

**MICHAEL
WYNESS**

**CHILDHOOD, CULTURE
& SOCIETY** IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

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CHILDREN, SCHOOLING AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Aims

- To explore the relationship between schooling and childhood.
- To examine schooling within a more global context.
- To assess the extent to which schooling adjusts to local circumstances.
- To explore the nature of schooling, with reference to social class inequality.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we explore the significance of schooling in children's lives and its relationship to the concept of childhood. We set out the way that contemporary understandings of childhood presuppose the dominance of mass compulsory schooling, and also provide a broader picture of schooling by examining the nature of schooling in a more global sense. This includes a discussion of the relationship between globalisation and schooling: the way that a Western conception of schooling has become a 'regime of truth' in that mass compulsory schooling is assumed to have universal benefits for all children (Foucault 1977). We also explore the possibilities that globalisation offers in focusing our attention on local settings where schooling adapts to the diverse sets of circumstances in which we find children and their families. We then discuss the significance of home-schooling, both as a challenge to mass compulsory schooling and as a means of analysing the relationship between schooling and childhood.

Despite the existence of local and regional variations of schooling, mass compulsory schooling has become an almost universal feature of children's lives. However, at the global and national levels the provision of schooling is not universally experienced by children in the same way. In the final extended section of the chapter we analyse how these differential experiences can be understood in terms of social class inequalities. We outline several themes here, including the significance of social class inequalities throughout the life-course of childhood, the role that schooling plays in reinforcing social class differences and theories that underpin the relationship between schooling and social class.

CONTEMPORARY SCHOOLING

Schooling has not always been a central part of children's lives. While children did attend school in the past, it bore little resemblance to contemporary schooling. In the 19th century in England there was much resistance to state involvement in schooling. Elementary schooling until the end of the century was intermittently provided by charities and the church. The curriculum was basic, involving the 'three Rs: reading wRiting and aRithmetic', with rote learning and discipline dominating pedagogical approaches (Martin 2008). There was no conception of secondary schooling or any strong sense that children were investments in the future. Unlike their European counterparts, there was little political commitment to state schooling (Green 1990). However, gradually throughout the latter half of the 19th century a reluctant state became more involved in the provision, assessment and auditing of schooling. It was not until very early 20th century that compulsory attendance at school became an enforceable rule and we could start talking about an education system of mass compulsory schooling in England.

One of the key features of medieval schooling was the lack of segregation of children either from adults or children of other chronological ages (Aries 1961). In contemporary schools, children are used to spending their time in classroom with other children of roughly the same age. Age has become a taken-for-granted and crucial means of regulating children in school: same-age children move together on an annual basis into the next class where the curriculum corresponds to the appropriate developmental age of the class. Children's peer relations and friendships are usually developed in the early years of schooling from the same age-related class. Davies (1982), in an early study of children's friendships, compares the degree of choice open to adults when developing friendships and social relations with the constrained nature of children's relations with others. Adults are likely to articulate their friendships in terms of the qualities of others; adults are connected to peers in all sorts of intangible ways. Children will refer to a similar range of qualities when describing their friendships. However, they are also prone to forming friendships with children who sit next to them in class; physical proximity becomes the grounds for friendships, given that children often have little say over where and with whom they sit in the classroom.

In recent years the differentiation of age is more nuanced, with parents focusing on differences between children within the same age-related classroom. Particularly within the first few years of compulsory schooling in England, there is a public debate over the age at which children ought to start school. Children start their first year, what is often termed the 'reception year', if they turn age 5 between 1 September and 31 August of the following year. Children will start school in the first week of September, which can mean that some children are aged 4 for most of their reception year, particularly those born between June and August following the school start in September, the year before. These 'summer babies' are argued to be at a disadvantage compared with children born much earlier in this time frame. A recent report argues that summer babies are less likely to do well in school than those born earlier in the school intake period (Crawford and Greaves 2013). The research correlated the age at which the child started school and a range of outcomes, including school leaving attainment at 16 and the likelihood of being designated with special educational needs. It found that the younger children started school, the more likely they were to have difficulties at school. In 2015 the UK government changed the rules to allow summer babies to start school a year later if their parents requested it. As we shall see in the latter half of the chapter, this research is part of a well-established body of knowledge that prioritises an early start to schooling and the importance of parents and teachers getting it right in these early years.

In many ways the key features of schooling in Western, affluent societies, such as teaching, the curriculum and the relationship between the school and the wider community, have been accentuated in recent years. The educational agenda at national and international levels has focused on the quality and quantity of provision, the nature of the curriculum, and the accountability of schools and teachers. There has also been some attention given to the roles that children themselves play within school. Children are the majority population in schools but until recently have had next to no clout in terms of decision-making processes. Schools are highly structured and hierarchical, much more so than any of the other institutions where we may find children. Despite the somewhat archaic social rituals in which children are embedded, the idea of the pupil's voice has emerged, offering children highly structured channels of communication through which their interests are articulated (Fielding 2006).

While these are important and highly visible features of schools and educational systems, much less is known about the various social, moral and psychological influences on children in schools that shape their wellbeing, what is known as the hidden curriculum (Giroux 1981). These influences are embedded in the relationships, ethos and reputation of the school and are largely implicit in the curriculum. They have often been drawn on by critics of contemporary education systems in that the hidden curriculum often hides or obscures a range of routine practices in the school that favour one group of children, in the process putting other groups at a disadvantage (this is discussed later in the chapter).

In recent years there have been attempts to broaden the curriculum and explicitly focus on areas that were hitherto hidden. Emotional wellbeing and citizenship have been two areas that policy makers have targeted in trying to explicitly shape the emotional, social and moral features of children's identities. With the rise of bullying in schools and sporadic concerns over shootings and violence in US schools, wellbeing and resilience have become more common

features in educational and school agendas (Ecclestone and Lewis 2014). Various initiatives have been set up to improve children's emotional and psychological capacities, both in terms of learning and coping with a more complex social and moral landscape. Citizenship has also become a prominent feature of school life as children come to terms with a broader cultural and social mix in schools. Thus, a citizenship curriculum explores issues of responsibility, morality and civic duty (Cockburn 2013).

In exploring this conception of schooling in relation to childhood, it is clear that the former has been instrumental in both constraining and broadening the lives of children. In the latter case, children's lives have been transformed by education systems that offer opportunities to develop their capacities, to absorb knowledge that widens their horizons way beyond their immediate circumstances. The notion of abstract ideas and concepts allows children to move beyond the particular to the general. Most education systems in the affluent world are infused by a sense of equity and justice. While we will explore the critical features of a meritocratic school system later in the chapter, schooling offers some children a chance to become socially mobile. The emphasis on the individual child in school, the competitive nature of assessment and attempts at providing more equitable arrangements for all children in school provides variegated pathways for children as they progress through school and into the labour market. Moreover, this individualism suffuses children's capacities to develop their social identities: the school becomes an important arena within which identity formation takes places.

A second crucial feature of schooling that shapes contemporary conceptions of childhood is an emphasis on protection and safeguarding. Schools assume this role *in loco parentis*: teachers are pedagogues with a commitment to developing children's cognitive capacities; they are also now more responsible for children's material and emotional wellbeing. Schooling shapes children's intergenerational relations in the way that teachers assume a privileged position in children's lives. Schools also serve to constrict children's lives, from the way that the timetable regulates children's movement to the role that the curriculum plays in positioning children within a developmental frame. Personalised learning, citizenship education and the affective dimensions of schooling can also be viewed as important means of tracking and controlling children, providing what Ecclestone and Lewis (2014) refer to as a 'bio-technology of control'.

SCHOOLING AND GLOBALISATION

The concept of schooling discussed above has arguably become a global benchmark. As we saw in Chapter 17 on international aid, mass compulsory schooling has become a powerful frame of reference for most countries in the global South. An emphasis on processes of globalisation brings into sharp focus the relationship between global markets and the expectation that schools function largely to improve the competitive nature of national economies (Penn 2005). Children are treated as proto-rational individuals who are viewed as 'future knowledge workers'. Schools are largely the means by which children develop capacities to thrive and compete in a global knowledge economy. If we take the English and Welsh national

curriculum as an example of this focus, one of the key aims is that children at the end of their schooling are ‘successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve.’ They will also become ‘confident individuals able to lead safe and fulfilling lives’ (cited in Patrick 2013). Anderson-Levitt (2003) refers to world cultural theory, which states that schools now take similar forms across the globe. Key features of schools include:

- national commitments to education as a universal human right
- the progressive incorporation of girls in schools generating mass compulsory schooling across all child populations
- centralised education policies generating professional standards, national curriculums and a progressively professionalised workforce of teachers
- a focus on whole-class pedagogies

We have also reviewed some of the critical literature on international agencies’ attempts to export a Northern model of investment in developing early years schooling in Southern contexts. The idea of futurity starts earlier as pre-school children are located on developmental and educational pathways with an expectation that they are more easily integrated into schools (Halpern 2013). The introduction of a curriculum for pre-school children is seen as being critical in the assessment of future positive outcomes. Children are able to compete more effectively later on in acquiring the requisite skills, qualifications and dispositions demanded by employers. The economy dominates educational considerations at a global level, putting considerable pressures on states to conform to Western models of mass compulsory schooling.

At the same time, there are cultural counter-pressures which help to differentiate education systems globally. Let us take the example of India where teacher–pupil relations are much more formal. Overt discipline is an integral feature of classroom life (Sarangpani 2003). The teacher’s authority is ‘naturalised’, based on contemporary notions of teacher regulation and more traditional community-based ideas of the teacher as an elder with a monopoly of knowledge and experience. In many Western primary and elementary schools, play is an integral feature of a teacher’s pedagogy. Particularly within the early years, children’s play is partly a means through which teachers assess children’s development, both in conventional psychological terms but also in terms of children’s acquisition of skills and knowledge. Play in an Indian context is clearly contrasted with children’s capacity to work. Thus, classroom work is much more teacher-oriented. Teaching approaches reflect the ‘dictatorial’ authority of teachers, a role that is actively endorsed by the children themselves (Sarangpani 2003). Play here is viewed as an absence of discipline; that children naturally get out of hand if they are not regularly controlled.

ALTERNATIVES AND ADJUSTMENTS TO SCHOOLING

Interestingly, in recent years, despite global pressures to reinforce mass compulsory schooling across all regions, there have been several attempts to revise, adjust and, in some respects,

challenge the idea of compulsory schooling. As well as being a universal common good, schooling adapts to local and cultural environments. While mass compulsory schooling has a centrifugal force globally, there are a number of diverse approaches to schooling which take account of the differing circumstances of children and their families. This is illustrated in the following case study on attempts to balance schooling and labour for child workers.

Case Study: Schooling working children in Mexico (Taracena 2003)

International and national policy focuses on ending child labour. This is partly due to the alleged debilitating effect work has on children's schooling. Despite these political commitments, national governmental and NGO initiatives have been set up in Mexico to integrate working children's schooling with their everyday economic responsibilities. Many poor 'Indian' children from the south of the country migrate to the north in search of work. They often work on large-scale farms in the north for four or five months each year before returning to their villages. This disrupts their schooling. Projects have sought to adapt the school calendar to fit in with their working schedules. This includes schooling being offered on-site for 2–3 hours per day after they have finished work on the farm. The curriculum has also been adapted so that schooling focuses on the education needs of the working children. Thus, basic skills in numeracy and literacy are prominent and are taught within a real-world context. Children are in a better position to work, particularly when their linguistic and numeracy skills help them with their work tasks and with issues relating to contracts and payment. One important feature of this educational approach is the addition of classes in human rights, which help to contextualise their working conditions. Finally, their schooling incorporates their mother tongue, thus providing them with the space in which to both learn the dominant language of Spanish and retain their own indigenous language which is spoken when they return to their villages in the south.

A second group of children that have to make a greater adjustment to mass compulsory schooling are Gypsy, Romany and Traveller children (GRT)¹. The one crucial difference between learning approaches in the home and at school is the primacy of abstract knowledge in the latter and the complete rejection of this approach in the former. Gypsy parents favour basic skills and computing. The inclusion of all other subjects as part of the formal and hitherto hidden curriculums are viewed with a great deal of suspicion.

Gypsy deals in daily life are predominantly connected with personal interaction, abstract generalisations are unknown and useless, replaced instead by concrete and specific symbolism which reflects shared and reciprocal experience. Knowledge is gained not by asking questions but by living out responses. (Liegeois, cited in Levinson 2008, p. 236)

Levinson's (2008) ethnography revealed very different conceptions of growing up and learning among GRT families. Children are tied to the cultural practices laid down by their parents. There seems to be much less engagement with the curriculum, the formal positions and roles of teachers and the expectation that schooling is an integral and compulsory part of their childhood. Data from the 2011 census in the UK affirms that almost two-thirds of the GRT population have no educational qualifications. This compares unfavourably with 23% of the total population of England and Wales (Le Bas 2014). Evidence suggests that children from GRT families lag behind other pupils considerably in terms of levels of attainment. They are also more likely to be categorised as having special educational needs, and are more likely to be excluded from school than other children (Foster and Norton 2012).

While there is still an expectation that schooling is compulsory and there are stringent rules on children's absence from school, some flexibility was introduced with respect to the registration of GRT children in schools. As part of the UK government's *Every Child Matters* initiative (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2004), the focus was on ensuring that educational outcomes were improved for children from deprived families. Thus, schools were to accommodate the mobile nature of GRT families, and parents were able to register their children at more than one school. There was also some flexibility about how schools could record the absences of children, thus accommodating the sometimes intermittent nature of their attendance (Department of Children, Schools and Families 2008).

In the previous section we hint at the possibility of local and national trends having a major impact on the structure and function of compulsory schooling. If we take this line of reasoning further, we can reach a point where the very idea of schooling is being challenged. One of the key trends in affluent and developing world countries is the rise of home-schooling. As with most activities in the home, there are issues of visibility and recognition. In a number of diverse cultural and political contexts, parents are taking direct control of their children's formal education. In some cases, children have been taken out of school and in other instances children have been taught at home from the outset. In the UK, in the former case there is likely to be a record of the children who are being 'home-schooled', but in the latter case, as children are not required to register as being home-schooled, we have only sketchy information about the numbers of children being schooled at home. In recent years this issue surfaced politically through the Badman report (Badman 2009). The report advocated the registration of home-schooled children as part of a more inclusive welfare system for improving the safeguarding of children (Badman 2009)².

In other contexts, for example Malaysia, parents are expected to register any home schooling with the education authorities. In practice, this is less likely to take place: Malaysian authorities are unlikely to enforce these rules (Tan 2011). In some countries, home-schooling is illegal, for example, in Germany. In a recent case a home-schooling family fled Germany for the USA and were threatened with deportation by the US authorities (BBC News 2014). 'German home school family will not be deported from US', BBC News, 5th March 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-26454988

In the USA, despite the difficulties of recording the numbers of children being home-schooled, commentators and researchers confidently claim that home-schooling is on the increase. According to the US Department of Education figures, 1.1 million were home-schooled in 2003, rising to 1.5 million in 2007, and the latest figures suggest 1.77 million children are being home-schooled (US Department of Education 2015). The latter figure accounts for 3.4% of the school population in the USA.

There are a number of reasons and motives behind the apparent popularity of home-schooling, particularly in the USA. Ideological and faith-based motives are common as parents reject what they view as the secular education offered by schools. For others, ideological reasons are central, with parents viewing schooling as a form of state interference, preferring to educate their children on their own (Kunzman 2012). There is a broader context of a perceived increase in crime and bullying in schools which shapes parents' negative perceptions of state schooling. There are also 'educational' reasons in that parents reject the pedagogic approaches in school. A recent media report on English parents taking their children out of school to home-school them refers to a range of reasons, including dissatisfaction with local schools, an inability to get a child into a chosen school, children with medical issues as well as broader philosophical and religious reasons (Jeffreys 2015).

These alternatives or adjustments to the standard schooled approach help to create more diverse conceptions of childhood. We discussed the schooled child as a product of late 20th-century Western trends that provide for and protect children. If we focus on these other educational trends, then we start to challenge, or at the very least refine, our understanding of children's lives and those around them (Wyness 2012). First, the age-related nature of compulsory schooling maybe less relevant in contexts where children's formal educational needs are driven by their work commitments. Moreover, generational relations between child workers and adults are varied, with children having to develop relations with employers and community leaders as well as parents and teachers. Age-grading is certainly less significant for children who are home-schooled. Despite the claims that home-schooled children's socialisation is incomplete due to the absence of peers within a learning and playing environment, there is ample evidence that home-schooled children develop friendship and peer relations with children and adults of different ages (Thomas 1998).

Importantly, the nature of home-schooled children's generational relations is different, bringing them in line with one of the key themes of this book, the diversity of adult-child relations in a global sense. While there is a degree of informality and flexibility in the way that parents relate to their children, mass compulsory schooling has generated formal and distant relations between children and adults, what are commonly referred to within a school context as 'pupils' and teachers. The issue of school readiness, discussed earlier, is partly related to the way that children are able to adjust to the formality and overt regulation that takes place in school. This is a significant feature of the shift from 'child' to 'pupil'. Arguably this is missing in a home-school context where 'teacher-child' relations are characterised by continuity of informality. Thus, the notion of secondary socialisation – the social, cultural and moral means by which teachers relate to children – does not really figure in home-schooled children's lives (Wyness 2012).

SCHOOLING, SOCIAL CLASS AND INEQUALITY

In this final section on schooling and social inequality, I want to focus, first, on the social scientific category of social class. While there is considerable debate as to how to define and categorise social class differences, researchers tend to converge on material factors, with income, home ownership levels, parents' occupation and education, and children's access to free school meals being used as measures of a child's social class status (Strand 2014). A combination of these criteria has been used to analyse large-scale databases. Many of these databases, such as the Millennium Cohort Study, the Youth Cohort Study and more long-standing ones such as the 1958 National Child Development study and the 1970 British Cohort Study, are longitudinal, allowing researchers to track the school careers of children from an early age. Let us focus on one of the current studies, the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), which is based at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at University College London. This multidisciplinary study tracks the lives of 19,000 children born at the turn of the century. It takes a holistic view on children's lives, assessing their psychological, biological, social and educational wellbeing over the life-course. It also incorporates data from both parents, allowing analyses to track children's schooling in the context of the family as well as the school.

Research has combined various assessments of young children's development, with socio-economic data being able to forecast the level of educational attainment reached by children well into adulthood (Evans 2006). The Millennium Cohort Study focuses on the pre-school period where cognitive and language development are different for children from affluent backgrounds compared to children from poorer families (Centre for Longitudinal Studies 2007). Research emphasised the concept of 'school readiness', with children from families in poverty being almost a year behind more affluent children by the time they reach age 3, and therefore less able to engage with the expectations of the early years of primary school. As children get older at each educational developmental stage, or key stage, the gap between working-class and middle-class achievement is maintained. Thus, the progress that children make throughout their school lives reinforces the differences between children in class terms.

Social class and outcomes

In England at age 16 children undertake exams, GCSEs, which shape their futures in terms of their academic careers. The mark of school success, at least in terms of attainment, are those that achieve at least five GCSEs at grades A–C. Passing GCSEs allows students to take 'A' levels in the final two years of school, enabling them to attend university. There has been a consistent gap between the proportion of poor and affluent children reaching this level of school attainment. There has been an increase in absolute terms of all children at this level in recent years. However, in 2012 in England and Wales, 35% of children on free school meals – an accepted measure of poverty – achieved five GCSEs at grades A–C compared with almost

two-thirds of children (62%) not on school meals (Barnard 2015). The lack of school qualifications has major implications for children in terms of their life-chances. First, it hampers their ability to work in later life: in 2010 around 25% of all those aged 25–29 with low or no qualifications were unemployed. Second, around 60% of poorly qualified people are paid less than £7 per hour, which is around the legal minimum (Barnard 2015). Thus, academic failure in school underpins life-long economic disadvantages in terms of employment and pay.

Intersectional differences

While the emphasis in this chapter is on schooling and social class inequalities, we also need to acknowledge that the nature of social class differences in school straddles a number of dimensions of social inequality. We have discussed the complicated nature of children's identity formation in Chapter 23. Gender, class, age, ethnicity and able-bodiedness are a few of the dominant social frames of difference within which children make sense of their lives. In exploring this in terms of inequality, it is clear that there are a number of variables or dimensions of stratification which complicate or potentially compromise the extent to which social class differences largely account for inequalities in schooling. In moving away from more reductionist approaches that focus exclusively on one aspect of difference, intersectionality has become a popular approach to exploring the interrelationship between several dimensions of difference (McCall 2005). In the following case study, recent research has explored the relationship between ethnicity and social class.

Case Study: Social class and ethnicity

Steve Strand (2014) takes an intersectional approach to school-based inequality in English schools. His research explores the relationship between class, ethnicity and gender. The last dimension is less noteworthy in that the statistical evidence on levels of school achievement by gender consistently demonstrate that at all levels girls outscore boys in all subject areas (OECD 2015). The relationship between social class and ethnicity, on the other hand, is far more contested. Much of the debate on the extent to which ethnicity plays a role in generating inequalities between different groups of students has tended to make comparisons between various ethnic groupings and a dominant white majority, with most categories of the former less likely to do well in school than the latter. However, in the UK in recent years, there has been some public commentary on the extent to which white working-class children are the most disadvantaged group in terms of educational outcomes. Research at the

(Continued)

(Continued)

University of Oxford argues that ethnic minority groups have overtaken their white working-class peers in terms of language and literacy skills (Strand 2014). Research followed the school careers of 15,000 children and reported on levels of attainment at ages 11, 14 and 16. The attainment gap was found to be most marked at 16 when children take their GCSEs. White working-class children were the ethnic group least likely to do well here. The researchers argue that as well as poor language skills, white working-class children had the lowest aspirations, with parents not pushing their children to go on to further or higher education. This is in contrast to migrant and established black and Asian groups of children growing up in a more aspirational family context.

Schooling and social class inequality: Critical factors

Various theories have been put forward to account for social class inequalities in schooling. Some have focused on the nature of the education provision and the continuing dominance of private or what is often referred to as 'public' schooling in the UK. Around 7% of children from predominantly affluent families in the UK attend public schools that offer major advantages in terms of resources and teacher–pupil ratios compared with the majority of children in the state sector (Independent Schools Council 2014). Within the state education sector there are also factors that generate class inequalities between children. First, the relationship between children and the curriculum influences class differences. Children's understanding of the world through the school curriculum has a major impact on their capacity to thrive in school. Working-class children tend to have more difficulties connecting with the school curriculum than middle-class pupils. For the latter there is a clearer and more direct link between their own lives and interests and the abstract and formal nature of school-based knowledge. Knowledge here becomes an end in itself: middle-class children are more likely to engage with abstract ideas that connect with their own affiliations and identities. On the other hand, the curriculum does not connect with working-class children's everyday lives and relations with their families, as their experiences are more likely to be shaped by more immediate influences from the community and the street (Hatcher 2000). In some respects, then, working-class children enter an alien environment when they go to school. At the same time, there is some potential for working-class children to access the curriculum for more tangible rewards. The ideas and conceptual tools that make up the curriculum can be grasped by working-class children as a means of gaining qualifications. Working-class children are still at a disadvantage in the classroom, but it does also suggest one possible route to educational achievement for children who lack the cultural means to progress throughout their school careers.

A second differentiating factor in school is the child's capacity to connect with an overarching communication structure in school, what Bernstein (1971) refers to as pedagogic voice. Within this structure there are two forms of pupil talk which dominate pupil and

teacher interactions, classroom talk and subject talk (Arnot and Reay 2007). In the former, communication is normalised and children are expected to internalise rules of language, movement, body posture and other modes of communication. In the latter, classroom talk is more specialised as children try to come to grips with the language and assumptions associated with the teaching of specific subjects. Both forms of talk situate children in the classroom as subordinates and learners, who are dependent on the knowledge and expertise of the teachers. In order to succeed in the classroom, children need to become familiar with both classroom talk and subject talk. They have to internalise what are referred to as 'recognition and realization rules' (Arnot and Reay 2007, p. 322), that is, they have to learn the deeply embedded norms and expectations of routine classroom discourse:

Students are expected to communicate in a certain way about their learning with the teacher using appropriate language forms (classroom and subject talk), express appropriate needs at appropriate moments, and display a high level of trust, patience, the motivation to learn and appropriate family support. (Arnot and Reay 2007, p. 322)

Middle-class children are in a stronger position to take advantage of these rules and regulations than working-class children. Working-class children, on the other hand, have more difficulty connecting with these hidden rules and taken-for-granted practices.

Third, the differentiating of children into ability groups within the classroom, what is referred to as setting, is a common practice in English and Welsh schools. Governments of all political persuasions have supported single-ability teaching. On the Labour Party's accession to political power in 1997, the new prime minister formally committed the government to single-ability teaching:

The modernisation of the comprehensive principle requires that all pupils are encouraged to progress as far and as fast as they are able. Grouping children by ability can be an important way of making that happen. (Tony Blair, cited in Carvel and McLeod 1997, p. 9)

While the intention may be to encourage children to progress through the different ability groups, research suggests that it has the opposite effect. Boaler's (2005) work strengthens the social class dimension by focusing on learning strategies. Children are 'set' in the first few years of primary school and between 80% and 90% of pupils remain in these sets until they leave school. Setting generates low expectations among children in lower sets. Children from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to appear in higher ability groupings. In most other developed countries, schools practise mixed-ability teaching where class differences are not as marked and where children from less affluent backgrounds reach higher levels of attainment.

Bourdieu, capital and habitus

Research has also concentrated on both the broader social structure in which schools are located and the micro-context which focuses on children's social identities. Bourdieu's conceptual

framework and those drawing on the work of Bourdieu attempt to integrate these macro and micro levels. In the latter instance, the analysis incorporates the everyday routines of children (their habitus) as an often-unconscious means through which they internalise their parents' social class status and, in the process, shape their own sense of self (Bourdieu 1997; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Educational success here is a product of three types of capital that are owned, shared and invested by the dominant social class.

- *Economic capital:* As with more conventional Marxist approaches, the more affluent sectors of society have greater material resources than the less well-off and have the economic capital to pay for their children's schooling. We referred earlier to a powerful private education sector. However, the majority of better-off parents send their children to state schools which are free for all children and it is within the state sector that class differences prevail. First, middle-class children are generally in better health and less likely to miss school than working-class children. Second, middle-class children live in more comfortable housing in areas where the better state schools are located and where children will have more space to engage with homework. Third, middle-class parents have the financial resources to take advantage of the various extra-curricular activities offered by schools. Parents are able to hire private tutors and buy educational resources such as computers.
- *Social capital:* Middle-class children will have social advantages over their working-class counterparts largely due to their parents' contacts, social networks and friendships that constitute the everyday social relations they possess. Coleman (1994, p. 300) defines social capital as 'the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person'. Importantly, these contacts and networks generate certain advantages for middle-class families. The social networks inhabited by middle-class parents means making the right connections at local clubs and institutions, such as the golf club and the parent/teacher association. This gives them social advantages in providing their children with a wider range of opportunities and a more appropriate social frame of reference as their children progress through the school system. Importantly, having social capital means parents developing relations with their children's teachers and head teachers. In an era of greater school choice in many affluent countries this is also extended to having connections with other potentially 'better' schools. In more recent years, middle-class parents have to work hard in maintaining their class status through their children, including researching local schools on the Internet, visiting schools and, more generally, being aware of the local marketplace in schooling (Ball 2003).
- *Cultural capital:* This is the most diffuse and abstract form of capital. In one sense, it means parents cultivating in their children the right attitudes and dispositions. This can mean using the same linguistic and cultural frames of reference as other affluent sectors of the population: the way children speak and the kinds of leisure activities they have help to differentiate them from other children in social class terms. In another sense, capitalism is embodied through the concept habitus where an individual's identity and personality reflect their social class position. Our taste in music, our dress code, even the way that we carry ourselves in public, all demonstrate our social class and differentiate us from others.

This is a more refined version of class inequality. Conventional Marxist analyses infer personal attributes from their economic status; Bourdieu argues that an individual has to work at displaying their cultural capital. These cultural resources are deployed by middle-class parents in maintaining their class positions and are passed on to their children through processes of socialisation. In the case of schooling, it is all about parents connecting with the attitudes, norms and values of the school.

Bourdieu (1997) tells us very little about how this cultural capital is displayed by children. Research has tended to focus on the way that parents support, relate to and engage with their children's schooling. This would include habits displayed through meetings with teachers and heads. It would also include the kinds of activities that parents encourage their children to undertake, which connects with the expectations of the school (Lareau 1989, 2011). Reading with children from an early age is one important home practice that enhances children's cultural capital. Children reading for pleasure is another example, which children pick up from their parents and which indirectly strengthens the relationship that families have with the schools as well as improving the cognitive capacities of children (Sullivan and Brown 2013).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus has directed the research focus towards small-scale, micro relations. One critical area here is the role of education in the early years and the relative involvement of parents. Two points are significant: the extent to which children have access to pre-schooling and the home as a learning environment. In the first case, free pre-schooling has been extended to all children in the past 20 years in the UK. An earlier study of pre-school provision in the UK, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project, identifies differences between disadvantaged and more affluent children, with the former spending less time in pre-school than the latter (Sylvia et al. 2004). Second, family influences provide an important focus for explanations on persistent if not widening gaps between the social classes in terms of education. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has focused on the role of parents in providing children with a 'home-learning environment' (Goodman and Gregg 2010). Poorer children have fewer opportunities to expand on what they learn in pre-school and primary school within the home. Gillian Evans (2006, p.45), in her ethnography of working-class life in south London, explores the dynamics between parents and children and observes that, 'formal learning plays little part in the way that caring relationships are established at home'. Thus, reading regularly with children from an early age is less likely to take place here. Working-class routines do not match with school expectations.

The absence of school 'readiness' and 'connectedness' is seen as an important factor in children's educational failure in later years. Working-class children are more likely to spend their non-school time on non-educational activities; they are less likely to be pushed by their parents, particularly when they claim to dislike school. Education is effectively seen as a separate sphere of activity associated with what goes on within the school. The home learning environment touches on the significance of parental aspirations. This has already been seen as a factor in differentiating the educational outcomes of poor white and poor ethnic minority children (Strand 2014). More broadly, working-class parents are less likely to view their children's education beyond the compulsory schooling years, whereas more affluent parents

make assumptions very early on in their children's school careers about access to further and higher education (Ball 2003).

While the home is seen as an important factor in explaining social class differences within schooling, it cannot be seen in isolation from broader material factors. Sullivan et al. (2013) are critical of the way the research on the home environment has been interpreted by policy makers as individual parents being held accountable for their children's limited life-chances. In effect, the policy and professional practice realms tend to favour individualised explanations for school failure rather than broader underlying social class differences. Research on the Millennium Cohort Study analysed data on parental class, education, income and attitude and emphasises that inequalities between children in terms of cognitive development between the ages of 5 and 7 widened (Goodman and Gregg 2010). This could not simply be accounted for in terms of parental behaviour and attitude. Social class, education and income were seen as being more significant factors in making sense of the widening gap than the extent to which parents invested their emotional and social resources in their children.

CONCLUSION

Schooling in some ways mirrors the conflicting conceptions of globalisation. On the one hand, global political commitments to mass compulsory education are part of a process of not only standardising and formalising education but universalising a particular conception of childhood. On the other hand, globalisation allows us a degree of recognition of localised and diverse social and political practices. It connects with a more fragmented global conception of childhood; children have a different relationship to formal education – compulsory, occasional and sometimes home-based. The overarching frame of reference for parents, children, professionals and policy makers is the standard schooled child where education is formalised, compulsory, future-oriented and highly regulated. Indeed, there is little commitment to challenging what is now an embedded and routinised conception of education. Nevertheless, at the interstices and margins schooling accommodates children's economic responsibilities, despite a global legal commitment to ending child labour. The issue of home-schooling brings into the foreground more fundamental questions about the relationship between schooling and education. The two are often conflated or, at the very least, education is assumed to exclusively take place within the highly regulated confines of the school. Home-schoolers consistently challenge this claim in that issues of learning and of intellectual and moral development often take place outside school systems.

Home-schooling clearly highlights the significance of the home as a learning environment. In the final part of the chapter we explored the significance of the home in trying to make sense of how schooling reinforces social class differences and outcomes for children. A recurring theme in school-based research is the enduring gap between working-class and middle-class children in terms of levels of educational development and school attainment.

The evidence suggests that differences in aptitude at a number of levels become apparent in the early years of children's lives, often before they start compulsory schooling. At the upper end of the age spectrum there has been an increase in levels of school attainment overall, but in relative terms there are still important social class differences. Research has focused on the role of parents in both engaging with schools and incorporating an ever-broadening educational project within the home. In both cases it is parents with greater economic, social and cultural capacities or capital, predominantly middle-class parents, who are in a much stronger position to connect with schools in the process giving their children an advantage in educational terms.

NOTES

1. There is some debate as to the terminology to be used here, with Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children often used (Levinson 2008).
2. This idea was subsequently dropped the following year due to a lack of political support.

Summary Points

- Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, schools have become increasingly sophisticated mechanisms for regulating children's lives.
- Global processes have attempted to standardise school for all children.
- Despite global processes, there are still important local nuances that differentiate educational systems.
- Despite perennial claims that formal education serves to increase children's life-chances, research still highlights the ways that schools reinforce social class inequalities between children.

Key Questions

- What aspects of schooling characterise the nature of contemporary schooling?
- Why might the globalisation of schooling have a negative effect on some groups of children?
- In what ways does home-schooling challenge contemporary childhood?
- How might children's schooling be shaped by their social class backgrounds?

Further Reading



Anderson-Levitt, K. (2003) A world culture of schooling? In: K. Anderson-Levitt (ed.), *Local Meanings, Global Schooling: Anthropology and World Culture Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

An analysis of how, globally, education systems are becoming more uniform.

Lareau, A. (2011) *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life*, Second Edition. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

A highly readable analysis of how children's social class backgrounds shape their schooling.

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