

# **“A” Level Sociology**

## **Teaching Notes for Students (AQuIRED Format)**

**Education and Training  
Differential Achievement (1).**

**Basic Patterns:**

- Generally, middle and upper class children (as defined by their father's occupation) tend to achieve more than their working class counterparts, both in terms of the length of their education and the level of qualifications they achieve. *Halsey, Heath and Ridge* ("Origins and Destinations", 1980), for example, found that upper middle class children in relation to working class children were:
  - 4 times more likely to stay at school until 16 (the minimum leaving age)
  - 8 times more likely to stay at school until 17
  - 10 times more likely to stay at school until 18
  - 11 times more likely to go to University.
- Not all working class children fail educational. Many achieve academic success in the education system - although the overall pattern is that there is a strong correlation between social class and achievement levels as measured by examination passes at GCSE, A-level, Degree level and the like.
- In simple terms, the higher your social class, the more likely you are to achieve educational success.

**Theories and Explanations.****1. WHAT theory / concept might explain this idea [Knowledge]?**

- **Material Deprivation**

**2. WHY is this theory / concept significant [Interpretation]?**

- The idea that the material conditions of an individual's home and cultural background could explain differential educational achievement has gone in and out of fashion in Britain over the past 50-odd years.
- The basic idea here is that children from materially deprived homes are at a disadvantage when compared to children from more affluent home backgrounds. Since poverty and deprivation apply only to children from working class backgrounds, these are potential causes of differential educational achievement.

**3. HOW** is this theory / concept significant [**Application**]?

- There are a variety of different forms of material deprivation that may have consequences for educational performance:
- **Poor diet**, leading to tiredness, lack of concentration etc.  
Recent research into the relationship between poor diet, malnutrition, poverty, etc. and foetal development suggests there is a relationship between these things 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 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).

- **Lack of privacy**, study room, etc. One consequence of this might be an inability to study within the home.
- **Lack of school resources** (books, computers etc.). This may result in working class children being at a disadvantage to their affluent peers.
- **The stigma of poverty**. This may have behavioural consequences if children are teased and bullied within the school.
- **The need to work to bring money into the home**. Less time is available for homework, the child is tired after working before / after school.

**4. BUT** what criticisms have there been of this idea [**Evaluation**]?

a. Pre-2nd World War, poverty and deprivation were an obvious 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 more generally-affluent 1960's.

b. **Halsey, Floyd and Martin** ("Social Class and Educational Opportunity, 1956) found the proportion of working class children admitted to Grammar schools 1952 - 1954 fell - despite the belief that the use of "objective" 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 (this was based on the idea that intelligence was inherited genetically).

- **Halsey et al's** study rejected the idea that material deprivation was a major cause of differential achievement because even among those working class children who attended Grammar schools, their educational success-rate was 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 peers.
  - 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, etc.), they noted two more-significant factors involved in explaining educational differences:
    - Home encouragement and parental attitudes. In particular, "cultural clashes" arising when a working class child entered the middle class environment of the school.
    - 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.
- c. The **Plowden Report** ("Children and Their Primary Schools", 1967) argued that only in extreme cases did poverty play a significant part in explaining differential educational achievement.
- d. **Douglas** ("The Home and the School", 1964) demonstrated that material deprivation - whilst significant in specific ways - was too broad an explanation for working class educational failure. This was mainly because it is possible for children from "impoverished" or "materially-deprived" backgrounds to succeed educationally.

## 5. CONCLUSION [Evaluation].

- There is a correlation between material deprivation and educational failure. However, the above suggests that material deprivation alone is not a causal factor. One obvious reason for this is that not all working class children fail educationally.
- 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.
- **Halsey et al** in particular show that where the measured IQ of both working class and middle class children is the same, the latter still, on average, gain more educational qualifications.

**1. WHAT** theory / concept might explain this idea [**Knowledge**]?

- **Parental Attitudes.**

**2. WHY** is this theory / concept significant [**Interpretation**]?

- **Douglas** argued that parental attitudes to their children's education was a crucial variable in the explanation of differential educational achievement. In basic terms, the idea of parental attitudes towards the education of their offspring is a socialisation argument. Douglas, for example, noted differences in socialisation between social classes.
- The significance of parental attitudes relates to the idea that the home environment can provide economic support, academic help, encouragement and motivation. These things are more likely to be present in upper and middle class homes than in working class homes.

**3. HOW** is this theory / concept significant [**Application**]?

- **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.
- The difference between working class and middle class parental attitudes can be expressed in terms of the latter having *future orientated* attitudes where the former are *present orientated*. Thus, middle class children are encouraged to stay in school for as long as possible (even though it means supporting them financially) since by gaining qualifications higher paid professional work becomes a realistic option in the future. 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.
- Thus, middle class children are surrounded by proof of the connection between educational qualifications and high occupational levels. It is easier for them to make this connection.

**4. BUT** what criticisms have there been of this idea [Evaluation]?

- Olive Banks ("The Sociology of Education", 1971) argues that the question of "aspirations" cannot be taken for granted or simply expressed in absolute terms. Parental aspirations for their 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.
  - Thus, it may not simply be the case that the attitudes of middle class parents reflect high aspirations for their children, whilst the attitudes of working class parents reflect lower aspirations.
- Thus, 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.
- Furthermore, 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 lack such encouragement.
  - b. The "solution" to lower working class achievement being some form of change in parental attitudes / encouragement.

- Attitudes about the social world develop 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 live. 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 advantages). For a girl with similar aspirations, the limitations are even more pronounced, since there are no professional women footballers in Britain.
- Finally, it is by no means certain that working class parents fail to see the value of educational qualifications and fail to encourage their children. There is evidence to suggest that working class parents do try to do this, but they lack certain social advantages and resources enjoyed by other classes power, influence, status and so forth). In basic terms, working class parents may not be as socially equipped as middle class parents to "play the system" to their children's advantage.

#### **5. CONCLUSION [Evaluation]**

- Parental attitudes do play a part in the differential achievement equation, but it is by no means certain that this idea can be used to explain class differences in achievement. Too many other factors (in particular power and status) are involved to be able to make an easy and definitive connection between parental attitudes and working class underachievement.

**1. WHAT** theory / concept might explain this idea [**Knowledge**]?

- **Class Sub-Cultures.**

**2. WHY** is this theory / concept significant [**Interpretation**]?

- Sociologists such as Halsey, Douglas and so forth have rejected a *mono-causal* explanation of educational achievement whilst arguing that educational success is closely associated with a range of non-school factors (home life, family size, parental attitudes and the like). To accommodate this range of possible causes, such writers tend to focus on the idea of subcultural differences between upper, middle and working class families.
- The basic idea here is that different social classes develop different values and norms based around their different experiences and needs. Upper class culture, for example, is very different to working class culture precisely because each of these broad groupings experiences the social world differently.
- For this type of explanation, a major source of differential achievement is found in the values adopted by different class cultures. Thus, 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".

**3. HOW** is this theory / concept significant [**Application**]?

- **Kahl** ("Some Measurements of Academic Orientation", 1965), 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.

- **Hyman** ("The Value Systems of Different Classes", 1967), argues that the value system of the working classes acts as a barrier to their educational advancement, in terms of the way they place a lower value on:
  - Educational success
  - High occupational status
  - Opportunities for personal advancement through education

**4. BUT** what criticisms have there been of this idea [**Evaluation**]?

- The concept of class sub-cultures as explanation for educational success and failure 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.
- 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 is 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.

- **Burgess** ("It's Not a Proper Subject: It's Just Newsom", 1984 ) argues that the solution proposed by Newsom to working class underachievement reflected the types of views outlined above. However, he argued that this solution simply perpetuated educational inequality since the types of courses suggested by Newsom became, in practice, a further source of educational differentiation between middle class and working class pupils.

## 5. CONCLUSION [Evaluation].

- The idea of class sub-cultures is plausible 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).
- However, the concept of class subcultures has its critics, since the question of class subcultures and their relationship to values (as opposed to norms) can be challenged. If we think, for example, about how values can be defined there are a number of ideas we can note:
  - "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).
- 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").
- Generally, however, there is little evidence that people from different social classes have different conceptions of 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.

**1. WHAT** theory / concept might explain this idea [**Knowledge**]?

- **Situational Constraints.**

**2. WHY** is this theory / concept significant [**Interpretation**]?

- Although having a superficial similarity to the idea of class sub-cultures, the theory of situational constraints involves the idea 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 (their situation) in terms of their ability to translate values into social behaviour and educational qualifications (the constraints).
- What we have to look is the way values arise and are translated into behaviour (norms), since values are not randomly distributed throughout a society. Rather, we can see clear patterns in relation to the extent and distribution of values throughout any society.
- The values people hold, 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.

**3. HOW** is this theory / concept significant [**Application**]?

- **Oscar Lewis**, talking 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** argued 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.
- 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".

**4. BUT** what criticisms have there been of this idea [**Evaluation**]?

- 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.

**5. CONCLUSION** [**Evaluation**].

- The idea of *class sub-cultures* tends to be associated with *Functionalist theorists* (although not exclusively) whereas *Situational constraints* theory is more frequently associated with *Marxist Conflict theorists*. The strength of situational constraints theory - its location of the causes the working class failure in the structure of an unequal society - is its major political / policy weakness since its basic argument is that in Capitalist societies equality of opportunity / achievement can never be reached.
- In short, the solution to working class failure is the radical restructuring of society.

1. WHAT theory / concept might explain this idea [Knowledge]?

- **Cultural Capital**

2. WHY is this theory / concept significant [Interpretation]?

- **Bourdieu and Passeron** ("Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction", 1973) developed the idea of situational constraints by using 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, and based upon fundamental *inequality*, this 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 and ideologically. Schools are agencies of cultural and ideological transmission and the dominant economic class (the class that owns the Means of Production) dominates culturally through the transmission of its cultural values through the school.

3. HOW is this theory / concept significant [Application]?

- 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 translated into social resources (things like wealth, power and status).
- The cultural capital we accumulate from birth can be "spent" in 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 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, 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.

**4. BUT** what criticisms have there been of this idea [**Evaluation**]?

- Bourdieu argues one of the major roles played by the school is *social elimination*. This involves the need to progressively remove pupils from access to higher knowledge and social rewards (Bourdieu calls this *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 could note two problems here in relation to education in our society:
  - a. Why has the government been so concerned to increase educational participation in recent years if one of the primary purposes of education is social elimination.
  - b. This argument assumes that teachers are agents of ideological domination, acting in concert with a ruling class - this argument is extremely difficult to sustain or demonstrate.

**5. CONCLUSION** [**Evaluation**].

- Bourdieu's argument is that the role of education is mainly one of social reproduction that serves the ideological purpose of enabling a dominant social class to reproduce its power, wealth and privilege legitimately. If everyone has an "equal opportunity" to succeed, 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.
- This argument has some validity, but it also overstates the situation in modern societies where increasing numbers of highly skilled workers may be needed to cope with computerisation. Additionally, the deskilling of many occupations should result in less need for some sections of the workforce to be educated. The education system does not seem to be responding in the way it should if Bourdieu's argument is valid.

- Both *class sub-culture* theory and *situational constraints* theory 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, 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.
- 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.

1. WHAT theory / concept might explain this idea [Knowledge]?

- **Cultural deprivation**

2. WHY is this theory / concept significant [Interpretation]?

- Unlike most other culture-based theories, *cultural deprivation theory* starts with the assumption that working class culture is not only different but also *deficient*. In effect, it is a culture that does not prepare children adequately for educational success. The focus of this theory is that there is something in the cultural background of working class children - male, female, black and white - that needs changing.
- In effect, the "cultural resources" possessed by these children are insufficient to ensure educational success, whereas the cultural resources of their middle and upper class counterparts go some way towards ensuring their relative success.

3. HOW is this theory / concept significant [Application]?

- 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:

“ 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.”

- 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.
  - 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.
  - This usually involved 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.

#### 4. BUT what criticisms have there been of this idea [Evaluation]?

- 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.

- Cultural deprivation theory 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.

### **5. CONCLUSION [Evaluation].**

- Somewhat perversely, of all the theories discussed so far, it is the one that probably has least sociological validity (cultural deprivation theory) that has been applied most often by governments in an attempt to understand and remedy working class educational failure.
- The current Conservative government in Britain, for example, has repeatedly tried to lay down (or prescribe) various ways that children should present themselves in schools in terms of things like *use of language*, spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Overall, however, any cultural theory of education that does not recognise cultural differences as stemming from the experience that people have in the social world cannot adequately explain differential educational achievement.