

“A” Level Sociology

Teaching Notes for Students

Education and Training

Differential Educational Achievement (2)

A. Theories of Educational Inequality.

1. Having established that there are patterns of educational success and failure, we need to look at sociological explanations of these patterns. We can group such theories into two main categories:
 - a. Those that focus on potential sources of inequality outside the school environment (social background differences).
 - b. Those that focus on potential sources of inequality inside the school environment.
- You need to be keep in mind that the cumulative effect of the following factors upon an individual's life chances may be highly significant. For example, whilst material deprivation may not, in itself, be a sufficient source of inequality to explain differential educational achievement in all cases, it may well be highly significant in relation to such things as an individual's:
 - Socialisation.
 - The type of school they attend.
 - Their patterns of attendance.
 - Their relationship with teachers.
- Wherever possible, I have indicated how various sources of educational inequality - inside and outside the educational system - have an effect upon one another.

The Meritocracy Thesis

1. In discussing differential educational achievement we are looking at this question in relation to the concept of meritocracy. In basic terms, the meritocracy thesis involves, as Bilton ("Introductory Sociology", 1987) notes, the ideas that:

"Firstly...social inequality is assumed to be a more or less inevitable outcome of individual differences in intelligence or talent, given the 'need' in industrial societies to offer incentives to those of higher ability. This assumption is the basis of the argument put forward by Herenstein ("IQ in the Meritocracy", 1973):

'If virtually anyone is smart enough to be a ditch digger, and only half the people are smart enough to be engineers, the society is, in effect, husbanding its intellectual resources by holding engineers in greater esteem and paying them more.'

Secondly, a meritocracy is by definition a society with structured social inequality; all it promises is equal opportunity to compete for unequal power and rewards. In a meritocracy, the education system is not expected to eradicate privilege and disadvantage: it merely offers a new sorting mechanism for recruiting people to subordinate or dominant positions."

2. A related concept, in this respect, is one that we encountered earlier in relation to Parsons, namely that of "equality of opportunity".

- If the meritocratic thesis is to be convincing, a primary requisite is that everyone, regardless of class, gender, ethnicity and so forth, must have an equal chance, within the education system, of success or failure. Bilton, for example, argues that:
- While there is a relationship between educational qualifications and social mobility, factors such as class, gender and ethnicity play a crucial part in determining an individual's overall life chances.
- Even where equality of educational opportunity exists (in relation to such things as access to educational resources, for example), non-educational factors such as class enter the equation in such a way as to distort the notion that in Britain we live in a meritocratic society.

3. The concept of "equality of educational opportunity" is a debatable one, since if non-educational factors evidently an individual's life chances - even in situations where individual's have identical educational qualifications - it follows that these factors must affect educational opportunity and, by extension, differential educational achievement. What we have to examine next, therefore, are sociological explanations of the various factors that affect educational opportunity and achievement.

B. Material Deprivation:

1. The idea that the material conditions of an individual's home and cultural background could explain differential educational achievement (considered in class terms) has gone in and out of fashion in Britain over the past 50-odd years:

- In the pre-2nd World War period, for example, poverty and deprivation appeared obvious candidates as a source of explanation for educational differences in achievement between upper / middle class children and their working class peers.
- Post-2nd World War, however, while material conditions improved for the working classes, their relative level of achievement did not improve significantly.
- This "educational discrepancy" was not only clear in the 1950's, but it was also manifest in the rather more generally-affluent 1960's.

2. Halsey, Floyd and Martin ("Social Class and Educational Opportunity, 1956), for example, found that the proportion of working class children admitted to Grammar schools between 1952 and 1954 fell - despite the widespread belief that the use of "objective" and "unbiased" intelligence testing at 11 (the "11-plus") would result in "bright" working class children over-coming any disadvantages in their environment and being able to enter Grammar schools.

- Halsey et al's study rejected the idea that material deprivation was a major cause of differential educational opportunity and achievement, however, on the basis that even amongst those working class children who did attend Grammar schools, their educational success-rate was far below that of their middle class peers:

Working class children, for example, were more likely to leave Grammar school at the earliest opportunity (age 15) than their middle-class counterparts.

- While they found a correlation between income and educational opportunity (mainly in relation to the financial hardship experienced by working class families in terms of not being able to afford school uniforms, educational trips and so forth), their analysis focused upon two more-significant factors involved in the explanation of educational differences:

a. Home encouragement and attitudes of parents:

In particular, they focused upon "cultural clashes" arising when a working class child entered the middle class environment of the school.

b. Material factors at home and school:

For example, the uneven distribution of Grammar schools. Many more of these schools were built in middle class areas than in working class areas.

- While material conditions did seem to play a part in explaining why many working class children went to Secondary Modern schools rather than Grammar schools, this idea did not explain why working class children who did attend Grammar schools still experienced relative educational failure.

3. The Plowden Report ("Children and Their Primary Schools", 1967), for example, argued that it was only in extreme cases that poverty played a significant part in explaining differential educational achievement.

4. Douglas ("The Home and the School", 1964) also demonstrated that material deprivation - whilst significant in specific ways - was too broad a categorization for the general explanation of relative working class educational failure. This was mainly because it is possible for children from "impoverished" or "materially-deprived" backgrounds to succeed educationally:

- This does not mean that material deprivation is not a factor. However, it cannot be the main factor in determining differences in educational achievement.
- Furthermore, Douglas (like Halsey et al) argued that working class attainment levels tended to diminish throughout a child's educational career - which suggests that other factors are at work in relation to educational attainment.

5. ~~Before we look in more detail at some of these factors, recent research into the~~ relationship between diet, malnutrition, poverty, etc. and foetal development has suggested there is a relationship between such factors and the physical development of the brain (just as there is a suggested relationship between cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, illness and the like and foetal development during pregnancy).

- In addition, Eysenck has claimed to have found a correlation between vitamin intake and IQ scores in children. In controlled experiments, children whose vitamin intake increased also increased their IQ score by a few percentage points. What is unclear, however, is the extent to which vitamin intake actually increased a child's "measured intelligence" (as opposed to simply correcting a vitamin imbalance that was affecting a child's ability to concentrate and so forth).
- One way of questioning this type of argument is to note, following both Halsey et al and Douglas, that:
 - a. Where the measured IQ of both working class and middle class children is the same, the latter still, on average, gain more educational qualifications.
 - b. In instances where both IQ and educational attainment is the same, middle class children, on average, go-on to attain higher-paid, higher status, employment than their working class peers.

C. Parental Attitudes.

1. While material deprivation may help to explain differential educational achievement on class grounds, it is clearly not adequate as a form of explanation on gender and ethnic grounds. In looking at the impact of what we might term "parental attitudes" on educational attainment, we can note the range of social factors that Douglas ("The Home and the School", 1964) identified as being significant here:

- The social class of a child's parents.
- The level of parental interest and encouragement.
- Size of family and position of child within the family (elder children did better, younger members of a "large" family did worse).
- Deficient care of babies in large families.
- Conditions in schools: the larger the class, the lower the test scores. Good primary teaching could compensate for material deficiencies in the home and lack of parental interest.
- Streaming reinforces the process of social selection: middle class children are mainly found in the higher streams.

2. ~~Douglas identified a range of social and educational factors which, considered in combination, help to account for relative differences in educational attainment. These factors fall into two main categories:~~

a. Social class background:

Parental attitudes, size of family and care of children.

b. Educational experiences:

School conditions, streaming.

- In relation to factors outside the school, Douglas focused on the importance of parental attitudes to their children's education as a crucial variable in the explanation of differential educational achievement. In this respect, Douglas notes the differences in socialisation experienced not just between social classes, but also between males and females and the members of different ethnic groups.
- Briefly, parental attitudes towards the education of female children will reflect their assumptions about the value of education for girls (for example, it may not be seen as being as important as the education of males). Thus, at various points in their educational career, girls are subject to parental pressures not imposed upon their male equivalents. Such pressures relate to:
 - a. The (still widespread) expectation that the main role for women in our society is that of "wife / mother / child rearer".
 - b. That some subjects (such as the natural sciences - physics, chemistry, etc.) lead to careers that are so male-dominated they are extremely difficult for women to break-into. Thus, parents may discourage their female off-spring from contemplating "unrealistic" career choices.
- In ethnic terms, it is evident that widespread differences in educational achievement between, for example, Asian Indians and West Indians may, in part, be due to the family / cultural background. The Asian Indian family, for example, tends to place great value upon the ethic of educational success and, most importantly, such family structures have the resources to support their (mainly male) children throughout their educational career.
- In relation to social class, both Douglas and Kahl ("Some Measurements of Academic Orientation", 1965) identify parental attitudes as a crucial variable in explaining why working class and middle class children of similar measured ability tend to have widely-differing educational experiences.
- Working class children lack parental support and motivation - and family pressures tend to push them into choosing the option of work - rather than education - at the earliest possible opportunity.

3. The difference between working class parental attitudes and those of their middle class counterparts can be expressed in terms of a "future orientated" set of attitudes possessed by middle class parents and a set of "present orientated" attitudes possessed by working class parents. Another way of expressing this idea is in terms of:

a. Deferred gratification:

- Middle class children are encouraged by their parents to see their education as a "means to an end" (higher pay, higher social status). In simple terms, although education may be relatively boring, meaningless and time-consuming, the rewards for persistence are to be found in later life.

b. Immediate gratification:

- Working class children are encouraged by their parents to "take what they can get, when they can get it". Leaving school at the earliest opportunity is a form of "immediate gratification", since the working class child can start to earn money at an earlier age than their middle-class peers.
- The ideas of "future" and "present" orientation stem from the different adult experiences of working and middle class parents which they use to condition the attitudes of their off-spring. There are, however, a number of problems here:
- Olive Banks ("The Sociology of Education", 1971) has pointed out that the question of "aspirations" is one that cannot be taken for granted or simply expressed in absolute terms. Aspirations for one's offspring have to be seen in the light of different starting points for people of different social classes:

For example, the son of an unskilled labourer who aspires to become a skilled craftsman may have relatively higher aspirations than the son of a bank clerk who aspires to become a bank manager.

In this respect, it is not clear how we are supposed to be able to measure (or "operationalize ") the relative difference in social aspirations and achievements across the class structure.

- While it might be possible to demonstrate a correlation between the values, attitudes and aspirations of parents and their offspring (highly-motivated parents producing highly-motivated children), it is more difficult to see parental attitudes / socialisation alone as being responsible for differential achievement.

Other socialising agencies (such as teachers, peer-groups and the mass media) may be significant in shaping the aspirations and motivation of children. Where these socialising influences conflict, the relationship between parental attitudes and child attainment may not be as clear-cut as writers such as Douglas and Kahl suggest.

- The question of parental motivation is a contentious one, since it is not possible to see parental aspirations for their offspring simply in terms of:
 - a. Middle class parents encouraging their children, whilst working class children as lacking such encouragement.
 - b. The "solution" to working class differential achievement being seen as involving some form of change in parental attitudes / encouragement.
- Attitudes about the social world arise in a context of social experience; they reflect that experience and people's experience conditions attitudes towards the future. Children are not "empty vessels" waiting to be filled with knowledge. They are conscious human-beings who take-note of the world in which they find themselves. If that world consists of widespread unemployment (even amongst those who achieve some form of educational qualification), this will place limitations on their behaviour and condition their attitude towards the value of qualifications.

For example, a boy who aspires to be a professional footballer will come to recognise the level of competition and limited opportunities to realise this aspiration (the risks involved in failure may outweigh the possible advantages)

For a girl with similar aspirations, the limitations are even more pronounced, since there are no professional women footballers in Britain...

D. Class Sub-Cultures.

1. Much of the writing about the influence of the home, parental attitudes and the like on educational achievement tends to focus upon subcultural differences between upper, middle and working class families.

- Kahl ("Some Measurements of Academic Orientation", 1965), for example, stresses the idea that different classes have different values and value-orientations ("aspirations") and these, in turn, find their expression in relation to different parental attitudes, motivations and so forth in relation to their children's education.
- Douglas ("The Home and the School", 1964) suggested that the failings of working class home life needed to be redressed by such things as improved primary school teaching and an increase in nursery schools to provide the kinds of stimulation lacking in working class homes.
- The Newsom Report ("Half Our Future", 1963) recommended that the school curriculum should be made "more relevant" to the needs of pupils of differing abilities. As Newsom argued:

"...all schools should provide a choice of programme, including a range of courses broadly related to occupational interests, for pupils in the fourth and fifth years of a five year course."

- Pupils in the lower streams (in the main from the working classes) were seen to require "non-academic" courses to help prepare them for their life outside school.
- Burgess ("It's Not a Proper Subject: It's Just Newsom", 1984) argues that these types of courses became, in practice, a further source of educational differentiation between middle class and working class pupils.

2. In the above, the basic source of differential achievement found in the values adopted by different class cultures. It is taken for granted that to succeed a working class child must somehow adapt themselves to the values perpetuated through the educational system in order to integrate themselves into a "culture of success".

- Studies such as the ones noted above take it for granted that, in a society with a highly- competitive, highly-differentiated, education system dominated by "middle class norms, values, attitudes, beliefs and ideologies", the children who succeed are those who can adapt most easily and successfully to the school environment and the beliefs / attitudes of their teachers. Thus, the picture we get is:

- Schools are middle class institutions.
- Learning involves a process of:
 - a. Conforming to middle class norms
 - b. Accepting middle class values relating to learning, teaching, knowledge, etc.
- To learn, the pupil must immerse themselves in the culture of the school.

3. This "realistic" view of schools as a social institution means that the children who succeed are those who learn how to conform.

Learning to conform involves a socialisation process that starts in the family and involves parental attitudes and motivations "socialised into" their children.

Thus, "success" is not simply a matter of class background (although there is a relationship between class and educational success). Rather, children who succeed are those, regardless of their objective class background, whose parents socialise them into the norms and values of middle class life.

4. This argument has a superficial attractiveness because it seems to explain why:

- Middle and upper class children generally succeed
- Working class children generally fail
- Some working class children succeed "against the odds"
- Boys do better overall than girls of the same class
- Middle class girls achieve more than working class boys
- Boys and girls from non-white ethnic groups generally achieve less educationally than their white peers.
- Asian Indian children do as well as their white, middle class, counterparts (and significantly better than their white working-class counterparts).

E. Situational Constraints.

1. The notion of class subcultures has its critics. While Hyman ("The Value Systems of Different Classes", 1967), for example, might happily talk about the way in which the value system of the working classes acts as a barrier to their educational advancement - in terms of the way in which their values place a lower value on:

- Educational success
- High occupational status
- Opportunities for personal advancement through education

not all sociologists see things in this way. In particular, the question of class subcultures and their relationship to values (as opposed to norms) can be questioned. We can begin to explore this idea by focusing firstly on the question of values.

- "Values" can be defined in the following ways:
 - "Ideas held by human individuals or groups about what is desirable, proper, good or bad": Giddens ("Sociology", 1989)
 - "Values...are more general standards concerning worthy behaviour". Bilton et al (Introductory Sociology", 1987)
 - "A value is a belief that something is good and desirable. It defines what is important, worthwhile and worth striving for": Haralambos ("Themes and Perspectives", 1990)
 - "Values are in a sense summaries of approved ways of living which act as a kind of base from which particular norms spring...values...provide general principles from which norms directing behaviour...are derived": Jones ("Theory and Method in Sociology", 1987)
 - Thus, values represent ideas about the way of the world:
 - The way that it is...
 - The way that it should be...
 - The way that we might hope it to be.
 - Values can be widely-held in society
"Education is the key to social mobility"
- or they can be intensely personal
"I believe in Devil-Worship"
- On a general social level, however, there is little evidence to suggest that people from different social classes do not have quite similar conceptions about the relative value of different ideas (such as educational qualifications, for example).

- This is not to say that all values are shared equally among all social classes / social groups, or that "shared values" are the basis of social order (as many Functionalists might argue). This idea is equally valid from a Conflict theory point of view, since we can use the concept of a "dominant ideology" to explain the presence and persistence of very basic ideas (values) about the social world.

2. What we have to look is the way values arise and are translated into behaviour (norms), since it is evident that values are not randomly distributed throughout a society. On the contrary, we can see clear patterns in relation to the extent and distribution of values throughout any society.

- The values we, as individuals, hold are the product of a complex social process involving the general socialisation process to which we are subjected (by parents, teachers, peers, the media, etc.) and our experiences in the social world.
- It is in this concept - the nature of the relationship between the values perpetuated through the social structure and our experience of the world - that we can develop the concept of "situational constraints". The argument is that we can explain such things as differential educational achievement not by arguing that different classes have different values, but rather, that different social groups / social classes are differently-placed in the class structure in terms of their ability to translate values into social behaviour (and, by extension, educational qualifications).

3. Lewis, talking generally about the poor and the nature of poverty, argued that:

"It is probably more fruitful to think of lower class families reacting in various ways to the facts of their position and to relative isolation rather than the imperatives of a lower class culture."

- Lewis is arguing that the poor are not "different" from mainstream society in terms of the values that they hold. On the contrary, they may well share the general values present in society. What makes them "different" in relation to their middle and upper class counterparts is their inability to translate those values into reality.

4. In educational terms, Westergaard and Resler ("Class in Capitalist Society", 1976) have noted that:

"The signs are that working-class parents have a high, and increasing, interest in their children's education - because they are aware of, and may indeed overestimate, the dependence of individual prospects in life on schooling. Typically, however, they lack the means - cultural as well as material, indirect as well as direct - to translate that interest into effective influence on their children's behalf. The result may well be growing consciousness of the ways in which the dice are loaded against their sons and daughters; and such consciousness may be made more potent by the knowledge that they have little chance of advancement for themselves, once they are set in manual working-class jobs without special educational qualifications to help them up."

5. Thus, a major difference between the concepts of "class sub-cultures" and "situational constraints" is that while the former accepts the way the education system is organised in our society as "given" - as being almost fixed and inevitable - the latter argues that the way schools are organised provides a "situational constraint" on the ability of working class parents and their children to achieve the level of educational success of which they are capable.

- Using the concept of class sub-cultures, the important variable in educational success is the ability of parents to socialise and motivate their children into the "values and norms" of a middle class social institution. In this instance, parental attitudes are crucial.
- Using the concept of situational constraints, the important variable is the organisation of the educational system. In this instance, changes in parental attitudes are seen as largely irrelevant, since the problem is not one of attitude but rather one of fundamental, structured, social inequality.

6. A further development on the idea of situational constraints is the work of Bourdieu and Passeron ("Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction", 1973).

- Bourdieu and Passeron use the concept of cultural capital to demonstrate how the working classes are systematically blamed for their relative failure within the education system.
- Two concepts are initially important in relation to Bourdieu's work:

Cultural capital (explained below) and
Cultural reproduction:

The way schools, in conjunction with other social institutions, help to perpetuate social and economic inequalities across the generations.

- For Bourdieu, the relationship between the education system (considered as part of the political / ideological superstructure in Capitalist society), and the economic infrastructure (or "base") is a dependent one:

In Capitalist society, where the economic infrastructure is highly stratified, based upon fundamental inequality and so forth, such things will be reflected in the education system.

- In cultural / class terms, therefore, the class that dominates economically (the bourgeoisie) will also dominate all other classes culturally / ideologically.

Schools are agencies of cultural / ideological transmission - the dominant economic class (the class that owns the Means of Production) dominates culturally through the transmission of its cultural values through the school.

- Cultural values might relate to such things as:

What constitutes "knowledge".

How knowledge is to be achieved.

How knowledge is validated and so forth.

- Bourdieu argues that, since there is no objective way of differentiating between different class cultures (upper, middle and working class cultures for example), the high value placed on dominant cultural values is simply a reflection of this class' powerful position within Capitalist society. A dominant class is able to impose its definition of reality upon all other classes.
- Each economic class develops an associated "class culture" involving ways of seeing the social world, ways of doing things within that world, etc. These things are specific to, and develop out of, each class' experiences in the social world.
- Children, are not simply socialised into the "values of society as a whole". Rather, they are socialised into the culture that corresponds to their class and, in Bourdieu's terms, this set of cultural experiences, values beliefs and so forth represents a form of "Cultural Capital". That is, a set of values, beliefs, norms, attitudes, experiences and so forth that equip people for their life in society.
- The term "cultural capital" is used because, like money, our cultural inheritance can be potentially translated into things like wealth, power and status.
- In a simplified sense, the cultural capital we accumulate from birth (through our socialisation) can be "spent" within the education system as we try to achieve things that are considered to be culturally important (mainly educational qualifications for the majority of children - but status can also be considered here when we think about the way the rich can educate their children privately at high status schools such as Eton, Harrow, Winchester and so forth).
- Not all classes start with the same kind or level of cultural capital. Children socialised into the dominant culture will have a big advantage over children not socialised into this culture because schools attempt to reproduce a general set of dominant cultural values and ideas.
- We can imagine this idea in terms of the education system being a shop where we spend our cultural capital on qualifications:
 - The Upper class child has a large amount of currency that is recognised by the shopkeeper as valid coinage - they can accordingly buy many things.
 - The working class child has a devalued currency (in the eyes of the shopkeeper). They can buy things, but not as much or of as high a quality.
- Perhaps a better analogy might be if you think about culture in terms of language.
- Imagine three people (one French, one German and one English) going into a shop in France (the "dominant culture", in this respect, would be French).

- The French person can speak the language.
- The German knows some French (enough to get by).
- The English person knows no French.
- Each of the above has a stock of cultural capital (in this analogy, their knowledge of languages) which they then proceed to spend by trying to buy things:
 - The French person does this quickly and efficiently - the shopkeeper (i.e. teachers in an educational system) understands this person perfectly.
 - The German takes longer to express him / herself and may not be able to buy everything they want. The shopkeeper has a problem understanding but with a bit of time and patience business is transacted amicably.
 - The English person - after much shouting, pointing and general gesticulation - succeeds in buying some basic things (or leaves the shop without being able to buy anything because the shopkeeper could not understand). For the shopkeeper, this customer is difficult to serve because they do not "speak the same language". It's not impossible for the shopkeeper to understand, but it takes a great deal of time, effort, co-operation and patience for this to happen.

- In class terms:

The French person is equivalent to the Upper class child.

The German person is equivalent to the Middle class child.

The English person is equivalent to the Working class child.

- In cultural terms, each of the above can speak a language, but some are more successful than others in making themselves understood.
- In educational terms, the ability to "speak the language" of the educational system, teachers and so forth produces big advantages.
- Thus, those children who have been socialised into dominant cultural values appear to the teacher to be "more gifted" - just as to a French shopkeeper the French person would appear to be "more gifted" or fluent than the English woman. In this sense, therefore, the education system itself may appear to be "neutral" or "meritocratic".
- Everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed, just everyone has an equal opportunity to buy something. However, it is only meritocratic in relation to a

pupil's ability to fit-in with the dominant cultural values perpetuated through the school system...

- Finally in this respect, Bourdieu argues that one of the major roles played by the school is that of "social elimination":
- That is, the need to progressively remove various pupils from access to higher knowledge and social rewards (what Bourdieu terms "differentiation" - the need to "make pupils different" in ways that are recognised as valid by a dominant culture). Elimination itself is achieved in two main ways:

Firstly through an examination system designed to progressively fail or exclude pupils. Working class pupils are far more likely to fail in examinations because their cultural capital is seen to be less valid.

Secondly, through self-elimination. Working class children quickly come to understand that they don't speak the same language as the educational system. It seems to offer them very little that is culturally useful and they "vote with their feet" by leaving the educational system as early as possible.

- Such children learn that their chances of educational success (as measured in terms of qualifications) are small and they "realistically" assess the possible future avenues open to them (which normally means work rather than higher education).
- We can conclude Bourdieu's argument by noting that the role of education as a means of "social reproduction" serves an ideological purpose in that it enables a dominant social class to reproduce its power, wealth and privilege legitimately - if everyone has an "equal opportunity", then failure "must" be a consequence of individual failing, rather than a fault of the way in which the system is structured to favour one class over another.

7. Both "class sub-cultures" and "situational constraints" focus on the idea that differential educational achievement can be explained in terms of the "barriers" to achievement that exist in our society.

- In the first instance, the attitudes of parents, for example, is seen to be a major barrier to working class achievement and helps to explain why girls underachieve in the education system.
- In the second instance, the way in which both society in general and the education system in particular, is organised is seen to represent a barrier to achievement. Such barriers are part-and-parcel of an education system designed to socialise people into a highly-differentiated institution of work, the implication is that:
 - In class terms, middle and upper class children are better-equipped to cross such barriers.

- In gender terms, boys are better-equipped (at least in terms of the variety of opportunity they have).
- In ethnic terms, white children are better-equipped than non-whites.
- However, that the crucial variable in educational achievement appears to be social class, given that middle class girls achieve more than working class boys, for example, and upper class blacks achieve more than working class whites.

8. In the above sense, what differentiates the successful child from the unsuccessful child is the level of resources (measured in terms of such things as their social competencies and experiences) that each brings to the educational sphere:

Thus, middle class children generally possess resources such as "language competence", norms of appropriate behaviour and so forth, which fit more or less neatly into the cultural expectations of teachers, whilst their working class peers possess resources that do not fit neatly into these cultural expectations.

- One way of assessing this idea in relation to differential educational achievement might, therefore, be to look at the social / cultural attributes of children from working class backgrounds who do succeed in the education system.

F. Culture and Community:

1. One of the first studies to focus on the attributes of successful working class boys who attended Grammar school and stayed until they were 18 was that of Jackson and Marsden. Ball ("Education", 1986) summarises the attributes of this group thus:

“ The majority come from relatively prosperous home-owning working class families. Often the families could be described as ‘sunken middle class’, where parents or grandparents had been downwardly mobile as a result of ill health, bankruptcy or other misfortune. Typically, they came from districts of mixed social class and an important minority of middle class children attended their primary school.”.

2. This kind of explanation for the relative failure of working class children within our education system focuses on the idea of "cultural deprivation" - the idea that there is something within the cultural background of working class children - male, female, black and white - that is deficient in preparing such children for educational success. In effect, the "cultural resources" possessed by these children are insufficient to ensure educational success, whereas the cultural resources possessed by their middle and upper class peers go some way towards ensuring their relative success.

3. This type of explanation has some merit - especially in relation to the educational experience of middle and upper class children in Britain educated in fee-paying Public Schools. There is little doubt, for example, that attendance at such schools

brings with it a considerable social status - and the "resource" possessed by the parents of such children is money.

- Tessa Blackstone showed that educational qualifications gained by children from Public Schools makes little difference to their occupational status in later life. Children who left Public School with few qualifications appeared to achieve similar levels of occupational status (higher managerial / professional occupations) as their peers who left with high qualifications. Blackstone argues that, in terms of social prestige / status, educational qualifications made little difference to the life chances of this group. In this respect, class background - rather than educational achievement - appears to be the main resource needed for social success.

4. In terms of cultural deprivation theory, the "solution" to working class underachievement lay in two areas:

- Working class culture would have to change - to become, in effect, a mirror-image of middle class culture (the idea that Musgrove satirises).
- Working class children would have to be "compensated" for their home background by the provision of extra educational resources that would give them equal opportunity to compete with their culturally advantaged middle class peers.

5. Given that the former "solution" was impossible, cultural deprivation theorists advocated the latter solution, with the emphasis placed on pre-school educational compensation (since, according to educational psychology, the "damage" to working class children done by exposure to working class culture through the experience of primary socialisation was too far advanced by the time a child reached school age for "compensatory education" to be of any real benefit).

- Compensatory education was first put into effect in America during the Kennedy Presidency in the early 1960's as part of the "War on Poverty". It was continued during the Johnson Presidency that followed, under "Operation Head Start". More resources were put into pre-school educational facilities for the poor, but the results of this effort were "disappointing" for cultural deprivation theorists. No appreciable increase in attainment among the working class resulted.
- In Britain, compensatory education was adopted in the form of "Educational Priority Areas". In the late 1960's the government increased the resources available for such things as school buildings, teaching materials, teachers' salaries, etc. in parts of four areas of the country (Liverpool, Birmingham, West Yorkshire and South-east London). Although many involved complained about the relative lack of resources put into the scheme, the results were again disappointing. No significant improvement in the educational attainment of working class children seems to have resulted from their participation in such schemes.

6. Despite complaints that compensatory education was either under-funded or that resources were misdirected, a more-plausible explanation for the failure of such schemes lies in the concept of cultural deprivation itself, for the following reasons:

- Firstly, it views working class culture as inferior to that of the middle classes - something that must be eradicated by the best efforts of concerned middle class professionals, in the interests of the working class themselves.
- Secondly, it theorises culture in terms of a set of basic attitudes that have to be changed - as if all that is required for educational success is for the working class to "throw off" the attitudes that are holding them back. In short, the real "solution" is for the working class to adopt middle class cultural attitudes.
- The problem here is the simplistic notion of "culture" involved. If cultures simply consisted of "attitudes", then it would be a relatively simple matter to change them - but clearly they do not. People develop cultural styles and attitudes out of the facts of their material existence; culture is rooted in the life experience of people and develops out of the way they experience the world as both individuals and as part of a wider social and cultural system of beliefs. Cultural change requires more than a simple psychological adjustment, since it is rooted in the structural arrangements that exist in any society.
- People do not choose to be poor, to live in sub-standard housing, to fail in the educational system or to work in low status employment. In a society that provides these type of conditions as part of its very structure, people will be forced to exist under these conditions. To live under such conditions needs a different form of cultural adaption than is needed to live under different conditions.

7. Cultural deprivation, by its very nature, sees nothing wrong with the way schools are organised as social institutions. Since upper and middle class children seem to display few problems of adjustment, the "problem" must lie in working class culture, rather than the way in which both schools - and society as a whole - are socially organised.