

A literature review
identifying group of
learners within
society and providing
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Those could include students who do not perform well in a specific subject area, do not show interest in gaining qualifications or perhaps are limited by poor language skills or culture from doing well academically at school. There have been many explanations for low attainment and some of them include:

- * Natural differences between sexes,
- * Natural intelligence,
- * Home background,
- * Type of schooling,
- * Different teaching styles (stereotyping by teachers),
- * Material factors (Hammersley-Fletcher, Lowe & Pugh, 2006).

Halsey performed a survey of the working class and found that material factors were central to whether learners stayed at school beyond the age of 16 (Halsley cited in Hammersley-Fletcher, Lowe & Pugh, 2006). Department for Education also states that the gap between the best and worst performers in our system actually widens as they go through education; and it is both significantly wider and more closely related to socio-economic status in this country than anywhere else (DFES, 2004).

In education, the relationship between schools and social inequality is often explored by looking at the test and examination scores achieved by different groups of children and young people, and other monitoring data. According to Molly Warrington by the age of 11, girls in many primary schools are performing better than boys, particularly in English, and this pattern of differential achievement is sustained and exacerbated throughout secondary education (Warrington and Younger, 2006).

This is a particular concern for white working class boys which is the reason why we should evaluate it further trying to establish possible reasons for their underachievement. BBC reported that government figures from January 2008 show only 15% of white working class boys in England getting five

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good GCSEs including maths and English. (BBC News, 2008). Above view is also supported by the chief inspector of schools who stated that white boys from poor families were worst affected and achieved the worst results aged 16 at school.

White British boys who qualify for free school meals achieve the worst results of any apart from gypsy and traveller children - with just 29 per cent getting good marks. (Daily Mail, 2012) Why is this happening then in a modern world where we seem to have unlimited access to books, resources and other forms of help towards achievement? There is no doubt that to be able to achieve we must have the desire to learn and aspirations to perform well academically.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs outlines the necessity of satisfying the basic physiological and safety needs before the ones on upper levels like achievement, understanding and approval make students realise their potential. Unfortunately white working class households often undermine the values of schooling, academic achievement and aspirations. Boys from very early age associate manual labour with 'masculinity and toughness' therefore do not find academic learning relevant to them as it is not based on what they have been told or taught at home.

Department for Education confirms that 'schools where socio-cultural strategies were most transformative were those where head teachers recognised that there were sometimes conflicts between the cultural contexts of home and school, and that such conflicts might lead to disengagement and potential underachievement' (DfES, 2005) Paul Willis

performed a case study through a detailed ethnographic account of school lives of white working class boys who were 'destined' for labour.

Boys showed lack of commitment to schoolwork and an acceptance of the authority of the teacher at the same time associating manual labour with 'masculinity and toughness'. Willis argued that the boys were drawing upon cultural constructions of masculinity which idealised manual workers strength, so becoming a source of higher self-esteem. The 'lads' asserted their masculinity in the stories they told about resisting mental work (Willis, 1977). Most schools in Britain are dominated by the anti-education and anti-aspiration culture which has much more pronounced effects on boys.

They believe that it is not 'cool' to learn, that real men work with their hands, not their minds, and that school does not matter (Telegraph, 2011). All of the above are deeply ingrained in our culture therefore boys like acting tough or hard, for example, by fighting or publicly denying adult authority; using humour and wit, sometimes as a confrontational device against teachers; wearing fashionable clothes and trainers or possessing culturally acclaimed knowledge, for example, being able to talk knowledgeably about the latest computer game (Swain, 2003, 2004).

There are many reasons for this behaviour but Connell claims that working class communities in some parts of England are those most affected by the collapse of the traditional local manufacturing industry base and deindustrialization. These working-class boys can no longer rely on work for their traditional status of power and see little point in gaining qualifications, therefore are more likely to reject values that are conducive to academic success such as work ethic or punctuality.

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For the same reason they do not value academic success and admire peers challenging school's authority (Connell cited in Younger, 2005). How do we change that? What do schools need to provide the best possible progress and the highest attainment for all pupils? Practical suggestions for educational organisations to better meet the needs of these pupils. Given the amount of literature talking about the underachievement of working class white boys, it appears that the reading material available, suggesting solution to the growing problem is limited.

The suggestions on how to better meet the needs of these boys have been based on the literature review. Main points however, have been developed through discussions with school staff, parents and pupils from a local primary school where most pupils are White British with a few from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and with a statement of special educational needs is below that found in most schools. Those discussions gave an insight into successful practices that minimise the impact of barriers to achievement for white working class boys.

After careful consideration of the subject, improving achievement of boys appears to be a very complex process linked to many factors playing important parts. They include factors like leadership and vision, the curriculum and language support, behaviour management, parental engagement, targeted support including the role of the learning mentor in supporting white working class pupils. Successful transition to Year 7 from Year 6 has proven to also have a positive impact on white working class

pupils. ' These factors are significant in all schools, whether mixed or single-sex, maintained or independent.

Senior managers play a crucial role in determining the most appropriate strategy for school improvement, based on close examination of the school situation and identification of the barriers to improving boys achievement' (OFSTED, 2003). The quality of management and leadership within the schools plays a major part in developing successful strategies. Head teachers who keep their students at the heart of the school's ethos and everything they do, find it easier to engage staff and parents. Strong leadership can be the driving force behind change, new expectations and inspirational success.

They should: * Create a culture of achievement with a positive can do attitude. * Have high expectations and the provision of intensive support should be expected of all * Allocate a lot of time to being in the classroom with teachers and pupils * Make sure that diversity of pupil's backgrounds and circumstances are celebrated. * Make sure that all children are encouraged to achieve their potential and stereotypical expectations are not made. * Make sure that books used, displays and worksheets avoid stereotypical images, sexist language and represent our multicultural society.

The curriculum and language support also plays a major part in tackling underachievement. The Guardian (2013) agrees that barriers to learning faced by white working class boys are mostly concerned with language and literacy: ' Many of these young people have a limited vocabulary and grasp of standard English and have a limited higher order reading skills such as <https://assignbuster.com/a-literature-review-identifying-group-of-learners-within-society-and-providing-reasons-for-their-possible-underachievement/>

skimming, scanning, synthesis, and empathy. Pupils with low levels of literacy rarely read at home, and their development in this area stalls when they get into their teens’.

Our school believes that the curriculum should be accessible to all children whatever their age, race, gender, ability or social background. The use of appropriate reading materials gives the teachers the ideal opportunity for tackling stereotypical views, as well as widens their knowledge and understanding of things that middle class pupils already know and understand. Considering the above it was interesting to find that Schools and Communities Research Review (2010) suggests, it is unlikely that changing textbooks or curriculum content will in itself lead to improved outcomes in reading or mathematics.

It is believed that professional development and coaching in effective teaching strategies make much more of a difference. Continuing, extensive professional development to teachers is likely to improve academic attainment for poor pupils therefore teachers need extensive, engaging workshops to learn new strategies and then coaching to be able to successfully implement and maintain them in their classrooms. Behaviour management also plays a major part in raising achievement of working class boys, and involves using successful strategy which requires a planned approach and subsequently dedication from all parties involved specially educators, pupils and parents. Ofsted reinforces this view by stating that behaviour is significantly better in settings which have a strong sense of community and work closely with parents and carers. In these settings learners feel safe and are confident that issues such as bullying are dealt

with swiftly and fairly (Ofsted, 2005). Involvements of parents in the school life of their children, and their aspirations for them, have been also acknowledged as some of the most important factors associated with lower educational achievement.

This appears to be particularly relevant to children from low-income families as parental aspirations and attitudes towards education vary significantly according to socio-economic status (Goodman and Gregg 2010). Young working class boys lack self believe and aspirations which results in having difficulties in understanding its importance and relevance. A lot of working class parents have had poor experience of education and believe that there is nothing to be gained from it as their children are likely to end up unemployed, or perhaps have achieved a lot in life through hard work despite having no formal qualifications.

In both cases parents do not believe in education therefore pass that view and lack of aspirations onto their children (The Guardian, 2013). The head teacher of the local school reported that the white working class families were the hardest to engage within the life of the school and their children's learning. School staff expressed frustration at the mismatch between the high aspirations of the school and low aspirations of the parents for their children's learning, and therefore have to work hard on strategies to engage white parents with a view to raising achievement.

School staff are aware that they have to draw parents in for positive reasons as a counter balance for the negative experiences that many had at school themselves. Younger ; amp; Warrington (2005) suggested that a combination of a strong learning ethos in school and increased involvement of parents in <https://assignbuster.com/a-literature-review-identifying-group-of-learners-within-society-and-providing-reasons-for-their-possible-underachievement/>

their children's education could raise aspirations and achievement. There are number of reasons why white working class pupils should be able to do well academically despite challenging socio-economic circumstances in the areas served by schools.

The evidence presented by the teachers from our local school mentioned earlier, enables the conclusion to be drawn that this school demonstrates the many ways in which they work to support pupils through a wide range of imaginative and inclusive strategies. Their success in raising the achievement of their pupils is a tribute to their vision, and to the very hard work that is needed to make it a reality. WORD COUNT: 2028 References BBC News Channel. (2008). White working class boys failing. Available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7220683.stm>.

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