

# **“A” Level Sociology**

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

**Education and Training  
Differential Achievement (4).**

**Issue: Ethnicity and School Factors****Introduction.**

- Two points need to be noted before we look in more detail at the issue of *ethnicity* and the *hidden curriculum*.
- Sociologists use the concept of *ethnicity* rather than “*race*” because the *validity* of “*race*” as a classification concept has been rejected by scientists. The concept of “*race*” is a socially-constructed one. Ethnicity, therefore, refers to the *cultural identity* of different groups (values, norms, traditions and so forth).
- Many of the points made in relation to class and gender differences can be equally applied to ethnic group experiences in our education system. This should be kept in mind when considering this area of the course.

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

- **Racial Discrimination.**

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

- Amongst ethnic groups, racial discrimination represents a form of negative labelling, whereby certain characteristics are attributed to different ethnic groups. These characteristics then form the basis for the differential treatment of such groups.
- In educational terms, beliefs held by teachers about the social and intellectual characteristics of different ethnic groups may influence the way that teachers relate to such groups, in terms of encouragement, hostility and so forth.
- There is much evidence to suggest that schools discriminate against pupils on the basis of pupil’s ethnic background. However, there is a distinction to be made between *systemic* discrimination (that is, discrimination that results from the way society is organised) and individual acts of discrimination. The focus here is mainly on the former.
- The reason for this is that patterns of differential achievement amongst different ethnic groups are clearly in evidence. If individual forms of racial discrimination were the cause of differential achievement we would not expect, statistically, to see such clear patterns developing.

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

- Where schools select pupils on the basis of characteristics other than strict IQ tests or written examinations, there is evidence that ethnic groups suffer disadvantages. Where selection is done by interviews, for example, the **Commission For Racial Equality** has found that Asian and West Indian pupils are less likely to:
  - Be admitted into a school.
  - Be admitted into the top streams or sets.
- This is becoming increasingly significant following the successive Education Acts from the mid-1980's onwards, where schools are allowed to select a proportion of their intake on the basis of interview.
- **Wright** ("Early Education") found evidence in primary schooling that teachers' viewed children from non-white ethnic minorities differently from white children. Asian children, for example, were more likely to be viewed as "a problem", received less teacher attention and were more likely to be excluded from classroom discussions.
  - Afro-Caribbean boys were more-likely to be seen as aggressive and unruly and subjected to negative labelling and sanction.
- **Gillborn** ("Race, Class and School Effects") found similar instances in his study of secondary schooling. In particular, teachers tended to have different perceptions of non-white children and, consequently, tended to treat them differently.
- One major way the **hidden curriculum** is manifested is in exclusions from school. Since the mid-1980's, exclusions have risen, partly as a result of schools having to publish examination results and truancy rates. Pupils with a reputation for being "difficult" or "uncooperative" are more likely to be excluded from school now than in the past - and non-whites are likely than whites to attract such labelling. Government figures for 1991, for example, show that Afro-Caribbean's made up 8% of school exclusions whilst constituting 2% of the school population. Two main reasons have been suggested for the above:
  - Teachers are more likely to define non-white children as being "a problem".
  - Ethnic minorities are more likely to experience frustration with racism and poverty and consequently display behavioural problems in the classroom.

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

- Although racial discrimination appears to be a possible source of differential achievement, one of the main problems with it is the fact that not all ethnic groups underachieve in the education system. Asian children, for example, tend to do well, whereas Afro-Caribbean males tend to do relatively badly. Similarly, Afro-Caribbean females achieve more than males.
- Thus, if racial discrimination was the sole factor in underachievement we would expect to see all non-white ethnic groups doing relatively poorly in the education system.

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

- **Stereotyping.**

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

- Racial stereotypes about intelligence, motivation and the like still persist in our society. For example, amongst many people there is a clear perception that ethnic minorities have lower levels of IQ than their white peers.
- This type of stereotyping ties in with labelling theory, whereby ethnic groups are seen to have certain characteristics that inhibit their ability to learn.

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

- **Figueroa** suggests that racial stereotypes affect pupil performance in three ways:
  - a. **Missassessment** of pupils - assessment procedures may be used that are culturally / racially biased and serve to confirm stereotypes held by teachers.
  - b. **Misplacement** - this involves teacher assessments of ethnic minority children placing them in lower streams / sets than should be the case if performance tests alone were used.
  - c. **Channelling** - this involves teachers encouraging ethnic minority children to participate fully only in stereotypical areas of the curriculum. For example, the idea that Afro-Caribbean boys are “naturally good at cricket or running”.

- **Brandt** (“The Realisation of Antiracist Teaching”) argues that our society systematically discriminates against ethnic minority children, similar to the way it discriminates against all children who do not conform to the stereotypical “good” pupil (by which is generally meant the middle class pupil). This discrimination is expressed in three main ways:
  - The curriculum (what counts as knowledge, the materials used, etc.).
  - The teaching process (teacher expectations and stereotypes, etc.)
  - The culture of the school (where little attention is paid to the cultural background of ethnic minority pupils).

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