



# Cultural Deprivation

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# Simulations

# Cultural Deprivation

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## Background 1: Functionalist Approaches to Education

Traditional functionalist approaches generally assume contemporary educational systems are **meritocratic** and hence explanations for differential achievement focus on **cultural** (especially the family) and **economic** processes. Since meritocracies are, by definition, competitive systems where "the best" win limited and desirable rewards, education systems are not designed to eliminate social disadvantages; their function is to efficiently **sift, sort** and **allocate** people into different economic positions based on their individual merits.

### Class and ethnicity

On the basis of the above, explanations for working class underachievement focus on **cultural deprivation** and the idea working class family life lacks the attributes that contribute to middle classes success. **Douglas** (1964), for example, noted the impact on educational attainment of variables such as:

- **parental attitudes**, expressed in terms of levels of encouragement and interest in a child's education.
- **family size** - larger working class families means fewer parental resources for each child.
- **position** within the family - older children achieved more than younger members of "large" families).
- **scant care** of babies in large families with fewer social and economic resources to devote to their care and upbringing. **Desforges** (2003), for example, argues the weight of evidence supports the claim "at-home good parenting" has a positive effect on achievement.

**Cultural deprivation** has two main applications in terms of educational achievement:

Firstly, working class children encounter difficulties adjusting to the middle class **norms and values** found in schools. **Bernstein** (1971), for example, argued **restricted codes** of working class speech clashed with the **elaborated codes** of middle class teachers which, in turn, influenced teacher's assessments; middle class students, able to express themselves in "the language of education", were consequently over-represented in top streams, sets and bands.

Secondly, wider economic pressures on family life resulted in working class children leaving school at the earliest opportunity. Parental attitudes and economic pressures combined to create a **present orientation** involving an **immediate gratification** that traditionally involved males moving into full-time manual work and females into part-time work and a family of their own. Middle class families on the other hand were **future orientated** and their children **deferred gratification** - they saw education as a "means to the end" of higher status employment.

Contemporary ideas about cultural deprivation have focused around neo-functionalist concerns about ways of **compensating** working-class children for their dysfunctional family life and, by so doing, give them an equal opportunity to compete with their culturally advantaged middle-class peers. Examples of compensatory education include **Education Action Zones**, the **Sure Start** pre-school programme and **Extended schools**.

Notions of cultural advantage and disadvantage focused on the family also apply to explanations for differences in **ethnic minority** achievement. The relative failure of black Caribbean working class boys, for example, has been variously related to the high number of female-headed single-parent families that fail to provide role-models for male children, the subsequent development of

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"anti-education" subcultures and the effects of large-scale unemployment - **Ball et al.** (2012) report black unemployment currently running at 50%; black boys see little prospect of paid adult work and so see little point to educational qualifications. **Sewell** (2010) summarises this general argument when he suggests "What we now see in schools is children undermined by poor parenting, peer-group pressure and an inability to be responsible for their own behaviour". The higher achievements of Asian Indians is explained in terms of cultural and family values of educational success, coupled with extended family structures that support children throughout their educational career. The achievements of Chinese pupils have also been explained by the phenomenon of **tiger mothers** (**Chua**, 2011) who push their children relentlessly towards educational success.

### Gender

While **cultural deprivation** can be used to explain differences in female educational achievement *between* classes - middle class boys achieve more than working class girls - differences *within* classes, where working class girls generally outperform their male counterparts, can be explained by linking social and **economic change** to gender **socialisation**.

**Wilkinson** (1994), for example, argues the gradual change from manufacturing to service industries has seen the development of a "knowledge-based" economy; one that "values brains more than it does brawn" and demands flexibility and dexterity. **Wilkinson** identifies skills women have traditionally demonstrated in the home - such as conflict resolution and interpersonal communication skills - as increasingly valued in the workplace. **Summerfield and Babb** (2004) note that in 1997 women in paid employment outnumbered men for the first time (although not all were in full-time work). **Economic change** has resulted in **parental attitudes** to female education slowly changing; whereas once most girls would expect to spend most of their life outside paid employment, the reverse is increasingly true; higher levels of female educational achievement reflect the greater need for qualifications to take into the workplace.

### Evaluation

Concepts of cultural deprivation locate educational failure in a working class culture that is not just *different* but **deficient** - if working class children could be more-like middle class children the problem of underachievement would be solved. **Hanafin and Lynch** (2002), however, suggest the idea of deficiency - such as working class parents not valuing education - is both misplaced and misdirected; they argue many working class parents, both black *and* white, took a keen interest in their children's education, but "felt excluded from participation in decision-making" within schools - unlike the middle-class women in **Reay's** (2000) study who were better-positioned to involve themselves in school decision-making. **Mirza** (2001) also cites the development of "Saturday Schools" among Black Caribbean communities as evidence for their commitment to education going unrealised within the state school system.

A second criticism is the assumption schools are **meritocratic** and so play little or no part in encouraging differential achievement - an argument questioned by Marxist, Feminist and Interactionist approaches.

While various aspects of cultural deprivation theory / compensatory education continually reappear from time-to-time in contemporary political discourse it could be argued this type of theory has in recent times been submerged into an **underclass theory** that argues a combination of material and cultural factors are the cause of educational failure among people who are increasingly disconnected from mainstream society.

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### Background 2: Language, deprivation and knowledge.

One of the strengths of the cultural deprivation sim is that it can be used to illustrate the idea of different – restricted and elaborated – language codes.

One of the key features of contemporary education systems, from both Consensus and Conflict perspectives, is social elimination; the higher up the system, the greater the number of pupils who are progressively eliminated. While functionalists see this as a *naturally* selective process of social reproduction, whereby the most able and talented rise to occupy the most functionally important positions in society, Marxists see this as a *socially* selective process of cultural reproduction; the key feature of education systems is not just social elimination, *per se*, but the elimination of working class pupils.

As we've previously noted, different perspectives employ different explanations for this general process, with the focus on ideas like material deprivation (Marxism) and cultural deprivation (functionalism). While neither of these broad arguments are particularly conclusive, material deprivation is at least an objective, measurable, category; we can quantify something like access to computer technology and relate this to educational practice and disadvantages.

Cultural deprivation, however, is a subjective category measured by ranking different types of cultural behaviour as superior or inferior; the idea working class "culture", for example, lacks many of the things common to middle class culture and this accounts for the latter's educational success. **Labov** (1972) is critical of this idea when he argues the problem of differential achievement is not located "in the children, but in the relations between them and the school system. Inner-city children do not necessarily have inferior mothers, language, or experience, but their language, family style, and ways of living are significantly different from the standard culture of the classroom".

A different approach to understanding social elimination involves moving away from unsustainable notions of cultural deprivation and towards understanding cultural differences; the idea pupils with different cultural backgrounds bring different things into the education system itself and these provide pupils with particular advantages and disadvantages that play-out through their school careers. We can, therefore, extend and refine ideas about power and control within education by thinking about different aspects of the "language of education"; both literal, in the sense of different types of language use conferring educational advantages and disadvantages and metaphorical; the idea that middle and working class pupils not only "speak different cultural languages" but that educational achievement is based on the ability to "speak the language of education" itself.

### language codes

**Bernstein** was one of the first to investigate how the use of language conferred certain cultural advantages and disadvantages on pupils. His basic argument was that education systems were based around a particular language code that needed to be either used or learnt if pupils were to succeed in the terms set by modern educational systems. In this respect **Bernstein** argued there are two basic language codes, restricted and elaborated that, while not class specific, are used in different situations and for different purposes.

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### 1. Elaborated codes are:

- complex in their use of vocabulary and the expression of ideas.
- subtle in terms of the range of meanings they express and convey.
- abstract in terms of their ability to grasp and express meanings.
- individual in the sense of clearly "spelling out" meaning. They are context independent and can be used and understood in a wide range of different situations.
- inclusive by elaborating meaning in situations where something has to be clearly explained.

### 2. Restricted codes are:

- simple in their use of language to convey direct meanings.
- predictable because an audience already understands the meaning.
- concrete in their expression of relatively simple, straightforward, ideas.
- collective in the sense ideas don't need to be "spelt out"; an audience already knows the general meaning being expressed. They are context dependent because meaning is restricted to the specific situation in which they are used.
- exclusive; meanings don't need to be elaborated because language is directed towards an audience that already understands most of what is being expressed.

**Bernstein's** basic argument is that restricted codes are used by all social classes. When conversing within families, for example, no-one would say "Greetings to you, that individual of the female sex to whom I am directly related by ties of kinship and personal affection" when they could just say "Hello Mum". Elaborated codes are, however, more likely to be used by the middle classes and this is significant, **Bernstein** suggests, because education systems are based on the use of both restricted *and* elaborated codes - something that gives middle class children a significant educational advantage. This follows because education involves:

- the development of new knowledge.
- new, higher, levels of understanding.
- abstract thinking and reasoning.
- moving away from simple shared meanings.
- a requirement to use elaborated codes.

This is significant for two reasons:

Firstly, working class pupils must first learn the elaborated code of the school *before* they can learn the knowledge being taught.

Secondly, the restricted codes of working class speech clash with the elaborated codes of middle class teachers. As **Edwards** (1987) puts it, "there is an "opposition" (or at least a "radical discontinuity") between the modes of communication which predominate in schools and those to which many pupils are accustomed". A good, if literal, example here is Mauritius where teaching may involve a mix of languages - English, French and Creole. Middle class pupils who are more fluent in English and French (the elaborated codes of the school) are therefore significantly advantaged through their familiarity with these languages; middle class pupils, able to express themselves in "the language of education", are less likely to find themselves placed in the lowest streams, sets and bands through teacher assessments.

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### evaluation

Although **Bernstein's** analysis moves the debate away working-class "deficiencies" and deprivations, it does, however, involve a number of problems.

While the kind of "class-based speech differences" **Bernstein** isolated were, at the time, arguably a relatively important feature of UK life, the same is not necessarily true in the 21st century; working and middle class speech patterns have arguably flattened, with middle class youth, in particular, taking on restricted forms of speech formerly the preserve of the working classes.

More significantly, **Edwards** questions whether "classrooms are normally predicated upon elaborated codes". He argues the normal mode of classroom interaction involves a system of restricted codes whose aim is simply to convey as clearly as possible sets of received knowledge to children, with little or no opportunity for them to question or evaluate this knowledge. This is the case right up until pupils reach the higher levels of education; in the UK, as in many systems around the world, this occurs post-16 when pupils take-on advanced level work where elaborated codes do become increasingly important as students need to engage in more-complicated reasoning and problem-solving modes.

The problem here, therefore, is that by the time elaborated codes becomes essential most working class pupils have already been socially eliminated from education. It's also reasonable to assume those who remain, from a-level to undergraduate level. must have necessarily mastered at least some aspects of elaborated speech, otherwise they wouldn't still be in the system. This suggests language codes alone are not a cause of social elimination and differential achievement.

### the language of education

While **Bernstein** was clear his research merely showed *differences* between working and middle class language codes, it leaves open the question of how to explain class-based achievement differences; on the one hand they could be interpreted as cultural *deprivation*; a failure by working class children to integrate fully into the education system. On the other hand, they could be explained by schools failing to develop a truly meritocratic system. While resolving this question is not straightforward, two pieces of evidence point us in the direction of examining what happens in schools and classrooms as contributory factors to differential achievement.

Firstly, **Labov's** "long-term participant-observation with a number of black adolescent peer groups" in America suggested that, contrary to the idea "black children from the ghetto area receive little verbal stimulation, hear very little well-formed language, and as a result are impoverished in their means of verbal expression", the reverse was true. While **Labov** noted working class black children "spoke a different dialect" (Black English Vernacular) he concluded "they have the same basic vocabulary, possess the same capacity for conceptual learning, and use the same logic as anyone else who learns to speak and understand English". Their language codes were, in this respect, *different* but *equal* to the codes used by their middle class peers.

Secondly, longitudinal studies that hold the measured IQ of a particular child cohort constant at the start of their educational career and examine their achievement levels at the end of their schooling suggest a significant "school effect":

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The **Robbins' Report** (1963) argued social class was a significant factor in achievement; of students with a similar IQ, more than twice as many middle class pupils went on to study at degree level than their working class peers.

**Duckworth and Seligman's** (2005) study of 13-14 year old pupils with similar IQ levels but different levels of measured *self discipline* - how they applied themselves to their studies - achieved at different levels.

**Murayama et al.'s** (2012) German study of mathematical achievement found IQ was only important in the initial development of mathematical competence. In the long-term measured intelligence showed no relationship to mathematical achievement. One conclusion drawn was that "students' competencies to learn in math involve factors, such as motivation and study skills, that can be nurtured by education".

This evidence keys into a wider debate about "the language of education"; the extent to which schools are "middle class institutions" and whether this confers hidden advantages to middle class children. **Bourdieu** (1986), for example, addresses this debate in terms of the role of education being one of reproducing the power and domination of powerful social classes through a combination of habitus and cultural capital.

### habitus

Habitus is similar to the idea of a *habitat*, the environment in which a group lives and flourishes and for **Bourdieu** (1973) schools are the "natural habitat" of the middle and upper classes. The working class child entering a middle class institution is like "a fish out of water"; they are immediately disadvantaged because their interests, beliefs, values and norms are not only different but actively conflict with those of both teachers and the education system. In the long run this not only leads to their eventual relative failure in academic terms, but also appears to be their own fault rather than that of an education system that neither represents nor favours this class. Middle class children, however, are immediately advantaged because their cultural background, in terms of its beliefs, norms and values, is similar to that of teachers and ethos of the school. **Beron and Farkas** (2001), for example, found linguistic differences disadvantaged working class and black children because they didn't "speak the middle class language" of schools and teachers.

In the same way different classes have different access to financial resources (economic capital, such as income and wealth), **Bourdieu** (1973) argues they have differential access to cultural resources in the shape of cultural capital - something **Light** (2013) defines as "fluency in a society's elite culture" or "high cultural knowledge that ultimately redounds to the owner's financial and social advantage". While knowledge is instrumental in cultural reproduction, this doesn't so much refer to knowledge acquired *in* schools as knowledge acquired *about* schooling; how, in other words, to play the educational system successfully.

Cultural capital takes numerous forms but is acquired, **Light** argues, "in the family and in formal schooling". In this respect "When the school curriculum reinforces the home curriculum, as it routinely does for children of the affluent, students obtain additional access to their own culture in school. Conversely, when the school curriculum contradicts or subverts the home culture, as it does for poor, immigrant, or ethnic minority children, students have to master a foreign culture at school while mastering their own at home".

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Different forms of capital, both economic and cultural, are contingent; while for neo-Marxists like **Poulantzas** (1974) possession of economic capital is always the most significant - the greater the individual's ability to draw on economic capital, the higher their levels of cultural capital - cultural reproduction involves the conversion of cultural capital into economic capital through the education system in the shape of educational qualifications. **Shapiro** (2004), for example, has shown how economic and cultural capital are linked: "racial inequality is passed down from generation to generation through the use of private family wealth" in the USA, with the white upper and middle classes being best-placed to provide their children with social, economic and educational supports that give a range of advantages over other ethnic groups.

In this respect, the key to educational attainment is understanding what **Bourdieu** (1986) calls the "code of the message"; the ability to, on the one hand, understand and become attuned to the messages about educational attainment transmitted through the cultural context of schooling and, on the other, exploit the advantages conferred by economic and cultural capital in an educational context.

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### The Simulation

Having completed these activities students should:

- understand that any educational system entails the power of some people to determine what counts as knowledge or skill
- understand the importance in an educational system of the assumptions teachers make about the prior experience of students'.

The exercise simulates the differential ability to learn deriving from differences in prior experience.

Since this activity entails misleading students initially, it is wise only to use it with a group with whom you have established trust.

**Materials:** A & B Symbol sets X and Y - one copy each of X for half the class and one copy of Y for the other half.

Symbol sets X1 and Y1 - a single copy of each.

1. Before you run this exercise look at symbol sets X1 and Y1- you will see that they combine the simple symbols. in X and Y to make new meanings. Work out for yourself as many additional complex symbols as you can.

Compose two simple paper-and-pencil tests - one based on each symbol set - containing two kinds of questions:

- a. What is the meaning of this symbol (drawn on the board)?
- b. What would be the symbol for this word (written on the board)?

You can include symbols you have made up yourself together with some from the right-hand cards (as appropriate)

You will need the X test for 4. below and the Y test for 8. below.

2. Divide the class into two groups, X and Y. Give each their first set of symbols (X or Y) to learn. Allow 3 - 4 minutes. Collect in symbol sets.

Designate one member of Group X as teacher. Give him or her the symbols X1. The "teacher" should:

- (i) teach the class symbol set X1 using the board
- (ii) ask the class for new complex symbols derived from the simpler ones.

For example, one of Group X might suggest combining the symbol for the sun with the symbol for "moves" to make a symbol for "time" or "day-time". The 'teacher' should very clearly say which suggestions are right and which are wrong (Group Y is much more likely to give 'nonsensical' suggestions.)

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Clean the board and give the class the X test you devised earlier.

5. Give the answers to the test, using the board, and record student scores against their initials on the board.
6. Now explain that Group X and Group Y had the same hieroglyphs but each set had different meanings. The teacher and the test assumed that one set of meanings was correct. Thus it was much easier for Group X to understand, create, interpret and remember them than it was for Group Y.

The neatest parallel is with pronunciation. Letters on paper do not make any particular sounds, yet some people say that some sounds correctly go with some combinations of letters, and that other pronunciations are wrong.

Explain that:

- Learning what is meaningful is easier than learning what is meaningless.
  - Learning what is consonant with previous experience is easier than learning what is dissonant.
  - Schooling presupposes a certain background which is shared by all groups equally, or those who do not share this background are viewed as deprived or stupid.
7. Both symbolic systems used in the simulation are equally valid but one group of students was advantaged because their system was given a superior status.
  8. Repeat the simulation, this time with the symbol sets from Y and Y1 as the valid knowledge (with steps 3 - 5 modified appropriately).
  9. Give a short presentation on the differences in meaning of cultural:

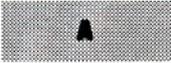
difference  
deprivation  
domination.

### Source

Pat McNeill and Roger Gomm

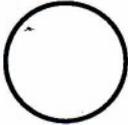
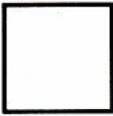
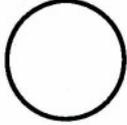
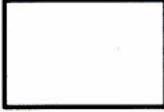
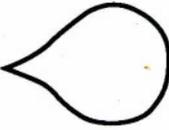
Cultural Deprivation

SYMBOL SET X

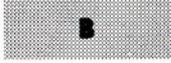


One copy each for half the class:

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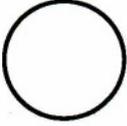
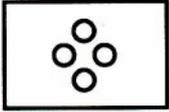
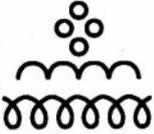
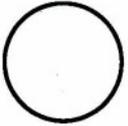
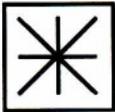
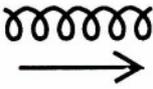
Symbol set X			Symbol set Y		
					
Container	Cloth	Moves	Sun	House	Support
					
Heat	Person	Message	Route	Spots	Machine
					
Electricity	Water	Sun	Tangle/problem	Hills/mountains	Hole

SYMBOL SET Y



One copy only:

One copy only:

Symbol set X1			Symbol set Y1		
					
Car	Clothing	Electric water heater	Orbit	Drill	Tunnel
	etc.			etc.	
Sunshade			Winding road/ being lost		

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