Explaining Class Difference

- There is a big difference in the achievement of pupils from different social classes in education in Britain; The main comparison is between the working-class and the middle-class
- Working-class: generally manual occupations including skilled workers such as plumbers, semi-skilled workers such as lorry drivers, and unskilled or routine workers such as cleaners
- Middle-class: generally non-manual occupations including professionals such as doctors or teachers, together with managers and other 'white collar' office workers and owners of businesses
- On average, children from middle-class families perform better than working-class children, and this class gap in achievement grows as the children get older
- Children of the middle-class do better at GCSE, stay longer in full time education and take the great majority of university places
- One explanation is that middle-class parents tend to be better-off parents who can afford to send their children to private schools, which many believe provide a higher standard of education e.g. average class sizes are less than half those in state schools; although these schools educate only 7% of Britain's children, they account for nearly half of all students entering the elite universities in Oxford and Cambridge (Eton sent 211 pupils to Oxbridge in a 3-year period while over 1,300 state schools sent no pupils)
- However, the focus is on why middle-class students may still do better in state education than the working-class and we group the explanations into internal and external factors
- Internal factors: factors within schools and the education system, such as interactions between pupils and teachers, and inequalities between schools
- External factors: factors outside the education system, such as the influence of home and family background and wider society

Sociological Explanations for Class Differences in Achievement

Analysis	Evaluation
External (Outside School) Factors	
	The Myth of Cultural Deprivation
1. **Cultural Deprivation**	Nell Keddie (1973) describes cultural
A nationwide study by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (2007) found that by the age of three, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are already up to one year behind those from more privileged homes and the gap widens with age. According to cultural deprivation theorists, many working-class families fail to socialise their children adequately. These children therefore end up being 'culturally deprived' i.e. they lack the cultural equipment needed to do well at school (such as language, parents' education and working-class sub-culture) and so they underachieve.	deprivation as a 'myth' and sees it as a victim-blaming explanation. She dismisses the idea that failure at school can be blamed on a culturally deprived home background. She points out that a child cannot be deprived of its own culture and argues that working-class children are simply culturally different, not
Language	culturally deprived.
Hubbs-Tait et al (2002) found that where parents use language that challenges their children to evaluate their own understanding or abilities (e.g. 'what do you think?' 'are you ready for the next step?'), cognitive performance improves. Leon Feinstein (2008) found that educated parents are more likely to use language in this way. By contrast, less educated parents use language in ways that only requires children to make descriptive statements (e.g. 'what's that animal called?') and this results in lower performance.	They fail because they are put at a disadvantage by an education system that is dominated by middle-class values. Keddie argues that rather than seeing working-class culture as deficient, schools should
Basil Bernstein (1975) identifies differences between working-class and middle-class language that influences achievement, and he distinguishes between two types of speech code:	recognise and build on its strengths and should challenge teachers' anti-working-class prejudices.
The Restricted Code: typically used by the working-class, consisting of limited vocabulary, and based on the use of short, often unfinished, grammatically simple sentences. Speech is predictable and usually consists of one word or gestures instead. The speaker assumes the listener shares the same set of experiences.	Barry Troyna and Jenny Williams (1986) argue that the problem is not the child's language but the school's attitude towards it. Teachers have a 'speech hierarchy': they label middle-class
The Elaborated Code: Typically used by the middle-class and has a wider vocabulary and is based on longer, grammatically more complex sentences. Speech is more varied and communicates abstract ideas. The speaker does not assume that the listener shares the same experiences, and so they use the language to spell out their meanings explicitly for the listener.	speech highest, followed by working-class speech and finally black speech. Tessa Blackstone and Jo Mortimore (1994) reject the view that working-class parents are
Parents' Education	not interested in their children's education. They say they attend fewer parents' evenings
Douglas (1964) found that working-class parents placed less value on education. They were therefore less ambitious for their children, gave them less encouragement and took less interest in their education. They visited schools less often and were less likely to discuss their child's progress. Their children therefore had lower levels of motivation and achievement.	because they work longer hours or less regular hours, or even that they are put off by a school's middle-class atmosphere, and not because they aren't interested. They may
Educated parents' parenting style emphasises consistent discipline and high expectations of their children. Less educated parents show harsh or inconsistent discipline that emphasises 'doing as you're told' and 'behaving yourself'. Therefore the child fails to learn independence and self-control, resulting in problems with motivation and interaction with teachers at school.	actually want to help their child's progress but they lack the knowledge and education to do so.
Educated parents also are more aware of what is needed for successful education i.e. reading to their children, teaching them letters and songs, helping with homework etc. and will seek more help with childrearing. They also tend to encourage trips to museums and libraries.	
Bernstein and Young (1967) found that middle-class mothers are more likely to buy educational toys, books and activities that stimulate intellectual development (because of their own education and better income than working-class families).	
	Cultural or Material Factors?
Working-class subculture	The fact that some children from poor families do succeed suggests that material deprivation is
Lack of parental interest in their children's education reflects the subcultural values of the working class. Large sections of the working-class have different goals, beliefs, attitudes and values from the rest of society and this is why their children fail at school. Barry Sugarman (1970) proposed 4 key features that act as a barrier to educational achievement in the working-class subculture:	only part of the explanation. E.g. the cultural, religious or political values of the family may play a part in creating and
Fatalism: A belief in fate – 'whatever will be, will be' and there is nothing you can do to change your status. Unlike the middle-class, there is no belief that you can change your own status.	sustaining the child's motivation, even despite poverty. Similarly, Feinstein shows that educated parents make a positive contribution
Collectivism: Valuing being part of a group more than succeeding as an individual. Unlike the middle-class who believe that an individual should not be held back by group loyalties.	to a child's achievement, regardless of their income level.
Immediate gratification: Seeking pleasure now rather than making sacrifices in order to get rewards in the future. Whereas the middle-class have the view that you make sacrifices now for greater rewards later, known as deferred gratification.	Nevertheless, Peter Mortimore and Geoff Whitty (1997) argue that material inequalities have the greatest effect on achievement. For
Present-time orientation: Seeing the present as more important than the future and so not having long-term goals or plans. Whereas the middle-class culture has a future-time orientation that sees planning for the future as important.	this reason, Peter Robinson (1997) argues that
There are however compensatory education programmes that aim to tackle the problem of cultural deprivation by providing extra resources to schools and communities in deprived areas e.g. Operation Head Start (which included Sesame Street as one initiative).	
2. **Material Deprivation**	
The term 'material deprivation' refers to poverty and a lack of material necessities such as adequate housing and income.	
• According to the DfE (2012) barely 1/3 of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieve 5 or more GCSE's at A*-C including English and Maths, against nearly 2/3 of other pupils	
• Jan Flaherty (2004) money problems in the family are a significant factor in younger children's non-attendance in school	
• Exclusion and truancy are more likely for children from poorer families. Children excluded from school are unlikely to return to mainstream education, while 1/3 of all persistent truants leave school with no qualifications	
• Nearly 90% of 'failing' schools are located in deprived areas	
Housing	
Overcrowding is common in working-class houses and has a direct effect by making it hard for the children to study at home e.g. no study space, disturbed sleep from sharing beds/rooms etc. Children in crowded houses also run a greater risk of suffering indirect effects such as increased likelihood of accidents due to overcrowding, cold or damp housing, or psychological distress from moving around temporary accommodation on a regular basis – all resulting in absence from school.	
Diet and Health	

Marilyn Howard (2001) says young people from poorer homes have lower intakes of energy, vitamins and minerals. These low energy levels can mean weakened immune systems (and so time off school) and lack of concentration in class.

Richard Wilkinson (1996) found that among 10 year olds, the lower the social class, the higher the rate of hyperactivity, anxiety and conduct disorders which all have a negative impact on the child's education.

Jo Blanden and Stephen Machin (2007) found that children from low-income families were more likely to engage in 'externalising' behaviours (e.g. fighting and temper tantrums) which disrupt their schooling.

Financial Support and the Costs of Education
David bull (1980) describes 'the costs of free schooling' and refers to children from poorer families having to do without equipment and miss out on experience4s and trips that would enhance their educational achievement. Also as a result, poor children may have to do with hand-me-downs and cheaper but unfashionable equipment which may result in isolation or them being stigmatised and bullied by peers. Theresa smith and Michael Noble (1995) add that poverty acts as a barrier to learning in other ways, such as inability to afford private schooling or tuition, and poorer quality local schools. Lack of funds also means children from poorer families may have to work part-time (e.g. paper rounds or babysitting) which can have an effect on their education.

Fear of Debt
Claire Callender and Jon Jackson (2005) conducted a study using a questionnaire survey of nearly 2,000 prospective students and found that working-class students are more debt averse – that is, they saw debt negatively and as something to be avoided. They also saw more costs than benefits in going to university. Crucially, they found that attitudes to debt was important in deciding whether to apply to university and the most debt-averse students (generally working-class) were over five times less likely to apply than the most debt tolerant students (generally middle-class). Increases in tuition fees from 2012 (max £9,000) may mean that the increased debt burden will deter even more working-class students from applying to university. E.g. according to UCAS (2012) the number of UK applicants fell by 8.6% in 2012 compared with the previous year.

Working-class students who do go to university are less likely to get financial help from their families. An Online survey by the National Union of Students (2010) found that 81% of those from the highest social class received help from home, compared to only 43% from the lowest class.

Diane Reay (2005) found that more working-class students would tend to choose a university near home to them, so they could save money by living at home and save on travel costs, even if it meant less chance of going to a higher status university. They were also more likely to get a job and work part-time to help fund their studies, meaning they would be less likely to gain a higher level degree.

3. **Cultural Capital**
Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argues that both cultural and material factors contribute to educational achievement and are not separate but interrelated. He uses the term 'capital' to explain why the middle-class are more successful. The term capital usually refers to wealth, but in addition to economic capital (money) he identifies two more types: 'educational capital' (qualifications) and 'cultural capital'. He states the middle-class generally possess more of all three types

Cultural capital
Refers to the knowledge, attitudes, values, language, tastes and abilities of the middle class. Middle-class culture is a type of capital because it gives an advantage to those who possess it. Like Bernstein, he argues that through their socialisation, middle-class children acquire the ability to grasp, analyse and express abstract ideas. They develop intellectual interests and an understanding of what the education system requires for success. They therefore have an advantage in school, where such abilities and interests are highly valued and rewarded with qualifications. By contrast, working-class children find that school devalues their culture as 'rough' and inferior, and their lack of cultural capital leads to exam failure. They 'get the message' that education is not for them and respond by truanting, early leaving or not trying.

Educational and Economic Capital
 Middle-class children with cultural capital are better equipped to meet the demands of the school curriculum and gain qualifications. Similarly, wealthier parents can convert their economic capital into educational capital by sending their children to private schools and paying for extra tuition. Dennis Leech and Erick Compos (2003) conducted a study in Coventry, and found that middle-class parents are also more likely to be able to afford a house in the catchment area of a school that is highly placed in exam league tables. This is now known as 'selection by mortgage' because it drives up the costs of houses near to successful schools and excludes working-class families.

tackling child poverty would be the most effective way to boost achievement.

Testing and Criticising Bourdieu's Ideas
Sullivan (2001) found students who read complex fiction and watched serious TV documentaries developed a wider vocabulary and greater cultural knowledge, indicating greater cultural capital. However although successful pupils with greater cultural capital were more likely to be middle-class, Sullivan found cultural capital only accounted for part of the class difference in achievement. Where pupils of different classes had the same level of cultural capital, middle-class pupils still did better. She concludes that the greater resources and aspirations of middle-class families explain the remainder of the class gap in achievement.

Internal (Within School) Factors

 Internal factors and processes within schools can cause these class differences. Many of these involve the daily face-to-face interactions between teachers and pupils, and among peer groups. These internal factors and processes include labelling, the self-fulfilling prophecy, pupil sub-cultures and how pupils' class identities interact with the school and its values.

Analysis	Evaluation

1. **Labelling**
This is where teachers may attach a meaning or definition to a pupil, and label them as bright or thick, troublemaker or hardworking. Studies show teacher's attach labels based on stereotyped assumptions about their class background and not on their academic ability, e.g. labelling working-class pupils negatively and middle-class positively. Becker (1971) found that teacher's would label pupils based on how close they came to fitting the image of the 'ideal pupil'. The pupil's work, appearance and conduct were key to influencing teacher's judgements. However, Amelia Hempel-Jorgensen (2009) found that the notions of the ideal pupil varies from teacher to teacher, and is in accordance with the social-class of the school i.e. in a largely working-class Aspen primary school where discipline was a major problem, the ideal pupil was defined as quiet, passive and obedient, but in contrast the mainly middle-class Rowan primary school had very few discipline problems and here the ideal pupil was defined instead in terms of personality and academic ability.

Labelling in secondary schools: Dunne and Gazeley (2008) found that in 9 state secondary schools, teachers 'normalised' the underachievement of working-class pupils, and they felt like they could do nothing about it. However they would overcome the underachievement of middle-class pupils. This is because they labelled working-class parents as uninterested in their children's education, but labelled middle-class parents as supportive. This led to the teachers in setting extension tasks for underachieving middle-class pupils but entering working-class pupils for easier exams.

Labelling in primary schools: Rist (1970) found that the teacher used information about children's home background and appearance to place them in separate groups, seating each group at a different table in an American kindergarten. The pupils the teacher decided were fast learners whom she labelled the 'tigers' tended to be middle-class and of neat and clean appearance. She seated these at the table nearest to her and showed them the greatest encouragement. The other two groups were labelled the 'cardinals' and the 'clowns' and she seated them further away. These groups were more likely to be working-class. They were given lower-level books to read and fewer chances to show their abilities e.g. they read as a group, not as individuals.

2. **The Self-fulfilling Prophecy**
This is a prediction that comes true simply by virtue of it having been made. Interactionists argue that labelling can affect pupils' achievement by creating a self-fulfilling prophecy;

Step one: the teacher labels a pupil (e.g. intelligent) and on the basis of the label, makes predictions about him (e.g. he will make outstanding academic progress)

Step two: the teacher treats the pupil accordingly, acting as if the prediction is already true (e.g. give him more attention and expecting a higher standard of work)

Step three: the pupil internalises the teachers' expectation, which becomes part of his self-concept or self-image so that he now becomes the kind of pupil the teacher believed him to be in the first place. He gains confidence, tries harder, and is successful. The prediction is fulfilled.

This can work both ways i.e. if the teacher has low expectations of a pupil, and communicates these expectations in their interactions, these children may develop a negative self-concept. They may come to see themselves as failures and give up trying, thereby fulfilling the original prophecy.

Teachers' Expectations: The Study

Labelling Theory is Deterministic
The labelling theory assumes that pupils who are labelled have no choice but to fulfil the prophecy and will inevitably fail. However other research says that that's not always true (see Mary Fuller, 1984 from ethnic differences). Marxists also criticise the labelling theory for ignoring the wider structures of power within which labelling takes place. Labelling theory tends to blame teachers for labelling pupils, but fails to explain why they do so. Marxists argue that labels are not merely the result of teachers' individual prejudices, but stem from the fact that teachers work in a system that reproduces class divisions.

Alternative Responses to Labelling and Streaming
Peter woods (1979) argues there are other responses to labelling and streaming, not just pupil subcultures:

- Ingratiation: being the 'teacher's pet'

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) told a school they had a new test specially designed to identify those pupils who would 'spurt' ahead. This was untrue, because the test was in fact a simple IQ test. But the teachers believed what they had been told. They tested all of the pupils, but then picked 20% of them purely at random and told the school, again falsely, that the test had identified these children as 'spurters'. On returning to the school a year later, they found almost half (47%) of those identified as spurters had made significant progress, with a greater effect on younger children. The teacher's beliefs had been influenced by the 'test', and these beliefs had then been conveyed onto the children, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in the pupils as a result.

3. Streaming

Streaming involves separating children into different ability groups or classes called 'streams'. Each ability group is then taught differently from the other. Working-class children tend to be streamed into lower ability classes, whereas middle-class children tend to be streamed into higher ability classes. A self-fulfilling prophecy then arises and those in low-ability classes (typically the working-class) will underachieve and those in higher ability classes (typically middle-class) will do well.

David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell (2001) showed that teachers use stereotypical notions of 'ability' to stream pupils, and they found that teachers were less likely to see the working-class and black children as having ability. As a result, these students were more likely to be placed into lower streams and entered for lower tier GCSEs. This streaming was linked to exam league tables. To be in a good position, it's all about the percentage of pupils who achieve A* to C. Schools need a good position in the league tables to attract pupils and funding. This publishing of league tables has led to the 'A-to-C economy' whereby schools focus their time, effort and resources on those pupils that have the potential to get 5 grade Cs or more to boost the school's league table position.

Gillborn and Youdell call this educational triage where students are 'sorted' into 3 groups:
- Those who will pass anyway and can be left to get on with it
- Those with potential, who will be helped to get a grade C or better
- Hopeless cases, Who are doomed to fail

This educational triage becomes the basis for streaming. Teacher's beliefs about the lack of ability of the working-class pupils are used to segregate them into lower streams or sets, where they receive less attention, support and resources. This results in lower levels of achievement for the working class.

4. Pupil Subcultures

Pupil subcultures often emerge as a response to the way pupils have been labelled. Colin Lacey (1970) identified the concepts of differentiation and polarisation to explain how pupil subcultures develop:

Differentiation: categorising pupils on ability and attitude/behaviour. 'More able' pupils are given high status by being placed in a high stream, whereas those deemed as 'less able' are placed in a low stream.

Polarisation: Pupils respond to streaming by moving towards one of two opposite 'poles' or extremes' i.e. pro-school vs. anti-school subculture.

Pro-school subculture: pupils in high streams (mainly middle-class) remain committed to the values of the school. They gain status through academic success.

Anti-school subculture: pupils in low streams (typically the working-class) suffer a loss of self-esteem, thinking they are of an inferior status. They look for status another way e.g. cheeking a teacher, truanting, not doing homework, smoking etc. to feel accepted by peers now they have been 'rejected' by teachers and the school.

Stephen Ball (1981) showed that in Beachside comprehensive school, banding had produced the kind of polarisation described by Lacey. Ball found that when the school abolished banding, the basis for pupils to polarise into subcultures was largely removed and the influence of the anti-school subculture declined. However, differentiation continued and teacher's continued to categorise pupils differently and were more likely to label middle-class pupils as cooperative and able. This positive label resulted in better exam results, showing the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Since Ball's study and the Education Reform Act (1988) there has been a trend in in more streaming and towards a variety of types of schools. Meaning there is still opportunity for schools and teachers to differentiate between pupils on the basis of their class, ethnicity or gender and treat them unequally.

5. Pupils' Class Identities and the School

'Habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984) is the learned ways of thinking, being and acting that are shared by a particular social class. Although one class' habitus is not intrinsically better than another's, the middle-class has the power to define its habitus as superior and to impose it on the education system. Therefore the school puts a higher value on middle-class tastes, preferences and so on.

These middle-class pupils gain 'symbolic capital' or status and recognition from the school are deemed to have more worth or value. The school then devalues the working-class habitus, so working-class pupils' tastes (e.g. clothing, appearance, accent) are deemed tasteless and worthless. Archer found that working-class pupils felt that to be educationally successful, they would have to change how they talked and presented themselves.

The 'Nike' identity refers to the working-class pupils seeking alternative ways of creating self-worth, status and value so they constructed class identities for themselves by investing heavily in 'styles' e.g. brand clothing such as Nike. Girls would also dress hyper-heterosexual feminine style. Style performances were heavily policed by peer groups and not conforming was 'social suicide'. The right appearance earned symbolic capital and approval from peer groups, also bringing safety from bullying. However, this can clash with the middle-class habitus as schools and results in the working-class being labelled as rebellious if they adopt this style. While the middle-class see these 'Nike' identities as tasteless, to the young working-class they are a means of generating symbolic capital and self-worth.

Nike styles also led to the rejection of higher education by the working-class because it is seen as *unrealistic* (not for 'people like us') and *undesirable* (it would not suit their preferred lifestyle or habitus). According to Archer et al, Working-class pupils' investment in 'Nike' identities is not only a cause of their educational marginalisation by the school; it also expresses their positive preference for a particular lifestyle. As a result working-class pupils actively reject education, not only because they 'get the message' that they do not fit into education, but also because it does not fit in with their identity or their way of life.

- Ritualism: going through the motions and staying out of trouble
- Retreatism: daydreaming and mucking about
- Rebellion: outright rejection of everything the school stands for

John Furlong (1984) observed that many pupils are not committed permanently to any one response, but may move between different types of response, acting differently in lessons with different teachers.

Working-class Pupils Can Achieve – But There Are Conditions

Nicola Ingram (2009) studied two groups of working-class Catholic boys from the same highly deprived neighbourhood in Belfast. One group had passed their 11-plus exam and gone to grammar school, one group had failed and gone to local secondary school. The grammar school had a strongly middle-class habitus of high expectations and academic achievement, whereas the secondary had a habitus of low expectations of its underachieving pupils.

She found that in order for working-class pupils to achieve and fit in to the middle-class habitus of a grammar school, the pupil must make a choice between sticking to their neighbourhood habitus (e.g. wearing the same things everyone does where you live i.e. 'Nike' identities) or conforming to the middle-class habitus and being accepted (by abandoning their 'worthless' working-class identity).

The Relationship Between Internal and External Factors

Internal and external factors are often interrelated, and so cannot be viewed consistently as separate explanations:
- Working-class pupils' habitus and identities formed outside school may conflict with the school's middle-class habitus, resulting in symbolic violence and pupils feeling that education is not for the likes of them
- Working-class pupils using the restricted speech code (external cultural factor) may be labelled by teachers as less able, leading to self-fulfilling prophecy (internal factor)
- As Dunne and Gazeley show, an internal factor – what teachers *believe* about working-class pupils' home backgrounds (an external factor) – actually produces underachievement
- Poverty (an external material factor) may lead to bullying and stigmatisation by peer groups (an internal process within school), which may in turn lead to truanting and failure