

1 EDUCATION



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AQA Specification

Chapters

Pages

Candidates should examine:

The role and functions of the education system, including its relationship to the economy and to class structure.

Chapter 1 covers the key theoretical approaches. Chapter 2 deals specifically with class. Chapter 6 looks at how these issues play out in relation to contemporary policies.

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Differential educational achievement of social groups by social class, gender and ethnicity in contemporary society.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 deal in detail with these issues.

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Relationships and processes within schools, with particular reference to teacher/pupil relationships, pupil identities and subcultures, the hidden curriculum, and the organisation of teaching and learning.

Chapter 5 covers these aspects in detail.

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The significance of educational policies, including policies of selection, marketisation and privatisation, and policies to achieve greater equality of opportunity or outcome, for an understanding of the structure, role, impact and experience of and access to education; the impact of globalisation on educational policy.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 consider the effects of policies on access to education.

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Chapter 6 deals specifically with policy issues, but there are important links with the theories discussed in Chapter 1.

1.1 THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SOCIETY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- › Understand Marxist, functionalist, social democratic and neoliberal perspectives on the roles and functions of education (AO1).
- › Apply these perspectives to contemporary British education (AO2).
- › Analyse the relationship between the education system, the economy and the class structure (AO3).
- › Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Marxist, functionalist social democratic and neoliberal perspectives on education (AO3).



INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

In England, for anyone born after 1 September 1997 it is now compulsory to stay on at school until the age of 18. But why is such a long (and expensive) education thought necessary? It is widely believed that all the time and effort devoted to education is good for individual pupils and equally good for the well-being of society as a whole. For example, for the individual it might open up opportunities and lead to higher pay, while for society it can help the economy to grow. Functionalist sociologists have a very positive view of education, in line with these widely shared beliefs. Marxists, however, have a very different view, seeing education as serving the interests of a small, higher-class minority and not those of society as a whole. This Chapter will examine the ideas and the evidence to see which view is more credible.

The education system is one of the most influential institutions in society. It takes individuals from the age of 4 or 5, or even younger, for six or so hours per day, over a period of at least 13 years in England. It bombards them with a vast amount of knowledge, attitudes and skills.

These are acquired either formally through set lessons, or informally through the hidden curriculum – the processes involved in being ‘schooled’ and the various interactions that take place while in school (for more on the hidden curriculum, see the section below on the Marxist approach). By the time they finish compulsory education, most pupils will have spent well over 15,000 hours in lessons.

GETTING YOU THINKING



1. Look at the photographs above. Make a list of the purposes of education for:
 - a. Individuals.
 - b. Society as a whole.
2. Is there anything that occurs in schools that you feel has no purpose? If so, what?
3. What have you really learned at school/college this week? Who will gain from your acquiring this knowledge, set of attitudes or skills?
4. Could you learn effectively without school?
5. Evaluate whether university education gives more benefit to the individual or to society. Analyse who should pay the cost of the fees. Give reasons for your answer.

COMPULSORY EDUCATION FOR ALL

It may seem normal today that all children are entitled to lengthy and free state education, this has not always been the case. Private schooling was always available for the upper and middle classes who could afford it, but it was not until 1880 that education was available to everyone up to the age of 10.

Forster's 1870 Education Act declared that school boards could be set up in districts where school places were inadequate. Between 1870 and 1880, about 4000 schools were started or taken over by boards. The school

boards were replaced with around 300 Local Education Authorities in 1902, by which time about 20,000 board and voluntary schools served 5.6 million pupils. The Fisher Education Act of 1918 made the state responsible for secondary education, and attendance was made compulsory up to the age of 14. The school-leaving age was raised to 15 in 1947, then to 16 in 1972, and for everyone born after 1997 it is now 18.

One of the main reasons for the rapid expansion of state education in Britain has been a belief that improved

education was necessary for economic success. There was concern in the late 19th century that Britain was falling behind competitors such as Germany in manufacturing industries. Improving education would ensure that Britain had the skilled workers necessary to compete effectively. Education was also thought by some to have an important civilising role. This was seen as important, as voting rights were extended to the majority of men in 1884, and all men over 21 in 1918 (plus women over 30). People hoped that if the mass of the population was better educated, they would make better-informed decisions about who to vote for. The state education system would also teach values and beliefs, which would help to ensure that they were shared by the population as a whole.

The expansion of education was supported by reformers who campaigned for the poor. They saw education as an escape route from poverty, so they believed that state education could help to produce a fairer society in which everybody had opportunities to succeed.

Different groups put the emphasis on different reasons for spending more on state education. These long-standing differences over the purpose of education still exist today.

Since the 1960s, post-16 education to age 18 in school sixth forms and further education colleges has expanded dramatically, as has higher education (see Chapter 6). By 2011/12, UK government expenditure by the Department for Education amounted to over £56 billion or about 8% of government spending (Rogers, 2012). In addition, much of the £21 billion budget for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills went on funding Further and Higher Education, which was 13.5% of total government spending (*Annual Abstract of Statistics*, 2005).

Do you agree that making education compulsory up to 18 will benefit the individual and society (for example by boosting the economy)? Give reasons to support your answer.

So why do modern societies invest so much in schooling the next generation? Sociologists are divided in their views about this. Most agree that education is important, both in teaching skills and in encouraging certain attitudes and values, but they disagree about why this occurs and who benefits from it.

Functionalist approach

Functionalism was the first sociological perspective to be developed, starting in the 19th century. The initial work of French sociologists such as August Comte (1798–1857)

and Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was then developed in the 20th century in the USA by Talcott Parsons (1902–79) and others. Using different approaches, they examined:

- › how societies managed to stick together and work successfully without falling apart;
- › how shared values and beliefs (for example about right and wrong) helped members of society to work together;
- › how institutions such as the family and the education system worked to create predictable and orderly societies.

Some functionalists, such as Durkheim, recognised that things could go wrong with social order, but they stressed that institutions were generally positive, and usually ‘functioned’ to meet the ‘needs’ of society. They paid less attention to inequality, conflict and social divisions than most other sociologists.

Functionalists argue that education has three broad functions:

1. Socialisation – Education helps to maintain society by socialising young people into key cultural values such as achievement, competition, equality of opportunity, social solidarity, democracy, religion and morality. Writing in the late 19th and early 20th century in France, Durkheim was particularly concerned that education should emphasise the moral responsibilities that members of society have towards each other and the wider society. For example, he believed that the teaching of history is crucial in developing a sense of loyalty to your own society. It encourages pride in the achievements of your nation and a sense of shared identity with those who are citizens of the same nation-state. In Durkheim’s view, the increasing tendency towards individualism in modern society could lead to too little social solidarity and possibly anomie (a state of normlessness or lack of shared norms). This emphasis can be seen today through the introduction of Citizenship and the maintenance of Religious Education as compulsory subjects.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Socialisation – Socialisation is the process through which individuals learn the norms, values and culture of their society; that is, they learn how to behave in order to fit in with their society. Primary socialisation – the earliest stage – usually takes place in families. Education is one of the most important agencies of secondary socialisation.

Parsons, discussing the US education system in the mid-20th century, also recognised the social significance of education. He suggested that it forms a bridge between the family and the wider society by socialising children to adapt to a **meritocratic** view of achievement. In the family, particularistic standards apply – a child's social status is accorded by its parents and other family members. However, in wider society, universalistic standards apply – the individual is judged by criteria that apply to all of society's members. Education helps ease this transition and instil the major value of achievement through merit. According to Parsons, education therefore helps to produce a value consensus – a general agreement about basic values in society. The value consensus helps to produce order and predictability in social life, ensuring that members of society share the same basic goals.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Meritocracy – A meritocracy is a society or system in which success or failure is based on merit. Merit is seen as resulting from a combination of ability and effort or hard work. In principle, this could be seen as a fair system but it is difficult to define and measure merit, and the prior existence of inequality makes it very difficult to have a system which genuinely rewards merit.

2. Skills provision – Education teaches the skills required by a modern industrial society. These may be general skills that everyone needs, such as literacy and numeracy, or the specific skills needed for particular occupations. As the division of labour increases in complexity and occupational roles become more specialised, increasingly longer periods in education become necessary.

Functionalist theory ties in closely with human capital theory, an economic theory which claims that investment in humans through education and training acts very much like investment in new machinery. Just as new machines may be able to produce a higher quantity of better quality products, so better educated and more highly skilled people can create more wealth through their work.

3. Role allocation – The functionalists Davis and Moore (1945) argue that education allocates people to the most appropriate job for their talents, using examinations and qualifications. Their argument is based on the principle

of meritocracy. Davis and Moore argue that some jobs are more important to society than others. For example, those taking key decisions such as chief executives of large corporations play a crucial role in society. Education helps to identify those capable of doing such jobs. The examination system encourages competition, individual achievement and hard work. It is closely linked to a rewards system that ensures those doing the most important jobs get the highest pay. The high rewards for some jobs are justified because the system is based on merit and it benefits society as a whole to have the most capable people in the most important jobs. This is seen to be fair because there is equality of opportunity – everyone has the chance to achieve success in society on the basis of their ability.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Role allocation – This is the process of deciding who does what within a society or a smaller social setting. The examination system plays a part in this, and the whole process of interviewing or direct recruiting of individuals for jobs is there to vet and select people for particular roles.

To what extent do you agree that education determines whether individuals end up with high status and well-paid jobs? What other factors might also be important?

Criticisms of the functionalist approach

In general terms, the functionalist perspective on education has been criticised for emphasising the positive effects of the education system and ignoring the negative aspects. Functionalists tend to ignore aspects of education that may be dysfunctional (harmful to society) and that may benefit some social groups more than others, and to ignore conflict in the education system and wider society.

In terms of socialisation, the functionalist view seems most applicable in societies where there is a single dominant and shared culture. In multicultural societies where, for example, different ethnic groups have different cultures and values, it may be hard to reconcile differences through education (see Focus on Skills below).

Furthermore, functionalists tend to assume that education succeeds in socialising individuals in the system. A number of studies suggest that not all pupils conform to the values promoted at school (see for example the discussion of Paul Willis in Topic X Chapter X).

In terms of skills provision, there has been a long-running debate in Britain about whether British education teaches pupils the right skills, and how successful it is in getting pupils to learn skills at all. It has often been argued that vocational education has low status in Britain, with the result that the education system does not produce the skills needed for the economy. For example, engineering tends to have a relatively low status compared to academic subjects such as history and English literature, even though engineering is more obviously relevant for a successful economy.

Many sociologists argue that globalisation is increasingly significant. National boundaries have become less and less important and interconnections between societies are increasingly strong. In a globalised economy, British companies and workers have to compete with companies and workers around the globe, yet critics argue that Britain lags far behind some other countries in training workers. For example, 2012 research (Pisa) placed the UK 26th out of 65 countries in terms of maths ability among 15-year-olds, 23rd for reading and 20th for science. Even if societies need the education system to provide the workforce with skills, that does not always mean that it will succeed in doing this.

The functionalist claim that education successfully allocates individuals to roles in a fair and meritocratic way has been very strongly disputed. This view ignores various ways in which social divisions such as those based on gender and ethnicity might affect educational achievement (see Chapter 1, Topic X). It assumes that all individuals have the same opportunity to receive high-quality education and ignores the existence of private education, which gives the wealthy more opportunity to select schools for their children. As we will see later (see Chapter X, Topic X) social class has a strong effect on educational opportunity – a point strongly supported by Marxists. They dismiss the view that education or indeed role allocation in general is meritocratic.

Marxist approach

Marxist ideas originated in the 19th century with the German revolutionary communist Karl Marx (1818–83), but his ideas have influenced generations of social scientists since then. Those who have largely followed

his ideas are known as Marxists, while those who have been influenced by his work but have then developed somewhat different ideas are known as neo-Marxists.

Marxists see capitalist societies, such as Britain today, as dominated by a ruling class. The ruling class consists of the wealthy who own what Marx called the means of production (the things needed to produce other things such as land, capital, machinery and labour power). The wealth of the ruling class enables them to dominate and control the non-economic parts of society – what Marxists call the superstructure.

For Marxists, education is seen as an important part of the superstructure of society. Along with other institutions (such as the mass media, family, religion and the legal system), it serves the needs of the ruling class who control the economic base. This base shapes the superstructure, while the superstructure maintains and justifies the base (see Figure 6.1).

For Marxists then, education performs two main functions in capitalist society:

1. It reproduces the inequalities and social relations of production of capitalist society. For example, it generally trains pupils from working class backgrounds to do working class jobs while providing elite education for the children of the wealthy, preparing them to take up positions of power in society.
2. It serves to **legitimate** (justify) these inequalities through the myth of meritocracy. It persuades members of society that their positions (particularly their jobs) reflect their ability, while in reality they largely reflect class background. (See Topic 1, Chapter 2 for a discussion of class inequalities in achievement).

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Legitimation – Legitimation is the process of justifying or gaining support for an idea, a policy, and institution or a social group. It often involves justifying an inequality or a form of exploitation, perhaps by portraying it as natural (for example, saying men are naturally stronger than women) or as fair (for example, claiming that it is always the most able who get the best-paid jobs).

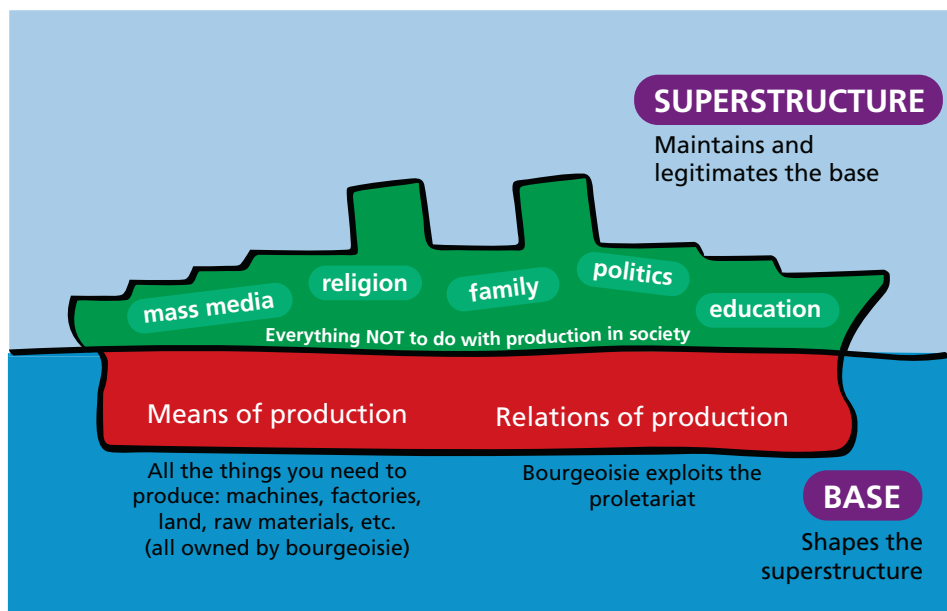


Figure 6.1 Marxist view of the superstructure of society

The Marxist Althusser (1971) disagrees with functionalists that the main function of education is the transmission of common values.

He argues that education is an ideological state apparatus (ISA). Its main function is to maintain, legitimate and reproduce, generation by generation, class inequalities in wealth and power. It does this by transmitting ruling-class or capitalist values disguised as common values. For example, in Britain and other capitalist countries, pupils are encouraged to accept the benefits of private enterprise and individual competition without question. To Marxists, these parts of the capitalist system provide much greater benefit to the ruling class than to other members of society. Along with other ISAs, such as the media and the legal system, education reproduces the conditions needed for capitalism to flourish without

having to use force, which would expose it as oppressive. Instead, **ideology** gets the same results by exerting its influence subconsciously.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that the working classes are effectively duped into accepting their failure and limited social mobility as justified. The education system tends to value the culture of middle and upper classes much more than that of the working class (for example classical music and 'serious' literature rather than popular culture). The cultural attributes of the working class are rejected because the system is defined by, and for, the middle classes who, in turn, succeed by default rather than greater ability. Their cultural assets are seen as worthy of investment and reward and hence have greater value as cultural capital. A process of cultural reproduction takes place in which the culture of the middle class is reproduced and given higher status than working class culture through the education system (This is discussed more fully in the next Chapter). Bourdieu sees this as a form of 'symbolic violence' against the working class.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Ideology – An ideology is a set of beliefs that promotes the interests of one group (for example one class) at the expense of others. For example, if the working class are persuaded by ideology that they only deserve very low wages, then this serves the interests of the ruling class.

Do you agree that the curriculum content in the British education system devalues the culture of the working class in particular and less powerful groups in general? Use examples in your answer.

FOCUS ON SKILLS



Values, education and Operation Trojan Horse

In 2014 it was alleged that there was a plot by Muslims to take over several Birmingham schools and to make sure they were run on Islamic lines. The 'plot' was investigated by Ofsted, which judged several of the Birmingham schools to be 'inadequate'. For example, they found that 'extremist' Islamic speakers were invited into some schools, that there was too little opportunity to learn about non-Islamic cultures, and that some female staff members thought they were spoken to in an intimidating way.

However, not everyone agreed that there was evidence of an Islamic takeover, or that the investigation was fair.

The following report is from The Guardian newspaper. It discusses the response of 20 experts to the Ofsted investigation and challenges the impartiality of Ofsted, given that a year earlier some of the schools in question had been judged 'outstanding'. These experts thought it was Ofsted, not the Birmingham schools, that was undermining 'British values'.

An ideology "at odds with traditional British values" has taken hold at the schools inspectorate Ofsted, a group of leading educationalists and Muslim leaders have warned. Led by Sir Tim Brighouse, a former chief education officer in Birmingham, the 20 experts – unhappy at the way Ofsted has conducted inspections into schools allegedly infiltrated by conservative Muslims – say in a letter to the Guardian that it is at risk of compromising political independence by producing "tarnished reports".

Their intervention comes days before Ofsted publishes results of an inspection of 21 schools ordered by education secretary Michael Gove, after claims that conservative Muslims were trying to infiltrate the

governing bodies of Birmingham schools in a plot dubbed Operation Trojan Horse.

On Tuesday, further evidence also emerged of abrupt shifts in Ofsted's inspection results, with a leaked inspection report showing that a second secondary school in the city that had been previously rated as good or outstanding in November 2013 is expected to be downgraded to inadequate when its new report is published next week. Describing the mass inspection as "a landmark in the history of education in these islands", Brighouse and the other signatories argue: "First-hand accounts of the Ofsted inspections that have emerged are disturbing. They suggest that inspectors were poorly prepared and had an agenda that calls into question Ofsted's claim to be objective and professional in its appraisal of standards in schools serving predominantly Muslim pupils.

"It is beyond belief that schools which were judged less than a year ago to be outstanding are now widely reported as 'inadequate', despite having the same curriculum, the same students, the same leadership team and the same governing body. This is uncharted territory, with Ofsted being guided by an ideology at odds with the traditional British values which schools are meant to espouse, particularly fairness, justice and respect for others."

Adams, R. (2014). *The Guardian*, 3 June 2014

Questions

1. **Understand.** What impression is given by the idea of 'infiltration'?
2. **Interpret.** What view of the inspection process is implied by this article?
3. **Analysis.** Analyse the reasons why the experts in the article questioned the view that the Ofsted investigation into Trojan Horse was objective and fair.
4. **Analysis.** On the basis of the evidence here, analyse whether functionalists would see the Birmingham schools involved as successfully carrying out their functions for British society.
5. **Evaluate.** With reference to the Trojan Horse allegations, evaluate whether education can ever pass on a shared culture in a multicultural society where there are strongly held differences in religious beliefs.

Correspondence theory

Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that education is controlled by capitalists and serves their interests. From a study of high school children in the USA they argue that there is a close relationship between schooling and work, because schooling is used to prepare children to work in capitalist businesses. The correspondence principle states that education corresponds to employment.

Capitalism requires a hardworking, docile and obedient workforce which will not challenge the decisions of management. Bowles and Gintis believes that education prepares such a workforce through the hidden curriculum, or the hidden, informal messages and lessons that come from the way schooling is organised. It works in the following ways:

- › Conformist pupils are awarded higher grades than those who challenge authority or think creatively.
- › Schools teach acceptance of hierarchy since teachers give the orders and pupils obey, just as workers obey managers in the workplace.
- › Pupils are motivated by the external rewards of exam success just as workers are motivated by wages, since neither pupils nor workers experience satisfaction in learning or work because it is directed by others and they have little control over it.
- › Both work and education are fragmented, or broken into small pieces, so that workers and pupils have little overall understanding of production or society. This keeps them divided and, in the case of workers, prevents them from setting up their own businesses in competition with their employers.

Like Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis see the idea of meritocracy as a myth – people are conned into believing that success or failure is based on merit, whereas in reality their class background determines how well they do in education. Their research suggests that intelligence (as measured in IQ tests) has less effect on grades than class background. However, because people believe that the education system is meritocratic this makes it seem fair and encourages people to accept educational failure and low wages.

Criticisms of the Marxist perspective

Marxism in general, and Bowles and Gintis in particular, have been criticised a number of ways. They tend to emphasise class inequality in education and pay little or no attention to inequality based on gender or ethnicity. The idea that education corresponds to work has been criticised by Brown *et al.* (1997), who believe that much work now requires teamwork rather than obedience of authority. Reynolds (1984) believes some education

encourages critical thinking, for example, Sociology. Some neo-Marxists such as Willis believe that the hidden curriculum is not always accepted (see below). They claim that it is debatable whether education is really controlled by the ruling class. Elected local education authorities and teachers have some independence and do not have to follow the wishes of capitalists all the time. Some of the evidence used to support Marxism is dated and may not be representative. For example, Bowles and Gintis conducted their research in 1976 in the USA, and it may not be applicable in Britain in the 21st century.

BUILD CONNECTIONS

The question of whether education provides a route for greater social mobility and therefore leads to a more open class system is crucial in a number of debates around class stratification. The easier it is to move up the class system through success in education the more open and meritocratic the system is.

Partly as a result of such criticisms, a variety of neo-Marxist (or new Marxist) approaches to education have been developed.

Neo-Marxist perspectives on education

An example of neo-Marxism applied to education is the work of Henry Giroux (1984). He disagrees with the conventional Marxist approach of Bowles and Gintis because he does not believe that working-class pupils passively accept everything they are taught, but actively shape their own education and sometimes resist the discipline imposed on them by the school. Schools are sites of ideological struggle by different classes and by different ethnic, religious and cultural groups struggling to ensure that education provides the things they wish for.

Capitalists have more power than any other single group but they don't have all the power. The most influential neo-Marxist study of education is a study of a group of boys (or 'lads') in a Midlands comprehensive school in the 1970s. Paul Willis (1977) conducted the study using interviews and participant observation in the school. The group of boys studied formed a group that took up an anti-school stance, which opposed the norms and values supported by the school. The 'lads' saw themselves as superior to teachers and conformist pupils who they called 'ear 'oles'. They were not interested in getting academic qualifications. At school their main aim was to do as little work as possible while entertaining themselves by 'having a laff' through bad behaviour. Their anti-school culture

FOCUS ON SKILLS



Schools, hypocrisy and the hidden curriculum

Phil Revell (The Guardian, 2004), an educational journalist, argues that schools are riddled with hypocrisy. Very often what people are taught in the formal curriculum of lessons is contradicted by the way the school is run (what is known as the hidden curriculum). He gives a number of examples.

There is an increasing problem with pupils being overweight, leading to a serious risk of heart disease and diabetes in later life. Schools often teach about the importance of a healthy diet but 95 per cent of Britain's secondary schools now have vending machines selling unhealthy sugary snacks and drinks.

Phil Revell worked in a school where children were expected to remove their shoes to avoid damage to the school hall floor, although the teachers were allowed to keep their footwear on, including high heels. Pupils are told about the importance of fairness and equal treatment, but teachers are allowed to jump the dinner queue.

In history lessons there is a great deal of emphasis upon studying Stalin and Hitler and how they ignored basic human rights. However, schools still use collective punishments (which are banned under the Geneva Convention). For example, they might be told that the toilets will be closed until somebody owns up to smoking in them or to leaving graffiti.

The importance of protecting the environment is often emphasised in schools but Revell describe schools as "temples to waste", which often have "uninsulated classrooms using worksheets that have been printed on unrecycled, chlorine-rich paper. The busiest machine in school is the photocopier".

Overall, any attempts to introduce critical or reflective thinking among pupils is more than cancelled out by a 'conveyor-belt approach to learning. Knowledge arrives in unrelated, bite-size chunks. What does it all mean, who cares as long as it can be assessed? Don't think about the problem. Write it down. There's a test next week'.

Questions

1. **Analyse.** Analyse the messages given by these examples of the hidden curriculum.
2. **Identify.** Identify any examples of hypocrisy that you have experienced at school and/or college and suggest the hidden message produced by them.
3. **Apply.** Apply the Marxist perspective on the hidden curriculum to these examples.
4. **Evaluate.** Evaluate the reasons why the hidden and formal curricula might give contradictory messages. Whose interests are being served?

was sexist (looking down on women) and racist (looking down on ethnic minorities). They valued traditional working-class masculinity, which emphasised toughness and saw manual work as more valuable than non-manual work such as office work. Willis followed the lads into their first jobs which were overwhelmingly unskilled manual jobs, often in factories. He found that in these jobs there was a shop-floor culture which was a very similar to the counter-school culture. They both involved lack of respect for authority and 'havin a laff' to cope with boring and tedious work over which they had little control. However, it was clear that although the 'lads' rejected aspects of

ruling class ideology, their rebellion against school meant that they still ended up reproducing class inequality since they ended up in working-class jobs.

Neo-Marxist perspectives suggest that the hidden curriculum is not always accepted and that education does not always succeed in socialising pupils into dominant values. It suggests that both functionalism and Marxism exaggerate conformity in education. Furthermore it is clearly the case that not all pupils conform at school. However, Willis's study is small-scale and dated. Working class pupils may not reject school as often today.

Comparing Marxism and neo-Marxism with functionalism

Despite the criticisms of both Marxism and neo-Marxism, it can be argued that these perspectives are just as relevant today as they were in the past. The influence of business on education may be stronger than ever. For example, local authorities have lost some of their power over education because they no longer run colleges, Free Schools or Academies. The Marxist Glenn Rikowski (2002, 2005) argues that there has been a 'business takeover' of schools. In the UK, this has involved businesses sponsoring Academies, the subcontracting of many school services (for example educational psychology services) to private businesses and an ever-growing emphasis on competition between schools. In terms of the curriculum, there is more emphasis on NVQs and BTEC in schools. (This is more fully discussed in Chapter 6).

However, Marxists and neo-Marxists may exaggerate the harmful effects of education as much as functionalists exaggerate the beneficial effects. Like functionalists, they also take an extreme view on the hidden curriculum, seeing it as entirely benefiting capitalism (while functionalists see it as entirely benefiting society as a whole). Neither Marxists and neo-Marxists nor functionalists base their ideas on detailed research into the content of schooling today, nor do they acknowledge that education may have different effects for different groups at different times (see Chapter 5 on processes in schools). Marxists and neo-Marxists emphasise class above gender and ethnicity, while functionalists ignore social divisions altogether. Like functionalists, Marxists and neo-Marxists tend not to put forward suggestions for improving the education system. Functionalists tend to assume that education already functions well, while Marxists assume that education could only become fair and just if capitalist society were overthrown and replaced by a communist society. Neither therefore suggests how education could be improved in existing societies. Other perspectives on education do make more concrete suggestions for how education could be improved, and these alternative perspectives will be discussed next.

Social democratic perspectives on education

Functionalism and Marxism are quite extreme views of education, but many sociologists and educationalists take a more moderate view, arguing that education does need to be changed to improve, but that this does not require a revolutionary change in society. However, they disagree over the direction of change.

Social democratic perspectives are associated with educationalists and politicians who would like to see

greater equality resulting from the education system. An example of this is the British Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s, who introduced and expanded comprehensive schools (see Topic X, Chapter X). Social Democratic perspectives continue to influence those educationalists, sociologists and politicians who stress that schools must give extra help to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Social democratic perspectives believe that as well as promoting economic growth, education is essential to promoting equality of opportunity in a meritocracy. However, they believe that education is not automatically meritocratic and that governments need to intervene to ensure that people from all social classes have the same chance to fulfil their potential in the education system. To achieve this, the government may need to make some changes in society as well as in the education system. From this viewpoint, a society that has too much inequality can never provide equal opportunities – the richest will always use their wealth to gain advantage (for example by buying private education). To some extent though, this can be counteracted. By taxing the wealthy more and spending the revenue on state education, it is possible to give those from working-class backgrounds a good chance to succeed.

They believe this can be achieved, for example, by expanding higher education to give more places for working-class pupils, by introducing comprehensive schools (so middle-class pupils can't gain an advantage by going to selective state schools), and by providing extra educational help for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Social democrats such as Halsey and Floud (1961) were very influential in the 1960s and 1970s when Labour governments followed some of these policies, but they have also continued to have some influence on Labour governments and the Coalition government since then.

Critics have argued that social democratic policies have not been particularly successful in helping the working class to do better in education. Despite many new policies being introduced to achieve this, the gap in attainment between classes remains large (see Chapter 2).

Woolf (2002) questions whether more and more government spending on education will automatically lead to economic growth. For example Switzerland has relatively low education spending but high economic growth.

The strongest critics of social democratic viewpoints have probably been neoliberals (see Topic X, Chapter X). According to many neoliberals, greater equality in education can lead to standards being undermined;

FOCUS ON RESEARCH: RESEARCH METHODS

The British Cohort Study and the Millennium Cohort Study – evidence on education and social mobility

The British Cohort Study is a longitudinal piece of research that takes as its subjects all those living in England, Scotland and Wales who were born in one particular week in April 1970. Data were collected about the births and families of just under 17,200 babies; since then, there have been five more attempts to gather information from this group. With each successive 'sweep', the scope of enquiry has broadened and it now covers physical, educational, social and economic development. In 2000, a new cohort study (The Millennium Cohort Study) was started, which initially collected data on 19,000 children born in 2000/1. This study has conducted interviews with the parents, cognitive tests on the children and interviews with their class teachers. By 2012, there had already been five sweeps of data collection when the children were different ages.

Data have been collected in a variety of ways. In the British Cohort Study's 1986 research, 16 separate methods were used including parental questionnaires, class teacher and head-teacher questionnaires, and medical examinations. The sample completed questionnaires, kept two diaries and undertook some educational assessments. The Millennium Cohort Study used interviews with parents, cognitive tests on children and interviews with class teachers.

Over the period of the research, the sample for the British Cohort Study reduced to 15,500, while the 2012 research for the Millennium Cohort Study involved a sample of just over 12,000.

Jo Blanden, Paul Gregg and Steve Machin have used data from The British Cohort Study to compare the life chances of British children with those in other advanced countries, and the results are disturbing. In a comparison of eight European and North American countries, Britain and the United States have the lowest social mobility (movement between classes).

Social mobility in Britain has declined, whereas in the USA it is stable. Part of the reason for Britain's decline has been that the better off have benefited disproportionately from increased educational opportunity.

Comparing surveys of children born in the 1950s and the 1970s, the researchers went on to examine the reason

for Britain's low, and declining, mobility. They found that it is partly due to the strong and increasing relationship between family income and educational attainment.

For these children, additional opportunities to stay in education at age 16 and age 18 disproportionately benefited those from better-off backgrounds. For a more recent group born in the early 1980s, the gap between those staying on in education at age 16 narrowed, but inequality of access to higher education has widened further: while the proportion of people from the poorest fifth of families obtaining a degree has increased from 6 per cent to 9 per cent, the graduation rates for the richest fifth have risen from 20 to 47 per cent.

Analysis of children in the Millennium Cohort Study at age 7 suggested that class inequality was continuing to have a major effect on educational achievement (Sullivan, *et al.* 2013). Even at such an early age there were marked class differences in children's cognitive scores and analysis of the statistics suggested that these were very largely determined by the income, social class and previous education of parents. On the other hand, the parenting style of parents made little difference to test scores.

Sources: Blanden, *et al.* (2005); Sullivan, *et al.* (2013)

The Centre for Longitudinal Studies (www.cls.ioe.ac.uk)

Questions

- 1. Explain.** Explain how the British Cohort Study and The Millennium Cohort Studies are longitudinal pieces of research.
- 2. Evaluate.** These studies both used large samples. Identify an advantage and a disadvantage of having a large sample.
- 3. Analysis.** It is sometimes claimed that longitudinal research is very useful for understanding changes over time. Identify two reasons why this may be the case.
- 4. Analysis and evaluation.** Could taking part in a study such as this affect the way participants behave, and therefore affect the results? Give reasons for your answer.
- 5. Analysis.** What do these studies suggest about the functionalist view that education is meritocratic and allocates roles efficiently in modern societies?

education becomes levelled down, and the most able students (for example, in mixed-ability classes that progress at the pace of the slowest learners) are not given the chance to reach their full potential.

Social democratic views are also criticised by some feminists, who believe they concentrate too much on class inequalities and not enough on gender inequalities.

Neoliberal/New Right perspectives on education

Neoliberal (also sometimes called New Right) perspectives have probably had the most influence on British education in recent years. Neoliberal views are very much in favour of private business and the **free market** because they believe that competition between companies drives innovation and encourages success. Like functionalists and social democrats, they see education as important for a successful economy, but they think that state education can be inefficient and a drain on a country's resources. High government spending on education and other services is seen as undesirable because it requires high taxes. These taxes ultimately come from company profits, and high taxation therefore makes companies less competitive.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Free market – The free market refers to a system in which people are free to buy and sell what they wish. In the free market, producers have to provide what consumers want or they will not be able to sell their products. Firms compete with one another to attract customers so, at least in theory, consumers get the products or services (including education) they want, and the quality continually improves.

Chubb and Moe (1988) believe that state education is unresponsive to the needs of pupils and parents and tends to have low standards. In contrast, private education has to please its customers in order to survive and therefore standards are high and there is constant pressure for them to improve further.

Market liberals believe that rising standards are essential as a result of **globalisation**. If countries are going to compete in an increasingly global economy, workers lacking high levels of skills will lose their jobs to more skilled workers in other countries.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Globalisation – Globalisation involves all parts of the world becoming increasingly interconnected, so that national boundaries become less and less important. Information, ideas, goods and people flow more easily around the world. If the economy is becoming more global, then British companies have to compete not just with other British companies but with companies from around the world. The same applies to educational institutions. For example, British private schools and universities compete with countries around the world (including the USA, Europe and China) to attract pupils or students.

These views have influenced all British governments to a greater or lesser extent since 1979.

Neoliberals take a less positive view of education than functionalists, believing that education needs to be run more as a business. However, their views are strongly opposed by both Marxists and social democrats, who both see state education as the only way to provide opportunities for pupils from all classes. From their point of view, private education puts profit before the well-being of pupils and will always favour the rich above the poor. Furthermore, this will tend to waste working class talent and therefore harm the economy.

Postmodernism and education

Despite their differences, the perspectives examined in this section so far (functionalism, Marxism, social democratic perspectives and neoliberalism) all agree that there is a single, best, direction for the education system. All can therefore be seen as 'modern' approaches to education. Modern perspectives see human problems as being able to be solved by rational planning and thought. They believe that scientific methods and the development of clear theories can analyse problems and come up with solutions. They therefore tend to argue that there is one single true or best way to develop education. Postmodern perspectives, on the other hand, deny that there is any single, best, way of tackling problems. They see societies as developing greater variety and pluralism, and they question whether any single, planned approach to education and other issues is desirable. (For more discussion of postmodernism, see Topic X, Chapter X).

This perspective has been applied to education by Robin Usher, Ian Bryant and Rennie Johnston (1997) in the context of adult education.

Education for adults has been particularly responsive to the need for greater choice and diversity, for example by the use of flexible and distance learning. No single curriculum is assumed to be useful for all learners. As a result, a vast range of courses is provided by educational institutions such as FE colleges, The Open University and Adult Education colleges. This allows learners to pick and mix different combinations of courses to suit their own objectives and lifestyles. Furthermore, education is no longer separate from other areas of life. It has become integrated into leisure and work. It can therefore have many different meanings to those who take up adult education. In these respects, adult education is typical of postmodern society, which is characterised by a blurring of the boundaries between different areas of life, greater choice and variety and the rejection of any kind of plan imposed from the centre on individuals.

Postmodern views can be criticised for exaggerating the changes in education. For example, Mike Haralambos and Martin Holborn (2013) point out that there is actually a greater centralisation in some aspects of education, particularly the national curriculum, rather than greater diversity and choice. The budget for adult education in the UK has been cut and, for example, the range of evening classes available for adult students has declined. They also criticise postmodernists for ignoring the way in which education may be shaped more by big business than by the needs and wishes of individual learners.

Keeping in mind neoliberal, Marxist, functionalist, social democratic and postmodern arguments, identify advantages and disadvantages of business leaders having direct involvement in state education. Do you think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages or vice versa? Give reasons for your conclusion.

FOCUS ON SKILLS



Eton College in Berkshire

Competition, exams and the purpose of education

In August 2014 Tony Little, headmaster of Eton, Britain's most prestigious private school, attacked England's exam system saying that it was 'unimaginative' and claiming it was not succeeding in preparing pupils for working in the modern world. He argued that it was too much like the exam system in Victorian times and focused too much upon test scores and too little on the content of education itself. Tony Little said that education needed to be about more than 'jostling for position in a league table' which could lead to schools putting too much emphasis upon test scores, which were in any case not always a reliable guide to the quality of the education that pupils had received. He argued that the exam system 'obliges



Barrowford Primary School in Lancashire

students to sit alone at their desks in preparation for a world in which, for much of the time, they will need to work collaboratively'. Little supported the head of a primary school at Barrowford in Lancashire who had sent out a letter to all Year 6 pupils telling them not to worry about their SATs results because the tests couldn't assess what made them 'special and unique' as individuals.

Michael Gove (a former education secretary) supported more traditional exams with less use of coursework. He justified this in terms of Britain falling behind the highest achieving places in the international Pisa tests, which placed England some way down the international rankings for essential skills such as literacy and numeracy. Shanghai, in China, topped the tables. However, Tony Little argued that the Chinese

themselves were concerned that their education was too narrow and that, ironically, they were trying to learn from Britain and develop a more 'all-round education' rather than focusing too much on literacy, numeracy and science.

Questions

1. **Identify.** Identify the central differences between the views of Michael Gove and Tony Little.
2. **Explain.** Explain the similarities and differences between Tony Little's views and the neoliberal perspective on education.
3. **Apply.** Apply Marxist perspectives to the differences between working-class and elite education suggested by this article.
4. **Evaluate.** Do you agree with the claim that the exam system in England does not prepare pupils for work in the modern world? Justify your answer.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Summary

- › The education system in Britain has expanded significantly over the last 150 years.
- › Functionalists believe that education successfully passes down a common culture, teaches essential skills and allocates individuals to appropriate roles in society.
- › Functionalists have been criticised for ignoring the faults and limitations of the education system.
- › Marxists see education as reproducing class inequality and justifying (legitimising) the position of the ruling class.
- › Neo-Marxists recognise that education does not always simply serve the interests of the ruling class.
- › Marxists have been criticised for neglecting the benefits of education and for neglecting ethnic and gender inequality.
- › Social democrats believe that education can be reformed in capitalist society to make it more meritocratic.
- › Critics of social democrats argue that attempts to produce greater equality can be expensive, can lower standards, and can hold back the most able students.
- › Postmodernists believe that no single plan will work best for education, and that the education system is increasingly characterised by diversity and choice.
- › Critics of postmodernism argue that the extent of choice may be exaggerated, and that because some aspects of education are more centralised, choice and diversity are in fact restricted.
- › Neoliberals support private enterprise and believe that education should operate more like businesses in order to raise standards.
- › Critics argue that neoliberal policies increase class divisions in education.
- › Neoliberals have been criticised for putting profit before the well-being of pupils.

Review Questions

1. Which act made state education compulsory up to the age of 14? [1]
2. Give three of the main reasons why education was first made compulsory in Britain. [6]
3. According to functionalists, what are the three main functions of schools? [6]
4. What does Althusser consider to be the main purpose of education, and how is it achieved? [4]
5. Why, according to Bowles and Gintis, do white, middle-class pupils do better? [2]
6. How does Willis's work appear to support the views of Bowles and Gintis? [4]
7. Give three reasons why what goes on in schools would appear to contradict the view of Bowles and Gintis that there is a correspondence between school and work [6]
8. Suggest two similarities and two differences between neoliberal and functionalist perspectives on education. [8]
9. Analyse how functionalists and Marxists differ in their views on the relationship between education and the economy. [10]
10. Evaluate Marxist and functionalist theories by identifying two strengths and two weaknesses of each theory. [16]

TAKE IT FURTHER

1. Interview a range of your teachers. Ask them to explain the values which they consider are encouraged by the following aspects of school organisation and routine: assemblies, speech days, sports days, school uniform, registration, house competitions, school rules, prefects, detention.

Evaluate the extent to which their responses subscribe to functionalist, Marxist, social democratic or neoliberal views of education.

When conducting the interview, try to make sure that you do not lead the teacher in any way. Keep your questions neutral and don't express support or criticism of their responses.

2. *Either*: revisit one or more of the books that you have studied in English at school and analyse the content. What sort of values does the book seem to support? How does this fit in with Marxist and functionalist views of education?

Or: Think about the last period of British history you studied most recently at school or college and analyse the course content. Did the course tend to celebrate British history or be critical of it? Did it fit with the functionalist view that studying history is important in socialisation and encouraging loyalty to your country?

3. Divide the class into groups who will argue either for or against the following statement:

"Elite universities reproduce class inequalities and benefit the few at the expense of the many."

Consider the chances that those from different backgrounds have of getting into high status universities. Think also about elite universities: does the value of the education provided, and the research they do, benefit society as a whole or just the people who study there?