

Learning Table 5: Selection, Marketisation and Privatisation Policies

	Analysis	Evaluation
Selection Policies	<p>1944 – 1965: The Tripartite System The 1944 Education Act brought in the Tripartite System which was based on the principles of meritocracy. This involved children being selected and allocated to one of 3 different types of secondary school, supposedly according to their aptitude and abilities. This was based on a test called the 11+ exam.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grammar Schools – offered an academic curriculum and access to non-manual jobs and higher education. They were for pupils with academic abilities who passed the 11+. These pupils were mainly middle class. Secondary Modern Schools – offered a non-academic practical curriculum and access to manual work for pupils who failed the 11+. These pupils were mainly working class. Technical Schools – were the third type but only existed in a few areas so really there was a choice of two schools for the majority. These would teach mechanical, scientific and engineering skills to serve industry and science. <p>1965 Onwards: Comprehensive Schooling The comprehensive system aimed to overcome the class divide of the tripartite system and make education more meritocratic. The 11+ was abolished along with grammars and secondary moderns. All pupils in a certain area would attend the local comprehensive school.</p>	<p>The Tripartite System Marxists: Rather than promoting meritocracy the system reproduced class inequality by channelling two social classes into two different types of schools that offered unequal opportunities. Feminists: The system also reproduced gender inequality by requiring girls to gain higher marks than boys in the 11+ to obtain a grammar school place.</p> <p>Comprehensive Schooling It was left to the local education authority to decide whether or not to go over to this system and not all did. Functionalists: Were in favour of comprehensive schooling because they argue it promotes integration and bringing children of different social classes together in one school. However an early study by Ford (1969) found little social mixing between working-class and middle-class pupils because of streaming.</p>
Marketisation Policies	<p>Education post 1988: Under Thatcher and Beyond The Education Reform Act of 1988 introduced marketization to education. This has created an education market by reducing direct state control over education and increasing competition between schools and parent choice of school.</p> <p>Parentocracy This literally means ‘rule by parents’ and promoted a market by several means including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publication of league tables and Ofsted inspection reports that rank schools according to their exam performance to give parents the information to choose the right school. Open enrolment, allowing successful schools to recruit more pupils. Funding formula, where schools receive funding per pupil. Schools having to compete to attract pupils. <p>David (1993) claims that this encouraged diversity among schools, give parents more choice and raises standards.</p> <p>Coalition Government Policies from 2010 The Conservative-Liberal Democrat government elected in 2010 had policies strongly influenced by the New Right and Neoliberals. They further supported the marketisation of education through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing schools to become academies and opt out of local education authority control. Allowing parents and others to set up free schools. They are funded directly by the state but are set up and run by parents, teachers, faith organisations or businesses rather than the local authority. It gives parents the chance to create a new school if they are unhappy with the state schools in their local area. 	<p>League Tables Ball (1994) and Whitty (1998) criticise marketization policies by highlighting that they reproduce class inequalities by creating inequalities between schools. Bartlett (1993) explained this by noting these policies encourage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cream-skimming – ‘good’ schools can be more selective, choose their own customer and recruit high achieving mainly middle class pupils. As a result these pupils gain an advantage. Silt-shifting – ‘good’ schools can avoid taking less able pupils who are likely to get poor results and damage the schools league table position. <p>For schools with poor league table positions, the opposite applies: they cannot afford to be selective and have to take less able, mainly working class pupils so their results are poorer and they remain unattractive to middle-class parents. The overall effect of league tables is thus to produce unequal schools and reproduce social class inequalities.</p> <p>The Funding Formula Schools are allocated funds by a formula based on how many pupils they attract. As a result, popular schools get more funds and so can afford better-qualified teachers and better facilities. This allows them to be more selective and attracts more able or ambitious generally middle-class applicants. Unpopular schools lose income and find it difficult to make the teacher skills and facilities of their more successful rivals. Unpopular schools fail to attract pupils and their funding is reduced.</p> <p>Parental Choice Gerwitz (1995) studied 14 London secondary schools and found that marketization advantages middle class parents who were in a better position to choose ‘good’ schools for their children. She identified 3 types of parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Privileged-skilled Choosers – Professional middle class parents who possessed cultural capital. They knew the importance of putting a particular school as first choice. They had time to visit schools and the skills to research options. Their economic capital meant they could afford to move their children around the education system to get the best deal out of it. For example by paying extra travel costs so that children could attend good schools out of their area. Disconnected-local choosers – working class parents whose lack of cultural capital meant they did not understand how school admissions worked. They were less confident with dealing with schools and less aware of choices open to them. Their lack of economic capital meant their child was restricted to going to the local school due to travel expenses. Semi-skilled choosers – Working class parents who were ambitious for their children. However they too lacked cultural capital and were frustrated by their inability to obtain a good school for their child. <p>Free Schools Allen (2010) argued that research from Sweden where 20% of schools are free schools, shows that they only benefit children from highly educated families. In the UK evidence suggests that free schools take fewer disadvantages pupils than over nearby schools. For example in 2011 only 6.4% of pupils at Bristol Free School were eligible for free school meals compared with 22.5% of pupils across the city as a whole.</p>
Privatisation Policies	<p>Privatisation involved the transfer of public assets such as schools to private companies. Private companies may be involved in building schools, providing supply teachers, work-based learning, careers advice and Ofsted inspection services. Many of these activities are very profitable for the private companies however; local authorities are often obliged to enter into these agreements as the only way of building new schools because of a lack of funding by the government.</p> <p>The Globalisation of Education Policy Many private companies in the education services industry are foreign-owned. The exam board Edexcel is owned by the US educational publishing and testing giant Pearson.</p> <p>Buckingham and Scanlon (2005) report that the UK’s four leading educational software companies are all owned by global multinationals such as Disney. Many contracts for educational services in the UK are sold on by the original company to others such as banks and investment funds.</p> <p>Some UK education businesses work overseas such as Prospects has worked in China, Macedonia and Finland. As a result, nation states are becoming less important in policymaking, which is shifting to a global level and which is also often privatised.</p> <p>The Cola-isation of Schools The private sector is also penetrating education through vending machines on school premises and the development of brand loyalty through displays of logos and sponsorships. This process is called the cola-isation of schools.</p>	<p>The Cola-isation of Schools Ball highlights that the benefits of private sector involvement in schools is very limited. For example, a Cadbury’s sports equipment promotion was scrapped after it was revealed that pupils would have to eat 5440 chocolate bars just to qualify for a set of volleyball posts.</p> <p>Marxists Critique of Privatisation Hall (2011) sees academies as an example of handing over public services to private capitalists, such as educational businesses. The neoliberal claim that privatisation and competition drives up standards is a myth used to legitimate the turning of education into a source of private profit.</p>

Learning Table 4: Ethnic Differences in Educational Achievement

Explaining Ethnic Difference

- On average, whites and Asians do better than black pupils, however there are significant differences among Asians (Chinese and Indian pupils achieving above national average, but Pakistani pupils achieving below national average)
- White pupils' achievements are very close to the national average (however white working-class pupils tend to achieve lower than that of any other ethnic group)
- According to a DfES study (2010) only 23% of white boys on free school meals gained 5 A*-C grades at GCSE, and according to Steve Hastings (2006) white pupils make less progress between the ages of 11 and 16 than Black or Asian pupils
- External Factors: factors outside the education system, such as the influence of home and family background and wider society
- Internal Factors: factors within schools and the education system, such as interactions between pupils and teachers, and inequalities between schools

Sociological Explanations for Ethnic Differences in Achievement

Analysis

External (Outside School) Factors

Evaluation

1. Cultural Deprivation

Intellectual and Linguistic Skills

Cultural deprivation theorists argue that many children from low-income black families lack intellectual stimulation and enriching experiences. This leaves them poorly equipped for school with a lack of reasoning and problem-solving skills. Bereiter and Engelmann see the language spoken by low-income black American families as inadequate for educational success. They see it as ungrammatical, disjointed and incapable of expressing abstract ideas. There is also concern that pupils who do not speak English at home (as their first language) will do worse than those who do. However, statistics show that in 2010, pupils with English as their first language (55.2%) were only 3.2 points ahead of those without English as their first language (52.0%) when it came to gaining 5 A*-C GCSEs 9inc. English and Maths).

Attitudes and Values

Lack of motivation is often seen as a major cause of failure in many black children. Most children are socialised into culture which highlights ambition, competitiveness and willingness to make sacrifices in order to reap rewards, however it is suggested some black children are socialised into a subculture that instils a fatalistic 'live for today' attitude that does not value education and leaves them unequipped for success.

Family Structure and Parental Support

Daniel Moynihan (1965) argued that because many black families are headed by a lone mother, their children are deprived of adequate care because she struggles financially in the absence of the male breadwinner. The lack of a father also means the boys do not have an adequate male role model. He sees cultural deprivation as a cycle whereby inadequately socialised children from unstable families go on to fail at school and become inadequate parents themselves. Charles Murray (1984) of the New Right perspective also argues that a high rate of lone parenthood and lack of positive male role models lead to the underachievement of some minorities. Ken Pryce (1979) compared black Caribbean pupils and Asian pupils and claims that Asians are higher achievers because their culture is more resistant to racism and gives them a greater sense of self-worth. Whereas black Caribbean culture is less cohesive and less resistant to racism, and as a result many black pupils have low self-esteem and underachieve.

Sewell (2009) argues the problem isn't the absence of the father for black boys that leads to underachievement; it's a lack of 'tough love' and adequate discipline. Street gangs of other fatherless boys offer black boys 'perverse loyalty and love', who present boys with a media-inspired role model of anti-school black masculinity. He concludes that because this leads to black boys thinking that speaking in standard English and doing well at school being viewed with suspicion and is seen as 'selling out' to the white establishment, black children (particularly boys) need to have greater expectations placed on them to raise their expectations.

Asian Families: Indian and Chinese pupils benefit from supportive families that have an 'Asian work ethic' with a high value of education. Lupton (2004) argues that adult authority in Asian families is similar to the model that operates in schools i.e. respectful behaviour towards adults was expected from the children, and in turn parents were more likely to be supportive of school behaviour policies.

White Working-class Families: Lupton studied 4 mainly working-class schools (92 white, 1 largely Pakistani and 1 ethnically mixed) and found that teachers reported poorer levels of behaviour from the white working-class schools despite the fact they had fewer free school meals pupils. Teachers blamed this on the low level of parental support and negative attitude of the white working-class parents towards education. By contrast, ethnic minority parents were more likely to see education as "a way up in society".

2. Material Deprivation

According to Guy Palmer (2012):

- Almost ½ of all ethnic minority children live in low-income households, as against ¼ of white children
- Ethnic minorities are almost twice as likely to be unemployed compared with whites
- Ethnic minority households are around three times more likely to be homeless
- Almost ½ of Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers earned under £7 per hour, compared with only ¼ of white British workers

There are several reasons why some ethnic minorities may be at greater risk of the material deprivation that results from unemployment, low pay and overcrowding:

- Many live in economically depressed areas with high unemployment and low wage rates
- Cultural factors such as the tradition of purdah in some Muslim households, which prevents women from working outside the home
- A lack of language skills, and foreign qualifications not recognised by UK employers (but this affects a minority, typically refugees)
- Asylum seekers may not be allowed to take work
- Racial discrimination in the labour market and housing market

3. Racism in Wider Society

- David Mason (2000) stated that 'discrimination is a continuing and persistent feature of the experience of Britain's citizens of minority ethnic origin'.
- John Rex (1986) shows how racial discrimination leads to social exclusion and that this worsens poverty for ethnic minorities e.g. in housing, ethnic minorities are more likely to be forced into substandard housing than white people of the same class
- Wood et al (2010) sent 3 closely matched job applications to each of almost 1,000 job vacancies, each applicant was fictitious and had a name associated with a particular ethnic group. For each job, one application came from a 'white person' and two from 'ethnic minorities'. They found that only 1 in 16 'ethnic minority' applications were offered an interview compared to 1 in 9 'white' applicants

Criticism of Sewell (2009)

Gillborn (2008) argues that it is not peer pressure, but institutional racism within the education system itself that systematically produces the failure of large numbers of black boys.

Criticism of the Cultural Deprivation Theory

Geoffrey Driver (1977) criticises the cultural deprivation theory for ignoring the positive effects of ethnicity on achievement. The black Caribbean family could actually provide girls with positive role models of strong independent women. He argues that this is why black girls tend to be more successful in education than black boys.

Errol Lawrence (1982) argues that black pupils underachieve not because of low self-esteem, but because of racism.

Keddie sees cultural deprivation as a victim-blaming explanation. She argues that ethnic minority children are culturally different, not culturally deprived. They under-achieve because schools are ethnocentric (biased in favour of white culture and against minorities).

There are two main alternatives provided:

Multicultural education: A policy that recognises and values minority cultures and includes them in the curriculum
Anti-racist education: A policy that challenges the prejudice and discrimination that exists in schools and wider society

Internal (Within School) Factors (1): Labelling, Identity and Responses

Analysis

1. Labelling and Teacher Racism

Studies show that teachers often see black and Asian pupils as being far from the 'ideal pupil' i.e. black pupils are seen as disruptive and Asians as passive. Gillborn and Youdell (2000) found that teachers were quicker to discipline black pupils than others for the same behaviour. This is because the teachers expected the black pupils to present more discipline problems and misinterpreted their behaviour as threatening or as a challenge to authority. Black pupils are therefore also more likely to be streamed into lower sets because this negative label, which in turn may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of underachievement. It has been found that Asian pupils were often spoken to in a childish language because teachers would assume they had no real grasp on the English language and left them out of class discussions. They were seen then not as a threat (like black pupils may be) but as a problem the teacher could ignore.

2. Pupil Identities

Archer describes three different pupil identities:

- **The ideal pupil identity:** a white, middle-class masculinised identity, with a normal sexuality. This pupil is seen as achieving in the 'right' way through natural ability and initiative
- **The pathologised pupil identity:** an Asian, 'deserving poor', feminised identity either asexual or with an oppressed sexuality. This pupil is seen as a plodding, conformist and culture-bound 'over-achiever', a slogger who succeeds through hard work rather than natural ability
- **The demonised pupil identity:** A black or white, working-class, hyper-sexualised identity. This pupil is seen as unintelligent, peer-led, culturally deprived under-achiever

Chinese students have been seen to be praised, but viewed negatively as they have been seen to achieve success in the 'wrong way' through hardwork, passive conformism rather than natural ability. Teachers stereotyped Chinese families as 'tight' and 'close' and used this to explain the girls' supposed passivity. Teachers often also wrongly stereotyped the Chinese students as being middle-class.

3. Pupil Responses and Subculture

Sometimes, pupils may choose to reject their labels and decide to prove it wrong, rather than accepting the label and becoming withdrawn. Fuller (1984) found that a group of black girls in a London comprehensive school had challenged their negative stereotype in pursuit of educational success. However they didn't do this to seek approval of teachers, nor did they show a concern about the routine of the school. They simply worked hard and achieved well in impartial external exams.

Mirza (1992) found that racist teachers discouraged black pupils from being ambitious through the kind of advice they gave them about careers and option choices, and identified three main types of teacher racism as a result:

- **The colour-blind:** teachers who believe all pupils are equal but in practice allow racism to go unchallenged
- **The liberal chauvinists:** teachers who believe black pupils are culturally deprived and who have low expectations of them
- **The overt racists:** teachers who believe blacks are inferior and actively discriminate against them

Sewell focussed on the absence of fathers, but also noted that their responses to schooling, including racist stereotyping by teachers can affect their achievement. He identified 4 such responses:

- **The rebels:** a small minority of black pupils, often excluded from school, rejected the goals and rules of the school and conformed to the 'black-macho-lad' stereotype
- **The conformists:** the largest group, keen to succeed, and accepted the school's goals and rules
- **The retreatists:** tiny minority of isolated individuals, disconnected from both school and black subcultures, despised by the rebels
- **The innovators:** the second largest group, pro-education but anti-school, value success but do not seek approval of teachers

Evaluation

Only focuses on teachers, not schools as a whole

There is a danger of seeing these stereotypes as simply the product of individual teachers' prejudices, rather than of racism in the way that the education system as a whole operates.

Gillborn and Youdell argue that the policy of publishing league tables creates an A-to-C economy and leads to large numbers of black and working-class pupils being placed in lower streams or entered for lower-tier exams, so it's not due to racism.

Ignores Success and Challenge of Stereotypes

There is a danger of wrongly assuming that once labelled, pupils automatically fall victim to the self-fulfilling prophecy and fail.

But this is not always true. However it is still important to recognise that attempting to avoid teachers' racism could in itself limit opportunities

Internal (Within School) Factors (2): Institutional Racism

Analysis

Individual racism is racism that results from the prejudiced views of individual teachers and others. Whereas institutional racism is discrimination that is built into the way institutions such as schools and colleges operate. The 'Critical Race Theory' can be explained in education by Gillborn (2008), who applies the concept of 'locked-in equality' to education. He sees ethnic inequality as "so deep rooted and so large that it is a practically inevitable feature of the education system". There are several ways in which the education system may be viewed as institutionally racist:

1. Marketisation and Segregation

Moore and Davenport (1990) show how selection procedures lead to ethnic segregation, with minority pupils failing to get into better secondary schools due to discrimination e.g. they found that primary school reports were used to screen out pupils with language difficulties, and the application process was difficult for non-English speaking parents to understand. These procedures favoured white pupils and disadvantaged those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Thus they concluded that selection leads to an ethnically stratified education system.

The commission for Racial Equality (1993) identified similar biases in Britain. The report identified the following reasons that admissions is made harder for ethnic minorities and means they are more likely to end up in unpopular schools:

- Reports from primary schools that stereotype minority pupils
- Racist bias in interviews for school places
- Lack of information and application forms in minority languages
- Ethnic minority parents are often unaware of how the waiting list system works and the importance of deadlines

2. The Ethnocentric Curriculum

Languages, literature and music: Troyna and Williams note there is a meagre provision for teaching Asian languages as compared with European languages. David (1993) describes the National Curriculum as a 'specifically British' curriculum that largely ignores non-European languages, literature and music.

History: Ball (1994) criticises the National Curriculum for ignoring ethnic diversity and for promoting an attitude of 'little Englandism' e.g. the history curriculum tries to recreate a 'mythical age of empire and past glories', while ignoring the history of black and Asian people.

Bernard Coard (1971; 2005) says the ethnocentric curriculum may cause underachievement by presenting, in History for example, the idea that the British bringing civilisation to the 'primitive' peoples they colonised. He argued that this image of black people as inferior undermines black children's self-esteem and leads to their failure.

3. Assessment

Gillborn (2008) argues that 'the assessment game' is rigged to validate the dominant culture's superiority. Independent 'baseline assessments' in primary schools have been replaced by the foundation stage profile (FSP in 2003). Overnight, black pupils now appeared to be doing worse than white pupils e.g. in one local authority where black pupils had been the highest achievers in 2000, by 2003 the new FSP had black children ranked lower than whites across all six developmental areas that it measured. However Gillborn explains the reversal as a result of two related institutional factors:

- The FSP is based entirely on teachers' judgements, whereas baseline assessments often used written tests as well
- A change in the timing: the FSP is completed at the end of reception year, whereas baseline assessments were done at the start of primary school

4. Access to Opportunities

Gifted and Talented: created to meet the needs of more able pupils in inner-city schools, but is not seen as equal because whites are over twice as likely as black Caribbeans to be identified as gifted and talented, and 5 times more likely than black Africans

Exam Tiers: 30 schools in the 'Aiming High' initiative to raise black Caribbean pupils' achievement, blacks were nevertheless more likely than whites to be entered for lower tier GCSE exams, often because blacks had been placed in the lower sets

5. The 'new IQism'

Teachers see potential as a fixed quality that can be easily measured so they can be put into the 'right' set or stream, or onto G&T etc. Secondary schools are increasingly only using old-style intelligence tests (IQ) to allocate pupils to different streams. But this no measure of 'potential', all it tells us is what a person has already learnt to do or what they can do, not what they may be able to do in the future. Gillborn concludes that the education system is institutionally racist, creating an environment in which ethnic minority pupils are routinely disadvantaged.

Evaluation

Too Much focus on Internal Factors

Sewell argues that Gillborn focuses too much on the internal factors, and although he doesn't believe racism has disappeared entirely, he does argue that it is not powerful enough to prevent individuals from succeeding. He says we should focus more on external factors such as boys' anti-school attitudes, the peer group and the nurturing role of the father.

Over-achievement of 'Model Minorities'

Indian and Chinese students perform better than the white majority. If these two groups do so well, then how can there be institutional racism in education, as critical race theorists claim?

Other Differences are More Important

Connolly (2006) notes that there is an 'interactions effect': class and gender interact differently with ethnicity depending on which ethnic group we are looking at. For instance, there is a bigger gap between the achievements of white middle-class and white working-class pupils than there is between black middle-class and black working-class pupils.

Education: The Research Context

There are 5 main groups and settings in education whose distinctive characteristics may make them easy or difficult to study:

1) Researching Pupils

Malcolm Hill (2005) suggests that there are 3 major differences between studying young people and studying adults:

- **Power and status:** Children and young people generally have less power and status than adults. This makes it more difficult for them to state their attitudes and views openly, especially if they challenge those of adults. In schools it is difficult because of the hierarchy, meaning the teachers have a power and authority over the students. Formal research methods such as structured interviews or questionnaires tend to reinforce power difference. Sociologists must consider how to overcome these power issues, for example using group interviews. Some students who resent the power of teachers over them may be less likely to cooperate with research, but on the other hand might feel empowered by participating in the research and express their true feelings about school.
- **Ability and understanding:** students' vocabulary, thinking skills and confidence are likely to be more limited than those of adults. Researchers will have to be careful how they word their questions. It may also mean it's more difficult to gain their informed consent. Recalling detail is more difficult for students as their memory is less developed than an adult. However it is important that we remember not all students are the same e.g. class, age, gender, and ethnicity can all create differences between students.
- **Vulnerability and ethical issues:** limited power and ability mean young people are more vulnerable to physical and psychological harm than adults. Therefore the participation of young people should be considered necessary and whether they stand to benefit from it.
- **Laws and guidelines:** child protection laws such as the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (2006) operate a vetting and barring scheme on adults working in schools, which requires the adult to have Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. As a result of ethical concerns, organisations such as Unicef, Barnardo's and the National Children's Bureau have developed special codes of practice for researching young people. An advantage of studying students is that because they are legally required to attend school, sociologists will know where to find their target research group – unlike with some other social groups they might study.

2) Researching Teachers

- **Power and status:** teachers have more power and status because of their age, experience and responsibility within the school. They also have legal responsibilities and a duty of care towards the young people they teach. As teachers may see it as 'my classroom', researchers may need to develop a 'cover' if they intend to carry out covert investigations and this may mean representing themselves as a supply teacher, or classroom example.
- **Impression management:** teachers are used to being observed, for example in Ofsted inspections, which makes them particularly good at 'impression management' (Erving Goffman, 1969). This means they can manipulate the impression that people have of us. Some researchers study teachers in their 'back stage' roles e.g. in the staffroom. However this may mean that a newcomer could be treated with some suspicion as they stand out. Teachers also are aware that any critical comments they make about the school where they work could affect their career. Head teachers can also influence which staff are selected to be involved with the research.

3) Researching Classrooms

The classroom is fairly small, confined social space with room for perhaps thirty people or so. Classrooms are also comparatively simple social settings: in most cases there are just two social roles in the classroom – teacher and pupil. All this makes classroom interaction relatively straightforward to observe and analyse.

- **Gatekeepers:** access to classroom can be restricted by gatekeepers, including head teachers, teachers and child protection laws. The more gatekeepers there are to a particular research setting, the more difficult it is for a researcher to obtain and maintain access.
- **Peer groups:** when in school-based groups such as classes and friendship groups, students may be more sensitive to peer pressure and the need to conform. This may affect the way they respond to being researched. It may be necessary to supervise students when they're filling in questionnaires, especially if this is done in class, in order to prevent peers from influencing one another's answers.

4) Researching Schools

Using large-scale surveys or official statistics means researchers can carry out their investigation on a large scale, very quickly.

- **School's own data:** exam results, league tables, Ofsted reports, government inquiries and school policy documents are all examples of secondary data publicly available about schools. Schools are therefore 'data-rich'. However, schools with particular issues e.g. high truancy rates may falsify their data so as not to deter applications. This would reduce any validity of research using these statistics.
- **The law:** because the students are legally obligated to attend school, it means that that researcher knows where everybody is so it makes studying the target population effective. However, since the school's primary role is to educate students, heads and teachers may see involvement in research as interfering with the school's most important function.
- **Gatekeepers:** according to Meighan and Harber (2007) heads sometimes view research negatively. Some situations and school settings may be 'off limits' to a researcher e.g. head teachers' interviews with parents. Beynon and Atkinson (1984) note that gatekeepers such as heads often steer the researcher away from the sensitive situations, such as classes where the teacher has poor classroom control.
- **School organisation:** unlike most other organisations in today's society, many schools are single-sex. This may pose problems where the researcher is of a different gender. The sociologist may become the focus of attention when they might prefer to keep a low profile, for example when conducting a participant observation. Because of the internal structure, timetables and meetings it may affect when and how a study can be carried out. The size of the school and its complexities also creates difficulties who often comment that it takes them months to work out where everything is and who does what in the school.

5) Researching Parents

- Parents can influence what goes on in education for example by how they bring up their children, parent-teacher association contacts and marketization policies encouraging parents to see themselves as consumers. However, class, gender and ethnicity may all affect how willing or able they are to participate in research.
- Access to parents: most parent-child interactions take place in the home, and as this is a private setting it makes access for sociologists difficult. Although lists of parents' names and addresses exist in school records, a school would not normally release such information to researchers. However, the school might well be happy to help a researcher contact parents by using the usual method of sending letters home with students.

The Researcher's Own Experience of Education

Everyone has an experience of education, including researchers. So they could draw on their own experience. However sociologists' personal experience and familiarity with classrooms and schools can dull their awareness of just how different educational environments are from other social settings. Sociologists need to be aware of their taken-for-granted assumptions about schools and classrooms, teachers and students.

Equally, the researcher has probably been quite successful in education which would make it hard for them to empathise with students in an under-achieving, anti-school subculture.

Education is also a prominent political issue, with different political parties, pressure groups and individuals holding conflicting opinions about what should happen in schools. Research into educational issues take place in this political context and the researcher has to be aware that their research may become part of a wider political and media debate.