

Social class and educational attainment bridging task resource

Material Deprivation and Social class differences in educational achievement

Gibson and Asthana (1999) pointed out that there is a correlation between low household income and poor educational performance. There are a number of ways in which poverty can negatively affect the educational performance of children.

For example

1. Higher levels of sickness in poorer homes may mean more absence from school and falling behind with lessons
2. Less able to afford 'hidden costs' of free state education: books and toys are not bought, and computers are not available in the home
3. Tuition fees and loans would be a greater source of anxiety to those from poorer backgrounds.
4. Poorer parents are less likely to have access to pre-school or nursery facilities.
5. Young people from poorer families are more likely to have part time jobs, such as paper rounds, baby sitting or shop work, creating a conflict between the competing demands of study and paid work.

Supporting evidence for the importance of material deprivation

- Stephen Ball (2005) points out how the introduction of marketisation means that those who have more money have a greater choice of state schools because of selection by mortgage
- Conner et al (2001) and Forsyth and Furlong (2003) both found that the introduction of tuition fees in HE puts working class children off going to university because of fear of debt
- Leon Feinstein (2003) found that low income is related to low cognitive reasoning skills amongst children as young as two years old
- The existence of private schools means the wealthy can afford a better education. Children from private schools are over represented in the best universities

Evaluations of the role of material deprivation

- To say that poverty causes poor educational performance is too deterministic as some students from poor backgrounds do well. Because of this, one must be cautious and rather than say there is a causal relationship between these two variables as the question suggests, it would be more accurate to say that poverty disadvantages working class students and makes it more difficult for them to succeed.
- There are other differences between classes that may lead to working class underachievement. For example, those from working class backgrounds are not just materially deprived, they are also culturally deprived.
- The Cultural Capital of the middle classes also advantages them in education.
- In practise it is difficult to separate out material deprivation from these other factors.

Cultural deprivation and Social class differences in educational achievement

A lot of research has indicated that class subcultures influence educational achievement. All of the studies below suggest that working class cultures are deficient and that working class children are deprived as a result. These explanations thus put the blame for working class underachievement on

the working class families themselves. In these explanations, working class parents basically teach their children norms and values that do not equip them for education in later life.

Five ways in which cultural deprivation can disadvantage children in education

1. Working class parents may show a lack of interest in their children's education
2. Lower class parents are less able to help their children with homework
3. Lower class children are more likely to speak in a restricted speech code. Rather than the elaborated speech code Basil Bernstein argued this.
4. Working class children are more concerned with Immediate Gratification rather than deferred gratification Barry Sugarman argued this.
5. The underclass has a higher than average percentage of single parent families. Melanie Philips argued this.

Supporting evidence for cultural deprivation theory

Two studies which show that cultural and material deprivation are related

Connor et al (2001)

Conducted focus group interviews with 230 students from 4 different FE colleges from a range of class backgrounds, some of whom had chosen to go to university and some who had not chosen to go to University. WC pupils discouraged from going to university for three main reasons:

- a. Firstly, such candidates want 'immediate gratification'. They want to earn money and be independent at an earlier age. This is because they are aware of their parents having struggled for money and wish to avoid debt themselves
- b. Secondly, they realise that their parents cannot afford to support them during Higher Education and did not like the possibility of them getting into debt
- c. Thirdly, they have less confidence in their ability to succeed in HE. Research by Leon Feinstein found that low income was related to the restricted speech code. His research revealed that children of working class parents tend to be more passive; less engaged in the world around them and have a more limited vocabulary. Children from middle class households had a wider vocabulary, better understanding of how to talk to other people and were more skilled at manipulating objects.

Evaluations of cultural deprivation theory

- If we look at ethnicity and gender differences in achievement to triangulate, it does seem that cultural factors play a role!
- It seems that it isn't just cultural deprivation but also material deprivation that explains underachievement
- Marxists would argue that cultural deprivation theorists blame the working class parents for the underachievement of their children whereas these parents are really the victims of an unequal society in which schools are run by the middle classes for the middle classes

Cultural Capital and Social class differences in educational achievement

For the sociologists in this section, the cause of lower class failure is the very existence of inequality itself in society and differences in power held by the working and middle classes.

Cultural Capital refers to the skills and knowledge middle class parents have that they can use to refer to the skills and knowledge middle class parents have that they can use to give their children an advantage in the education system. Give their children an advantage in the education system.

Social Capital is the support and information provided by contacts and social networks which can be is the support and information provided by contacts and social networks which can be converted into educational success and material rewards. Converted into educational success and material rewards.

Three ways in which middle class parents use their cultural capital use their cultural capital

- Middle class parents are better educated and are more able to help their children with homework
- Middle class parents are more skilled in researching schools
- Middle class parents teach their children the value of deferred gratification

Two ways in which middle class parents use their social capital

- They speak to parents of children who already attend the best schools.
- They are more likely to know professionals who work in the best schools Supporting evidence for the importance of

Supporting evidence for the importance of cultural capital

Diane Reay (1988) -- Mothers make cultural capital work for their children. Her research is based on the mothers of 33 children at two London primary schools. The mothers of working class children worked just as hard as the middle class mothers. But the cultural capital of the MC mothers gave their children an advantage.

Middle Class Mothers had more educational qualifications and more information about how the educational system operated. They used this cultural capital to help their children with homework, bolstering their confidence and sorting out their problems with teachers.

Stephen Ball argues that government policies of choice and competition place the middle class at an advantage. Ball refers to middle class parents as 'skilled choosers'. Compared to working class parents (disconnected choosers) they are more comfortable with dealing with public institutions like schools, they are more used to extracting and assessing information. They use social networks to talk to parents whose children are attending the schools on offer and they are more used to dealing with and negotiating with administrators and teachers. As a result, if entry to a school is limited, they are more likely to gain a place for their child.

The school/ parent alliance: Middle class parents want middle class schools and schools want middle class pupils. In general the schools with more middle class students have better results. Schools see middle class students as easy to teach and likely to perform well. They will maintain the schools position in the league tables and its status in the education market

The role of Cultural Capital — Evaluation

- Cultural capital has proved difficult to operationalise and measure
- However, more and more research suggests this is important in explaining middle class success and working class failure.
- Helps to explain why the Middle classes always do better despite compensatory education. Cultural Capital and

Class Differences in Education — In school factors

1. Teacher pupil relationships

Howard Becker: Labelling and the Ideal Pupil -- In the 1970s, Howard Becker argued that middle class teachers have an idea of an 'ideal pupil' that is middle class. This pupil speaks in elaborated speech code, is polite, and smartly dressed, He argued that middle class teachers are likely view middle class pupils more positively than than working class pupils irrespective of their intelligence.

Rosenthal and Jacobsen argued that positive teacher labelling can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the student believes the label given to them becomes true in practice.

2. Pupil Subcultures

Willis' (1977) research involved visiting one school and observing and interviewing 12 working class rebellious boys about their attitude to school during their last 18 months at school and during their first few months at work. Willis described the friendship between these 12 boys (or the lads) as a counter-school culture. Their value system was opposed to that of the school. The Lads attached no value to academic work, more to 'having a laff' because they thought that their future work roles in factories would not require them to have qualifications. They saw school as irrelevant.

Mac an Ghail's study of Parnell School (1994) - Found that there was a greater variety of working class subcultures that Willis' research suggested. He found three types of subculture

- The Macho Lads — just like Willis's Lads
- The Academic Achievers — these were working class kids who were doing well and tended to come from the upper end of the working classes
- The New Enterprisers — these focused on vocational and were interested in business and technology — were still concerned with success rather than rejecting school

Class and gender-- Boys from different class backgrounds experience school differently

- Working class boys are generally under pressure to express traditional anti--school masculinities
- Middle class boys are more likely to try hard at school, expressing their masculinity through being competitive in examinations
- However, middle class boys still feel some pressure to be seen to not be making an effort in school.

3. The organization of teaching and learning.

Banding and Streaming disadvantages the working classes and some minority groups - Stephen Ball (1980s) found that following comprehensivisation working class children were more likely to be put into lower sets.

Bourdieu argues that schools are middle class environments full of teachers with middle class values and tastes. It has been argued that the absence of working class teachers with their distinct accents and dialects means that teachers fail to relate to working class children.