectations by:

• Structuring knowledge: Preparing people for the differing levels of knowledge required in the workplace involves creating different levels of knowledge in the school. For example, academic (theoretical) knowledge (such as AS-levels) is valued more than practical (vocational) knowledge because the former is the type most useful for professional workers. Similarly, some forms of knowledge are

more valid than others (the ability to do algebra, for example, is considered more valid than the ability to remember who played in goal for Chelsea in the 1970 Cup Final - Peter 'The Cat' Bonetti, in case you're wondering).

• Social control: Children have to learn to accept and respect 'authority', since this will be important in the workplace. As you will know from your own education, the higher you go, the looser the controls on your behaviour (by the time you reach A-level you can be largely trusted to 'do the right things').

• Commodification of knowledge: testing and exams are part of a process where knowledge is given an economic value; in other words, it can be bought and sold. This is important because knowledge, unlike skills (such as the ability to mend a car), can't be easily valued unless you certificate it. Your knowledge of sociology, for example, will be economically worthless unless you pass your AS-level.

• Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs): The content of education is controlled by the State and, for Marxists, this is the means by which the way people think about the world is conditioned by what they learn in school (both in the formal and hidden curriculum). This, in turn, is related to:

• Social learning, which refers to the role played by teachers in 'transforming pupil consciousness'; that is, ensuring they accept 'the realities of life' and, by extension, their likely future social positions.

- Hegemony: Antonio Gramsci (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, 1971) used this term to describe the idea of legitimate leadership. In other words, people obey authority because they believe it right to do so. For example, most people would accept Tony Blair has a right to exercise political leadership because he was democratically elected. As Dominic Strinati ('An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture', 1995) put it, 'Dominant groups in society . . . maintain their dominance by securing the "spontaneous consent" of subordinate groups'. This idea is important, when thinking about the role of education because if people believe education is meritocratic they will believe failure is their fault, not that of a system designed to ensure their failure.

- Correspondence Theory: Bowles and Gintis ('Schooling in Capitalist America', 1976) argued education is a proving ground in which the organisation of the workplace is reflected in the organisation of schools. Education, therefore, becomes a test of control and conformity - those who conform are allowed into the higher areas of education (and, by extension, work) whereas those who do not are excluded. The unstated role of education, therefore, is cultural reproduction: workplace inequality is reflected and reproduced in the organisation of schooling.

- Social Reproduction: Pierre Bourdieu ('The Forms of Capital', 1986) attacks the idea that education systems are meritocratic (see below); for Bourdieu, their real role is to reproduce the power and domination of powerful social classes, something achieved through habitus. An easy way to grasp this idea is to think

⚠ 🌱 Growing it yourself: school and work

The following table explores the relationship between work and school by identifying/explaining possible areas of correspondence. Some parts have been left blank for you to complete.

Once you've done this, expand the table by identifying and explaining further possible areas of correspondence (e.g. tests and grades).

School	Work
Schools arranged hierarchically (top to bottom)	Workplace has different levels (e.g. managers, senior managers, etc.)
	Employers have authority over employees
Students have no say in curriculum	
School uniform	
	Tea breaks
Further Examples	

about the idea of a habitat - the environment in which a group lives and flourishes. The natural habitat of fish, for example (the environment it needs) would not be suitable for humans (and vice versa). For Bourdieu, schools are the 'natural habitat' of the middle and upper classes - they reflect their interests, values and beliefs. The working-class child is like 'a fish out of water' - their values and beliefs are different because of cultural capital - the idea, in basic terms, that our social backgrounds give us certain advantages and disadvantages. Thus, working-class and middle-class children enter the education system with skills and abilities (such as how we speak and express ourselves) that advantage the middle-class child (because their cultural background is similar to that of the school). Thus, working-class children have to 'learn how to learn' before they can actually learn the things on the school curriculum - which gives them a decided disadvantage in the educational game.

- Farkas ('Family Linguistic Culture and Social Reproduction', 2001), for example, found significant linguistic and vocabulary differences between different social classes of white and black children in the USA which, he argued, disadvantaged working-class children in both pre-school and school environments.

- Meritocracy: Bourdieu is critical of this idea because differences in cultural capital influence the relative starting points of students (middle and upper class children have a hidden advantage). However, as he notes, the objective of schooling is cultural reproduction by progressively eliminating lower class children from the school system in ways that make their failure appear their own fault - by examination failure and self-elimination (they give up and leave school at the earliest opportunity).

Discussion point: equal opportunities?

This is a simple demonstration of how equality of opportunity (giving people the same chance to demonstrate their abilities) can actually be unfairly biased by 'cultural background'.

Select two students, one tall, one short. Stand them next to each other and explain their educational future rests on a single target - whoever can jump and reach highest wins.

A discussion about how the competition could have been made fairer (should the shorter student have been allowed to stand on a chair or given a helping hand?) can set the scene for a consideration of **compensatory education** (the idea some children, because of their 'deprived' social background, should be given additional help within the educational system to compensate for their deprivation).

⚠ Growing it yourself: cultural capital

Imagine three people (one French, one German and one English) go into a shop in France (the 'dominant culture', in this respect, would be French).

• The French person speaks the language.

• The German person knows some French.

• The English person knows no French.

The objective is to buy 7 oranges, 1 kilo of flour and 1 litre of cooking oil.

Write a brief explanation (100-200 words) explaining how cultural capital advantages or disadvantages each person in this situation.

When you've done this, imagine the French person is like an upper-class child, the German a middle-class child and the English a working-class child. Write a further brief explanation (200+ words) explaining how their cultural capital advantages or disadvantages them within the school.

Discussion questions: Marxism

To help you evaluate some of the ideas we've just examined, think about - and discuss - some or all of the following questions.

• **Correspondence**: Is the 'correspondence between school and work' a sleight-of-hand? For example, is it possible to find a connection between anything that happens in schools and the workplace (try it and see)? If you can, what does it tell us about the usefulness of this theory?

• **Perspectives**: The similarities between Marxism and Functionalism can, at times, be striking - are some Marxist perspectives just, to use **Jock Young**'s phrase (The New Criminology, 1973), 'Left-wing Functionalism'? To explore this idea, identify some of the similarities and differences between Functionalist and Marxist explanations of the role of education.

• **Social Control**: Are teachers really 'unwitting agents' of social control for a ruling class? Identify and explore some of the ways teachers, through their behaviour, both enforce and undermine the relationship between education and the workplace.

If you are feeling confident, you might like to explore the following questions.

• **Arguments**: How significant are arguments within Marxism? **Poulantzas** (Classes in Contemporary Capitalism, 1975) for example, argues schools are 'relatively autonomous' institutions (that is, governments actually give schools and teachers quite a bit of freedom to act and interpret the curriculum - albeit within certain limits). How different is this from **Althusser's** argument?

• **Dominant ideologies**? Similarly, **Urry, Abercrombie** and **Turner** (The Dominant Ideology Thesis, 1975), prefer Gramsci's concept of hegemony, rather than the idea of there being a 'dominant ideology' in our society. Is there really a clear set of 'ideas about the role of education' in our society and, if not, can you identify what these competing ideas might involve?

Feminism

As I have suggested, the focus of feminist research has changed somewhat in the light of increasing female achievement, something that is reflected in two main ways:

• Work: Despite their educational achievements, women consistently lose out in the workplace. As Treneman ('Will the boys who can't read still end up as the men on top?', 1998) notes: 'The statistical under-achievement of boys in schools is nothing compared with the statistical over-achievement of men in life' (the pay gap between men and women still, for example, reveals an average 20% difference over an individual's lifetime). •

Warrington and Younger ('The Other Side of the Gender Gap', 2000) noted that male and female career aspirations still reflected traditional gender stereotypes (childcare, nursing, hairdressing and secretarial for girls, computing, accountancy and plumbing for boys) and Gordon ('Citizenship, difference and marginality in schools', 1996) found that, although teachers frequently praised girls' efforts, they reported finding boys more interesting to teach and gave more time and effort to motivate and retain their attention - once again suggesting the different levels of importance teachers give to male and female work.

• Roger and Duffield ('Factors Underlying Persistent Gendered Option Choices', 2000) suggest a number of reasons why girls tend to avoid science subjects that are equally applicable to a range of gendered curriculum choices.

  • Primary socialisation entrenches concepts of gender identity in males

and females, conditioning the choices they make in school.

  • Role models: In primary teaching, for example, nearly 90% of classroom teachers are female, leading to an early connection between gender and work. •

Careers advice tends to reinforce traditional male-female work roles.

• Work experience places boys and girls into traditionally stereotyped jobs. Jeannie Mackenzie's study of 'school-based work experience' placements ('It's a Man's Job . . .', 1997) found, for example:

45% of girls [in the study] were allocated to caring placements but these did not always reflect their choices. Boys who did not get their preferred placement tended to be allocated to occupations which were regarded by them as either neutral or as traditionally male while girls who were unsuccessful were allocated to traditionally female occupations.

• Identity: The emphasis here is on understanding different levels of achievement amongst females by examining different forms of identity (how class and ethnicity, for example, impact on gender). Warrington and Younger (2000) for example, found very little difference between the percentage of boys and girls who leave school with no qualifications.

Diane Reay (' "Spice Girls", "Nice Girls", "Girlies", and "Tomboys" ', 2001) found a variety of female identities developing in the primary classroom, including, most interestingly, as the following exchange suggests, girls who wanted to be like boys:

Jodie: Girls are crap, all the girls in this class act all stupid and girlie.
Diane: So does that include you?
Jodie: No, cos I'm not a girl, I'm a tomboy.

Interactionist perspectives

⚠ Preparing the ground

Interactionist perspectives focus on the role of education as a process rather than a system. In other words, they're interested in examining the idea that education is a social construction whose role isn't fixed and unchanging but, on the contrary, fluid and open to a wide range of interpretations. A classic example of this is the question of whether the role of the education system is one of two things.

- Education: John Dewey (Democracy and Education, 1916) argued education should be 'transformative'; focusing on individuals and their social, psychological and moral development as people. Education, in this respect, involves providing the means for individuals to achieve their 'full potential' (whatever that may, in reality, turn out to be).
- Training: The role of education is to give people the knowledge and skills they need to perform specific work-related roles (doctor, mechanic, etc.).

This general debate in our society over the role and purpose of schooling is played out in a number of areas, two of the most significant being:

- Outside the school: The role of education is never clear-cut and uncontested; various interest groups (parents, teachers, governments, businesses) have an input into the system,

trying to shape it to reflect their interests, prejudices and concerns. Some groups, of course, are more successful in having their views heard (government and business organisations over the past 20 years, for example, have been powerful shaping forces in education). The dominance of these groups has resulted in the role of education being 'officially' defined in terms of its training role - the objective (through policies such as the National Curriculum, Key Stage testing, literacy hours in primary schools and so forth) is to produce 'a highly skilled and trained workforce'.

• Inside the school: While official declarations and definitions of the role of education are important influences on behaviour within schools, the relationship between the various actors involved in 'doing education' (teachers and their students, for example) is important and worthy of study. This is because interactionists want to consider

how these social actors interpret their roles within the context of the education system itself.

To illustrate this with a simple example, the sociology course you're following (for whatever reason - you like the subject, your friends took it so you did too, you ticked the wrong box when deciding your options and now you're stuck with it . . .) has, in terms of its structure and content, been decided by the exam board (or awarding body as it's now known). Thus, if you want the qualification you have to study what is laid down in the specification. However, teachers don't all teach sociology in the same way - for some the objective may be to get you through the exam, for others it may be to provide an 'interesting learning experience' on a wet Friday afternoon. The main point here is that what happens 'inside schools' is a process that can be shaped - but not determined - by official definitions of the role of education.

Discussion point: education or training?

One way of demonstrating this idea is to decide the purpose of education. Does it involve 'educating people' (and if so, how? Should you be allowed to study what you want, when you want?) or does it involve 'training people' (giving them specific work skills?) - or maybe it's a combination of both?

To help you organise your discussion, draw the following table and identify relevant points you can use to argue your case about the purpose of education.

Education?		Training?	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**	**Advantages**	**Disadvantages**
Pupils and teachers can focus on material they enjoy learning	Are there things we must learn to take our place in adult society?	You get the skills you need to get a job	What if the skills you've learnt are no longer needed?
Add your own ideas to these lists.			

⚠ Digging deeper

Interactionist perspectives focus explanations about the role of education on what happens inside schools, mainly in terms of school processes. These involve ideas about how educational roles are interpreted and negotiated 'at the chalk face'. In this respect, Interactionists employ a range of ideas to understand the ways teachers and pupils construct 'education'.

- Labelling theory has traditionally been used to describe how teachers, as powerful actors in the education game, classify (or stereotype) students and, by so doing, influence the way they understand their role and status within the school. Pauline Padfield (' "Skivers", "saddos" and "swots" ', 1997), for example, has explored the way 'informal reputations' gained within the school influenced official definitions of pupils.

  Labelling theory has been used to show how school processes such as streaming (grouping by ability on a yearly basis), banding (students taught at different levels, for example, Intermediate and Higher Maths) and setting (grouping by ability on a subject-by-subject basis) are divisive (they encourage students to think of themselves - and each other - in terms of fixed educational abilities).

  Ruth Lupton's study (Do Poor Neighbourhoods Mean Poor Schools?, 2004)
  notes the decision made by the head teacher of one school to abandon banding: 'principally to counter problems of low self-esteem among pupils in the lower band. Within the context of the selective system and the school's poor performance and reputation, mixed

ability teaching was seen as an important way to give all pupils the message they were equally valued'.

Additionally, we increasingly have an educational system, as Hattersley and French ('Wrong Division', 2004) point out, that labels whole schools as either 'good' (academically successful) or 'bad' (academically failing) - and the consequences of the latter label frequently means closure.

Discussion point school labels

You have probably got some knowledge about schools and colleges in your area (by reputation at least). As a class, identify the things you know about these institutions. What sort of reputation do these schools and colleges have and how do you think it affects people's general perception of them?

Can you identify any ways schools/colleges with poor reputations have tried to 're-label' themselves to try to change people's perceptions (for example, where I live Secondary Modern schools that had a poor reputation have re-named themselves 'Community Schools').

- Self-concepts: The concept of labelling relates to this idea in terms of questions like: How do you know if you are a good or bad student? How does your teacher know if they're good or bad at their job? How good is the reputation of your school?

  These questions relate to how we see ourselves and, for Interactionists, self perception is fluid and intangible, mainly because we look to others to tell us how

we are doing (you may, for example, look to your teacher to tell you how 'good' or 'bad' a student you are. Equally, your teacher may look to you to tell them something about their abilities as a teacher). Labelling is an important aspect of this process of self-construction (if your teacher continually gives you poor grades or students continually misbehave in a class we soon start to get the picture), based on the idea of:

- Reference groups - the people we use to check 'how we're doing' in whatever role we are playing. Not everyone in our reference group is equally important; significant others are people whose opinion we value while insignificant others are people we don't really care about (if your teacher isn't a significant other, you won't particularly care how they label you - although the labels that stick will always have consequences). This idea can of course, be applied to whole schools as well as groups and individuals within them. One outcome of all the processes just described may be a:

- Self-fulfilling prophecy - a prediction we make that, by making, we bring about. On an individual level, if we're labelled by teachers as 'dim' because, despite our best efforts, we get poor grades then perhaps we start to see our self in terms of this label and stop trying to get decent grades (what's the point - we're dim) and, in effect, confirm the teacher's label. Robin Nash (Keeping In With Teacher, 1972) demonstrated how the values held by teachers about 'good' and 'bad' pupils were rapidly transmitted to pupils through attitudes and behaviours. Nash concluded: 'Certainly children of low

Discussion questions: interactionist perspectives

To help you evaluate some of the ideas we have just examined, think about - and discuss - some or all of the following questions.

- **Labelling**: Is this idea applied in a deterministic way (that is, does it suggest labelling always has a specific outcome?). In your experience, for example, is it possible to overturn negative labels and - if so - how?
- **Outside school factors**: How important are things like government policies, cultural capital and so forth in shaping school and pupil performance and achievement?
- **Self-concept**: To what extent do you agree/disagree that 'a weakness of Interactionist theory is that individuals are seen in isolation from wider social influences and stresses'? In other words, are schools the most important influence on how we see our self in educational terms? For example, identify and consider some ways teachers are important for pupil self-concepts and then think about how other social groups may influence our educational performance.
- **Setting and banding**: What positive features of these practices can you identify?
- **Inside school factors**: Do Interactionist theorists overstate the importance of these in explaining the role and purpose of education?

social origin do poorly at school because they lack encouragement at home, because they use language in a different way from their teachers, because they have their own attitudes to learning and so on. But also because of the expectations their teachers have of them'.

This concept also applies to whole classes of students who may be labelled in this way. Studies abound (Stephen Ball's Beachside Comprehensive, 1981, Paul Willis's Learning to Labour: How working-class kids get working-class jobs, 1977, Cecile Wright's Race Relations in the Primary School, 1992 and Troyna and Hatcher's Racism in children's lives, 1992) to demonstrate how this occurs through practices such as streaming, setting and banding, ethnic stereotyping and so forth.

Finally, whole schools may be enveloped by a self-fulfilling prophecy. If schools do badly in league tables of GCSE results, middle class parents stop sending their children to the 'bad school', whose results may continue to fall.

Postmodern perspectives

⚠ Preparing the ground

Postmodernist views on the 'role of education' are difficult to categorise for the deceptively simple reason that, as Clinton Collins ('Truth as a communicative virtue in a post-modern age', 1993) suggests: 'The term describes cultural changes happening to people throughout the post-industrial world, willy-nilly'.

Postmodern writers are like football commentators, describing the action for us as it unfolds (sheepskin coat optional)

The 'willy-nilly' tag is important because it suggests postmodernism is concerned with describing cultural tendencies and processes, in all their (glorious) confusion, for both our amusement and, probably, bemusement. In other words, postmodernists don't have a view, as such, on the role of education since this would suggest there is some essential 'right' or 'wrong' position on the subject. What they do have - which I propose to outline - is ideas about the relationship - and tension - between two competing, increasingly opposed, processes.

Modern institutions, such as schools, were born out of the Industrial Revolution and the development of modern society. As such, they exist to serve a number of purposes all of which, according to writers such as Foucault (Discipline and Punish, 1977), are to do with power ('Everything reduces to power', as he helpfully puts it). The power principle, in this context, relates

to how the modern state tries to exert social control through institutions such as education.

The other side of this spectacle are postmodern people - the increasing resistance and decentralising attitudes of students (and indeed teachers) to the centralising tendencies of modernist education systems.

In other words, we have a situation where, on the one hand, the education system has, over the past few years, been subjected to increasingly centralised control by, for example, the government. This idea of 'control from the centre' has been evidenced by things like the introduction of a:

• National curriculum that sets out the subjects to be taught in all state schools.
• Key Stage testing, at ages 7, 11 and 14, that sets attainment targets in English and maths for all pupils.
• Literacy and numeracy hours introduced into primary schools in 1998.

Commenting on the introduction of the literacy hour, the National Literacy Trust (2004) noted:

> The National Literacy Strategy is an unprecedented intervention in classroom teaching methods. [It] describes term by term how reading and writing should be taught . . . The policy requires primary teachers to teach a daily English lesson in which pupils are taught for the first half of the lesson as a whole class, reading together, extending their vocabulary . . . and being taught grammar, punctuation and spelling.

On the other hand, however, we have a situation that David Elkind ('Schooling the Post-Modern Child', 1998), characterises in terms of the idea that: 'Whereas modern childhood was defined in terms of differences between age groups, postmodern childhood is identified with differences within age groups'. In other words, there is a sense of what Phil Willis ('Social class "defines school achievement": The Guardian, 23/04/03) describes as 'Decentralising education from government and reducing the number of tests and targets' in order to '. . . free schools up to deal with the needs of individual children'.

⚠️ Digging deeper

We can develop the distinction between modern institutions and postmodern people in the following way.

Modern institutions

The idea of control, for postmodernists, works on two levels.

• Intellectual control involves how people think and act in a number of ways.
    • The curriculum, for example, specifies the things (subjects) considered worthy of being known and its content is controlled down to the finest detail (think about the sociology specification or government initiatives involving things like literacy hours and detailed lesson plans for primary school teachers).
  • Knowledge is also controlled in terms of what you learn. English literature, for example, involves learning 'classic texts' (Shakespeare, Dickens and so forth - sometimes called 'high culture' - what governments and educationalists view as the best possible examples of our culture) and largely excludes 'popular culture' (the books and magazines most people

actually read, the computer games they play, the films they watch . . .) that is considered, within the National Curriculum for example, as being largely unworthy of serious, detailed, study.

- Sites of control: In an overall sense, schools are sites which attempt (through their captive audiences) to distribute (and legitimise) certain forms of what Provenzo (Teaching, Learning, and Schooling, 2002) identifies as: language, practices, values, ways of talking and acting, moving, dressing and socialising (to name but a few). Schools, from this viewpoint, are not simply organised for 'education', but also for institutionalising the culture of powerful groups.

- Physical control involves both:

  - Body: Think about what you can and can't do in school. You must attend (or your parents may be prosecuted) and you must be in certain lessons (and places) at certain times. Once in those lessons there may be restrictions on when you can speak, who you can speak to, how you speak to them, as well as movement restrictions (such as asking permission to go to the toilet and not being in corridors when you should be in a lesson).

  - Space: Schools are increasingly introducing closed-circuit television (both inside and outside the classroom) for the purpose of patrolling and controlling space - who is allowed to be in certain spaces (classrooms, corridors, staffrooms) and when they are allowed to be there.

Postmodern people

For postmodernists, what we are seeing are changes in people's behaviour (under the influence of globalisation and cross-cultural contacts and exchanges) which include:

Active consumption: Mark Taylor (Generation NeXt Comes to College, 2004) argues students are changing: 'They are the most academically disengaged, or even compliant college students with all time low measures for time spent studying

⚠ Growing it yourself: the school prison

Foucault (1977) likened schools to prisons in terms of their use of surveillance techniques. Are schools really like this and, if so, how?

Using the following table as a guide, identify some of the ways schools are like prisons in terms of how they attempt to control body and space.

Body		Space	
Prison	School	Prison	School
Electronic tags	Electronic registers	Cells	Classrooms
	Teachers	Warders	

and all time high measures for boredom and tardiness . . . bringing educational and social characteristics to campus that are challenging educators'. Taylor characterises these students in a number of ways (not all of them particularly flattering): Consumer oriented, wanting instant gratification, adaptable to new situations, sceptical and cynical to name but a few.

• Differentiation: Elkind (1998) suggests a key characteristic here is the idea of difference and, in a sense, the fragmentation of identities. In other words, students want to be recognised and treated as unique individuals rather than as groups (genders, classes. ethnicities and so forth). To use Giroux's phrase (Slacking Off, 1994) students are increasingly 'border youths' whose identities cut across class, ethnicity and gender categories.

• Sousveillance (the opposite of surveillance - to watch from above) means 'to watch from below' and expresses the idea students (and teachers) are increasingly critical and dissatisfied with their treatment in the education system.

As Hanafin et al ('Responding to Student Diversity', 2002) argue:

Mainstream education is constructed on a flawed notion of intelligence and consequently disables many learners, perhaps even the majority . . . Through over reliance on a narrow range of teaching methods, students are denied access to curriculum content. Narrow assessment approaches further compound disablement. At its most extreme, mainstream education supports and structures unnecessary failure and exclusion.

In addition, we could also note here the development of new:

• subjects, such as media, film and cultural studies

• ideas about learning - Howard Gardner's ideas about multiple intelligences (Frames of Mind, 1993), for example, express the idea that

. . . it was generally believed intelligence was a single entity that was inherited; and that human beings - initially a blank slate - could be trained to learn anything, provided it was presented in an appropriate way. Nowadays an increasing number of researchers believe precisely the opposite; that there exists a multitude of intelligences, quite independent of each other.

• relationships - the teacher as 'facilitator', helping students to learn.

Finally, postmodernists note, as I have suggested, some contributing processes to the above involve:

• Globalisation (of course), because it opens up new ways of thinking and doing and, as Shen-Keng Yang ('Educational research', 2002) notes, it also promotes a new interest in local cultures (your immediate and personal environment, for example).

• Uncertainty (both for students and teachers) about the teaching and learning process - what, for example, is expected of people? Have they made the right choices about what to study?

One upshot of uncertainty is a contradictory outcome to that noted by Taylor (2004). Howe and Strauss (Millennials Rising, 2000), for example,

characterise the 'postmodern generation' as being well focused on grades and performance, interested in extra curricular and community activities, demanding of secure environments and more interested in maths and science than in humanities.

On the other hand, as we will see when we look at New Right perspectives, governments have responded to uncertainty by increased efforts at centralisation and control. The National Curriculum, Key Stage tests and so forth are all attempts, it could be argued, to maintain an outdated perception of the role and purpose of education.

New Right perspectives

⚠ Preparing the ground

New Right perspectives are difficult to classify because they tend to straddle an uneasy divide between, on the one hand, Functionalist theories (involving, for example, structural concepts like role allocation and social differentiation) and, on the other, individualistic views about people as consumers who exercise choices about the education their sons and daughters receive. Problems of classification notwithstanding, we can note how New Right perspectives generally focus on two basic areas.

• Society: Although Margaret Thatcher's (in)famous observation, 'There is no such

Discussion questions: postmodernism

To help you evaluate some of the ideas we've just examined, think about - and discuss - some or all of the following questions.

• **Surveillance**: Can things like CCTV in schools have positive aspects (such as creating a secure and safe environment)?
• **Postmodern people**: How aware are students and parents of their role as 'consumers' of education? Do you see yourself as a 'postmodern person' and if not, why not?
• **Identities**: How important (or unimportant) are things like class, gender and ethnic identities? Do people see themselves as 'individuals', part of large groups or, perhaps 'individuals within large groups'?
• **Patterns**: Is it possible to identify patterns of behaviour within school (for example, groups of boys and girls acting in specific, different, ways)? If so, what does this tell us about postmodern ideas?
• **Postmodern people**: Look again at how both Taylor (2004) and Howe and Strauss (2000) characterise 'postmodern students'; which, in your experience, is the more realistic characterisation (and why)?

thing as society, only individuals and families', suggests these perspectives take a rather dim view of sociological arguments about society and culture (they also take a dim view of sociologists, come to that), this is not to say they don't have strong views about the role of the state which, in basic terms, involves the idea the role of government is to guarantee the freedom of:

- Individuals: From this perspective, people are seen as consumers, able and willing to make informed choices about their lives and families (which, incidentally, is seen as the basic social unit in any society). However, they argue consumer choice is limited, in societies such as our own, by the way governments have allowed teachers to set the education agenda - an idea we will develop in more detail in a moment.

Rather than concern ourselves with trying to specify, from this perspective, the exact relationship between the individual and society, it's perhaps easier to think in terms of the relationship between individuals and the state (which includes things like political government, the Civil Service and social control agencies such as the police and armed forces). In this respect, New Right perspectives argue for a minimal state. In other words, the ideal role of government in any society is that of creating the conditions under which private enterprise can flourish and in which individuals can go about their daily lives with the minimum of political interference. The role of the state, therefore, is largely reduced to one that guarantees the safety of its citizens - both internally, through agencies such as the police, and externally through agencies such as the armed forces.

Although this characterisation oversimplifies New Right arguments somewhat, it does give a general flavour for the perspective and its emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of individuals (to provide, for example, for both themselves and their families) and the general belief that capitalism (and private enterprise) is the best possible way of ensuring the largest number of people have the highest possible standard of living.

These ideas, as I am sure you appreciate, mean that when we consider the role of education from this perspective the general argument is that government should not be involved in its provision.

⚠ Digging deeper

New Right perspectives on the role of education have been influential in both Britain and the USA in recent years and we can develop the ideas we've just noted in the following way.

Society

- Business organisations are seen as wealth creators and, as such, should be allowed to get on with the thing they do best (creating wealth if you have to ask), free from state 'interference'. In this respect:
- Governments are seen as bureaucratic organisations, unable to adjust quickly and easily to change. They should not involve themselves in areas (such as industry and commerce) where businesses can, it is argued, do a better job. The role of governments, therefore, is not to 'do things' (like manage schools or . . . err . . . railways) but rather to create the conditions under which businesses can successfully operate. One reason for this is:

- Competition: Businesses, unlike governments, are competitive organisations, forced to innovate (find new and better ways of doing things) if they are to capture and retain customers.

Individuals

As Pateman ('Education and Social Theory', 1991) notes, the New Right sees consumer choice as being limited by producer capture: 'Teachers (the "producers") have set their own agendas for schools when it should be parents (the "consumers") who set agendas for teachers. The New Right then argues for breaking up schooling monopolies and for enfranchizing the consumer'. The role of government, in this respect, is to guarentee:

- Choice: This is achieved in a variety of ways: by encouraging different types of school; allowing businesses a say in the building, ownership and running of state schools; encouraging fee-paying, private schools (thereby contributing to the diversity of educational provision and the enhancing of parental choice).

- Standards, in the sense of ensuring teachers teach the same curriculum, testing (at various Key Stages) to ensure schools are performing their role properly and to identify schools 'failing their customers'. League tables which show the 'best' and 'worst' performing schools are also designed to give consumers choice over where they send their children.

- Training, rather than education. The objective is to ensure schools produce students with the skills businesses need ('Key Skills', for example, such as maths and ICT). The New Right is keen on 'traditional subjects' (English, maths and science) and antagonistic to subjects like

media and film studies - and, of course, sociology.

- Socialisation: Schools have an important role here, not just in producing new consumers and workers, but also ensuring children have the 'right attitudes' for these roles. Part of this process involves (in a similar sort of argument to that used by functionalists) instilling respect for legitimate authority and the development of future business leaders.

Discussion questions: New Right

To help you evaluate some of the ideas we've just examined, think about - and discuss - some or all of the following questions.

- **Training**: Should schools be about more than simply training people for the workplace? If so, what sort of things should schools be doing to enhance individual experience of education?
- **Private schools**: Do they 'enhance consumer choice' or simply divide people on the basis of income? What arguments - for and against - can you identify?
- **Development**: What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of government control over the education system?
- **Curriculum**: Is the kind of school curriculum (in terms of subjects and content) you've experienced appropriate for the twenty-first century? What subjects, for example, should/shouldn't be on the curriculum?
- **Marketisation**: What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of private business control over the education system?

In this section we have looked, in general terms, at the role played by education in society from a variety of different perspectives. One of the roles we have touched on at various points is the idea of schools as areas of formal teaching and learning and how learning, in particular, is validated and certificated. In the next section we can develop this idea a little more by focusing on the concept of differential achievement - why some social groups do better or worse than others in our education system.

Differential achievement

Introduction

The focus of this section, (if you hadn't already guessed) is an examination of 'explanations of the different educational achievement of social groups by social class, gender and ethnicity'.

WARM UP: SOCIAL CLASS AND ACHIEVEMENT

This exercise is in two parts.

1. In small groups, create a table like the one shown. Each group should choose one of the areas indicated (family, work or school). For your chosen area, identify as many factors as you can that might give a child an educational advantage or disadvantage (I have noted a few to get you started).

Area	Possible advantages?	Possible disadvantages?
Family and home life	Positive parental attitudes to value of education	Poverty
Work	High income	Unemployment
School	Private schooling	Exclusion from school

2. For each factor you've identified within your chosen area, write a short explanation about how you think it might advantage or disadvantage a child's education. For example:
'Parental unemployment may mean a child has to leave school at 16 to get a job to help support their family'.

Once you have completed this, present your ideas and explanations to the rest of the class.

Social class

⚠️ Preparing the ground

We can begin this section by identifying some of the ways social class impacts on educational performance at various levels of our education system, from achievement at Key Stage 1 (7 year olds) to participation at degree level. Once we have outlined the basic relationship between class and educational performance we can then move on to examine some explanations for this relationship.

Key Stages 1-3

Table 4.2 illustrates achievement differences between social classes using eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) as a measure of attainment. This does, of course, assume (probably quite reasonably) pupils with FSM status come from the lower social classes.

The most notable feature of these figures is the comparatively lower performance of FSM pupils at all stages of compulsory schooling, (from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4 (GCSE)).

Key Stage 4

If we look in a bit more detail at Key Stage 4, by breaking the figures down into specific social classes, we can see more clearly the general relationship between class membership and achievement. Firstly, middle-class (professional) children perform comparatively better than working-class (skilled and unskilled manual) children - but there are also clear achievement divisions within the working class. Secondly, educational performance for all social classes has improved in recent years, although, as I have just noted, the performance gap between the higher and lower social classes is still apparent.

	1989	2000	2002
Professional	52	74	77
Skilled manual	21	45	52
Unskilled manual	12	26	32

Table 4.3% of selected social classes gaining 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C
Source: Department for Education and Skills, 2004

	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4 (GCSE)	
	Reading	English		Writing	Science		Maths			5 or more A*-C	No Passes
Non FSM	88	79	74	85	79	74	93	76	75	55.2	4.1
FSM	69	54	44	64	52	42	80	53	46	24.4	12.2

Table 4.2 % Achievement: Key Stages 1-3 (ages 7, 11 and 14) to Key Stage 4 (GCSE)
Source: Department for Education and Skills, 2004

Further and higher education

If we look at participation (or 'staying-on') figures for those in full-time further (post-16) education by social class, an interesting picture begins to emerge. Working-class participation, although still generally lower than middle-class participation, has increased significantly in recent times (unskilled manual participation, for example, has more than doubled since 1989). This suggests a couple of things.

- Vocational qualifications: Many working-class children stay on in education, post-16, to study for vocational qualifications (that are directly related to specific occupations (bricklaying, for example) or types of occupation (tourism, for example) not offered during their period of compulsory schooling.

- Educational value: Many working-class children (and presumably their parents who may have to support them financially during their period of study) place a value on educational qualifications. The interesting thing to note here, perhaps, is the possibility such children have problems with their school (in terms of achievement, what they are required to study and so forth), not with the idea of education itself.

Finally, if we look at participation in higher (degree-level) education, a similar trend - in terms of middle-class (non-manual) children having a higher level of participation than working-class (manual) children - is again evident. However, we need to keep in mind that if relatively large numbers of working-class children are participating, post-16, in vocational education courses it makes it less likely they will be subsequently involved, unlike their middle-class peers, in higher education. It is, therefore, important to consider the idea that different social classes may develop different routes through the education system.

	1991	1998	2002
Non-Manual	36	48	51
Manual	11	18	19

Table 4.5 % Participation in HE by social classes
Source: Social Trends 34 (2004)

In terms of the figures we have just examined, the general patterns of achievement we have noted suggest the higher your social class, the greater your level of educational attainment. Sociologists have, of course, developed a number of possible explanations for this situation which, for convenience, we can examine in terms of two general categories: outside school factors and inside school factors.

	1989	2000	2002
Professional	68	82	87
Skilled manual	39	66	69
Unskilled manual	27	59	60

Table 4.4 % in full-time education at age 16 by selected social classes
Source: Department for Education and Skills, 2004

Outside school factors involve explanations focusing on the home background (both material and cultural) of pupils. These include, for example:

• Material deprivation, which refers to things like poor diet/nutrition, lack of private study facilities and resources, the need to work to supplement family income and so forth. These combine to give affluent (well-off) pupils a relative advantage in school (the ability to use computers and the Internet for homework/coursework, for example).

• Attitudes to education focuses on the idea that middle-class parents take an active interest in their children's education. Diane Reay ('Emotional capital', 2000) suggests middle-class mothers, for example, invest time and effort (or emotional labour) in their children's education. Working-class parents, on the other hand, either don't particularly care about their children's education (the classic argument being they prefer their children to leave school and start work at the earliest possible opportunity) or they fail to control their children's behaviour, which results in things like truancy, exclusion and underachievement. This links easily into:

• Cultural deprivation theory and the idea that working-class culture is somehow 'lacking' in the attributes (such as positive parental attitudes about the value of education) and practices (reading to children, helping with homework and so forth) that make the middle classes educationally successful. Solutions to cultural deprivation focus around 'compensating' working-class children for their cultural deprivation by providing extra educational resources to give them an equal opportunity to compete with their culturally advantaged middle-class peers. By and large, this type of theory has been submerged into:

• Underclass theory, which suggests a combination of material and cultural factors are the cause of educational failure among a class of people who are increasingly disconnected from mainstream society. According to New Right theorists like Charles Murray and Melanie Phillips ('The British Underclass 1990-2000', 2001), the underclass involves 'people at the margins of society, unsocialised and often violent . . . parents who mean well but who cannot provide for themselves, who give nothing back to the neighbourhood, and whose children are the despair of the teachers who have to deal with them'.

Underachievement is explained by arguing that material factors (economic deprivation) and cultural factors (a moral relativism that fails to condemn unacceptable behaviour, for example) combine to produce, in Phillips' (2001) words, 'the socially excluded who are no longer just poor but the victims of anti-education, anti-marriage policies which have undermined personal responsibility'. This theory, therefore, identifies the underclass as a group mainly responsible for underachievement - through things like truancy, misbehaviour and general beliefs (state handouts and petty crime as preferable to qualifications and hard work, for example). In other words, this version of underclass theory blames governments (for creating a class of people dependent on state handouts) and

parents (for failing to take moral responsibility for child care and socialisation). A different, more left-wing, take on this involves:

- Class culture theory, which argues different classes develop different values and norms based around their different experiences and needs. For the middle classes, educational qualifications are an important way of reproducing individual class positions, whereas for the working classes the work-based route to money and status has always been more important. Class differences are demonstrated in a variety of ways: deferred/immediate gratification, parental experiences of higher education - or not as the case may be - and so forth.

- Class subculture theory takes this a little further by arguing state schools are institutions dominated by 'middle-class norms, values, beliefs and ideologies' and some working-class subcultural groups succeed by adapting successfully to this school environment - whereas others, of course, do not. A modern version of this general theory relates to:

- Identities, which pinpoints changing male (and female) identities as causes of differential achievement; the idea, for example, some working-class boys develop a 'laddish, anti-school, anti-learning' culture. Becky Francis's secondary school study (Boys, Girls and Achievement, 2000) argues that teenage boys used 'laddish' behaviour in the classroom as a way of offsetting the generally low levels of esteem they received from both teachers and (female) pupils (findings that link back to earlier subcultural studies - such as Albert

Cohen's Delinquent Boys (1955) - which focused on the idea of status deprivation as a cause of boys' educational disaffection).

- Cultural capital is an idea we have examined earlier and its application to educational achievement lies in areas such as those identified by Reay (2000) when she argued the importance of 'mothers' emotional engagement with their children's education' - in areas such as help and encouragement with school work and pressurising teachers to improve their children's performance. Middle-class women, according to Reay's research, were particularly successful in investing their emotional capital in their child's education.

Inside school factors (sometimes called the hidden curriculum) involve explanations for differential achievement that focus on:

- Type of school: Different types of school (private, grammar, comprehensive . . .) involve different levels of teacher, parent and pupil expectations - in other words, top performing schools, whether in the private or state sector, create a climate of expectation that pushes pupils into higher levels of achievement. In addition, status differences between schools also tell pupils something about their relative educational (and social) worth.

Gewirtz ('Can All Schools Be Successful?', 1998) demonstrated that, even within schools of similar status, there is a huge difference between a top state school and an inner city school labelled as 'failing'. In the latter, for example, she found, 'difficulties in staff recruitment and parental involvement,

and strained relationships between management and staff as improvement agendas became hijacked by day-to-day fire-fighting'.

• Class sizes: Private (fee-paying) schools dominate school league tables, one explanation for this being teachers give more time to individual students because of smaller class sizes. According to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), in 1999 average class size in state secondary schools was 20 pupils, whereas in private schools it was 10.

• Teacher attitudes involves the ideas of labelling and self-fulfilling prophecies (which we have explained previously).

The basic idea here is teachers communicate, (consciously and subconsciously), positive or negative beliefs about the value of their pupils. Pupils pick up on these ideas and, in the process, see themselves in terms of the labels given to them by their teachers (as intelligent or unintelligent, for example).

• Social inclusion/exclusion has one fairly obvious form (physical exclusion), which includes self-exclusion (truancy) as well as actually being barred from school (DfES figures for 2001 show 10,000 permanent school exclusions, for example). Malcolm et al ('Absence from School', 2003) found broad agreement amongst Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and

Discussion point: schools

One of the schools pictured below is a public (fee-paying) school the other isn't. Can you guess which is which?

What factors led to your decision? What educational and social advantages/disadvantages do you think there might be for pupils who attend either the fee-paying school (pictured left) or the state school (pictured right)?

Discussion point: labelling

How have you (or people you know) been labelled at school?

What effects did this labelling process have? (for example, did it demoralise you or spur you on to prove the label was incorrect?).

What do your experiences tell us about the nature and effectiveness of labelling processes and self-fulfilling prophecies?

teachers that absence correlated with lower attainment (which is not too surprising, all things considered).

Another, less obvious form of inclusion/exclusion is ability grouping (a general label for practices such as streaming, setting and banding). Harlen and Malcolm's wide-ranging 'Setting and Streaming' (1999), for example, concluded educational performance was affected by many school processes - 'class size, pupil ability range, teaching methods and materials . . . and teachers' attitudes towards mixed-ability teaching'.

Hallam, Ireson and Hurley ('Ability Grouping in the Secondary School', 2001) noted how setting, for example, had both benefits for pupils (minimising disruptive behaviour) and disadvantages (stigmatising lower set pupils, the association between lower sets and unemployment, higher sets and good exam grades). They also noted a familiar trend in this type of research (from Nell Keddie 'Classroom Knowledge', 1971, onwards) - teachers giving 'more creative

work and privileges to higher set students while restricting lower sets to tedious, routine tasks'.

Hallam et al's research highlighting how high and low set pupils attracted different stigmatising labels ('thick', 'dumb', 'boffin', 'clever clogs') relates to ideas about:

- Pupil subcultures. As an explanation for differential achievement, this idea has a long and respectable history (see, for example, David Hargreaves' 'Social Relations In A Secondary School' (1967) and Pete Woods' 'The Divided School' (1979) - the latter noting the existence of pro and anti school subcultures, from ingratiating, compliant pupils, through ritualists 'going through the motions' to outright rebels).

More recently, Martin Johnson (Failing School, Failing City, 1999) has described schools in Northern Ireland where some pupil subcultures were marked by 'hostility and indifference' to learning, which correlated with high levels of absence and lower levels of educational achievement.

Finally, Colin Lacey ('Hightown Grammar', 1970) noted streaming and setting created the belief, even among relatively successful grammar school students, they were failures when compared to their peers. Thirty years later, Power et al ('Education and the Middle Class', 2003) found much the same sort of subcultural labelling process at work when they noted how successful middle-class students labelled themselves as failures for their inability to match the achievements of some of their high-flying peers.

Growing it yourself:
pupil subcultures

In small groups (or as a whole class) use your experience of school/college life to identify as many pupil subcultures as you can.

Once you've done this, make a list of the general social characteristics of each group: are they, for example, single or mixed gender, middle or lower class? are these groups associated with setting/banding (and, if so, how)? The general social behaviours of these groups: are they, for example, pro or anti school?.

Digging deeper

Although we have identified a range of possible explanations for class-based differential achievement, we need to remember two things.

Firstly, as Mairtin Mac an Ghaill ('What about the Boys?', 1996) argues, social class origins remain the single best predictor of educational success or failure. Demack, Drew and Grimsley ('Myths about underachievement', 1998) also note, 'While school effectiveness research has focused on school differences, social class differences are still the largest differences of all and the children of professional parents have the largest advantage of all'.

Secondly, we should avoid the assumption that 'the majority' of working-class children are necessarily academic underachievers. Significant numbers do succeed educationally and they have been increasingly successful (albeit from a low starting point) over the past 15 years at GCSE. Working-class children are also increasingly present in post-16 education. The fact they remain, despite increases in recent years, under-represented in higher education also tells us something about the activities and preoccupations of this group.

Outside school factors

- Material deprivation: Although studies over the past 40 years have shown there is no clear and simple relationship between poverty/deprivation and educational performance, there is, nevertheless, a link.

  Douglas's classic study ('The Home and the School', 1964) concluded material deprivation was too broad an explanation for relative working class failure because some materially-deprived children managed to succeed. Working class attainment also tended to fall throughout a child's education, suggesting other processes, within the school itself, contributed to differential achievement levels.

  Mortimore (The Road to Improvement: Reflections on School Effectiveness, 1998), however, argues that 'In any country in the world . . . there is a strong relationship between deprivation in the early years and later educational outcomes' and Robinson (Literacy, Numeracy and Economic Performance, 1998) concludes:
  'A serious policy to alleviate child poverty might do far more for boosting attainment in literacy and numeracy than any modest interventions in schooling'.
- Parental attitudes: We need to be careful when suggesting attitudes and a lack of involvement by working class parents in their children's education are a cause of differential achievement. As Hanafin and

Lynch ('Peripheral Voices', 2002) argue, working-class parents are interested in their children's education and progress, but they 'felt excluded from participation in decision-making', which suggests the 'problem' lies not so much with parents but with schools - something addressed by New Labour educational policies that have attempted to involve parents in the running of their child's school. Desforges' literature review ('The impact of parental involvement', 2003), on the other hand, also suggests 'at-home good parenting' has a positive effect on achievement.

• Cultural deprivation/underclass explanations have a superficial attractiveness, but MacDonald and Marsh ('Disconnected Youth?', 2003) found 'no evidence of a distinct, deviant, underclass culture' in their research on Teesside, Middlesbrough. What they found was a complicated picture of 'marginalised youth' struggling to come to terms with their low status and social exclusion. As Mac an Ghaill (1996) notes, the problem is not the culture of working-class boys; rather, changes in the labour market (the decline in manufacturing jobs) have effectively excluded such boys from their traditional work in industry. This gives a useful comparison to the situation found by Paul Willis ('Learning to Labour', 1977) when he argued many working class boys were unconcerned with educational achievement because their objective was to leave school and start earning money - something that may no longer be as easy to achieve as it was at the time of Willis' study.

Inside school factors

Nell Keddie ('Tlnker, Tailor: The Myth of Cultural Deprivation', 1973), observed that if we, as sociologists, focus our attention on the supposed deficiencies of children (in terms of cultural deprivation, for example), we may not notice the shortcomings of schools - something particularly evident over the past 30 years in terms of strategies designed to improve the performance of underachieving students.

• School effects: Taking a range of general factors into account, Ruth Lupton (Do poor neighbourhoods mean poor schools?, 2003) concluded that 'neighbourhood poverty' and 'poor schooling' go hand-in-hand - the main question being, of course, which comes first; are schools 'poor' because of their ability intake or do schools - through processes such as labelling and self-fulfilling prophecies - fail to inspire and educate their pupils?

• Value-added: Thomas and Mortimore ('Comparisons of value added models', 1996) argue that, by controlling for social class and applying value-added analyses to educational attainment (measuring the relative improvement - or lack of same - of children within a school between, for example, one Key Stage and the next), schools can substantially raise pupil achievement.

• League tables: Robinson (1998) has additionally noted the impact of school league tables on achievement; while overall levels of achievement have risen in recent years, he argues this is at the expense of the lowest achieving children because teachers have concentrated their

efforts on 'marginal pupils' (those just below the magic C grade at GCSE). Slight improvements in their attainment, Robinson argues, results in hugely improved pass rates at GCSE.

• Study support: A number of writers have noted how changing ways of supporting students can affect achievement. In 'The Impact of Study Support', (2001), MacBeth et al, for example, noted areas such as attendance, attitudes to school and attainment increased for students who participated in out-of-school-hours learning - something incorporated into New Labour educational policy in the shape of Extended Schools (discussed in more detail below).

To put the above into an overall context, Lucy Ward ('Pupils at good schools "gain 18 months" ', 2004) notes that, according to DfES research, of differences in performance between schools:

• 73% is due to a child's level of achievement on starting secondary school •

• 19% on the proportion of pupils qualifying for free school meals

• 8% on the effectiveness of teaching.

⚠ Gender

Preparing the ground

We can begin this section in a similar way to the section we have just completed on social class - by identifying some of the ways gender impacts on educational performance at various levels of our education system, from achievement at Key Stage 1 (7 year olds) to participation at degree level.

Once we have outlined the basic relationship between gender and educational performance we can then examine some possible explanations for this relationship.

Key Stages 1-3

According to DfES figures (2004), girls outperformed boys at every Key Stage in 2003, with the exception of Key Stage 2 Maths and Key Stage 3 science (where their levels of achievement were the same). If we include class-based factors in the analysis, a couple of points can be noted.

• FSM children: Both boys and girls in this category achieved less than their non-FSM peers. Among this group, girls outperformed boys at every Key Stage level with the exception of Key Stage 3 science and Key Stage 2 maths (where small percentage differences in achievement in favour of boys were apparent).

• Non-FSM children: The general pattern of achievement for this group was similar to the FSM group - girls outperformed boys with the exception of Key Stage 2 maths.

We can add a couple of points to the above.

• Marginal differences: With the exception of English at Key Stage 2 and 3, the percentage difference in performance between boys and girls (both FSM and non-FSM children) is marginal - 2 percentage points at most.

• Social class: the significance of social class should be noted here; FSM girls achieved less than non-FSM boys. This

suggests, at the very least, social class is a significant factor in explaining male and female educational achievement.

Key Stage 4

The pattern of gender achievement at GCSE is, as you might expect, similar to that at Key Stage 1-3; girls, over the past few years have outperformed boys at this level. It is also significant to note that, over the past 15 years, the gender gap at this level has increased (as Table 4.6 demonstrates).

	1989	2000	2002
Male	28	44	46
Female	31	54	56

Table 4.6 % gaining 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C by gender
Source: Department for Education and Skills, 2004

Further and higher education

When we look at participation rates post-16 we find more girls than boys in further education. According to DfES figures (2004), for example, in 2002 75% of 16-year-old girls and 66% of 16-year-old boys were in full-time education. In terms of achievement, as Table 4.7 shows, girls achieve more than boys in terms of exam passes at A-level and its equivalent than boys.

	1996	2000	2001
Males	34	37	37
Females	42	46	47

Table 4.7 % achieving 1 or more A-level passes or equivalent by gender
Source: Department for Education and Skills, 2004

In terms of participation in higher education, according to Social Trends 34 (2004), more

women than men were studying full time for a first degree in 2002 (630,000 as against 519,000). The equivalent figures for 1971 were 173,000 women and 241,000 men).

Growing it yourself: gender and achievement

30 years ago explanations for differential achievement focused on why boys achieved more than girls in the education system. Today, the reverse is true.

Using the table below as a starting point, identify changes in both society and schools that might be responsible for changing patterns of gender achievement.

Outside school factors	Inside school factors
Increasing female employment	Teaching strategies
Changing nature of work	Curriculum changes
Further factors?	

As with the work we did on social class we can organise this section in terms of inside and outside school factors.

Outside school factors

- Social changes: From a post-feminist perspective, Helen Wilkinson (No Turning Back, 1994), idenifed a range of changes that, she argued, represented a 'historic shift in the relationship between men and women'. These included:
- Cultural changes, such as contraception, the availability of abortion and the outlawing

of sexual discrimination.

- Labour market changes that increasingly drew women into the workforce. The gradual change from manufacturing to service industries has seen the development of a 'knowledge-based' economy that 'values brains more than it does brawn' and demands flexibility and dexterity. Wilkinson identifies skills women have traditionally demonstrated in the home (or private sphere) - conflict resolution and interpersonal communiucation skills, for example - as increasingly valued in the (post) modern workplace (or public sphere). These changes mean an increased importance being placed by women on:

- Educational qualifications - the route into areas of the labour market traditionally dominated by men. In other words, by acquiring measurable credentials (qualifications), women are increasingly able to enter the workforce and compete for jobs with men. This change is reflected in:

- Workforce participation: According to the Office for National Statistics (Social Trends 34, 2004 in 1997), women in paid employment outnumbered men for the first time (11.248m to 11.236m). Against this, men still outnumber women in terms of full-time employment (in 2003, 11.5 million men and 6.7 million women were in full-time work) and, as of 2003, male employment has also overtaken female employment again (15 million to 13 million respectively).

- Globalisation: Ros Coward (Sacred Cows: Is Feminism Relevant to the New Millennium? 1999) identifies economic globalisation, which encourages greater workplace flexibility and opportunities for home working using computer technology, as further evidence of a seismic shift (or 'Genderquake' as Wilkinson terms it) in male-female relationships.

- Socialisation: Although such things are difficult to precisely track, there is evidence to suggest changes in female primary socialisation. Carter and Wojtkiewicz ('Parental involvement with adolescents' education', 2000), for example, found greater parental involvement, help and attention in the education of their daughters. In terms of how socialisation impacts on gender identities (especially conceptions of masculinity and femininity) Isabella Crespi ('Gender socialization within the family', 2003) argued that adolescents now have a range of possible gender identities available to them, rather than the restricted range (paid worker/domestic worker) of even the recent past. In this respect, two things may be happening to help explain changes in female achievement.

- Opportunities: Females have more opportunities to express a range of different 'femininities' - including ones that involve a career, rather than just part-time work.

- Social change: As changes occur in the workplace, these reflect back onto family socialisation processes. Parents, for example, change their perception of their children's future adult roles and, consequently, the relative

importance they place on male and female educational achievement.

- Identities: The idea of changing male identities - what Jones and Myhill ('Seeing things differently', 2003) term 'hyper masculinity' (or laddishness to you and me) may also contribute to differential educational achievement as boys redefine their future adult roles. Both Epstein et al (Failing Boys?: Issues in gender achievement, 1998) and Lydon ('Man Trouble', 1996) pinpoint the idea of males losing control of both their unique identities and their lives as a result of changes in both female behaviour and the workplace. In this respect, the argument is that, as a result of changing identities, some boys see education as irrelevant to their future. Platten ('Raising boys' achievement', 1999) takes issues of identity further by arguing boys are increasingly victims of negative gender stereotyping when compared to girls (boys 'command' but girls 'request', for example). In other words, traditional male behaviour is reinterpreted (largely negatively) by teachers, which leads us to consider inside school factors.

Inside school factors

- Labelling and stereotyping explanations suggest a reversal of traditional forms of gender labelling, with girls increasingly being positively labeled (as high achievers who work hard and have least behavioral problems). Boys, on the other hand, are increasingly negatively labeled in terms of underachievement, laziness and behavioral problems (although class perceptions are also significant here, with working-class boys, in particular, attracting negative labels).

- National curriculum: Introduced in 1990, this made subjects such as maths and science compulsory to GCSE level and encouraged the breakdown of gendered subject choices (the idea that males and females, when given the choice, opt for different subjects). This resulted in increased female achievement in these subjects.

- Coursework: The expansion of this option, mainly through the introduction of GCSE, benefits girls because it demands steady, consistent, work over time (something which is, supposedly, more suited to the way girls work).

- Curriculum initiatives such as 'Girls into Science and Technology' (GIST) encouraged the breakdown of barriers around traditionally male subjects, whereas work experience initiatives introduced girls to the possibility of full-time work at an early age (although, as Mackenzie (1997) has demonstrated, there are arguments about whether or not girls and boys are still encouraged to follow 'traditional' employment options).

- Identities: Francis (2000) argues that changes within the school and wider society have altered the way girls construct femininity (they no longer see it mainly in terms of the home) whereas concepts of masculinity have remained largely unchanged. This fits neatly with the fact higher levels of female achievement over the past 25 years have not been at the expense of male achievement - the 'underachievement of boys' is relative to improvements in girls' achievement - it hasn't necessarily declined.

  Barbara Walker ('Understanding boys' sexual health education and its

implications for attitude change', 1996) similarly identifies changing conceptions of masculinity, in terms of 'finding a role in a fast-changing world' as a challenge many young men are unable to resolve in the education system, an idea that leads into:

• School subcultures: These have traditionally been cited in explanations for male underachievement. Barber ('Young People and Their Attitudes to School', 1994), for example, identified three main types of underachieving male subculture.

  • Disappointed boys were not inclined to do much at school outside the maintenance of their peer group relationships.

  • Disaffected boys disliked school but used it as an arena for their general disaffection (bad behaviour, in other words).

  • Disappeared boys attended school as little as possible.

Similarly, the Northern Ireland Department of Education's 'Review of research evidence on the apparent underachievement of boys' (1997) linked male underachievement to 'anti-school subcultures and peer-group pressures'.

⚠️ Digging deeper

It is, perhaps, ironic that current concerns over differential achievement have been framed in terms of boys' underachievement. As David Spendlove ('Sometimes it's hard to be a boy', 2001) has noted: 'With the examination period now upon us again, we await the inevitable results showing that girls have out-performed boys in all subjects and at all levels. There then follows the usual media frenzy with headlines about boys' underachievement . . .'.

The irony here is that substantial numbers of boys have always 'underachieved' in our education system - a 'problem' that has only merited attention in the context of a rise in female achievement. In this respect, it is tempting, perhaps, to note Cohen's observation ('A habit of healthy idleness', 1998): 'The question to ask is not "why are boys underachieving?" but "why are we concerned about it now?" '.

Be that as it may, it is useful to note two different ways the question of male underachievement has been framed. The first reflects a postmodern influenced concern with identities and gender discourses. Following the lead suggested by the Queensland Department of Education ('Boys Gender and Schooling', 2002), we can note how debates about gendered differential achievement have focused around four main ideas (or discourses if you're feeling a bit postmodern):

• Boys as victims suggests underachievement results from the 'feminisation of school and work', whereby male role models, ways of teaching and learning that have traditionally favoured boys and so forth have been replaced by ideas and practices favouring girls.

• Failing Schools locates the problem within the school, in terms of narrow measures of intelligence and achievement and teaching/testing regimes that favour female ways of thinking and working. In addition, schools fail to address or resolve problems associated with material deprivation.

- Boys will be boys focuses on the idea certain aspects of masculinity (aggression, later maturity and so forth) are biologically determined and, therefore, fixed at birth. Solutions to underachievement here focus on schools developing ways to 'engage boys effectively and actively'.

- Gender relationships focuses on how different notions of masculinity and femininity affect student beliefs and practices - for example, how students choose different subjects to study and why male classroom behaviour is more disruptive than female behaviour. The concern here, therefore, is the various ways gender identities are constructed and how they might be changed.

We can also note how, according to Jones and Myhill (2003), the concept of 'underachievement' is constructed in a number of ways by teachers who are, they argue, increasingly likely to identify boys as 'potential underachievers'.

Ideas about what counts as 'underachievement' also vary in terms of gender. Female underachievement, for example, becomes invisible in the rush to identify and explain male underachievement. In addition, teachers rationalise achievement differences in terms of their perceptions of the nature of male and female abilities; female achievements, for example, are characterised in terms of 'performance' - understanding what an examiner wants and delivering it - whereas males are characterised in terms of 'ability'. Teachers, in other words, according to Jones and Myhill, define and re-evaluate their role in terms of how to stimulate boys' natural abilities.

The second (modernist) way reflects a concern with social class, rather than gender. In this respect, the question is framed in terms of the extent to which gendered educational achievement is primarily an issue of class rather than gender. Murphy and Elwood ('Gendered

⚠ Growing it yourself: solutions to underachievement?

Thinking about each of these discourses, use the following table as the basis for identifying how each might suggest solutions to male underachievement. Once you have done this, identify possible criticisms of these potential solutions.

	Boys as victims	Failing Schools	Boys will be boys	Gender relations
Solutions?		Different forms of testing		
Criticisms?			Assumes 'boys' are all the same ('homogeneous') and will respond to the same teaching styles.	

experiences', 1998), for example, note how recent improvements in female educational achievement is 'not shared by girls from low socio-economic backgrounds'.

Epstein et al (1998) have also questioned the idea of 'male underachievement' as a general category when they ask which boys underachieve, at what stages in the education system is underachievement apparent and, perhaps most importantly, what are the criteria used to measure underachievement? In addition, as I have suggested at the start of this section, DfES figures (2004) relating to class, gender and achievement at Key Stages 1-4 suggest social class is a significant factor here, given that the educational achievement of lower class girls is generally worse than that of higher class boys.

Gorard, Rees and Salisbury ('Investigating the patterns of differential attainment of boys and girls at school', 2001) also note that there is little difference in male/female attainment in maths and science and no significant gender difference at the lowest attainment levels for all other curriculum subjects. The 'problem', they argue, is one that exists among 'mid-to-high-achievers', where girls achieve higher grades than boys. Supporting this argument, a study by Birmingham's education authority (Times Educational Supplement, September 2000), demonstrated, 'the most disadvantaged pupils are boys from a poor, ethnic minority, background who were born in the summer, never went to nursery and spent their primary school years moving from school to school'.

Ethnicity

⚠ Preparing the ground

As with the previous sections on class and gender, we can begin this section by identifying some of the ways ethnicity relates to educational performance at various levels of our education system. Once we have examined the basic relationship between ethnicity and educational performance we can identify some possible explanations for this relationship.

Please note in the following, the identification of different ethnic groups (Indian, White and so forth) uses the UK Government's classification system for ethnicity.

Key Stages 2 and 3

For 2003, Department for Education and Skills figures (2004), show children from different ethnic backgrounds had different levels of achievement in English and Science. These were, in descending order of attainment

- Indian
- White
- Bangladeshi
- Black Caribbean
- Black African
- Pakistani.

We can add two things to the above.

- Mixed ethnicity: Noting how children from mixed ethnic backgrounds performed may tell us something about the influence of cultural factors on

achievement levels. Thus, the top achieving ethnic group at this level in 2003 was White and Asian; interestingly, White and Black Caribbean children showed significantly higher levels of achievement than Black Caribbean children.

• Gender: Girls perform marginally better than boys for all ethnic groups in English and Science at this level.

Key Stage 4

At GCSE level, the pattern identified in the previous Key Stages is largely reproduced - the main exception being the relative underachievement of Black Caribbean ethnic groups. Although their performance has improved markedly over the past 15 years, they still appear, as a group, to achieve least at this educational level.

	1989	1998	2002
Indian	n/a	54	60
White	30	47	52
Bangladeshi	n/a	33	41
Pakistani	n/a	29	40
Black	18	29	36

Table 4.8 % with 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C by ethnicity
Source: Department for Education and Skills, 2004

When we include gender in the equation, we once more find girls outperforming boys in all ethnic groups (including mixed groups) at this level. Similarly, for all ethnic groups boys are more likely to leave school with no A*-C passes at GCSE.

Further education

One interesting thing to note about participation in post-16 education, as Table

4.9 demonstrates, is the relatively low level of White - and the relatively high level of Black - participation.

	1989	2000	2002
Indian	n/a	92	91
Black	68	84	82
Bangladeshi	n/a	81	79
Pakistani	n/a	81	77
White	47	70	69

Table 4.9 % whose main activity is full-time education at age 16 by ethnicity
Source: Department for Education and Skills, 2004

Heidi Mirza (Young, Female and Black, 1992) has noted one reason for higher Black participation is the number of black women staying in education post-16. More recently, Kamala Nehaul ('Parenting, Schooling and Caribbean Heritage Pupils', 1999) has noted how black parents

> . . . valued education for the enhanced life chances it offered . . . The importance attached to education was reflected in the myriad of ways in which all parents supported children's schooling . . . the encouragement given to reading, the priority placed on talking regularly with children about the school day, the provision of materials and books for school, and the commitment to supporting homework.

These ideas are interesting - in relation to participation and achievement levels of black children - because, as with social class, they point us towards the idea that, in the case of some ethnic minorities (as with some social classes), problems related to differential achievement and participation appear to be more marked pre-16 than post-16.

When we consider patterns of ethnic educational achievement, the picture is

parents and children, with 'White institutions' that seem to regularly fail them - an idea we'll explore in more detail in a moment. When considering this idea as a possible explanation for differential achievement (in basic terms, White and Indian parents, for example, have different attitudes to - and involvement with - their children's education, Nehaul's work (1999) offers evidence to contradict this type of explanation).

- Identity: The underachievement of Black Caribbean boys is a striking feature of our education system. In addition, as they move through school, achievement seems to fall (until, at GCSE, they have the worst academic performance of all children). Black Caribbean girls perform significantly better at GCSE (although achievement levels are lower than for any other group of girls). White and Black Caribbean boys also achieve more, which suggests identity (and possibly concepts of masculinity that lead to rebellion against 'White' schooling) may be significant factors in the explanation for the decline in performance of Black Caribbean boys.

Inside school factors

- School cultures covers a general range of possible explanations.
  - The school curriculum, for example, may involve, according to Blair et al ('Minority Ethnic Attainment and Participation', 2003) teaching practices and expectations based on cultural norms, histories and general cultural references unfamiliar to many ethnic minority pupils.
  - Role models: Blair et al (2003) also point to a lack of role models within the school for ethnic minority pupils. Statistics for school teachers are not currently (2004) available, but in FE colleges 7% of staff were drawn from ethnic minority groups (which is roughly in line with their representation in the general population). In Scotland (not, admittedly, the most ethnically diverse or representative part of the UK), 1% of secondary and 0.4% of primary teachers were from ethnic minorities (Scottish Executive National Statistics, 2004).
  - Racism: Aymer and Okitikpi ('Young Black men and the Connexions Service', 2001) argue that Black Caribbean boys are more likely to report negative experiences of schooling, some of which include racial abuse and harassment from their peers. It is perhaps instructive to note, therefore, Kerr et al ('England's results from the IEA International Citizenship Education Study', 2002) found British students had less positive attitudes towards 'immigrants' than in many other countries. This, they argued, was likely to shape peer group interaction.

Although school cultural factors can be significant, they may be too generalised to adequately explain the intricacies of ethnic group attainment differences (why, for example, should high achieving Indian pupils experience less racism than lower achieving Black Caribbean pupils?). We can, therefore, look at a range of more targeted explanations.

- Teacher-pupil interactions focus on the specific relationships found within

different schools. The Runnymede Trust ('Black and Ethnic Minority Young People and Educational Disadvantage', 1997) argued a range of hidden processes occur within schools that 'deny equal opportunities'. Ethnic minority students, for example, reported:

- high levels of control and criticism from teachers

- stereotypes of cultural differences, communities and speech that betrayed negative and patronising attitudes.

Diane Abbott (a black Labour MP) has argued (see: Gaby Hinsliff ' "Scared" white teachers fail black students', 2002) that 'White women teachers' fail to relate to black boys because they are frightened and intimidated by them. A failure to challenge disruptive behaviour, she argues, leads to an escalating situation which results in black boys being excluded from school (Black Caribbean boys are more frequently excluded than any other ethnic group).

Foster, Gomm and Hammersley (Constructing Educational Inequality, 1996), on the other hand, suggest the over-representation of Black Caribbean boys in low status sets and bands within the school is simply a result of 'unacceptable behaviour' on their part. MacBeth et al ('The Impact of Study Support', 2001) also noted schools are increasingly concerned about low ethnic minority achievement and take steps to address the problem - the use of out-of-school-hours learning support for example, served to raise achievement levels amongst Asian students in particular.

Labelling: Although we may - or indeed may not - reject the idea schools are 'institutionally racist' (the idea racist attitudes and practices go unchallenged - or are secretly encouraged - within schools), various forms of subtle labelling and stereotyping (intentional or otherwise) do seem to impact on ethnic achievement. Generally positive teacher attitudes to Indian pupils (based on the knowledge of their high levels of attainment) may be offset by negative beliefs about Black Caribbean pupils. David Gillborn ('Education and Institutional Racism', 2002) thinks schools are institutionally racist, especially in the light of curriculum developments that, he argues, are 'based on approaches known to disadvantage black pupils'. These include: selection in schools by setting, schemes for 'gifted and talented' pupils and vocational schemes for 'non-academic' pupils. Teachers, Gillborn argues, 'generally underrate the abilities of black youngsters' which results in their assignment to low-ability groups, a restricted curriculum and entry for lower-level exams.

The Pupil Level Annual School Census (2002), for example, shows black pupils are more likely to be classified in terms of Special Educational Needs (SEN) - 28% of Black Caribbean secondary pupils as against 18% of White pupils. Sammons et al ('Special educational needs across the pre-school period', 2002) also suggest pre-school minority group children are more likely to be 'at risk' of SEN than White children. Again, whether this reflects

beliefs about ethnic groups or is the result of socio-economic factors is a point for debate.

Stereotyping: Figueroa (Education and the Social Construction of Race, 1991) suggested teachers frequently limit ethnic minority opportunities through the use of culturally-biased forms of assessment (the way students are expected to speak and write, for example) and by consigning pupils to lower bands and sets on the basis of teacher-assessment. Teachers generally have lower opinions of the abilities of some ethnic minority groups, which results in a self-fulfilling prophecy of underachievement - something the Runnymede Trust report (1997) also suggests.

⚠ Digging deeper

When examining explanations for the educational underachievement of some ethnic groups relative to other ethnic groups, it is easy to overlook the fact one of the largest groups of underachieving pupils is White working class boys. Thus, while explanations focusing on factors such as racism, school processes and teacher-pupil relationships are significant in explaining some forms of ethnic underachievement, they don't necessarily apply to this group. When studying all forms of differential achievement, therefore, we need to keep in mind how class, gender and ethnic factors intersect and, in this respect, we can note a number of ideas, beginning with the observation that achievement is a relative concept. In other words, it depends on:

• What we measure - is it, for example,

measured in terms of simple exam passes (and, if so, at what level and grade?) or can it be measured in terms of participation rates in, for example, post-16 education and training?

• When we measure it - again, the point at which we measure achievement will be significant. In addition, ethnicity is a changing status, in the sense changes occur over time. Bangladeshi children, for example, are one of the most recent immigrant groups to the UK. Their achievement levels (initially amongst the lowest for all ethnic groups) have increased significantly over the past few years.

• How we measure it - are we, for example, interested in exam passes or in progress made from different starting points (a value-added assessment)?

This idea suggests the concept of achievement involves at least two related ideas.

• Meanings: The concept of achievement can mean different things, depending on how you specify its possible measurement.

• Measurement: For example, is it measured in terms of a product (such as an exam grade) or in terms of a process (such as a value-added assessment that measures the progress made by a pupil between a measurable start and an end point - such as, for example, the distance travelled, in terms of achievement, between GCSE grades and A-level grades)?

If we measure achievement in terms of product, no account is taken of the social and cultural backgrounds of different pupils (their cultural capital, to use

Bourdieu's (1986) concept). If, on the other hand, we measure achievement in terms of process, recognition and understanding of different levels of cultural capital can be built into the measurement process.

Discussion point: the education race

To understand the difference between the measurement of achievement in terms of product or process, think about education and achievement in terms of a race.

Everyone starts at the same point. The aim of each pupil is to compete and cross the finishing line first (to gain the highest level of educational achievement). Although the race involves a certain equality of opportunity (everyone is allowed to enter), some pupils have their legs tied together, while others have large, heavy, weights strapped to their bodies Other pupils are able to cycle to the finish line. These ideas symbolise the advantages and disadvantages some children may have because of the social and cultural background.

Consider these questions:

• Is this race fair?

• Is it fairer to measure achievement in terms of product or process (keeping in mind that the children with their legs tied together may make substantial progress in the race, but they lag far behind the cycling pupils)?

• Which social groups benefit the most from measuring achievement in terms of product?

Underachievement is, similarly, a relative concept. If we look, for example, at Black Caribbean achievement in terms of GCSE passes, then evidence of underachievement (within and between ethic groups) is not difficult to find. Alternatively, if we look at post-16 participation in full-time education, White children, as we have seen, seem to participate least.

• Participation: In addition, evidence of underachievement in compulsory education should not automatically be considered evidence of wider underachievement. As noted earlier, Black Caribbean Saturday schools don't appear to have significantly impacted on performance at GCSE level. However, since post-16 participation rates for black children (especially in FE colleges), ranks second only to Indian children, this suggests black parents - and children - value education but have problems with the kind of education offered in schools. Further education seems to meet the needs of this ethnic group in ways that schools don't, an explanation supported by Aymer and Okitikpi (2001), among others - such as Blair et al (2003), who suggest colleges 'Can provide a space where young Black men are supported by a community of Black students, an opportunity to study a curriculum that celebrates Black cultures and histories and to develop positive relationships with tutors'.

• Social class: Just as we shouldn't underestimate the importance of ethnicity and gender, social class is also significant. As Blair et al (2003) note, children who receive Free School Meals are less likely to achieve than children of the same ethnic group who do not qualify for FSM.

A final word, in this respect, might be to note Gillborn and Gipps's observation ('Recent Research on the Achievements of Ethnic Minority Pupils', 1996) that, whatever a student's gender or ethnic background, those from the higher social classes, on average, achieve more in terms of exam passes and grades.

The question of differences in achievement between social groups is an important one in our society and, for this reason, we have spent some time looking at what sociologists have to say on the matter. In the next section, however, we can look at how government, through the development of various social policies, have been - and continue to be - concerned about the best way to resolve the social problem of different levels of achievement between social classes, genders and ethnic groups.

State policies

Introduction

During the 1997 election campaign, when asked to name his government's 'top three priorities', should a New Labour government be elected, Tony Blair replied 'Education, education, education', something I mention not because it's particularly profound but rather because it symbolises an increasing state (government) interest in education over the past 25 years. The identification and examination of state policies in this period will be the main focus of this section - although we will also need to understand something of the relatively brief (and sometimes not very glorious) history of government-sponsored educational provision in our society.

WARM UP: EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

Having experienced 'education' for some considerable time, you'll be aware of state polices that have affected education over the years. Initially in small groups, use the following table (I have included a couple of policies to get you started) as a basis for identifying recent educational policies. Once you have done this, come together as a class to share your knowledge of policy and discuss whether you believe these policies have had positive or negative effects on your experience of schooling.

Policy	Positive effect?	Negative effect?
Comprehensive schools	All pupils receive a similar education	Very large schools that mean individual pupils can feel lost and unimportant within the school.
National Curriculum	Everyone is taught the same subjects	Everyone has to study the same things - lack of individual choice.
Key Stage testing	Progress is monitored to identify educational weaknesses that need improving	Pupils feel pressurised and stressed by constant testing.
Additional policies?		

Nineteenth-century education

⚠️ Preparing the ground

It may be surprising to learn (but, then again, it might not) the history of government involvement in the provision and regulation of education in Britain is not a very long one. It is only over the past 100 years or so - dating from the Forster Education Act (1870) - that governments have sought to provide education for the mass of the population. These early attempts were not particularly successful, although the fact the elementary schools established in 1870 were neither free nor compulsory probably explains the general lack of participation in them by the majority of the working classes. Various attempts were made, over the following 60 years, to 'educate the working class' with varying degrees of success.

⛏️ Digging deeper

If the impact of these attempts to provide schooling was not particularly great (in terms of the numbers of children experiencing state education), the role of education, if not explicitly defined, was laid-out in terms of meeting two needs:

• economic - the increasing need, as modern, industrial society developed, for a literate and numerate population to work machines in factories

• political - the need for a population

socialised into the demands of an increasingly complex division of labour (in particular, one that was well-schooled in the disciplines required by factory forms of production).

As we will see, despite the many recent changes to our education system, it is arguable the role of education - at least in terms of how it is generally seen by the state - probably hasn't changed a great deal. However, in terms of impact and experience, the following was arguably the most influential education act of the twentieth century.

1944 Education Act

⚠️ Preparing the ground

This educational reform introduced two main elements into the role and experience of education.

• Universal education: Free, compulsory education for all between the ages of 5 and 15 (until this point secondary schooling wasn't free, although elementary schools had a nominal leaving age of 14 for most children who bothered to attend).

• Tripartite system: Although, as David Bell ('Change and continuity: reflections on the Butler Act', 2004) notes, the 1944 Act didn't specify a tripartite system (there was simply 'heavy guidance' from the Ministry of Education in this direction), the school system was reformed with the introduction of

compulsory secondary schooling after the age of 11, based on three types of school (for, in effect, three types of pupil):

- grammar - providing an exclusively academic education

- secondary modern - providing a mix of practical (or vocational - providing skills required for the workplace) and academic education, with the emphasis on the former

- secondary technical - providing a largely work-related technical/vocational education.

The tripartite system had the following features.

- Selection for each type of school was based on an intelligence (IQ) test that claimed to identify different types of learner - in basic terms, those suited to an academic-type (theory-based) education and those suited to a vocational (practice-based) education. Students were tested at 10 (the so-called '11 ' exam) and assigned a school on the basis of their test performance (with roughly the top 15-20% of pupils awarded grammar school places).

- Parity of esteem or, if you prefer, the idea each type of school was 'separate but equal'. Children were literally separated by attending different schools, but the idea of 'equality' was rather more questionable, for a couple of reasons.

  - Bipartite education: Few technical schools were built or established (partly because it proved difficult to quantify 'technical ability' in an IQ test and partly because of the expense) which effectively meant a two-school (bipartite) state system developed -

those who passed the 11   went to grammar schools, those who failed went to secondary modern schools.

  - Status: It quickly became clear grammar schools, attracting mainly middle-class pupils who were more likely to stay in school to take the General Certificate of Education (GCE) exams at 16, were held in higher regard (by universities, employers and, indeed the general public). They had greater status than secondary moderns, which attracted predominantly working class pupils who were supposed to work towards a (non-examined) School Leaving Certificate at 15.

A couple of exceptions to this general situation were:

- Private schools: Fee-charging schools were not covered by the Act and could operate outside its general scope. These, by and large, remained the preserve of upper-class pupils.

- Comprehensive schools: Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were given responsibility for introducing the educational reforms in their area and some chose to interpret the injunction to provide 'free and equal' education differently. In London, for example, eight comprehensive schools were built between 1946 and 1949.

⚠ Digging deeper

The tripartite system, whatever its actual weaknesses in terms of scope and implementation, represented a clear statement of the role of education in modern society, in terms of the relationship between

schools and the economy. It resembled a broadly functionalist perspective by defining the education system in terms of differentiation and role allocation. The relationship between academic schooling and professional careers, vocational schooling and non-professional/manual work is evident here (as indeed it was in the practice of each type of school - secondary moderns, for example, emphasised the learning of manual skills (woodwork, bricklaying and so forth) for boys and domestic skills - needlework, cookery and the like - for girls). In this respect, the system was underpinned by two main ideas.

• Ability: Children were defined, as I have suggested, in terms of differing abilities and aptitudes which, coincidentally or not, reflected both the economic structure of the time (a plentiful supply of manufacturing jobs, for example) and ideas about the respective roles of males and females. The latter's experience of secondary modern schooling, for example, focused primarily on the knowledge and skills women would need for their 'traditional' roles of wife and mother.

The concept of 'separate abilities' was, however, underpinned, as McCulloch ('The Norwood Report and the secondary school curriculum', 1988) has noted, by psychological ideas about the nature of intelligence. In particular, the academic/vocational division for different types of schooling reflected the idea, popularised by psychologists such as Cyril Burt, on whose research the tripartite system was largely based (although, in recent years, an unresolved controversy has raged over whether Burt falsified his original research data), that intelligence

was both innate and relatively fixed at around the age of 10 or 11.

• Academic/vocational aptitudes were reflected in the basic premise of the tripartite system, with secondary modern schools being organised - at least initially - around a vocational type of education designed to prepare boys for various forms of skilled manual work (agricultural as well as industrial) and girls for lower level non-manual occupations (secretarial, office and nursing, for example) that reflected both their general economic position and family role - working class women were generally expected to work until they married and then replace full-time work with domestic responsibilities.

This system had a number of significant effects.

• Compulsory education became fully established for the mass of the population.

• Social inequality was not only embedded in the system, it was also routinised (made to seem to normal and inevitable) and ideologically justified (on the basis of the 'objective testing' of innate genetic characteristics).

• Social segregation was also established as a routine educational practice with the classes 'unofficially' separated in different schools.

The impact of the tripartite system on the experience of schooling for many pupils differed in terms of:

• Labelling: Grammar schools were seen as 'superior' in terms of both the education offered and the status of the children who attended. Grammar school teachers were

also more highly qualified - and paid more - than their secondary modern counterparts.

- Stereotyping: Secondary modern children faced two related forms here. Firstly, the fact of failing the 11   and, secondly, in terms of the idea they had lower natural levels of intelligence.
- Gender: Apart from the differences in what girls and boys were taught, there were more grammar school places available for boys than girls (a legacy of the pre-1944 situation of single-sex secondary schools). This meant girls with higher measured levels of IQ were often denied places at grammar schools in favour of boys with lower measured IQs.

Comprehensive schooling

⚠ Preparing the ground

The gradual domination of secondary education by comprehensive schools was:

- Protracted: A lengthy process, mainly started in 1950s, encouraged by Wilson's Labour Government in the 1960s (Circular 10/65 tends to be seen as the start of a 10-year effort to reform the tripartite system) and finally (almost) completed by Shirley Williams (the then Labour Education Minister) in 1976 when an Education Act instructed all councils to 'prepare plans for Comprehensive schooling' in their area.
- Challenged, not least by influential advocates of grammar schooling but also

by some LEAs who fought to retain grammar schooling through the Courts. Hence:

- Partial, given that some LEAs (having 'produced plans' for comprehensive schooling never implemented them) still operate grammar schools - around 160 such schools still exist within the education system in various parts of the country - mainly those with a history of Conservative council control. Some grammar schools also avoided becoming comprehensive by becoming public, fee-charging schools.

The introduction of comprehensive schooling reflected three basic ideas.

- Selection (by IQ test) was abolished because it was educationally (and socially) divisive. All children, regardless of prior academic achievement, would receive the same secondary education in the same school. Mixed ability teaching (where children of differing levels of attainment are taught in the same class, by the same teacher, the same curriculum to the same level) was seen as the way forward. 25 years later, the jury is still out on this one - Hallam, Ireson and Hurley (2001) suggest some subjects (English and humanities) were considered by teachers as more appropriate for mixed ability classes than others like maths and modern languages. A new exam (GCSE) was phased in to replace the Ordinary Level ('O-level') and Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) divide (the latter was aimed at a lower level than 'O-level').
- Social integration: One of the guiding principles of comprehensive schooling

was the desire to remove the socially divisive tripartite system. Education, therefore, was used to promote social mixing. Initially, this meant ensuring each school had a mix of different social classes, although this ideal has effectively been replaced by a form of 'self-selection' by catchment area (you become eligible to attend the school if you live within a certain radius of it).

- Economic changes, in tandem with a desire for a more meritocratic education system, were also an important motor of change, for three reasons.

  - Work: The decline in manufacturing industry meant fewer manual jobs available as a 'vocation'.

  - Technological changes produced an increasing demand for a better educated general workforce.

  - Gender: Increasing numbers of women were involved in the workforce, creating a general resistance to the type of 'traditional' education they received in secondary modern schools.

⚠️ Digging deeper

Comprehensive education attempted to change the general role of the education system in a couple of ways.

- Ideologically: Comprehensive schools represented the idea social class divisions could be abolished through a system of education that encouraged 'social class mixing', equality of opportunity and achievement through talent and hard work. In other words, it represented ideas about social integration, meritocracy and egalitarianism (equality). In this respect, we can see these ideas reflect a general

Functionalist view of society, with its stress on consensus, shared values and the allocation of adult roles through proven merit.

- Economically: A central theme of comprehensive education was that the population contained a larger pool of talent than was generally recognised by any previous system. The changing nature of economic production - and the increasing importance of service industry - led to a reappraisal of both the purpose of education and the general skills/qualification base. The role of education, in this respect, was to respond to the changing economic needs of society by producing a highly educated, skilled and trained workforce.

The impact of comprehensive education was felt in a number of ways.

- Provision: New purpose-built co-educational schools, for example, developed in many areas to replace closed/amalgamated schools. A comprehensive school, for example, might typically replace a couple of grammar schools (boys' and girls') and a secondary modern school - creating a large institution with better facilities and more curriculum choice.

- Exams: The school leaving age had been raised to 16 in 1972 and this was accompanied by the gradual introduction of a new GCSE exam taken at 16 by all students. Differentiation between exam systems (pupils of different abilities taking different exam levels) was replaced by differentiation within a single exam system.

- Grammar and public schools: The continued existence of these schools

within a nominally 'Comprehensive' system created problems in that parents who had the money and/or desire could continue to buy a different (higher status) type of education, perpetuating the class divisions comprehensive education was (theoretically) designed to remove.

In some respects, Comprehensive schools did provide a different set of experiences for both teachers and pupils.

• Size of schools, for example, was generally larger and more impersonal.

• Labelling: Children were no longer stigmatised by the label of failure at 11.

• Gender: New opportunities for girls (especially working class girls) developed as they followed a similar curriculum to boys (although some differences remained in terms of a gendered curriculum choice - girls were still expected to take subjects such as Home Economics, for example).

On the other hand, some school practices simply transferred from the tripartite system to the comprehensive school (as part of a hidden curriculum discussed in more detail in the final section).

• Streaming, setting and banding, for example, developed to differentiate pupils within the school. The general outcome was to find middle-class children in the higher streams, sets or bands and working-class children in the lower streams, sets or bands, which, of course, raised the question of:

• Labelling: These practices effectively created a system of positive and negative labelling within the school - with some pupils being almost entirely separated from others. Another form of selection and separation involved:

• Catchment areas: Originally, schools were supposed to have a social mix of pupils (which invariably meant some children faced long journeys to school) but fairly rapidly this devolved into 'selection by area' - inner city schools attracted high levels of working class kids and suburban schools attracted middle class kids.

• Regional differences: As Linda Croxford ('Inequality in Attainment at Age 16', 2000) notes, different parts of the UK operated different systems - in Scotland and Wales all state-funded secondary schooling was comprehensive, in Northern Ireland it was selective, and England had, as we have seen, a number of regional variations. Croxford's research also noted:

   • social segregation was lower in Scotland and Wales

   • attainment was, on average, the same in Wales, England and Northern Ireland, although girls outperformed boys in all four systems

   • social class was a major determinant of attainment, although it made less difference in Scotland than in England.

Discussion point: different pupils/different schools?

Should pupils be taught in different types of school?

Use the following table as the basis for exploring arguments for and against this idea.

Different Schools	
Arguments for	**Arguments against**
Some pupils want to develop academic skills, others want to develop vocational skills.	Socially divisive.
Further arguments?	

1979-1997: The Conservative years

⚠ Preparing the ground

In 1976, the then Labour Prime Minister James (later Lord) Callaghan gave a speech at Ruskin College in Oxford to initiate a so-called Great Debate about education (which, true to form, was neither 'Great' nor a 'debate'). Although no major educational reforms came from this speech, it paved the way for major reforms under the Thatcher (Conservative) government elected in 1979, in two ways.

- Basic skills: It suggested schools were failing to instil 'basic skills' in their pupils. As Callaghan stated: 'I am concerned . . . to find complaints from industry that new recruits from schools sometimes do not have the basic tools to do the job'. In 1978, the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) was introduced, aimed at 16-18 year old school leavers, paying a small allowance as part of its training programme. Interestingly, it was described at the time, by Albert Booth the Employment Secretary, as a 'New Deal' for the young unemployed - an evocative echo of the American 'New Deal' programmes of the 1930s credited with dragging America out of the deep economic recession of the period.

- Core curriculum: It floated the idea of a 'core curriculum of basic knowledge' (about which, more in a moment).

These ideas, it could be argued, set the agenda for two major developments during the 1980s.

New Vocationalism

High levels of youth (especially school-leaver) unemployment in the early 1980s led to the development of the New

Vocationalism (presumably to differentiate it from the 'Old Vocationalism' of the tripartite system). New emphasis was placed on the idea of training, as opposed to education (remember the distinction we made in an earlier section?); initially, the focus was on post-16 training, with some forms of vocationalism gradually introduced into the pre-16 curriculum. During the 1980s, a range of New Vocational schemes were initiated, developed . . . and discarded.

• Youth training schemes: Introduced in 1980 (as a development of YOPs) and aimed at unemployed school leavers, these offered job training with trainees receiving a small payment over-and-above any state benefits they received. This expansion of YOPs was described by James Prior, the then Employment Secretary, as a 'New Deal' for young people (are you beginning to see a theme developing here?)

• Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI): This initiative - piloted in 1982 and fully introduced in 1987 - marked an important development because it aimed to introduce technical/vocational education to 14-18-year olds within schools. As Bell et al ('TVEI and the Education-Industry Relationship', 1988) noted at the time 'TVEI remains unambiguously education-led'.

TVEI was a series of initiatives, rather than a vocational curriculum, some of which came from government (Records of Achievement and 'work experience', for example) and some from schools (such as developing the use of Information Technology and equal opportunity schemes for expanding the number of women going into traditionally male forms of employment).

• Youth Training Scheme (YTS): Introduced in 1983 as a one year, post-16, course. The original intention was for YTS to be a logical vocational extension of TVEI courses developed in schools. In 1988, the 'Youth Training Guarantee' required all unemployed 16 and 17 year olds to register with YTS - which was renamed 'Youth Training' (YT) - for education or training.

• Vocational qualifications: Two forms of qualification were introduced in 1986; the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) - a one-year, post-16 course designed as a preparation for work or further vocational study.

  • National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) introduced the idea of workplace competencies - every job had a set of identifiable, measurable, skills. Every job could, in theory, be vocationally certified - the main drawback, however, was you initially had to be doing a job before you could achieve the qualification (so it is debateable how much NVQ contributed to 'training'). However, for various reasons aspects of NVQs were introduced into schools and led, directly, to the introduction, in 1993, of GNVQs.

  • General National Vocational Qualifications GNVQs were offered at three levels - Foundation, Intermediate (equivalent to GCSE) and Advanced (equivalent to A-level). The latter was subsequently renamed the Advanced Certification of Vocational Education (AVCE) and are

now to be known as Vocational A-levels. We can also note that, indirectly, the development of GNVQs led to the introduction of Key Skills with Curriculum 2000.

• Modern Apprenticeships were introduced in 1995 for 18-19 year olds and linked to NVQs. Designed to be a 'quality training' scheme, an ironic note here is the reintroduction of apprenticeship training after it was effectively abolished by the Conservative Government because it led to 'restrictive labour market practices' (New Right-speak for Trade Union involvement).

David Yeomans ('Constructing vocational education: from TVEI to GNVQ', 2002) neatly summarises the focus of the New Vocationalism when he notes it reflected a belief that: 'Better vocational education and training = Greater individual productivity = Economic growth'.

Education Reform Act (1998)

This was a major development for a number of reasons.

• National curriculum: Strange as it may seem, the subjects taught in schools were never specified by governments until 1988 (until this point, Religious Education was the only compulsory subject). The following table explains how the National Curriculum was originally constructed.

National Curriculum: 1988	
English	'Core subjects'
Maths	30 -40% of the timetable
Science	
Technology	
Music	
Art	Non-core subjects
History	50% of the timetable
Modern foreign language	
Geography	
Physical education	
Optional subjects:	
Religious education etc.	10%-20% of timetable if required.
Other requirements:	

• 'A daily act of worship' of a 'broadly Christian nature' (parents had the right to withdraw children from this).
• Sex education
• Citizenship Lessons added to curriculum in 2003

• Key Stage testing was introduced at 7, 11 and 14 (Stages 1, 2 and 3). Key Stage 4 was GCSE. At the end of each Stage, children were assessed - using Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) - against national 'Assessment Targets' (the aim being to eventually ensure all children achieved a certain level of competence relative to their age). The original testing regime has been severely curtailed over the years - testing and teacher assessments of the core subjects at Stages 1-3 are now the norm.

• Institutional freedom involved the idea of 'freeing' schools from the 'bureaucracy' of local government control in a number of ways.

- Grant-maintained schools were directly funded by government, rather than through LEAs (and local taxation). To encourage schools to 'opt-out' of LEA control, generous funding packages were offered. For schools that didn't opt out (relatively few actually did) the:

- Local management of schools initiative gave head teachers and governing bodies direct control over how they spent the school budget.

- City Technology Colleges - new schools specialising in the application of Information Technology to all aspects of the curriculum were introduced, partly funded by private companies (at least in theory - some funding was forthcoming from a few wealthy individuals who supported the government's New Right agenda, but the bulk of the expenditure came from government; around 20 such colleges were actually completed). Finally, an

- Open enrolment policy was developed whereby popular and 'successful' schools were allowed to expand at the expense of 'unsuccessful' schools. Parents were, in theory, given more choice about where to send their children and LEAs couldn't set limits on school size to reduce parental choice.

Between the 1988 Act and the 1996 Education Act (whose main purpose was to consolidate all education reforms since 1944), a number of significant changes were made, which we can note as follows.

- Higher education: The following were gradually introduced:

- student loans (1988) replaced grants
- student numbers increased
- polytechnics (once considered a vocational form of HE) were given university status (1993).

- Parents' Charter gave parents the right to information from a school about its performance.

⚠ Digging deeper

With the development of vocational education and the 1988 Reform Act we can see the influence of New Right thinking on education during this period.

Role: The education system became more closely aligned with the needs of industry over this period, in terms of both the development of explicitly vocational elements and the range of subjects that schools could teach. The 'core curriculum' of English, maths and science, in particular, was designed to satisfy employer-led demands for workers with 'basic skills' of literacy and numeracy. At the time, some writers (for example Lacey: 'Professionalism or Bureaucracy?', 1985) argued such prescription (that is, setting out the subjects that had to be taught in all state schools) would not improve the quality of education but, rather, result in greater bureaucracy.

Opinions about the New Vocationalism are generally divided.

For some, such as Dan Finn ('Education for Jobs', 1988), youth training schemes involved:

- cheap labour for employers
- bonded labour - 'trainees' who left a job risked losing state benefits

- pretend jobs - many trainees were either on 'work creation schemes' devised and funded by government or in work offering no prospect of further employment once the 'training period' was over (and the government subsidy ended)

- little training - and certainly not in the skills required for work in a high technology, service-based, economy

- hidden subsidies that shifted the burden of training costs from employers to the taxpayer.

In addition, for Marxist writers such as Bates et al (Schooling for the Dole, 1984) and Bates and Riseborough (Youth and Inequality, 1993), the New Vocationalism had a number of features.

- Class division: Most (white) middle-class pupils followed the academic education route to high pay, skill and status employment whereas (white and black) working class pupils were encouraged along the vocational route to lower paid/lower status work.

- Social control: Taking potentially troublesome, unemployed youth 'off-the-streets' and subjecting them to workplace discipline.

- Lowering wages for all young people by subsidising some employers.

- Lowering unemployment figures.

Feminist writers also criticised vocationalism for channelling girls into 'traditional' female areas of the workforce - hairdressing, secretarial and 'caring professional' work such as nursing.

On the other hand, the new vocationalism had a couple of positive features.

Yeomans (2002) notes the general political belief that 'education in general, and vocational education in particular, will have an economic pay off remains strong and continues to have a powerful influence on the education policy of the major political parties'.

Sue Heath (Preparation for Life? Vocationalism and the Equal Opportunities Challenge, 1997) suggested TVEI, for example, helped involve women in areas of schooling (and eventually work) that were traditionally male preserves by insisting on equal opportunities.

Impact: Lee Murray ('How far did the 1998 Education Act usher a radically new direction in British Education?', 2002) argues most of the Act's reforms (such as CTC's and 'opting-out') had very little impact on the education scene; the actual curriculum didn't change that much and Key Stage testing has been generally watered down over the years. However, one way Conservative Government changes impacted was by setting the agenda for subsequent educational reform under New Labour in the 1990s (as we will see in a moment).

Experience: One interesting thing to note, in this context, is how the changes just outlined reflect some of the contradictions in New Right thinking (contradictions which, it could be argued, have been carried through to New Labour's education policy in the twenty-first century). In this respect we can note two tendencies.

- Economic liberalism, relating to control of school budgets and decision-making about teaching resources etc. One objective here seems to have been to remove schools from local government control and influence.

- Centralised control of the 16-18 curriculum. Post-16 vocational training had, for example, a strong compulsory element (school-leavers who refused training could have state benefits removed) whereas, as we have noted, the secondary school curriculum (and eventually that of primary schools too) became increasingly prescriptive; what could be taught - and even how it was to be taught - was effectively decided by the government.

In this respect, New Right perspectives (like their postmodern counterparts) recognise the significance of economic change but, unlike the latter, want to retain highly centralised control over some areas of society (schools and family life for example).

Finally, we can note a couple more points relating to the experience of education.

- Curriculum of the Dead: Stephen Ball ('Education, Majorism and the "Curriculum of the Dead" ', 1995) argues that Conservative reforms tried to 'deconstruct the comprehensive, modernist curriculum and replace it with an . . . authoritative curriculum of tradition' - in other words, an attempt to specify a school curriculum that focused on learning 'facts' and which gave central importance (by enshrining them in law) to traditional curriculum subjects such as maths and science. It was, almost literally a 'curriculum of the dead' because this is where its focus, according to Ball, lay - the distant past.

- Education or training: For all the recent changes in the education system (including ones we will examine in a moment), the central problem of, to paraphrase John Lea ('Post-compulsory education in context', 2001), 'What are schools for?' remains unresolved. Pete Abbs (The Educational Imperative, 1994), for example, argues against the idea that 'the first task of teachers is to serve the economy, to turn out skilled robots and uncritical consumers for the hi-tech age'.

⚠ Growing it yourself: what are schools for?

Use the following table as the basis for thinking about these two ideas about the purpose of schooling.

The main purpose of schools is to:	Arguments for	Arguments against
Educate young people for adult life		
Train young people for work		

1997-2004: New Labour

⚠ Preparing the ground

The scope and diversity of educational changes seems to have accelerated over the past seven years and covers all aspects of education, from primary, through secondary to tertiary (higher education). For our

convenience, we can categorise these changes under the following headings.

Primary education

- Literacy and numeracy hours were introduced as part of the curriculum and all primary pupils to have one hour each day devoted to reading and writing. The prescriptive nature of the strategy (telling teachers how to teach as well as what to teach) was unique, at the time, for primary education.

- Nursery education encouraged through the use of tax credits for parents.

- Class sizes of more than 30 children at Key Stage 1 were made illegal in 1997 (although it is debatable how strictly the law is enforced).

Secondary education

- Curriculum 2000: A-levels split into two qualifications (AS and A2) and Key Skills introduced (Main skills: Communication, Application of Number and IT. Wider skills: Improving Own Learning, Working with Others and Problem Solving) as part of 'basic skills' strategy.

- Types of school: Within the comprehensive system, school diversity has developed along the following lines.

  - Specialist schools - specialising in a particular curriculum area (such as modern languages), these schools can select up to 10% of their intake by 'aptitude'.

  - Beacon schools are given increased funds to spread 'high quality teaching practice' amongst lower-performing schools.

- Foundation schools (as part of the 'Five Year Strategy' - see below) will be allowed to set their own curriculum.

- Academies (the latest addition) will be established in partnership with private sponsors, located in disadvantaged areas and encouraged to specialise in certain curriculum areas. These schools may also select up to 10% of their intake by aptitude.

- Tomlinson Report (2004): This review of the 14-19 curriculum recommended, among other things, the reform of examinations such as GCSE and A-level into a School Diploma modelled on the International Baccalaureate.

Mike Tomlinson, author of the Tomlinson Report (2004)

  A more-detailed examination of the Report can be found at the end of this section.

- Home-school agreements (where parents promise to ensure children attend school etc.) made legally binding, although never enforced.

- Targets: Literacy strategy and learning targets introduced (Moser Report, 1999).

- Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) introduced for 16 year olds in full-time education, 2004. Payment depends on attendance targets being met by individual students.

- Performance Indicators (commonly known as league tables) were expanded to include all primary and secondary and

schools in England (Scotland and Wales abolished such tables). Based initially on GCSE/A-level results and, increasingly, Key Stage SAT results, these tables have been extensively criticised for their bias in favour of schools with selective intakes (Public and Grammar schools) and bias against schools with high levels of SEN ('Special Educational Needs') and Free School Meals (FSM) children.

To counteract this in-built disadvantage, the government now publishes 'Value-Added' League Tables measuring progress (rather than actual level of achievement) made by a pupil between, for example Key Stage 3 and 4.

- Social inclusion:
  - New Start scheme aimed to target 'disaffected or underachieving' 14-17 year olds by encouraging schools to develop new ways of motivating such pupils.
  - Vocational Training: 'Disaffected' 14-16 year olds allowed to spend part of the school week at FE College or work experience.
  - Excellence in Cities (2000) introduced a range of ideas, including: Learning Mentors and Support Units, City Learning Centres, more Beacon and Specialist schools, support for Gifted and Talented pupils and small Education Action Zones (that involve clusters of Primary and Secondary schools joining forces with parents, LEAs and local business to improve educational services).
  - Sure Start (2000) programmes designed to improve services to poorest pre-school children and families to prevent truancy and increase achievement. Additional schemes aimed at pregnant teenagers to help them back to education/employment.

- Extended Schools: Following an American model, schools offer a range of services/facilities (crèches, support for parents, curriculum and leisure opportunities for pupils outside the traditional school timetable) to engage pupils and parents in their child's education. Wilkin et al ('Towards the development of extended schools', 2002) found a positive impact on 'attainment, attendance and behaviour' by offering activities that increased 'engagement and motivation'.

- Vocational: Whether we consider these changes in terms of the new 'new vocationalism' (as it were) or simply an extension of existing vocational initiatives, a number of developments are worthy of mention:
  - Integrating provision has involved attempts to link post-16 training more-closely with school and work. National Traineeships, for example, were an early introduction, designed to provide a link between school leaving and Modern Apprenticeships.
  - New Deal: Showing either a distinct lack of imagination or a touching faith in the past, this required all unemployed under 25s to take either a subsidised job, voluntary work or full time education/training.
  - Careers: All schools must provide careers education for 13-18 year old pupils. 'ConneXions' (the renamed 'Investors in Young People' careers'

service) was introduced - with a 'cool' name, presumably to appeal to 'The Kids'.

• Providers: Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) replaced by Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

• Work experience expanded to a two-week placement for all state maintained school pupils. As part of increased vocational awareness, pupils were also to be taught 'job skills' such as interview techniques.

• Vocational GCSEs introduced to replace Intermediate GNVQs.

Post-16 education

• Dearing Report (1997) - a major review of Conservative education policy that led to changes in Key Stage testing as well as laying the ground for the subsequent reform of the 14-19 curriculum (the Tomlinson Report, 2004 - discussed in more detail below). Also recommended students should be charged for their tuition fees (so you know who to blame).

Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998) created a new system of student loans and fees. Grants largely abolished but 'poorer families' exempted from fees after political criticism that working class students would be unfairly penalised.

Participation: Target of 50% of under-30s to 'experience Higher Education' by 2010.

Five Year Strategy

Having looked at policy in the recent past, we can finish by outlining New Labour's plans for the future (assuming, of course, they are re-elected), unveiled in July 2004 as part of a five year strategy.

• Providers: Greater private industry involvement in the funding, owning and running of schools. New providers (parent groups, religious organisation and businesses) can set up new schools.

• Personalised learning will expand, with the objective being to 'tailor the curriculum' to the needs of each individual pupil. This, however, is likely to raise serious labelling issues.

• Schools: The aim is to expand 'good schools' and close 'failing schools' (replacing them with Academies). Greater control over attendance and behaviour will be introduced, part of which involves the expectation every school will have a uniform and code of conduct. The 'extended schools' experiment will itself be extended and specialist schools will be allowed to develop a second 'specialism'.

Ten Year Strategy

Looking even further into the future, the Tomlinson Report (2004) is intended to form the basis for wide-ranging reform of the 14-19 curriculum and, as such, it is worth outlining the Report's main recommendations (even though, at the time of writing, it's not clear whether the government intends to implement them all). The basic recommendations are '. . . to replace existing 14-19 qualifications including A levels, AS levels, AVCEs, BTECs and GCSEs' with a diploma framework. There will be four levels of attainment:

• Entry

• Foundation

• Intermediate

• Advanced.

Achievement at each level is recorded as a pass, merit or distinction and 'Detailed performance records' would be available to teachers, employers, universities and colleges, recording the grades achieved in particular components of the diploma.

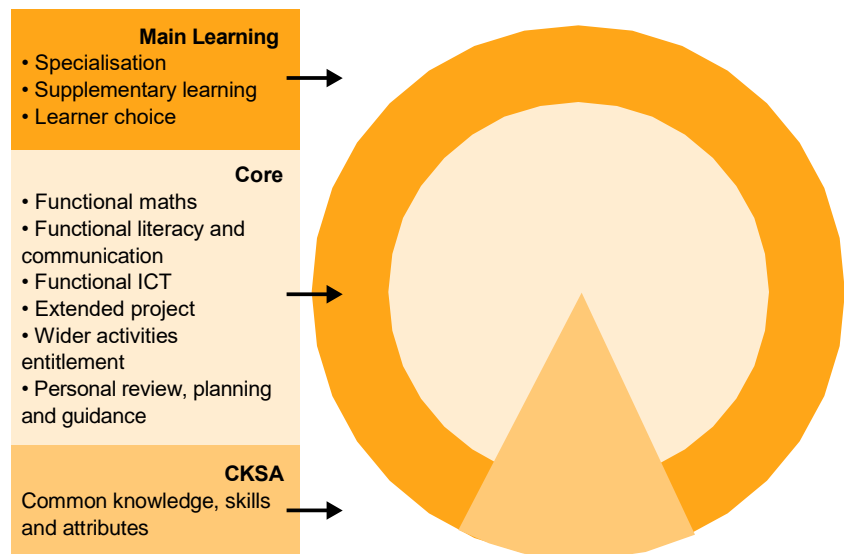As the following table shows, the diploma is built around three areas.

- Main learning: Most time would be spent on these subjects.

- Core learning: The focus here is on students gaining 'a minimum standard in functional communication, mathematics and ICT for each diploma'. An extended project (to replace 'most externally assessed coursework' would be part of all core learning, as would participation in 'sports, arts, work experience and community service. Their participation would be recorded on their diploma, but would not be compulsory'. Personal reviews and evaluations of learning would also feature here.

- CKSA: The focus here is the development of skills (problem solving, teamwork and study skills, for example), rights and responsibilities, active citizenship, ethics and diversity.

National Curriculum (14-16) subjects would be retained as options within the diploma. However, the report proposed 'up to 20 subject mixes. Young people could choose an 'open' diploma with a subject mix similar to GCSEs and A-level combinations. Alternatively they could choose a diploma specialising in an employment sector or academic discipline'.

Vocational education and training can be either integrated into 'open diplomas' (mixed with academic subjects, for example) or followed as distinct 'vocational pathways' (routes through the various options and qualifications). In theory, 'schools and colleges, working with training providers, could tailor programmes to each young person's needs and abilities' which, in turn,

The 14-19 Diploma Framework

Main Learning
- Specialisation
- Supplementary learning
- Learner choice

Core
- Functional maths
- Functional literacy and communication
- Functional ICT
- Extended project
- Wider activities entitlement
- Personal review, planning and guidance

CKSA
Common knowledge, skills and attributes

is seen by Tomlinson as a way of tackling social exclusion (in the form of 'disengagement and poor behaviour')

Assessment: An interesting notion here is that 'students sit too many external exams'. The proposal, therefore, is for fewer external tests and more teacher assessment, although formal exams would be retained and 'External exams would also remain in the advanced diploma as well as for communication, mathematics and ICT in each diploma'.

Potential problems of teacher labelling and stereotyping impacting on their assessments of pupils would be resolved using a system of external moderators who would sample teacher assessments.

⚠ Digging deeper

Role: New Labour policies shaping the role of education in the twenty-first century reflect a range of functionalist and New Right perspectives and ideas. Functionalist ideas, for example, are reflected in areas such as:

• Social solidarity: One of New Labour's major concerns has been with social exclusion (a form of underclass theory linking educational underachievement, crime, delinquency and poverty). Education policy, therefore, has focused on measures to combat truancy, the introduction of Extended schools as a way of involving all sections of the community in the educational process and the development of different types of schools (Specialist, Foundation, Academies and so forth) as a way to raise achievement among the worst performing (academically) sections of society. Vocational forms of education have also

been developed as a means of raising achievement through social inclusion. •

Social integration: Measures such as school uniforms, codes of conduct and home-school agreements are classic integrating mechanisms, designed to promote social solidarity. The development of Extended schools also reflects the idea involving parents in the education of their children helps to control behaviour and increase achievement.

New Right perspectives, on the other hand, are increasingly reflected in ideas like:

• Marketisation strategies - the way to improve educational performance is to 'open schools up' to commercial influences. This involves a range of initiatives, from commercial funding of school building (the Building Schools for the Future programme - due to begin in 2005 - for example, involves capital spending by both the government and private industry, whereas the Seed Challenge initiative involves capital spending by government on a school if the school can attract 'matching funds' from non-government sources) to commercial firms actually owning and running schools. Critics of such involvement - such as Davies and Adnett ('Market Forces and School Curriculum', 1999) - point to a couple of potential problems.

  • Curriculum innovation decreases because of uncertainty about its success or failure (and, in particular, the consequences of getting it wrong). •

  Burden of change falls disproportionately on those schools

with the least resources to innovate successfully.

In addition, we can also note:

- long-term planning is inhibited by the need to produce 'instant improvements'

- competition between schools for pupils may actually decrease innovation and improvement because schools simply develop ways of attracting a limited pool of 'high ability, high motivation' pupils.

- Informed consumers: One problem with the idea of consumers (parents to you and me) being able to pick and choose schools is that equality of opportunity is more apparent than real. For example, what happens if a school is over-subscribed with applications (more parents want their children to go to that school than it has places available)? If a school cannot expand, the provider (a school), rather than the consumer, may end up choosing which pupils it accepts.

The experience of school performance (league) tables is a good example of how consumer choice may be limited. The rationale for the hierarchical ranking of schools (one on top of the other) is to allow consumers to judge the effectiveness of their local schools. However, such tables may lack validity for a number of reasons.

- Special needs: Schools with few SEN pupils have higher average academic performance.

- Resources are not distributed equally across all schools (inner city comprehensives, for example, fare worse in this respect than suburban public or grammar schools).

- Social class factors, rather than what happens within a school, may have more influence on exam results. Schools with large numbers of working-class children, for example, achieve less on average than schools with a largely middle-class intake.

- Exam values: Schools develop ways of 'improving their performance' by manipulating exam entrance. For example, they may be reluctant to accept lower class pupils (those who, historically, perform least well educationally); greater time, effort and teaching resources may be given to 'marginal students' (those who, with extra help can achieve five A-C GCSE grades) at the expense of pupils considered unlikely to reach this target.

Self-fulfilling prophecies: High ranking schools attract more middle-class pupils who, historically, achieve most educationally.

- Impact: Changes to educational provision have impacted on both providers and consumers in a number of ways:

- commercial input into school building and ownership

- centralised direction of the school curriculum, teaching methods, what pupils should wear to school and so forth

- failing schools and the consequences of not meeting (centralised) government performance targets

- competition between schools for pupils (especially those pupils with the 'right' attitudes and motivations).

- Experience: While it is always difficult to

evaluate the experience of schooling, we can note a number of general developments.

• Social inclusion has involved attempts to both increase levels of achievement and to ensure pupils from social groups who have, historically, been largely excluded from schooling are reintegrated into the system.

• Training: Greater emphasis, in recent years, has been placed on the relationship between education and work. While this has positive aspects (allowing students to follow vocational courses closely integrated to their needs and preferences) it also has rather less positive consequences in terms of:

  • selecting students for 'vocational training'

  • specialisation at a too early age

  • training that doesn't particularly match the changed economic situation (for example, vocational training that doesn't include high levels of ICT)

  • academic/vocational class divides in our educational system are perpetuated (in crude terms, middle-class pupils receive a high status academic education and the rest don't).

As Rutherford ('Education as a Frontier Market', 2003) argues: 'Education and training is changed from the social provision of a public good, into a services market involving private transactions between customers and providers'.

• Curriculum changes: Some changes can, once again, be viewed in a generally positive light. Michael Fielding ('Students as Radical Agents of Change', 2001), for example, has noted opportunities for student involvement in the teaching and learning process through curriculum initiatives (which, presumably, would involve the new requirement on schools to teach Citizenship).

Attempts to simplify the school curriculum by offering different routes through the school (in terms of academic/vocational subjects, Foundation, Intermediate and Higher levels and so forth) may help to clarify pupil choices and the possible introduction of a School Diploma may also broaden pupil experience by widening their choice of subjects.

Conversely, however, Fielding also notes a conflicting tendency within schools; the over-emphasis on exam performance and education as a series of 'measurable outcomes', serves to limit both choice and channel pupils into an increasingly narrow set of educational experiences.

This section has covered the development and application of educational policy over the past 50 years, from the introduction of universal, free, education to the recently published Tomlinson Report that charts the proposed way forward for the next 10 years. As such, it represents a logical development of the ideas about education as a social institution discussed earlier in the chapter. In the final section, however, we are going to focus on another side to the educational debate, namely understanding what goes on 'inside schools' in terms of the relationship between adults and children.

School relationships and processes

Introduction

In this final section we are going to examine debates about schooling as a social process; in other words, we need to look more closely at what goes on 'inside schools', in terms of the organisation of teaching and learning, teacher/pupil relationships, the influence of the hidden curriculum and the development of pupil subcultures.

As you will note, we have touched on some of these ideas in earlier sections but we need to develop them in more detail to arrive at a rounded picture of education in our society.

⚠️ Preparing the ground

The organisation of teaching and learning

We can categorise these processes in terms of two main ideas.

- Social organisation refers to how education is organised in terms of things like the educational policies we examined in the previous section. The social organisation of education, therefore, sets the basic context for the:

- Sociological organisation of teaching and learning, which involves examining areas like:

- School and classroom organisation: How is teaching and learning physically organised?

- Curriculum organisation: for example, what must be taught in schools.

- Socialisation and social control: How is it established and exercised?

- Teaching styles: Are there different theories of teaching?

- Learning styles: Are there different theories of learning?

WARM UP: TIME TRAVEL

Imagine you have been transported back in time to 1904 - what differences and similarities do you think there might be between the early twentieth and early twenty-first century school/classroom?

Similarities	Differences
Going to school	No physical punishment

**Victorian Classroom
Late nineteenth century**

**Edwardian Classroom
Early twentieth century**

**Modern classroom
Early twenty-first century**

You will, no doubt, have established, some fairly obvious similarities between Edwardian and contemporary schooling. For example:

• school as a place you go to learn

• you are taught by teachers (adults)

• you may wear uniforms (although this depends on the school).

There are, of course, some obvious differences: relationships with teachers may be friendlier and their style of teaching different; discipline is very different (corporal punishment (physical beating) is no longer allowed) and, of course, the technology of the Edwardian classroom was very different - writing with chalk on a piece of slate probably doesn't quite match today's computers, data projectors and electronic whiteboards - although most students probably still record their work in ink, on paper).

In the following we can look at some significant aspects of the organisation of teaching and learning (a few of which, I suspect wouldn't have seemed too different to pupils 100 years ago).

• Social structures: By and large, schools are hierarchical structures, not only in terms of the power/authority relationship between adults (teachers, administrative and support staff) and pupils (who, by-and-large, have very little power within schools and are consequently unable to officially influence the teaching and learning process), but also in terms of the general authority structure within the school.

⚠ Growing it yourself: school hierarchies

This exercise can be completed in small groups or as a whole class, depending on your knowledge of different types of educational institution.

Draw an organisational chart, based on your knowledge of primary/secondary school/college, to include everyone - from the head teacher/principal down to the youngest year group pupils (if you're lucky, your teacher may have a chart available for the teaching staff which you can adapt for this purpose).

Indicate, where known, the gender and ethnicity of the staff occupying the positions of authority you've identified.

Discussion points

You might like to consider: What are the social characteristics (age, gender, etc.) of the most/least powerful people in the organisation?

What levels of respect/obedience are people in the organisation expected to show towards each other? (For example, how are pupils expected to act towards staff and vice versa?)

• Bureaucratic organisation: Schools are, in some ways, bureaucracies organised, for teaching and learning purposes, around basic principles designed to maximise their efficiency as people processors. In other words, schools are modern institutions, an idea expressed by the American educationalist Ted Sizer (Horace's Compromise The Dilemma of the American High School, 1984) when he argued schools tend to be organised around principles of:

• Uniformity: They operate, in other words, with little concern for the needs of individuals (teachers or learners) and emphasise a narrow definition of achievement (how many tests are successfully passed) rather than the quality of student understanding.

• Quantification is the main way the value of a school, its teachers and students is expressed. 'Success' is measured in exam passes and league table position.

• Expectancies: Schools (and by extension teachers and students) are set targets, determined at a national, government, level, for student learning (all 7 year olds, for example, should achieve Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and maths).

• Division of labour: This is highly fragmented (split into small parts) and tightly controlled. The school day, for example, is divided into rigid lessons and what is taught is not open to negotiation.

• Individual responsibility is limited; learning is controlled (by the needs of testing regimes, for example) and there's little scope for individual development or expression. Students are generally expected to learn similar things, at similar times, in similar ways.

Whether or not your experience of schooling fits exactly (or even inexactly) with the ideas we've just noted, have a look at the following examples of two different kinds of educational philosophy about how teaching and learning should be organised:

Summerhill School (founded by A.S. Neill in 1921)	
Schooling norms	**Schooling values**
Children can follow their own interests	Provide an environment so children can define who they are and what they want to be.
No compulsory assessments or lessons	No pressure to conform to artificial standards of success based on predominant theories of child learning and achievement.
Children are free to play when and how they like	Spontaneous, natural play not undermined or redirected by adults into a learning experience for children.
All school rules and decisions made democratically by children and adults	Create values based on the community. Problems are discussed and resolved openly and democratically.
Boarding fees range from £5300 to £6550 depending on the age of the student. http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk	

Steiner Schools
'The school curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the child at each stage of their development. Children enter classes according to their age rather than academic ability and the teacher is free to present subject material in an individual way that aims to awaken and enthuse the children, encouraging them to discover and learn for themselves. In this way the child is not educated solely in the '3 Rs' but also in the '3 Hs' - Hand, Heart, Head - the practical, feeling and thinking capacities'.
Rudolf Steiner School: Kings Langley: http://www.rudolfsteiner.herts.sch.uk/

⚠ Growing it yourself: alternative schools

What are your views on institutions like Summerhill and Steiner Schools?

Split into two groups:

• group one should identify possible advantages of this type of schooling

• group two should identify possible disadvantages.

Combine your observations into a table similar to the following:

Advantages	Disadvantages
Pupils learn at their own pace.	What if people don't learn anything?
Variety of learning techniques	What if people don't behave?

Discussion point: alternative schools

Once you've done this, you might like, as a class, to consider the strengths and weaknesses of these types of school compared to your school/college.

- Curriculum: The teaching and learning process in schools is constrained by the nature of the school curriculum, in terms of what can or can't be taught. Two things are useful to note here. Firstly, how little the school curriculum actually changed over 100 years. Compare, for example, the National Curriculum subjects noted in the previous section with:

The Board of Education Curriculum: 1904	
English	Manual Work (boys)
Maths	Domestic subjects (girls)
Science	Physical Exercise
History	Foreign Language
Drawing	Geography
Music added shortly afterwards	

Secondly, the relevance of the curriculum - in terms of the usefulness or otherwise of what is taught - is rarely questioned, although, having said that, John White (Rethinking the School Curriculum, 2003) has argued: 'Many subjects are bogged down in values held over 100 years ago. They need to be freed from the dead weight of custom and from the shackle of the assessment system before they can focus on what is really important'. He argues, for example:

- History contains little of relevance to the twenty-first century.
- Science is laboratory-based, employing techniques no scientist currently uses (the Bunsen burner!)
- Music - one of the most important aspects of pupil culture - is reduced to the study of dead, white, European classical composers.

The Royal Society for the Arts has argued a curriculum for the twenty-first century ('Opening Minds', 1998) should be based around five 'competencies':

- learning: being taught how to learn, think and critically reflect
- citizenship: focusing on behaviour, rights and responsibilities
- relationships: understanding how to relate to others
- managing situations: dealing with change and so forth
- managing information: how to access and judge the value of different sources.

- Teaching and learning styles: Having suggested schools are bureaucratic institutions that don't seem to have changed much over the past century in terms of how they organise knowledge and information, in recent years a great deal of work has gone into thinking about how teachers teach and students learn. The impact of new technologies (the Internet, interactive white boards, CD-ROMs and so forth) on teaching styles should not be underestimated since, although it may be much the same old curriculum, technology opens up new ways to teach and learn (although we are, of course, only at the beginning of any

exploration of how such technology impacts on the organisation of teaching and learning).

Similarly, developments in teacher and student understanding of learning styles (differences, for example, in the way different students process information - visually, verbally and the like) are starting to have an impact, as is the idea of things like Howard Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences (Multiple Intelligences after Twenty Years, 2003) which argues students possess a range of 'intelligences' (interpersonal, emotional, musical and so forth) as well as the ones (language, mathematical and spatial) traditionally recognised and tested (in exams and IQ tests) in schools.

The hidden curriculum

Brian Jackson (Life In Classrooms, 1968) argued the hidden curriculum involves the things we learn from the experience of attending school. It is, therefore, a form of socialisation process, involving a mix of formal and informal techniques.

Meighan ('A Sociology of Education', 1981) suggests: 'The hidden curriculum is taught by the school, not by any teacher . . . [it involves] an approach to living and an attitude to learning'.

Skelton ('Studying hidden curricula', 1997) suggests it involves: 'That set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes. These messages may be contradictory . . . and each learner mediates the message in her/his own way'.

In this respect, Carrie Paechter ('Issues in the study of curriculum', 1999) suggests

the hidden curriculum has two basic dimensions:

• Intended aspects are the things teachers 'actively and consciously pursue as learning goals'. These include, fostering certain values (politeness, the importance of order, deference to authority and so forth) and discouraging others (bullying and sexism, for example). It is 'hidden' in the sense these things are not part of the formal curriculum, but teachers and students are probably aware of many of the processes going on in the school (some of which may actually be explicit, in terms of things like anti-racism or anti-sexism policies).
• Unintended aspects might include the messages teachers give to students in the course of their teaching - things like status messages (whether boys appear to be more valued than girls - or vice versa), messages relating to beliefs about ability (whether teachers believe it is 'natural' or the product of 'hard work') and so forth.

Have a look at the 'Discussion point' opposite. Having established what we mean by this concept (and, I trust, how the interpretation of its meaning reflects Skelton's argument), we can identify some aspects of its content in the following terms:
• Status messages covers a number of areas related to ideas we develop about our 'worth' in the eyes of others. This includes, for example:
  • Type of school: State or private, grammar or non-grammar, for example. •
  Streaming/banding/setting and how membership of 'high' or 'low' academic groups impacts on pupil perceptions of themselves and others.
  • Academic and vocational courses and

Discussion point: images of the hidden curriculum

How would you interpret the meaning of the following?

Primary science

Primary cookery

Secondary science

What do these examples tell us about the hidden curriculum?

subjects have different statuses in our educational system. The introduction of 'Vocational GCSEs' for example, reflects the implicit assumption academic GCSEs are not suited to the abilities of some students (and it probably doesn't take too much imagination to guess the social class of students who will be encouraged to take these new qualifications).

- Class position - how ranking in terms of academic success or failure affects children's self-perception and value.

- Classroom organisation - in terms, for example, of authority within the classroom (teacher at the front, directing operations or a situation in which there is no clear authority ranking).

- Socialisation/social control messages relate to ideas about what is required from

pupils if they are to succeed educationally. Some of these ideas refer explicitly to the way pupils are encouraged to behave within schools (for example, the various classroom processes that involve order and regularity - attendance, punctuality and so forth) whereas others are less explicit and relate to the things pupils must demonstrate in order to 'learn how to learn'. That is, learning to conform not just to the formal rules of the school but also to the informal rules, beliefs and attitudes perpetuated through the socialisation process. These include things like recognising:

- Authority, in terms of the powerful role played by the teacher within the classroom - not simply in terms of organisational rules (when to speak, where to sit and so forth) - but also in relation to:

- Learning, which may involve ideas like individualism (learning is a process that should not, ultimately, be shared) and competition (the objective is to demonstrate you are better than your peers). Learning also involves ideas about what is to be learnt in terms of:

- Knowledge: Teachers, for example, select and present certain ideas as valid. To pass exams (and thereby succeed in educational terms), the pupil has to learn to conform to what the teacher presents as valid knowledge.

- Assessment is an integral part of the hidden curriculum because it involves the idea learning can be quantified (through tests and exams) and that, consequently, only quantifiable knowledge is valid knowledge. Assessment is, of course, crucial to various forms of teacher labelling and stereotyping that go on within schools and classrooms and contributes to pupil (and indeed teacher) identities.

- Identities: These are a significant aspect of the hidden curriculum, not just in terms of the things we've already noted (different senses of identity related to types of school, how pupils are perceived, categorised and treated and the like), but also in terms of ideas like class, gender and ethnicity. Hill and Cole (Schooling and Equality: Fact, Concept and Policy, 2001), for example, argue the hidden curriculum functions to exclude particular groups (especially working class children, but also such groups as the mentally and physically disabled).

- Elizabeth Burn ('Do Boys need Male Primary Teachers as Positive Role Models?', 2001) argues current government preoccupations with initiatives relating to boys' achievement (male role models, after-school learning clubs, boy-friendly curricula, single-sex classroom groups . . .) sends messages about achievement to both males and females - that boys have 'a problem', for example and the achievement of girls is both devalued and (perhaps) part of the problem. Similarly, Emma Smith ('Failing Boys and Moral Panics', 2003) questions the idea of framing debates about underachievement in terms of 'failing boys'.

Questions of identity are also related to subject choice in terms of what students choose to study (mainly post-16 under the conditions originally set by the National Curriculum, but some forms of choice at Key Stage 3 - decisions about vocational or academic GCSEs for example - are gradually being introduced) and why they make these choices. A wide range of evidence suggests males and females make different subject choices when given the opportunity. These choices are not just influenced by the people around us (Cooper and McDonald ('Why Science?, 2001), for example, found both parents and teachers influential in a student's choice of degree courses) but also by perceptions relating to masculine and feminine identities. Caroline Bamford ('Gender and Education in Scotland', 1989) noted the research evidence suggested more boys take subjects like science, geography, technical drawing and computing, whereas more girls take secretarial studies, biology, French, home economics and history.

Abbot and Wallace (Feminist Perspectives, 1996) also point out feminist research has shown how concepts of masculinity and femininity are influenced by factors such as:

- Academic hierarchies - how the school is vertically stratified in occupation terms (men at the top being the norm).

- Textbooks and gender stereotyping: Males appear more frequently and are more likely to be shown in active ('doing and demonstrating'), rather than passive, roles. Lesley Best ('Analysis of sex-roles in pre-school books', 1992), for example, used Content Analysis to demonstrate how pre-school texts designed to develop reading skills remain populated by sexist assumptions and stereotypes.

David Gillborn ('Citizenship, "Race" and the Hidden Curriculum', 1992) also notes how the hidden curriculum impacts on ethnic (as well as gender and class) identities through citizenship teaching, where the content of the subject teaching (democracy, racial equality, etc.) frequently clashes with the 'learned experiences' of black pupils.

- Formal curriculum: Decisions about what subjects should be studied, how they should be studied and the particular content of each subject are also significant aspects of the hidden curriculum. Paechter (1999), for example, argues:

  - Subject learning - as opposed to process learning - is generally considered more important in our education system. For example critical thinking is a process where we learn how

to assess and evaluate knowledge. However, somewhat ironically, its value is only realised when it is turned into a subject to be studied.

  - Specialisms: Each subject has its own special skills and knowledge and the curriculum becomes increasingly specialised as students progress through the system.

  - Hierarchy: Some subjects are more important than others (English, maths, science and ICT have special places in the school curriculum; social science, media studies etc., barely get a look-in).

    White and Bramall ('Why Learn Maths?', 2000) question this hierarchy when they argue against forcing children to learn high levels of maths: 'The maths we need for everyday life and work is mostly learnt by the end of primary school'.

    Michael Reiss ('Representing Science', 2001) similarly questions the value of science as a National Curriculum subject when its teaching is '. . .putting pupils off further study of science by limiting the subject to tedious experiments that have little connection to everyday life'.

- Teaching within schools assumes teachers, as the 'organisers of learning for others', are a necessary aspect of schooling. This raises a number of interesting questions (for example, are teachers actually needed?) about the nature of knowledge and learning. Even the development of electronic learning (delivered via the Internet, for example), assumes the presence of teachers to organise and direct learning.

Teacher/pupil relationships

We have considered aspects of this relationship at various points (in terms of labelling, stereotyping, self-fulfilling prophecies and differential achievement, for example) and so, you'll be relieved to know, I don't propose to go over this ground again. However, there are further aspects of this relationship that can be usefully explored here.

- Switching-on: Cano-Garcia and Hughes ('Learning and thinking styles', 2000) argue this relationship is significant in terms of how successful (or unsuccessful) pupils are in switching-on/conforming to teaching styles. They argue, for example, the most academically successful students are those who can work independently of the teacher within a fairly rigid set of teacher-controlled guidelines and procedures. In other words, successful pupils understand what the teacher wants and develop 'teacher-pleasing behaviours' designed to provide it.

- Switching-off: The other side of this idea, of course, is what Barrett ('Middle schooling', 1999) has termed 'switching-off ' - the idea that where pupils fail to see what they're supposed to be learning as 'useful now, as well as in the future' turns a large number off, in terms of learning. In addition, switching-off also seems to occur when pupils feel they lack power to influence the scope, extent and purpose of their studies.

  Seaton ('Reforming the hidden curriculum', 2002) expresses these two basic pupil orientations more academically as 'learned dependence' on the one hand and 'experienced alienation' on the other.

- Tacit agreements: These two ideas (switching-on and switching-off) capture, in a small way, one of the problems teachers face in the teaching and learning process - contradictory demands made by a fragmented student body (which is a posh way of saying some students like some things and others don't).

  This is not particularly a problem, however, when teacher and pupils are acting in tacit agreement about the purpose of education. It is probable middle-class children gain no more and no less satisfaction from their schooling than working-class children; Barrett, however, suggests the former are more likely to tacitly agree with teachers about the purpose of education - the accumulation of credentials (qualifications) - and be more inclined, therefore, to participate in teacher-pleasing behaviour.

  One important aspect of the breakdown of teacher - pupil relationships we need to note, in this context, is of course pupil violence towards teachers and other pupils. DfES figures for 2004 show nearly 300 pupils were expelled for assaults on adults, in addition to nearly 4000 fixed period suspensions. There were also 300-plus expulsions and 12,800 suspensions for attacks on fellow pupils.

- Teaching styles: In terms of the different ways teachers interpret their role, we could note four basic categories of teaching styles:

  - teacher-centred, where the teacher directs and informs the class

  - demonstrator, where although the class is teacher-centred and controlled, the emphasis is on demonstrating ideas

and encouraging students to experiment

- student-centred, where the role of the teacher is defined as helping (or facilitating) the student to learn by giving them responsibility for their own learning

- delegation styles involve requiring students to work independently on tasks, at their own pace.

In terms of the ideas at which we have just looked, you might find John Gatto's arguments ('The Six-Lesson Schoolteacher', 1991), interesting. You can find the article at:

www.sociology.org.uk/as4aqa.htm

Pupil subcultures

This final section brings together, in a variety of ways, the general ideas we have just examined in terms of how teaching and learning is organised, the formal and hidden curricula and how teacher-pupil relationships develop and impact on pupil orientations towards school and education (not necessarily the same things - you can hate school but value education and, of course, vice versa).

Traditionally, the sociology of pupil subcultures has focused on the identification of two basic subcultural types.

- Reactive subcultures develop, as the term implies, as a reaction to what someone is doing - in this instance, the school or teachers. In other words, this body of theory argues school subcultures develop out of the dissatisfaction of some groups of pupils with their treatment within the school.

- Independent subcultures are similar but involve the idea particular subcultural groups already exist within the school (they have developed independently of any adult input) and are subsequently labelled, in some way (positively or negatively) by those in authority.

In addition, these - again traditionally - have been subdivided into:

- pro-school subcultures - groups of pupils who, for whatever reasons, see schooling in a positive light

- anti-school subcultures - pupils who, as you might expect, aren't too keen on school or what it has to offer.

The literature is heavy with studies identifying these types - Hargreaves ('Social Relations In A Secondary School', 1967) and Woods ('The Divided School', 1979) for example and Johnson ('Failing School, Failing City', 1999) more recently in relation to Northern Ireland schools. Much of the research (including Willis's Learning to Labour, 1977) focused on the idea of:

- Counter-school subcultures - how pupils - usually young, white, working-class boys - developed subcultural groups as an alternative to the mainstream culture of schools. Woods, for example, adapted

Merton's Strain Theory of deviance (Social Structure and Anomie, 1938) to argue for a range of different subcultural responses (adaptations) to school culture - from ingratiators (pupils who try to earn the favour of teachers - the most positive adaptation) at one extreme to rebels (who explicitly rejected the culture of the school) at the other.

While much subcultural theory focused on 'lads' (and, by and large, 'bad lads') and their behaviour, to explain how and why this group is complicit in its own educational failure, some research also included girl's behaviour. Sue Lees (Sugar And Spice: Sexuality and Adolescent Girls,
1993), for example, noted how female subcultures developed around:

• Pro-school girls, which included those who intrinsically valued education (seeing school as enjoyable and worthwhile) and those who took a more extrinsic or instrumental approach to their studies (they saw qualifications, for example, as a necessary means towards a desired end and didn't particularly value school 'for its own sake'). In addition, some girls saw school as an enjoyable place for socialising with friends, without necessarily seeing qualifications as being particularly important.

• Anti-school girls included some subcultural groups who saw school as a pointless waste of time, an unenjoyable and uncomfortable period in their life they have to get through before being able to escape into the adult world of work and family.

In addition, writers such as McRobbie and Garber ('Girls and Subcultures', 1975) and Christine Griffin ('It's Different For Girls', 1986) have used subcultural theory to explain how and why girls develop different kinds of response to their treatment and experiences within school and society.

In general, the majority of 'traditional' subcultural analysis focuses on the idea of pupils and teachers reacting, in some way, to each other's behaviour (in terms of status-giving or status denial, the acceptance or rejection of authority, labelling processes and so forth). However, more recently, writers such as Mac an Ghaill (The Making of Men, 1994) have changed the focus to that of masculinity and femininity, as well as developing a class and ethnic approach to understanding pupil subcultures. Mac an Ghaill, for example, identifies working-class subcultural groups such as New Enterprisers - boys who want to be self-employed - and Real Englishmen - middle-class boys disaffected with their school experience. In addition, recent developments have led in two main directions.

• Subcultural theory has been questioned, not so much in terms of the behaviour it seeks to explain, but more in terms of the idea of subculture itself. For example, we need to ask if pupil subcultures really exist, since there seems little evidence these groups develop any real forms of cultural production and reproduction within the school setting (that is, there is not much evidence of cultural identities nor any coherent and consistent way of recruiting and socialising new members). In addition, the concept of subculture suggests some sort of permanence and rigidity within groups, whereas recent types of research suggest this is not the case.

- Identity has become the new focus for explaining pupil behaviour. Rob Shields (Lifestyle Shopping, 1992), for example, argues 'post-subcultural theorising' thinks about identity in terms of its fragmentation (lots of different identities co-existing within schools, for example), rooted in 'fleeting gatherings' rather than rigid groups and focused on consumption (the things you buy and use - which can be real, in the sense of actually buying stuff, or metaphorical, in the sense of buying into a particular lifestyle).

  - Lifestyle shopping: Sara Delamont ('Gender and the Discourse of Derision', 1999), for example, has linked achievement and underachievement in the observation of female lifestyle shopping - the general rejection of 'failing working boys' who were not seen as having either the educational/work prospects or attitudes that make them particularly attractive future partners.

  - Neo-tribes: Andy Bennett ('Subcultures or Neo-tribes?', 1999) also points to a different way of conceptualising pupil subcultures with the concept of neo-tribes; dynamic, loosely bound groups involving a range of different - and fleeting - identities and relationships centering around lifestyles rather than a 'way of life'. In other words, this concept questions the idea of subcultural groups (something relatively permanent and tangible) and replaces it with the idea of loose-knit associations and interactions that chop and change over time (in a postmodernist sort of way).

⚠ Digging deeper

As we have seen, school relationships and processes are both complex and inter-connected (for example, the hidden curriculum links into teacher-pupil relationships which, in turn, influences the development of pupil subcultures/styles). In this final section, therefore, we need to establish a general framework within which we can interpret these ideas. This framework can be developed around two school processes identified earlier, namely the formal and informal (or hidden) curricula. In this respect, we are interested in examining the formal curriculum in a little more depth since this aspect of school organisation arguably sets the tone for the informal curriculum.

One of the first sociologists to question the ideological nature of the formal curriculum was M.F.D. Young (Knowledge and Control, 1971) when he argued the way knowledge is categorised, presented and studied is significant for any understanding of school organisation and processes. If people believe it is possible to identify the 'most important' areas of knowledge in society, then some form of consensus is manufactured - and on this consensus can be built a system of testing and evaluation and individuals can be evaluated against their knowledge and understanding in a way that appears:

- objective: since there is agreement about what constitutes knowledge, testing can be measured against known standards of competence
- fair: pupils can be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they reach certain standards

• meritocratic: success or failure in reaching agreed standards can be expressed in terms of individual characteristics. If standards exist and children have an equal opportunity to achieve them then success or failure is down to individual levels of effort, motivation and so forth.

Young (from a Marxist perspective) argued the formal curriculum reflected the interests of powerful social groups in terms of the way knowledge was:

• selected - involving decisions about which subjects appear on the curriculum, the content of each subject and so forth

• organised - involving decisions about how teachers teach (alone or in groups, for example), how pupils should work (competitively or cooperatively, etc.), classroom organisation (who is in control) and the like.

• stratified within the classroom, the school and society. This involves thinking about why theoretical knowledge is considered superior to practical knowledge, the division between vocational and academic subjects, how subjects are compartmentalised (taught separately) rather than integrated (related to each other), teaching children different levels of knowledge, based upon assessments of their ability and so forth.

In a similar way, Michael Young ('Knowledge, learning and the curriculum of the future', 1999) argues that the formal curriculum is changing, in various ways, as our society changes (under the influence of global economic and cultural factors, for example).

Curriculum of the past	Curriculum of the future
Knowledge and learning 'for its own sake'	Knowledge and learning 'for a purpose'
Concerned with transmitting existing knowledge	Focus on creation of new knowledge
Little value on relationships between subjects	The interdependence of knowledge areas
Boundary between school and everyday knowledge	Link between school and everyday knowledge

Finally, we can finish by developing these basic ideas a little further, using Bernstein's argument ('On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge', 1971) that the way knowledge is organised (in his terms 'classified and framed') has consequences for the kinds of messages children receive about the nature and purpose of education.

Discussion point: classification and framing

Have a look at the following table that outlines Bernstein's ideas.

Characteristics of strongly classified and strongly framed knowledge	Characteristics of weakly classified and weakly framed knowledge
There are right answers and these are already known.	There are no right answers. Education is a process of explanation and argument.
Pupil's personal experience is largely irrelevant (unless specifically requested as an example and then it will be right or wrong).	The personal experiences of pupils are always important.
Knowledge is divided into subjects. When one is being studied, other subjects are irrelevant.	Subject boundaries are artificial. Pupils should link various forms of knowledge.
'Education' is what goes on within the school.	'Education' never stops. It occurs everywhere.
Teachers determine the time and pace of lessons.	The pace of learning is determined by the pupil and their interests.
Education involves matching the individual performance of pupils against fixed standards.	Education is seen as a process of personal development.

Now, in small groups or as a class, consider the following questions.

- In your experience, which type of framing (weak or strong) most closely matches your experience of schooling and why?
- Which of the two types of classification and framing most closely matches government educational policies over the past 20 years?
- Which type of framing most closely matches the Summerhill school curriculum?
- Is sociology 'weakly' or 'strongly' framed (and why)?
- If you have experience of e-learning (via the Internet for example) in your school/college, is this knowledge strongly or weakly framed and classified?