

Educational attainment

[Education](#)



This essay will be discussing the aspect to whether or not social class or rather the lack of any social class has anything to do with the educational attainment of children in the British education system. This essay will also try to account for the differences in educational attainment. Furthermore it will also begin to critically examine a range of sociological explanations for the differences in educational attainment. This essay will be giving an explanation of what education attainment means. Education Attainment is the level of education that a person has achieved.

The factors that contribute to a person's educational attainment to do with the said person's home life, and whether or not their home life will help toward them succeeding or fail them in education. There are many theories that take a stance on why students attain different levels of education. This essay will be discussing the arguments that was find to be the most significant to this issue such as cultural deprivation theory, material deprivation theory, genetic and non-genetic explanations hidden agendas and functionalist and Marxist theories.

Successful education attainment is more often achieved by those of a higher class background. A quote that explains this statement is that of Kidd, Wilson (1998, p. 62) '1990, 81% percent of university students came from middle class backgrounds'. Some Marxist sociologist might argue that this proves their idea that the more powerful group or higher class in society seems to be achieving more. This could be linked to meritocracy in which a student or a pupil is rewarded depending on merit examples are either by gender or family wealth.

Functionalist would argue that education is there to better the whole society. They would also argue that we can't all be brain surgeons, because if we were, who would be there to clean up the blood after or nurse the patients back to good health. In order to fully account for the differences in educational attainment it is of course important to firstly discuss how educational attainment is measured in the UK. 'State education began in Britain in 1870 with the Foster Education Act by which the state assumed responsibility for elementary education' Haralambos (1998, p. 6).

Although education only began about 139 years ago it has changed a lot over time. When education first began it was introduced it was mainly to get more people to work in the factories. People needed to be able to know how to read in order to understand the way in which the factory machines worked. It was essential for working class people to learn how to read at this point in time. The British educational system is based on a three tier ideal, Primary, Secondary and Higher Education.

We take our first formal examinations at the end of our secondary education aged 16 which are G. C. S. E's introduced in 1988, from then onwards students will mainly focus (for two years) on the traditional A 'levels which are the benchmark for entrance into higher education such as university. At university one would normally embark on a three year degree and end their university life aged 21. When one talks of educational attainment they are usually referring to the qualifications mentioned above.

As referred to by Meighan and Harber (2007, p. 130) 'The British constitution form - where the intention is to encourage children to adopt the British

version of Westminster style representative democracy and therefore to perpetuate the status quo'. Whilst noting this education seems to be based on whatever government that is in at the time and their view. This idea has been illustrated even more so when the Conservatives were in more in 1979. Each government in the UK brings a different approach to education when they get into power.

As cited by Meighan and Harber (2009, p130) 'Harber (1984) proposes that two positions occur more frequently in debate about the UK curriculum as any others. He describes these as the conservative and the liberal - reformist, the first limiting political education to British constitution approach and the second favouring the democratic studies from, with the added idea of increasing the potential for democratic participation in economics, educational and political influence groups (such as pressure and interest groups). As the years went on technology advanced the more education played a key role in society.

Education helps to aid and guide people to their dream jobs or sometimes to the job that it best suited to them. 'Reforms in the British educational system since World War 2 have had two main objectives in mind to create a meritocracy, through equality of educational opportunity and to create a highly trained and efficient workforce by transferring vocational skills' Heaton and Lawson (1996, p. 13). Whilst it is interesting to compare the abilities of individuals against each other, it makes more sense from a sociological perspective to examine contrasting groups.

The groups that seem the most relevant to start examining are the working classes and their life chances against that of the higher classes. It will become clear that the adversities and hurdles faced by the working classes and exemplify that cultural variations make a significant difference to educational attainment and potential. Higher income families have the time to help their children to do well in education and even if they do not have the time they do have the money to hire someone to help their children achieve a good education.

In contrast to this working class families do not have the time to help their children with things such as homework or projects. They are working so hard and for so many hours that, when they do get home they are tired. Most working class families have two or more children, so they always think that the older child or children would be able to help the younger ones. This always poses the question of who will be there to help the older child if he or she needs it.

Working class families cannot afford to pay for a tutor to come and help their children if they can't help them with their homework this in turn lessens their children's educational attainment. If a child does not understand what is going on in their class and they don't have anyone around who could help explain it to you in that situation the child would not be able to get the most maximum out of their educational attainment. Most working class families work in jobs where their job description includes a lot of manual work.

While middle class families work in jobs such as solicitors, doctors, company financial managers and so on. Yet working class families instead of trying

their best to help their children become all that they could be, do not even bother because they have accepted their lifestyle and social class and feel as if they don't need to acquire more. Children then start to become labelled in schools as a result of this as explained by Meighan and Harber (2007, p. 434) 'The thesis of this section is that labellers operate not on personal initiatives, but on socially constructed ideas fed in to their consciousness.

Linking several categories of special education is the notion of 'underachievement'. This is neither the fact that most working class families do not have the time for their children, makes it even more hard for the said children in question. Functionalists believe that in order for a society to exist it must be ordered in such a way to meet these conditions you need to get educated. Some believe that education performs two functions which are followed 'General socialisation of the whole population into the dominant culture, values and beliefs of society.

Selecting people for different types and levels of education' (website S-cool.co.uk accessed 10-05-10) Marxist believes that education is used as a way to keep the working class from getting to much power. Some Marxist sociologists believe that education is just used as a way of reinforcing the class system. This is done by making the students accept that they are not going to acquire more than their parents have done in education so they should not try that little bit harder.

This could be seen as part of the hidden curriculum in the sense that kids would not want to disrespect their parents and say that they can do better in their lives and amount to more in society. In the hidden curriculum students

are taught about learning rules, following routines and regulations. Both Marxism and functionalism agree that schooling socialises students into the prevailing norms and values of society. We can talk about these differences in many different explanations. Genetic explanations argue that we are born intelligent. It gives a biological reason for educational success.

It suggests that it is what is in our genes that make us smart. It argues that intelligence is passed down from generation to generation and can not be affected. With this in mind you could dispute that this theory suggests that some individuals are born superior to others. It does not take into account the socialisation process. It argues that intelligence is a fixed, one way of testing this intelligence is by using the intelligence quotient tests commonly know as IQ tests. Such tests have proven that working class students have a lower IQ level.

It is , however, argued that the tests and all tests for that matter are culturally prejudice and that the middle classes have been conditioned and equipped to answer the types used in these tests. A Marxist take on this would suggest that it is the middle classes that set the educational system and hurdles to be jumped over, therefore such hurdles are assemble to benefit the middle classes and keep people in their places. We know this from the questions that came up in the 11 plus exams which it was argued questions were culturally geared toward the middles classes.

This explanation is also quite controversial because it does not take into account race. It therefore would imply that because the majority of blacks are working class they have a genetically inferior disposition. Outside school

explanations has for me a more grounded sound explanation for the differences in educational attainment. It takes into account home background and home influences looking at the structures of society. It takes into account material deprivations. Working classes generally have fewer tools to embark on a successful course of study.

They can often live in over crowded dwellings unhealthy living conditions hence providing fewer opportunities for quiet study. Because they are poorer they are less likely to have access to their own personal IT facilities again hindering their course of studies further. Unsatisfactory housing conditions would certainly hamper ones educational potential. The thought was that as the material conditions of the working class improve, then differential educational achievement can be eliminated.

Unfortunately this has not been so as there have been improvements in the social conditions since the 1960's but this has not decreased the gap between the working classes and middle classes. It is also argued that culturally we have different attitudes towards education and educating our young. 'This idea is based on the assumption that most working -class parents share a value system that encourages their children to drop out of school at an early age and devalues what they learn there' Heaton and Lawson, (1996, p. 26).

It could be argued that this is not a characteristic of all of the working classes. This explanation suggests that the working classes offer less encouragement and support towards their young which is another source of controversy. What is more proven is the differences in basic diet. Poorer

families are affording less nutritional food eating less fruits and sometimes not even providing an adequate breakfast for their young. We now know that this has a significant affect on the processing of information and attention span of the individuals whilst at school

The language that the working classes use is very basic. Their vocabulary is very limited passed down from generation to generation. The uses of double negatives accepted as normal whereas it would be corrected by the middle classes. There are is also a working class culture of colloquial words that are accepted as the norm when perhaps it was wholly the working classes is very basic. Their vocabulary is very limited passed down from generation to generation. The uses of double negatives accepted as normal whereas it would be corrected by the middle classes.

There are is also a working class culture of colloquial words that are accepted as the norm when perhaps it was wholly incorrect and adapting to these language differentiations causes an unwillingness to participate with confidence in class. These parents are less likely to correct mistakes and therefore such errors of language go on uncorrected. The problems occur when embarking on their formal schooling it could be argued that this is just another characteristic of the cycle of poverty. It is important to point out that some do break the cycle the cycle is not absolute.

Inside school explanations quite simply talk about the internal workings of the schools. It focuses on two fundamental areas which are the streaming of the students and also teachers expectations of those students. Both these areas form the basis of the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is the

unofficial or informal learning that takes place within the classroom. It is argued that this hidden curriculum forms the foundations in the minds of the students about their position within society. It forms the foundations of self fulfilling prophecy and it forms the basis of how they see each other and as a result treat each other.

Students are put in their place from an early age and are labeled. Marxist suggests that this is the most important part of schooling because it encourages inequality as a norm. you could argue that this form of streaming is a Functionalist ideal as it encourages the concept that we all have a role in society and the working classes are to fulfill the roles set for the working classes and that they should not set their sights any higher as it would be out of the class structure and would go against the grain.

The system would not work if we all set our sights to become brain surgeons. An example of this is the fact the there are more successes at A' Level now from the working classes enabling them to have more access to University. As a result it is said that A' levels are becoming too easy or, which is probably more to the point, being attained by too many of the working classes. As a result they have introduced the A' Level plus which is a blatant strategic movement of the goal posts. It is clear that there are differing factors that effect the attainment of our students.

There are barriers socially, economically and culturally. The genetic approach is one that is weak and offers no real scientific evidence to suggest that IQ is passed from one generation to the next. It does not take into account and therefore gives no value to the socialisation process which we

as a modern society borders on ignorance. It makes a mockery meritocracy which some could argue is a true and real ideal. The outside school explanation takes into account the external sociological influences such as inadequate housing. The lack of parental involvement.

It talks about access to facilities or lack of as the case may be. It talks about overcrowding. More importantly it talks about the culture of education and the fact that parents from the working classes are not always proactive or equipped to fully assist their young. It also quite controversially talks about the unwilling to encourage their young to further their education. It is suggested that working classes attribute less importance to education because the types of occupations that they will embark on require less of the formal qualifications studied in school.

That is probably the biggest indicator of the cultural differences between classes. So it certainly is an uneven playing field with regards to educational attainment, however, the working classes are culturally different not deficient. The system is too middle class and not responsive enough to the range of cultural differences. In conclusion this essay has tried to explore the links between social class and educational attainment. This essay has also showed why education plays such an important role in society.

It has also looked at the differences between classes and tried to find the sociological method that explores the way in which educational attainment is being measured. This essay focuses on some of the tack-ticks used by such as labelling that stops some working class children from attaining the best that they could in education. Finally this essay touches on the fact of an ever

changing government in the UK does not help towards education, because with the change of each government comes the change of plan and curriculum.