Education and social inequalities: Sociological explanations

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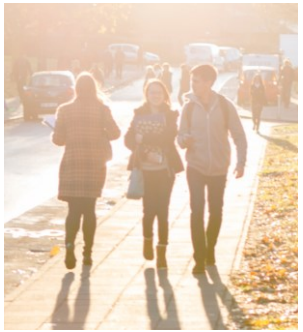
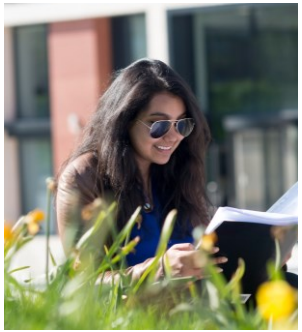
Today

- Thinking about your own educational journey
- Considering the role and function of education
- Sociological thinking about education (with a bit of Philosophy and Psychology, too…)
- Studying education at university

Your own educational journey…

- Draw a timeline of your educational ‘journey’ so far, from birth to now
- Note things that you think helped and that perhaps hindered your ‘journey’
- Add your future aspirations, too

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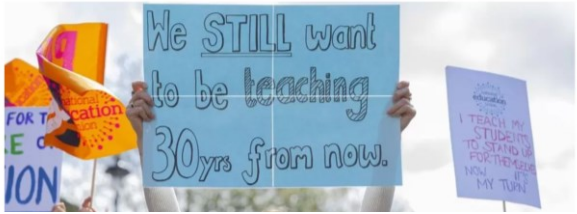
Can you think of any education stories in the news recently?

Education in the news

Teachers in England to strike for two days in July, NEU announces

17 June



Children need more than this limited literary diet of white, male authors

The school curriculum must include more books by women and more with female protagonists, write **Debbie Brazil and Rachel Fenn.** Plus letters from **Patricia McCarthy** and **Gavin Bailey**

School for pupils with mental health needs to open in Wiltshire

4 days ago

Racist notes in schoolboy's bag probed by police

An investigation is launched after a student finds racist notes left in his bag by other pupils.

Read more >

Pupils should not sit exams before fifth year - report

2 days ago

Pupils who used food banks in pandemic fared worse at GCSEs, study finds

Findings prompt concerns about long-term impact of cost-of-living crisis on poorer students' life chances

What is education (schooling) for?

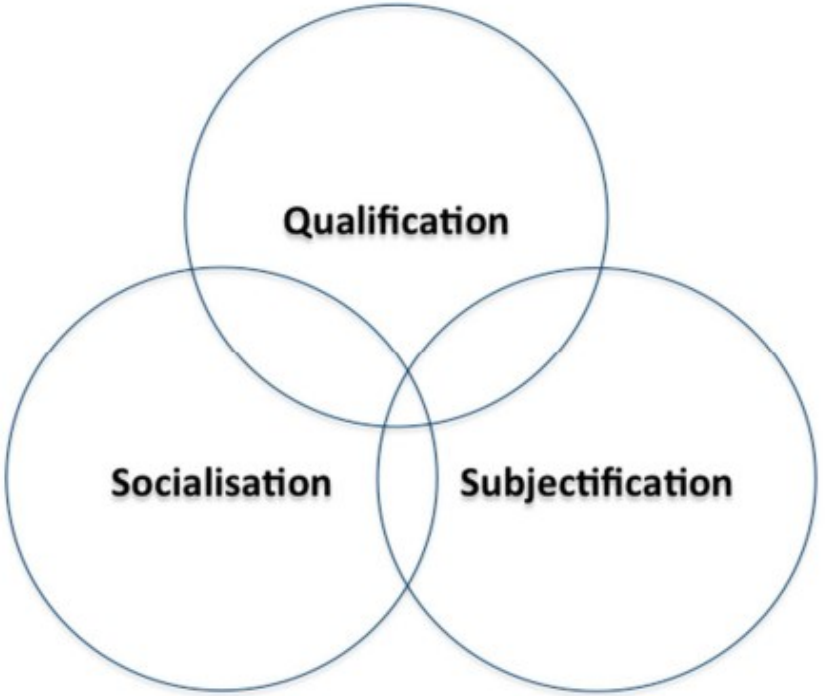
Think about the *role* and *function* of formal education for children and young adults

Biesta's three functions of education

Qualification: advancing knowledge, skills and abilities for use in labour market, for further study, etc.

Socialisation: passing on social, political and cultural values and behaviours aimed at preserving society

Subjectification: how the uniqueness of each student is nurtured; also about developing their agency as citizens



What other ways could you organise the roles/functions we came up with?

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‘Consensus’ view

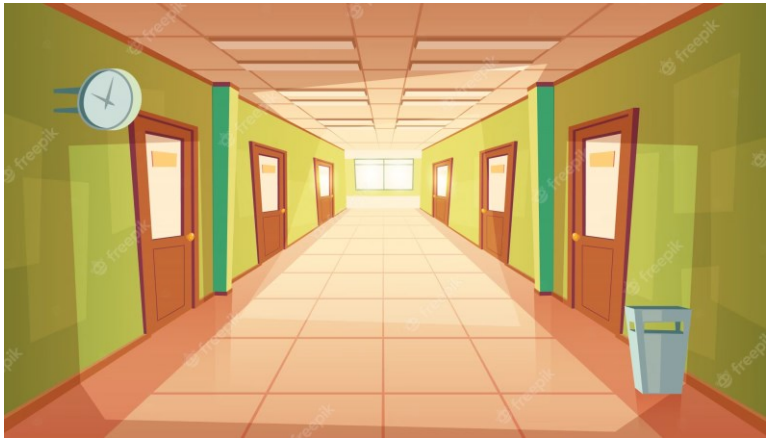
- Promotes social solidarity
- Socialisation (bridge between family and society)
- Value consensus
- Role allocation (and ‘meritocracy’)

‘Conflict’ view

- Transmits ruling class ideology
- Creates obedient, compliant workers
- Legitimises inequality

Features of school education…

- With a partner, write a list of the defining features of school education…



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Features of school education…

- With a partner, write a list of the defining features of school education…

Can you put each feature of schooling into one of these categories?

Three forms of inequalities to consider

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1. Inequalities **by** education in life outcomes: *How do long-term outcomes such as earnings or well-being differ between those with more and less education?*
2. Inequalities **in** education between groups: *How do patterns of educational attainment differ between groups? Does educational attainment reinforce existing patterns of disadvantage, or act as an engine of social mobility?*
3. Inequalities **of** education: *How do the resources and opportunities that the education system offers differ across children, young people and adults?*

Farquharson, McNally and Tahir (2022) 'Education inequalities', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities

Three forms of inequalities to consider

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Why do education inequalities matter?

What inequalities does the existing education system produce?

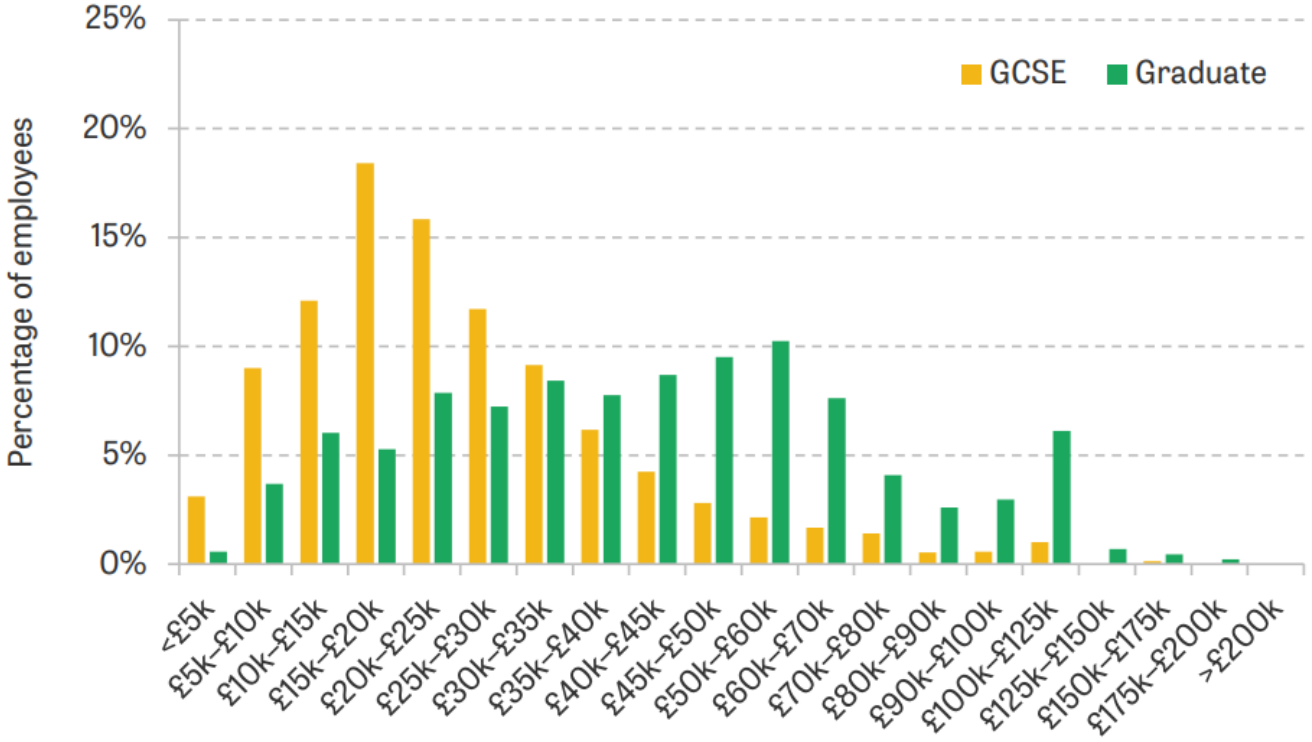
What causes education inequalities?

Farquharson, McNally and Tahir (2022) 'Education inequalities', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities

1. Why do education inequalities matter?

Annualised earnings

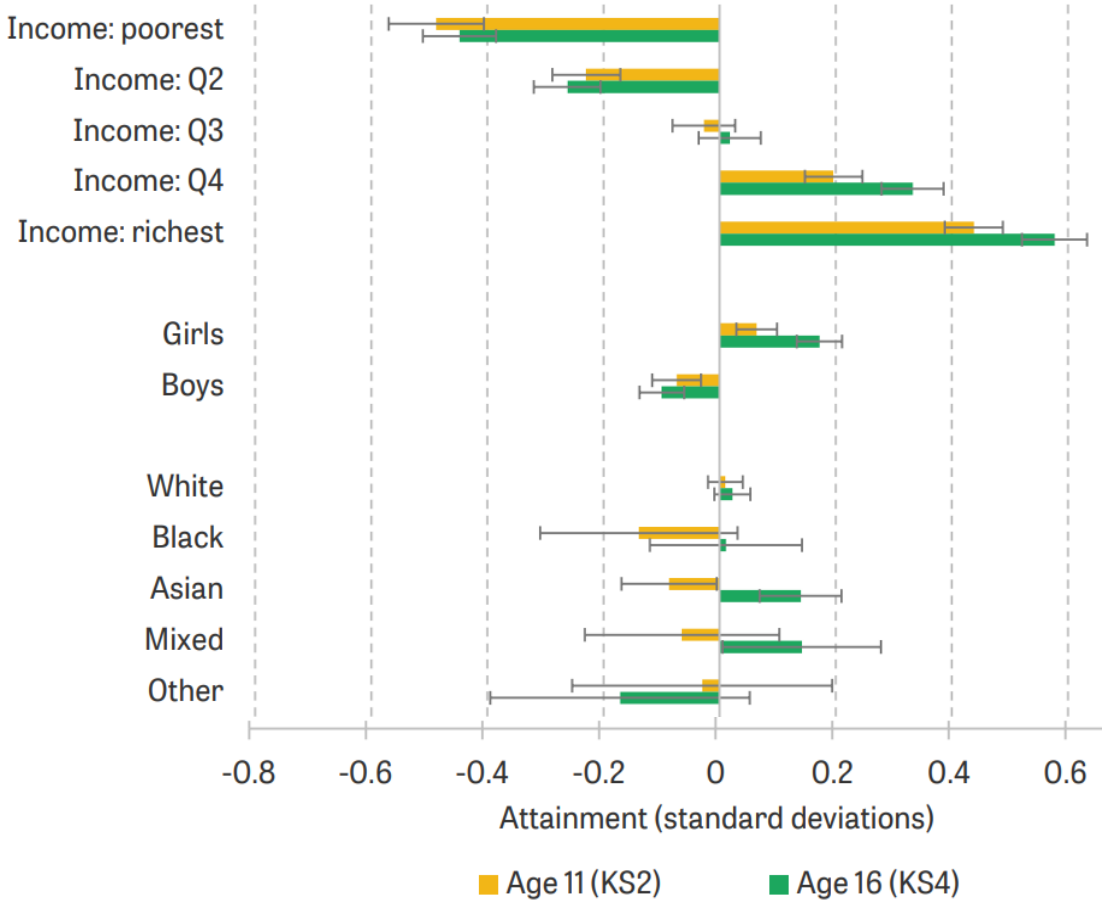
Figure 13. Distribution of annualised earnings among employees educated to GCSE and to degree level, ages 45–50



Farquharson, McNally and Tahir (2022) '[Education inequalities'](), IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities

2. What inequalities does the existing education system produce?

Figure 24. Educational attainment at the end of primary school and at GCSE, by pupil characteristics



Farquharson, McNally and Tahir (2022) '[Education inequalities', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities]

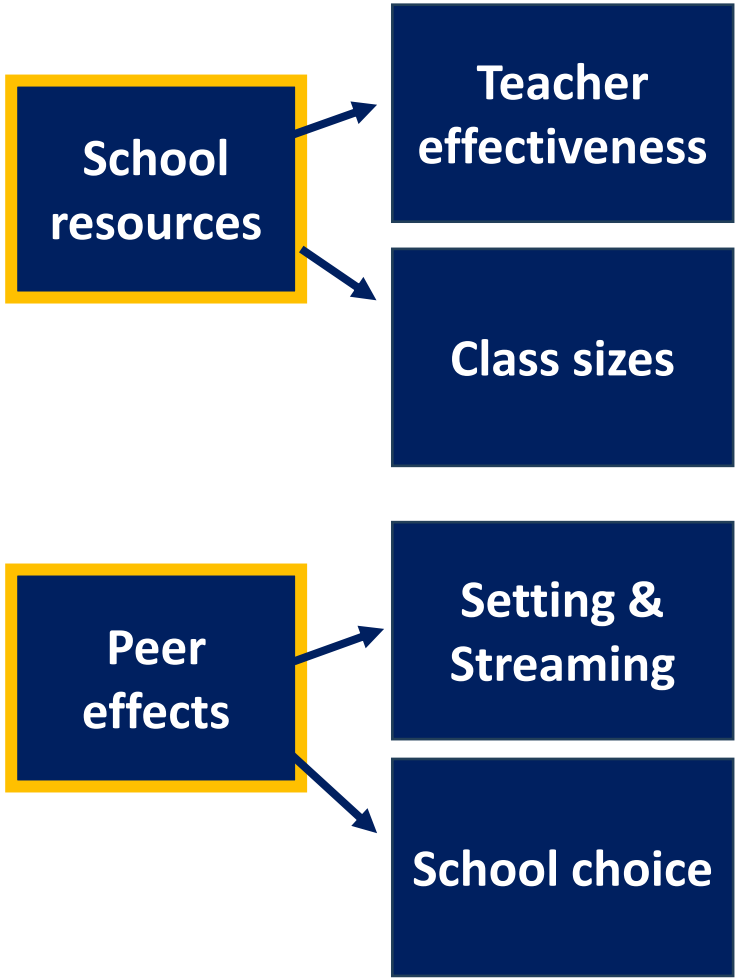
I wonder how we could explain these data?

Features of school education…

- With a partner, write a list of the defining features of school education…

Coming back to our list of features… what might explain some of these inequalities?

3. What causes education inequalities?



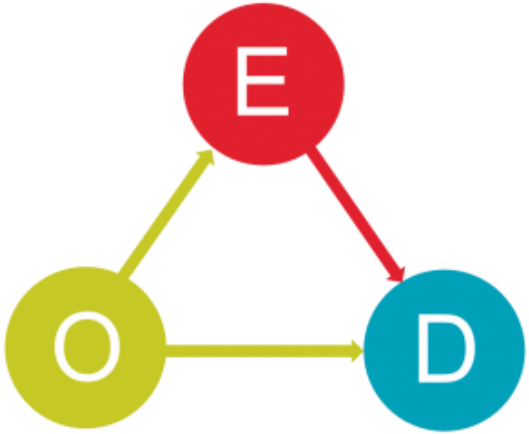
Farquharson, McNally and Tahir (2022) '[Education inequalities', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities]

The OED triangle

O stands for socioeconomic origins

E stands for Education

D stands for destinations in adult life.



Social reproduction occurs when there is a close relationship between origins and destinations

Social mobility is when that relationship is broken by a move up or down the social ladder.

Sullivan (2019) Inequalities in education and society: The home, the school and the power of reading

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“Education is often advanced as the key to social mobility both for individuals and society.

But the British experience over at least the last 50 years has been of educational expansion but little change in social mobility.”

Breen (2022) ‘The stubborn persistence of educational inequality’, IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities

You’re going to climb a mountain…

What challenges and problems will you face on your climb?

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What equipment and resources will you need?

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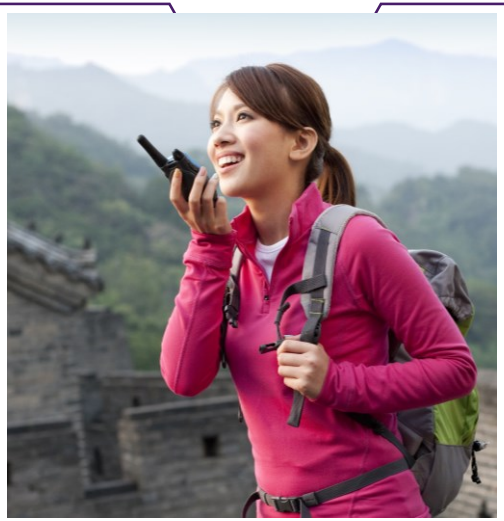
What else would you need to make a success of your climb?

What else would you need to make a success of your climb?



Congratulations – you made it!

- But not *just* because of your own individual talent, effort and determination…
- To make it easier, you relied on certain resources (or ‘capitals’):
  - *Economic*
  - *Cultural*
  - *Social*

Imagine a different mountain…

- What are the challenges someone might face?
- Consider the three ‘capitals’…
  - *Economic*
  - *Cultural*
  - *Social*

A degree from a university with high entry standards

An executive job in a leading City firm

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002)

- Important theorist of social reproduction; influential in educational research
- The theory of capitals (+ ‘habitus’ + ‘field’)
- We draw on our economic, cultural and social resources (‘capitals’) to help our chances of success in the different ‘fields’ we encounter in life (e.g., our neighbourhood, our school, our work)

Bishop (2020) Chapter 2 – Education and Habitus, in Sociology for Education Studies

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002)

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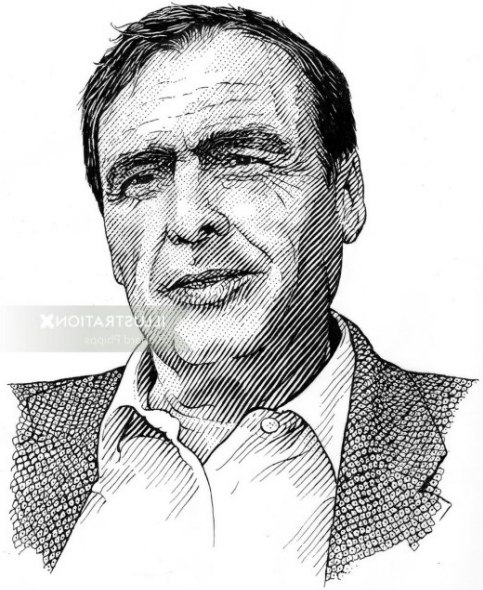
- The *capitals* we have allow us to strengthen our position in a *field*
- Thinking about the 'field' of education, we can see how *particular* economic, cultural and social capitals would be an advantage
- Importantly, Bourdieu argues that different fields assign different value to capitals; in schooling, having 'middle class' cultural capital gets you further than 'working class' cultural capital



Bishop (2020) Chapter 2 – Education and Habitus, in Sociology for Education Studies

So… we should just make sure everyone has the same ‘middle class’ knowledge… right?

‘Knowledge-rich’ curricula

“The ‘knowledge-rich’ curriculum has…become the new orthodoxy and the government ignores other voices... What is more, focusing on knowledge allows the government to influence what knowledge is taught, **limiting a broader, more diverse approach to history, literature and the arts**. …this results in working-class and ethnic minority students seeing fewer examples in the taught curriculum from their cultures, fewer role models from their communities, and fewer aspects of their everyday lives reflected in the school curriculum.”

Reay (2022) ‘Measuring and understanding contemporary English educational inequalities’, IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities

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"Central to working-class relationships to state schooling is that it is not their educational system. The system does not belong to them in the ways it does to the middle classes and they have little sense of belonging within it…. the educational system is not theirs, does not work in their interests, and considers them and their cultural knowledge as inferior".

Reay (2022) 'Measuring and understanding contemporary English educational inequalities', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002)

- ‘Habitus’ is also important; Bourdieu refers to the ‘habits’ we grow up to have – our dispositions, preferences, ambitions as a result of our social experiences
- Our ‘habitus’ may be more *in tune* with certain fields; if our attitudes and values align with those of the field, we are more likely to feel comfortable within it

Bishop (2020) Chapter 2 – Education and Habitus, in Sociology for Education Studies

• To feel like a ‘fish in water’
• To have a ‘feel for the game’

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002)

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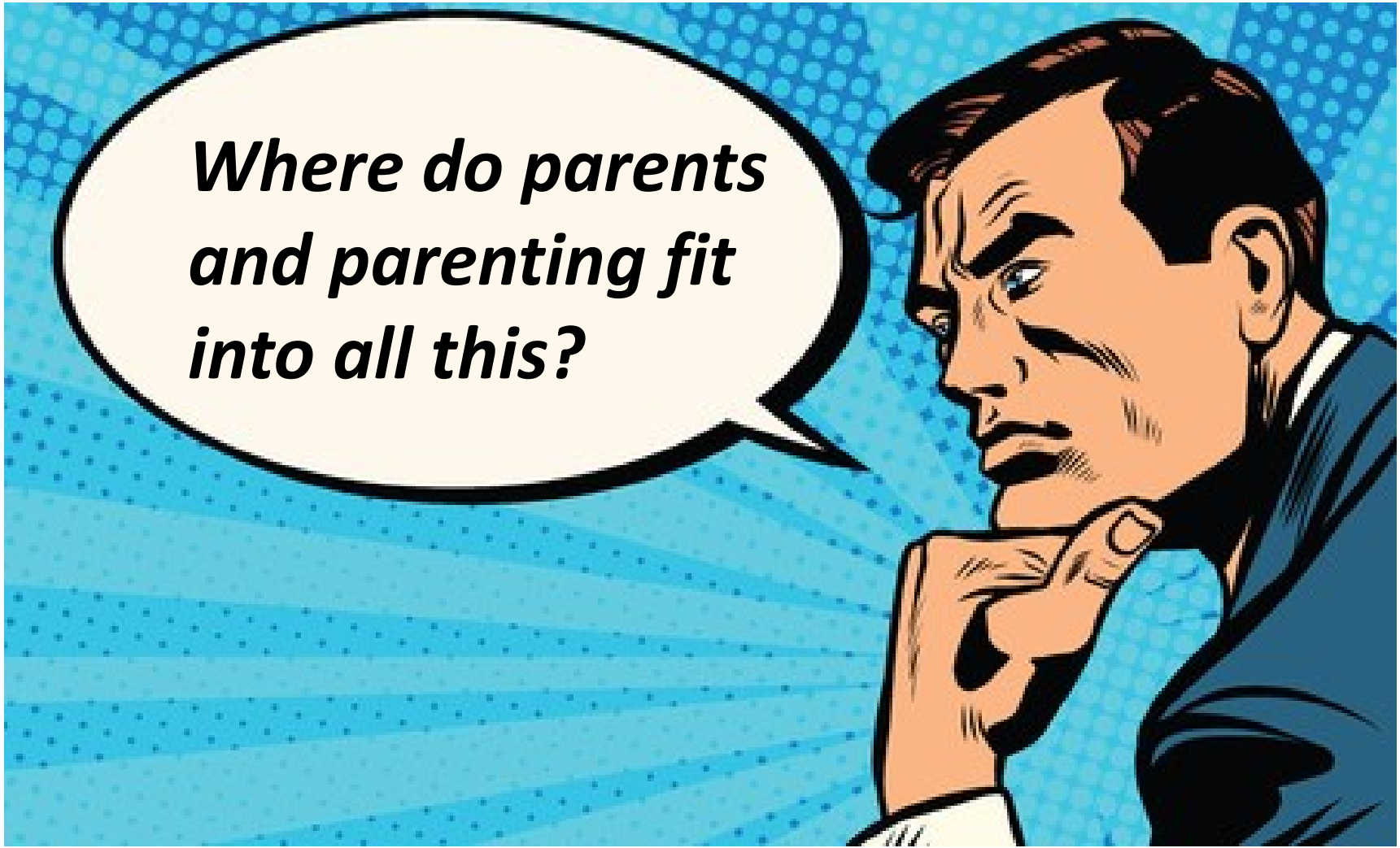
Our attitudes, dispositions, preferences, values

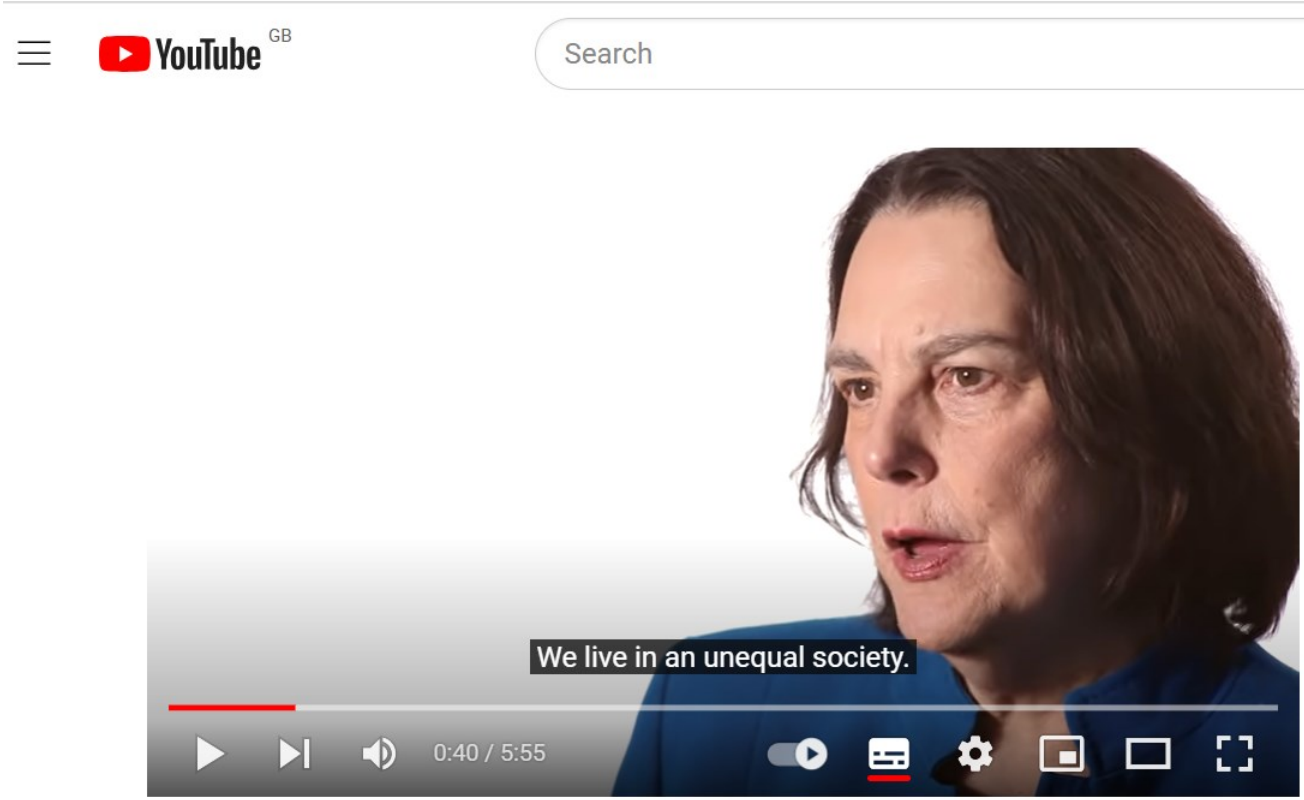
$$[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$$

The things we choose to do (or not) and how we do them

The strength of our (economic, cultural, social) resources in a particular field

Bishop (2020) Chapter 2 – Education and Habitus, in Sociology for Education Studies


Where do parents and parenting fit into all this?



Unequal Childhoods: Annette Lareau

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HN9ydNktAc

Social class and parental involvement in education

- Social class (socio-economic status) variations in involvement -> different approaches to child's development (see Kadar-Satat et al, 2017)
- Middle class parents tend to have a greater sense of ownership over educational knowledge; have an 'active consumer' approach to school involvement
- Working class parents tend to view teachers as professionals with superior knowledge on children's education, leading to lower involvement with child's school and schooling
- Middle-class parents often have a philosophy of 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2003)
  - A sustained focus on developing particular skills and traits in children; often entails a tight timetable of organized activities managed and overseen by parents
- An 'intensive parenting' approach stemming from a perceived need to secure a competitive advantage in an unequal society…

Kadar-Satat et al (2017) Father Involvement in Primary Schools: A Pilot Study in East Lothian, Fathers Network Scotland, available at www.fathersnetwork.org.uk

Lareau (2003) *Unequal childhoods: Class, race and family life*

	Concerted Cultivation	*Accomplishment of Natural Growth*
Key Elements	Parent actively fosters and assesses child's talents, opinions, and skills	Parent cares for child and allows child to grow
Organization of Daily Life	Multiple child leisure activities orchestrated by adults	"Hanging out," particularly with kin, by child
Language Use	Reasoning/directives Child contestation of adult statements Extended negotiations between parents and child	Directives Rare questioning or challenging of adults by child General acceptance by child of directives
Interventions in Institutions	Criticisms and interventions on behalf of child Training of child to take on this role	Dependence on institutions Sense of powerlessness and frustration Conflict between child-rearing practices at home and at school
Consequences	Emerging sense of entitlement on the part of the child	Emerging sense of constraint on the part of the child

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'Concerted Cultivation'

Lareau (2003) *Unequal childhoods: Class, race and family life*

Sources cited in these slides

- Bishop (2020) Chapter 2 – Education and Habitus, in Sociology for Education Studies
- Breen (2022) 'The stubborn persistence of educational inequality', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities
- Farquharson, McNally and Tahir (2022) 'Education inequalities', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities
- Reay (2022) 'Measuring and understanding contemporary English educational inequalities', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities
- Sullivan (2019) Inequalities in education and society: The home, the school and the power of reading
- Winchell-Lenhoff, Singer, Gottfried (2022), Thinking Ecologically in Educational Policy and Research

Additional Sources

- Ainsworth (2013) Sociology of Education: An A-to-Z Guide
- Boronski and Hassan (2020) Chapter 4 in Sociology of Education
- Open Textbook resource chapter introducing sociological understandings of education's role in society (with links to other useful chapters)
- Reay (2017) 'Working class children are damaged by the English education system,' says Cambridge professor
- Riddell (2020) Chapter 5 in A Student's Guide to Education Studies
- YouTube (Crash Course Sociology), Schools & Social Inequality: Crash Course Sociology #41
- YouTube (Stanford University), Unequal Childhoods: Annette Lareau
- Search relevant terms (e.g., 'social inequality and schooling', 'education and gender', 'family and schooling') in International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences

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Introducing BA Education Studies

Dr Mark Pulsford, University of Warwick

July 2023

A little history

- In the UK almost 25 years ago, as a reaction to changes in teacher education, ‘Education Studies’ was born as an undergraduate subject
- It was based on 4 core disciplines:
  - Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, History

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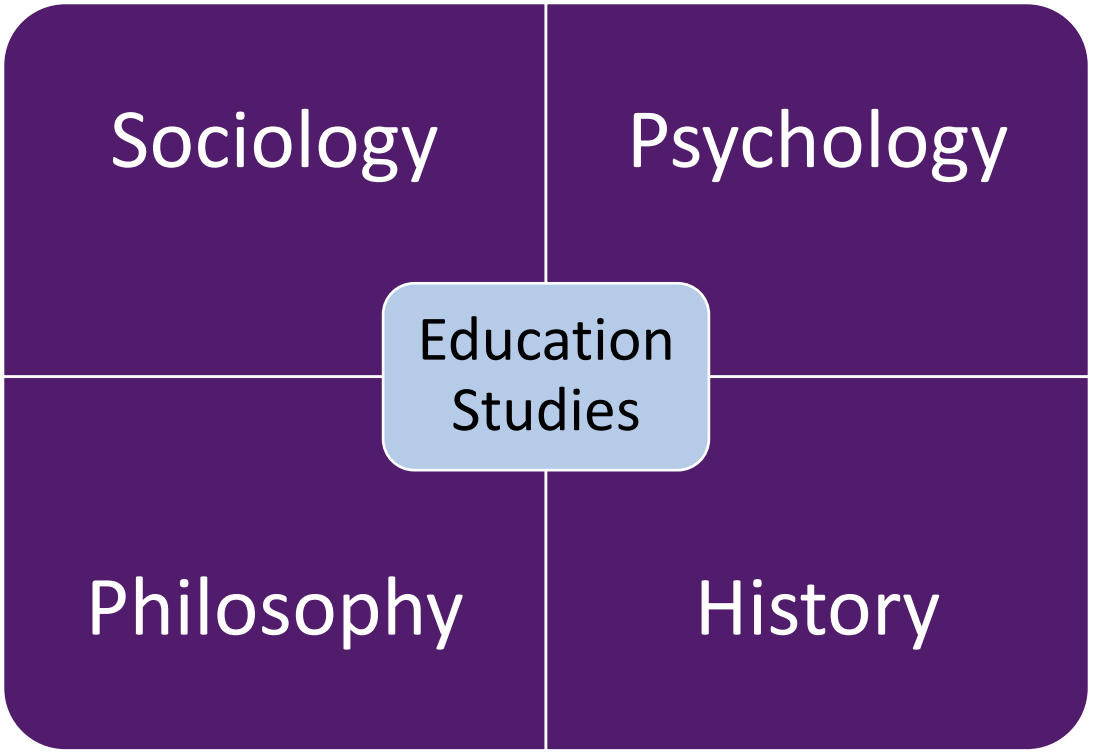


Politics

Economics

Childhood

Global

What is Education Studies about?

- ..”Education studies is concerned with understanding:

  how people develop and learn throughout their lives,

  the nature of knowledge and critical engagement with ways of knowing and understanding.

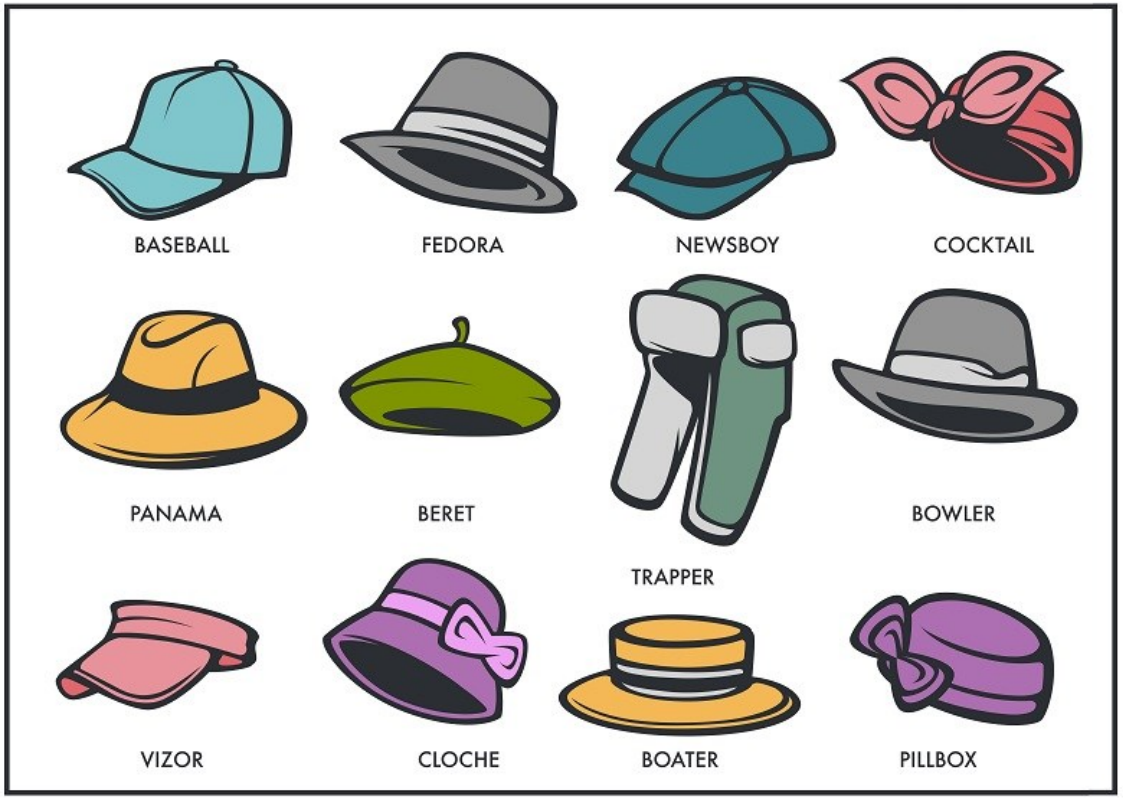
- It offers intellectually rigorous analysis of:

  educational processes, systems and approaches, and their

  cultural, societal, technological, political, historical and economic contexts.

- Many courses include the study of broader perspectives such as international education, economic relationships, the effects of globalisation and the role of education in human rights and ecological issues.
- They all include critique of current policies and practice and challenge assumptions”

QAA Education Studies subject benchmarks



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A varied and vibrant subject

A varied and vibrant subject….

Themes and topics

- Social and political issues
- Global and international
- Families, parents, children
- Learning and development
- Arts and creativity

Skills

- Critical thinking
- Research and analysis
- Collaboration and negotiation
- Reflective and ethical thinking
- Inter-disciplinarity

Those who study education…

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- are curious about the broader contexts that education sits within
- care about equality, value diversity, and support inclusion
- think critically and creatively and make connections across subjects
- often come from groups that have been historically marginalised in education or underrepresented in Higher Education
- are realistic and grounded, but passionate about making change

What are some of our recent graduates doing now?

What?

- Teacher
- Project Manager
- Researcher
- Analyst
- Work Coach
- Social Worker
- Youth Worker

Where?

- Schools
- Charities
- Consultancies
- Think Tanks
- Universities
- Local Government
- Civil Service
- Business

Time for Questions

educationundergrad@warwick.ac.uk

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