

**[This chapter is based upon components of my sociology of education teaching at the University of the West of England, some of which was previously taught by my ex-colleague Arthur Baxter, to whom a debt is owed for various materials and ideas expressed here. I do, however, take full responsibility for any errors and omissions!]**

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

1. Explain how sociology can aid our understanding of educational processes and systems
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the key concepts and theoretical approaches in the sociology of education and how they have changed over time
3. Developed an awareness of social context, of social diversity and inequality and their impact on educational processes and outcomes
4. Explain in sociological terms why different social groups achieve differential outcomes from engaging with education
5. Outline an understanding of the nature and appropriate use of research strategies and methods in gaining knowledge in the sociology of education

### Introduction: Why Study the Sociology of Education?

When studying the sociology of education it soon becomes apparent there is an inevitable overlap with most if not all of the disciplinary focus of this book's other chapters. We cannot examine the sociology of education without understanding its history, and the politics, economics, philosophy and psychology underpinning it. The notion of comparing education systems and peoples' experiences of engaging with them across societies and within a given society over time is central to this process as well. This overlap is illustrated by reference to some of the key researchers and theorists cited in this chapter. American writers Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (see key figure/s 1) are considered primarily as economists, whilst Stephen Ball (see key text 1) writes largely upon policy and its implications for people. As he himself notes in the introduction to the key text referred to below, '...it is sometimes difficult to say who is a sociologist of education and who is not' (2004: 1), although Ball undoubtedly is.

Any account of something as complicated and as varied as the sociology of education is inevitably a partial one. There are many potential topics for inclusion in this chapter, and it is strongly recommended any student of the subject reads around it widely. Some pointers for further reading appear in the chapter, and it is hoped the subjects covered inspire you to delve deeper into this fascinating topic.

#### Activity 1

Sociology is essentially the study of society and of social life. With this broad definition in mind, and without reading this chapter any further, try to come up with a list of key concerns and interests a sociologist of education might have. Compare your list to the one below; how closely aligned were you?

A recent article by Lauder et al. (2009) outlines six key questions they suggest have structured the sociological study of education since it developed in the 1950s. I have developed their suggestions here to come up with a list of ten:

1. What is the purpose of schooling?
2. How does education affect the life chances of different groups in society?
3. Why do some social groups generally win in terms of educational outcomes and others lose?

4. Why are there variations or exceptions for individual members of such groups to this norm?
5. How can educational processes be understood?
6. What do pupils learn at school apart from the official curriculum?
7. Is education a means of liberating people or of controlling them?
8. What is the relationship between educational outcomes and economic success for individuals and the wider society?
9. How do peoples' educational experiences affect their sense of identity?
10. What role does post-compulsory education play in society?

You will notice the overlap referred to in the chapter's introduction above in terms of other academic disciplines. Question 1 above for instance is central to the chapter in this book on the philosophy of education (Chapter 3), whilst question 9 is equally applicable to the chapter on the psychology of education (Chapter 6) and question 8 to the economics of it (Chapter 4).

### **A Brief History of the Sociology of Education**

#### *1950s – Early days and political arithmetic*

As suggested above, in the UK at least the sociological study of education began in earnest in the 1950s. Much early work was centred on the London School of Economics (LSE), which many credit with developing the popularity of sociology itself (Dale 2001; Halsey 2004; Lauder et al. 2009). The LSE's early work focussed upon social mobility, that is, people changing social class (the manner of categorising people's jobs to outline a broad system of social stratification or hierarchy) during their working life from that they were born into or ascribed at birth. The approach of looking at educational opportunity and social mobility within an industrial democracy is known as the 'political arithmetic' tradition within the UK, whilst in the US such an approach is sometimes called 'educational sociology'. It generally used large statistical datasets to examine social inequality over time, and was set within a particular paradigm (i.e. a way of seeing and understanding the world) dominating the sociology of education. This is often referred to as the Increased Meritocratic Selection (IMS). See topic 2 below for a more detailed discussion of these issues.

Education policy changes followed the recognition that, despite the expansion of secondary schooling for all after the Second World War with the implementation of the 1944 Butler Education Act, massive social inequality persisted, which the education system was having little success in addressing. Comprehensive schooling was introduced in the mid-1960s, although for largely political reasons it never fully replaced selection through the 11+ examination across the UK. (See topic 3 below for a further discussion of this). A new graduate level teacher education qualification, the BEd, was introduced around the same time, both longer and a higher level than its predecessor. The sociology of education became a staple of such professional programmes, along with other disciplines featuring in this volume, and this laudable approach of 'educating' rather than merely 'training' new teachers, helping develop a deeper understanding of the role and purpose of education within society, held sway until the Conservative Government under Margaret Thatcher forced a re-focussing of such programmes' content in the mid-1980s.

#### **Key Text 1**

Stephen Ball (2004) *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Sociology of Education* London: RoutledgeFalmer

This is a lively, accessible and informative collection, and at about 300 pages, far more portable than that by Halsey, Lauder, Brown and Stuart Wells outlined in the key text 3 box! The editor is probably the leading contemporary writer on the sociology of education, particularly in terms of educational policy. This edited collection draws largely upon people

still writing today, and again is structured to demonstrate the concerns of contemporary sociologists of education. It contains seven sections each containing two readings: *Social class*; *Globalisation and the economy*; *Gender*; *Regulation*; *Curriculum*; *Teacher*; *Students and classroom*. Whilst on the face of it there are obvious omissions here (ethnicity for instance), these are often covered in the selected articles – the reading on ‘youthful masculinities’ by O’Donnell and Sharpe for instance covers how the masculinity of young men is nuanced by class, ethnicity and rural/urban localities.

### *1960s – The Interactionists*

Interactionist or ethnographic sociologists (those who study smaller scale, personal actions rather than the bigger population-wide outcomes of those from the political arithmetic tradition) grew in influence as the 1960s went on. Writers such as Hargreaves, Lacey and much later Ball demonstrated how, far from being a neutral ‘black box’ that pupils just passed through exempt from any effects, the structure of schools and the expectations of those working in them had enormous impact upon the experiences and educational and wider social outcomes of children. This tendency to study the structures and processes of secondary schooling is explored further in topic 2 below.

### *1970s – The New Sociology of Education*

In the early 1970s, a different and altogether more controversial approach to the discipline was developing, the so-called ‘new sociology of education’ (NSOE), perhaps best exemplified by the early work of Michael FD Young (e.g. 1971) (see key figure 3 box). Young’s edited collection, which included contributions from Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu (see key figure boxes 5 and 6), marked a change in direction for the sociology of education exploring for the first time the teachers’ role in reproducing social inequalities. The political arithmetic approach had positioned the teacher and the school as neutral agents in this process, but the work of Young and his collaborators, like those from the interactionist perspective mentioned immediately above, demonstrated another side to education. It was no longer seen as primarily a progressive force for greater equality and increased personal autonomy as intended by those behind the raft of educational policies introduced as part of the expanding post-war welfare state. Instead it was, as Lauder et al. (2009: 573) suggest, ‘deeply implicated in the reproduction of (social) inequality’.

### **Activity 2**

Consider how the education system may be responsible for the reproduction of social inequality. What factors may stop some people succeeding at school or assist others? Write a list. How many of these are largely within the control of the individual concerned (i.e. their agency), or a consequence of their place in society (i.e. the social structure). All will to some extent be a combination of the two, but consider which exerts the biggest influence. This notion of ‘structure versus agency’ runs through the study of sociology generally, just as ‘nature versus nurture’ is central to the study of psychology, or whether we are fundamentally competitive or cooperative beings underpins the study of politics.

As Dale (2001) suggests, the NSOE offered several new aspects to substantiate its claim to be a fundamentally differing approach to the political arithmetic tradition of authors including Halsey. The most important of these were its focus upon the curriculum as an appropriate topic for sociologists of education to study, and its emphasis on the potentially liberating activities of teachers and teacher educators themselves – they were agents of potential social change. NSOE’s primary focus remained persistent social class inequalities within the education system, similar to the political arithmetic tradition, but their proscribed remedies differed significantly. It sought to move away from tackling the structures of education and towards the key role of individuals working within the system.

### *1980s – An external ideological attack*

Nearly two decades of Conservative Government (1979-1997), including the most ideologically antagonistic period under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) led to major changes within UK educational policy and within the sociology of education in response. This period is characterised by several significant pieces of legislation including the introduction of the national curriculum, of grant maintained schools and other market-led reforms, particularly to secondary schools. These reforms led to the neo-liberal (i.e. where individual wishes are promoted above strategic planning by the state) ideology of parental choice determining school provision, rather than the Local Education Authority; these changes have continued to date under both Conservative and Labour governments, and, since May 2010, under the UK's Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition.

In terms of where teaching the discipline occurred – its institutional location – and its wider status and significance, the 1980s witnessed a definite downturn in the sociology of education's fortunes. These resulted from a clear ideological attack by the government of the day; sociology graduates were denied entry to teacher training courses (Dale, 2001); and the subject was effectively removed from the curriculum of teacher education courses (along with philosophy and psychology). Lauder et al (2009) also point to what they consider to be attacks on the Open University, now established as a leading centre of the discipline through its publications and study programmes.

#### Key Figure/s 1 – Samuel Bowles (1939- ) and Herbert Gintis (1940- )

Contemporary American thinkers who tend to work together, both of whom are more properly described as economists rather than sociologists, though Gintis is sometimes also referred to as a 'behavioural scientist'. In their 1975 book *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Bowles and Gintis nevertheless came up with an important idea in the sociology of education, that of the 'Correspondence Principle'. This explains how the internal organisation of schools corresponds to the internal organisation of the capitalist workforce in terms of its structures, norms, and values. For instance, hierarchy systems in school reflect inequalities in the structure of the labour market, with the head teacher as the managing director, and pupils lower in the hierarchy. Formal education offers an insight into how to interact in the workplace, giving direct preparation for entry into the labour market.

### *1980s onwards – Challenges from within*

Meanwhile, within the discipline, from the 1980s onwards, some criticised the traditional emphasis placed upon white working class boys and their education – Willis' study being a good example (see key text 2), this remains an ongoing concern. Feminists including Miriam David and Gaby Weiner helped the issue of gender adopt an increasingly central position within the discipline, whilst others including Heidi Mirza and David Gilborn kept ethnicity to the fore. Authors including Mairtin Mac an Ghaill and Debbie Epstein focussed upon sexuality, whilst Len Barton (see key journal box) and Harry Daniels amongst others explored students with disabilities. Stephen Ball (2004) refers to this as the period of 'minority epistemologies' or 'standpoint theories'; the attribution of a particularly focussed analysis of the experiences of those traditionally marginalised by the discipline, and, indeed, many others.

#### Activity 3

In your library or on the internet look up some of the names in the section above and read some of their work to get a flavour of their interests. Consider the criticism they might level at those focussing upon the educational attainment of white working class boys.

### *1990s to the present day*

Some writers identify a 'policy turn' in the sociology of education throughout the 1990s. Lauder et al (2009) for instance outline how throughout the decade both major political parties in the UK sought to standardise or, more pejoratively, 'teacher proof' key areas of pedagogy (i.e. teaching), curriculum and assessment. Their primary area of interest concerned how to improve the performance of schools through changing the personnel – or at least their approach – through managing them differently. More recently much government policy and the sociology of education has concerned the school effectiveness and school improvement (SESI) movement. This links with attempts from the 1970s onwards to approach the issue of inequality in education by exploring factors present in 'good schools' and 'bad schools', and to try and improve schools by changing things accordingly. Much media coverage and local authority energies have gone into recruiting so called 'super heads' to bring dramatic changes to schools, often based upon stricter discipline and uniform codes, in an attempt to raise standards.

Stephen Ball is often associated with studying such social policy, or perhaps more specifically, its impact upon people. Like Bernstein (key figure 5) who was writing on the topic in the 1960s, Ball is concerned with how the middle classes utilise policy for their benefit, effectively to the detriment of others less privileged than they are. As I write this a debate is taking place regarding the merits of 'free schools' (an idea championed by Education Minister Michael Gove of the Coalition Government), set up by parents and other interested parties, and the impact on the education of the children who may attend such schools, and, an area often of little concern to such parents, those left outside by such arrangements. This aspect of the discipline will be another key area for future work.

#### Activity 4

Using internet facilities see what areas of policy Stephen Ball has researched. You can use a library electronic journal search engine, look at his homepage at the Institute of Education ([www.ioe.ac.uk](http://www.ioe.ac.uk)) or just 'google' his name.

## SIX TOPICS

**The six themes or topics below cover various issues concerning sociologists of education, from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to today. The topics chosen are all important areas of interest and scholarship, but they are just a selection from many possibilities, as any chapter this length could only ever be. The idea is to provide an overview of each topic, with references to related issues and recommendations for further study. You will notice an inevitable degree of overlap and recurrence of key themes within these topics.**

### **1. The role and function of education in society**

If you have studied sociology before, at A Level or on a BTEC course for instance, you will be familiar with the notion of functionalism; it approaches the study of society by considering an aspect of it – the education system in this instance – and examining what role it performs. Functionalism was the dominant sociological perspective while the sociology of education was becoming established as a discipline in Britain in the 1950s as explained earlier. It underpins the political arithmetic tradition outlined below, which as explained above, dominated the sociology of education until the early 1970s. The work of the famous French functionalist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), one of the founders of sociology, influenced Basil

Bernstein (key figure 5). Whilst functionalism has not always found favour amongst academic writers and theorists, it is generally popular with the media and policy makers.

#### Activity 5

This is a development of Activity 2 you met earlier. Having read the summary of the historical development of the sociology of education and the ideas of a few key theorists, make a list of what alternative roles different sociologists may think the education system plays within wider society. Remember, as with any group of 'experts', be they art critics or economists, different people have different beliefs and values, and I want you to draw that out here. Consider what it can do for individuals and organisations as well as wider society itself. Revisit this exercise after you have finished the whole chapter.

Durkheim's major concern was how modern industrial society held itself together following the breakdown of traditional religious-based forms of social solidarity or cohesion in agrarian society. He decided the answer lay in the social role played by the education system, the central function of which was to make children 'social beings'. For Durkheim, education is primarily the means for society perpetuating itself through recreating the conditions of its very existence; that is, preparing children for collective life. This involves encouraging both homogeneity (similarity) and diversification (difference). Societies are constructed by the values and practices of groups within it, and the education system imparts these values to 'asocial beings', a process known as 'socialisation' (see philosophy of education chapter for further discussion of this topic). School functions as an abridged form of society with similar structures and rules, and the classroom is where a child learns to be disciplined within a social setting, and to strive for collective goals (see key figure 2 box for Ivan Illich, and the 'hidden curriculum' below).

#### Key Figure 2 – Ivan Illich (1926-2002)

Ivan Illich was a controversial figure in educational thinking, and another who addresses disciplinary issues and concerns ranging across other chapters in this book. He was born in Austria, studying there and in Italy, before becoming a Catholic priest, a role which led him to New York initially, then to Latin and South America. There he became outspoken against the impact of economic development upon traditional ways of life, blaming it for destroying knowledge and skills and ultimately the self-sufficiency of non-industrial societies. Illich is best known for two key ideas, the first of which is from his 1971 book, *Deschooling Society*. In this radical but influential text he proposed the abolition of formal education which he suggested did nothing positive for the poorest and turned all of us into passive consumers. Long ahead of his time in terms of adopting technology to benefit educational processes, Illich called for its harnessing to develop mutually beneficial 'learning webs'. Illich's second key contribution to the study of education was his role in developing the notion of the *hidden curriculum*. In some quarters Illich is attributed with coining the phrase, whilst others suggest a variety of other writers did so, including John Dewey (see chapter 5) and Phillip Jackson. However, there is no doubt that even if Illich did not invent the expression, he, along with other radical educators including the Brazilian Paulo Freire (see chapter 5) and John Holt, developed it further. The idea strikingly expresses the notion that schools do not simply teach the official, formal curriculum, but that they also transmit values, processes, rules and, perhaps most importantly, social relationships. In this role schools help maintain the existing (unequal) social order, a function of schooling that has far greater impact on students than the learning of the formal curriculum itself.

As well as socialisation, functionalists see other key roles that education plays. It fulfils the function of social selection, that is, determining how given roles in society are allocated to

particular individuals. For functionalists, this is decided by ability, suitability and effort, and should involve a degree of inter-generational mobility, so the children of say lawyers or road-sweepers should not necessarily follow their parents into similar status occupations. Education has a central role in ensuring ascriptive (inherited) social status is not simply reinforced, but that the most capable and hardest working pupils get the best rewarded positions. Through school, pupils internalise the value of achievement, so they accept inequality in outcomes of status and wealth later in life. This is an integrating function of the school, which counteracts strains imposed by social differentiation. It is crucial here that whilst they see peoples' academic abilities as correlated with family status (academically high achieving parents are more likely to have high achieving children for instance) there must still be space in the system for a genuine selective process.

So functionalists including Durkheim and eminent American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) accept the system is meritocratic. There are however problems arising from the existence of meritocracy, for example lower class students may find the personal costs of achievement too great (see section 6 on HE choice, *habitus* and risk). Personal stakes for bright, low status pupils are high. They may reject school from fear of 'burning their bridges' with members of their families and peer culture. However, for functionalists this demonstrates the system's success rather than its failures, despite 'costs' to the individuals involved. As suggested throughout this chapter, much subsequent work in the sociology of education has tried to demonstrate the continuance of ascriptive factors in education (see for instance the following section on the IMS thesis or political arithmetic approach, and topics 3 and 5 below on strategies employed by middle class parents to ensure their children do not fall down the social ladder).

Unlike contemporary functionalists, Durkheim is not socially conservative (i.e. against large scale social change). When writing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries he argued society had not reached a point where people's place was determined by talent and effort, it being a source of 'anomie' (social disaffection or isolation) as a consequence. Durkheim's solution was to abolish inheritance to improve the fluidity of the class structure and ensure a fairer distribution of 'social goods'.

#### Key Journal

*The British Journal of Sociology of Education (BJSE)*. Published six times a year by Routledge, part of the Taylor & Francis group. This leading publication has been going for some considerable time – it was started in 1980 under the editorship of Len Barton, who is still editing it at the time of writing this chapter in 2010. Unlike some other journals, BJSE has a dual focus on both theory and empirical studies. It has always maintained a board of executive editors that reads a little like a 'who's who' of the discipline in the UK. It also draws upon research from elsewhere in the anglo-phonic world, notably Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. The journal is available online ([www.tandf.co.uk/journals/bjse](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/bjse)), and a free sample copy can be obtained. A quick trawl through recent volumes (which can easily be done online) will reveal what the key current issues in the sociology of education are. As well as the six or so main articles, each issue will normally contain a list of recent doctoral theses awarded in the discipline, a review essay, an extended review and a review symposium on a major book or collection of books. Like other journals it also publishes responses to articles from other academics, encouraging a debate on key topics.

## 2. Reducing inequality – social mobility and the political arithmetic approach

This section looks at a view of education dominating educational policy and in turn research in the sociology of education since 1944. It sees education as linked to the economy in providing employment skills, to the class structure in providing social fluidity and movement, and to democracy by offering individual fulfilment and opportunity. As society develops industrially, technological progress imposes growing demands for talent developed by the education system, which coincides with western societies' democratic ideology based on individual freedom and opportunity. Behind this lies a Durkheimian vision of a society where differences in outcome are accepted because *all* have the opportunity to succeed (see section 1 above).

This notion is of a meritocratic society where the rewards someone gets in terms of status and money is determined by their efforts and abilities rather than what they have through the family they were born into. The process of a society moving towards a meritocracy is in three stages, as Michael Young outlines. (Please note that, rather confusingly, this is not the Michael FD Young featured in the key figure 3 section). Remember, this is a 'macro' theory in that it considers society as a whole rather than just a given individual:

1. During industrialisation, the link between peoples' social origins and their educational attainment weakens over time, as all human resources are developed to maximise economic productivity.
2. The link between educational attainment and class destination strengthens over time as ability and motivation become dominant criteria for selection to the best paid and most prestigious positions, and achievement prevails over 'ascription', that is, social status at birth
3. The link between class origins and destinations weakens over time, so society becomes more meritocratic.

As noted above this *Increasing Meritocratic Society* (IMS) view dominated social policy in the second half of the twentieth century, for example, underpinning the New Labour Government's view of education during its time in office (1997-2010). As suggested above it also dominated the sociology of education; Dale (2001) for instance called it the discipline's 'dominant project'. Work such as that of Halsey's (1980) *Origins and Destinations* study was highly influential to thinkers and policy makers alike, and remains so today. This approach is also known as Political Arithmetic. The model is so powerful because education itself is; the whole of the rational, enlightened, industrial society requires an educated population, and for society to perform to its full potential requires everyone to have an equal opportunity to benefit from it fully. So, has it worked? Is Britain a more meritocratic society now than it was before the major post-war educational reforms?

The short answer is yes, but not by much or to the extent most people would hope. Returning to the three point approach above, British research has failed to reveal any consistent movement to greater fluidity. As Halsey (1980: 205) suggested, '(i)f the hereditary curse upon English education is its organisation upon lines of social class, that would seem to be as true in the 1960s as it was in 1932 when Tawney wrote'. And this phenomenon continues since then, just look at league tables for school performance or the social background of those accessing the most prestigious universities today. In both cases a clear link exists between economic advantage and higher performance, so education has not significantly removed the effect of class origins on destinations.

That is not to say no-one was affected by this widening of opportunity, just that its effects were not as wide-ranging as anticipated or hoped for. Research showed that in the middle period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century education *did* become more important in terms of destinations. Generally those people moving up the social order did so through gaining educational qualifications, my own father for instance. My dad was born in 1940 to a working class family in the East End of London. His father worked on a production line in a factory, a dirty,



unpleasant and dangerous job using poisonous chemicals in a manufacturing process. My dad was the eldest of three sons, and did well enough in the end of primary school 11+ exam to go not to a grammar school but a technical school rather than the secondary modern his younger brothers later attended. My father left secondary school with sufficient qualifications to get an engineering apprenticeship, eventually becoming a senior engineer, a solidly middle class job. My two uncles both left school without qualifications and worked in manual jobs until they retired – one was a docker, the other a lorry driver.

#### Activity 6

Using the example of my father and his brothers, or people from your own family if you prefer, think about what life chances and opportunities education can offer (or deny!) people. Think too about the impact on the opportunities and life chances on later generations of the families concerned.

But stories such as my father's, of greater education leading to class mobility, are not necessarily the norm. Recently research shows presumptions of greater correlation between educational attainment and class destination do not hold for recent decades, that is, 'by the later twentieth century the part played by education in mediating class mobility was no longer growing but, rather, in decline' Jackson *et al.*, (2005: 6). Work contrasting two cohorts, born in 1958 and 1970 found the association between origins and destinations is stable across this period, so society had not become *more* meritocratic (as expected by the IMS thesis). For men and women the effects of education on the type of job they had are weaker in the latter period. Jackson *et al.*, (2005: 6) argued the effect of class is largely explained by the difficulties associated with mobility strategies 'from below'; people trying to be upwardly mobile face greater barriers than those trying not to move downwards; the 'glass floor', the invisible barrier stopping people falling down the social hierarchy is as impenetrable as the more familiar 'glass ceiling' preventing others rising higher. The 2009 government report (chaired by MP Alan Milburn, the ex-Minister for Health) on 'fair access to the professions' (Milburn, 2009) proves interesting reading in this context; it can easily be obtained through the internet. (See also section 5 on education and the middle classes for further information).

#### Key Figure 3 – Michael F.D. Young

A contemporary British writer, not to be confused with the Michael Young who wrote (with Peter Willmott) on changing family structures in post-war Britain and who also wrote *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, in which he described a (mythical) society where someone's ability and effort leads to social rewards; i.e. there are no barriers preventing equality of access to such a fair and socially just system.

Michael FD Young, a key figure in NSOE (see above) is based at the Institute of Education. Writing in the early 1970s he led the move from sociologists of education being primarily concerned with the uneven distribution of educational outcomes (see section 2 above) to one where the interplay of knowledge, the curriculum and power are to the fore. Young's recent work restates the importance of knowledge being taught in formal educational settings, rather than the process of education itself being left to solve a wide range of social ills.

### 3. From meritocracy to the marketplace – the social impact of post war changes in educational policy

Building on earlier work by Phillip Brown, Taylor *et al* (2005) subsequently identified four post-war phases of secondary school provision in the UK, especially England, each with particular characteristics, priorities and problems:

### 1. *The rise of mass secondary education (1944-1960s)*

- Compulsory secondary education introduced
- Plurality of provision
- Tripartite system
- State funding of faith schools
- Parents expressed preferences between schools eg single sex and co-educational, religious and secular
- Sought to give opportunities to academically capable working class children

However, although schools were meant to cross social boundaries, the middle classes were massively over-represented in grammar schools.

### 2. *Introduction and expansion of comprehensive education (late 1960s-early 1980s)*

- Shift from plurality towards homogeneous provision
- Part of wider welfare reforms eg social housing
- Aimed for greater *equality of opportunity*
- Provision varied nationally – mixed Local Education Authority (LEA) enthusiasm
- Geographical admission policies – ie school catchment areas

Theoretically, there was considerable choice between types of schools, especially in urban areas with their higher population density offering greater provision. However, middle class children were more likely to live near ex-grammar schools which tended to be located in wealthier areas, or were more willing to travel to 'better' schools, reducing the actual social mix sought by policy makers.

### 3. *Diversity through quasi-markets in education (early 1980s-late 1990s)*

- Neo-conservative attempts to confront comprehensive system's 'problems'
- State schools moved outside LEA control
- State/private partnership of some schools
- City Technology Colleges programme (1986)
- Grant Maintained (GM) schools established in 1988 Education Reform Act
- Some selectivity possible in GM schools

Again, problems in some areas, with many LEAs unable to meet demand at high performing GM schools. As previously, middle class children once more enjoyed the greatest opportunities.

### 4. *New Labour and school diversity (1997-2010)*

- Education *the* priority of New Labour Government, with 1997 Election Manifesto suggesting 'standards, not structures are the key to success'
- Mixture of choice and competition with new public accountability practices
- Attempts to end selectivity largely rhetorical e.g. *parental* ballots on abolition of 160-odd remaining grammar schools (i.e. not everyone in the local communities affected – those whose children were at the less prestigious secondary modern schools were not allowed a vote to abolish the system of selectivity for instance).
- *Some* policy shift from diversity to homogeneity of provision e.g. through the abolition of the Assisted Places Scheme that offered poorer working class children funding towards private education fees
- Intervention to pursue higher standards e.g. National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, expansion of specialist schools, support for city academies
- Some 'privatisation' e.g. transfer of 'failing' schools in era of increased surveillance to commercial organisations and out of LEA control
- Greater resourcing of disadvantaged communities e.g. Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities

Again, despite progress in tackling social exclusion, the middle classes tended to benefit under these policies. For example, recent changes in Higher Education (HE) funding

meaning many less well-off students struggle to finance university study, as you or your fellow students may well know from personal experience!

Whilst writing this chapter, the precise educational policy direction of the new Coalition Government elected in May 2010 is unclear, though moves are afoot to increase the number of academies (self-governing but publicly funded schools), and to make it easier to establish 'free-schools', those set up independently and funded by government but not regulated in the same manner. In my opinion neither of these policy directives will help equalise opportunities between working and middle class children, rather they will have the opposite effect. The UK's Equality and Human Rights Commission's October 2010 report *How Fair is Britain?* (EHRC, 2010) is a good place to start when looking at inequality and educational outcomes in terms of class, gender, sexuality, disability or ethnicity – again this can easily be obtained online.

It is not possible to include all of these elements in this chapter – a choice has to be made – so I have chosen to focus on class and gender issues. The major area of race and ethnicity in education has been touched on in the history of education chapter in this book and some key books (Banks, Panayi, Gilborn) are cited there.

#### Activity 7

List the arguments for and against introducing a policy such as that abolishing the Assisted Places Scheme referred to immediately above, the money from which was used to reduce primary class sizes in all state schools. How should a government balance policies that greatly benefit a small number of individuals against those benefitting a larger number to a lesser extent? This dilemma has lain at the heart of educational policy making decisions for the last century or more.

#### 4. Schools and gendered identity

Since the late 1990s the stress on the improved performance of girls in terms of exam results and progression to university has been allied to the view that the problem in education now revolves around boys' underachievement. This has led some to argue that problems associated with girls have now been dealt with, but this is interpreted by some as part of a backlash against feminism. This section looks at work questioning these assumptions. I will look at recent studies of femininity and masculinity in schools, to see what range of gendered identities are now readily available to children at school.

Three general themes emerge from the studies, namely that:

1. Certain forms of masculinity remain hegemonic, that is, dominant over other forms of masculinity and over femininity
2. Some forms of femininity are still difficult to achieve, especially forms associated with being clever
3. Even girls choosing transgressive forms of femininity (i.e. those deviating from 'the norm') generally reinforce the dominance of masculinity

The work cited below generally sees gender as 'performance' i.e. something needing to be 'achieved' and competently performed (Butler, 1988). It is based on the distinction between sex and gender. Sex is given by our biology (that is, we are born male or female), but gender is a social construction; this is another good example of the nature/nurture discussion referred to earlier. Boys and girls are actively engaged in the construction of their own gender identities, and what is deemed appropriate masculine or feminine behaviour in one context may be wholly inappropriate in another. In school, children are part of a gender 'regime', with a number of competing definitions of masculinity and femininity at play, and these revolve around behaviour inside and outside the classroom, subjects discussed in

formal and informal settings and how they present themselves in terms of dress, speech and body language etc.

The last decade or so has witnessed a large number of studies on this topic, and the most frequent conclusion is often one of hegemonic masculinity: it is better being a boy, an opinion shared by boys and girls alike. As Reay (2001:164) suggests, 'the contemporary orthodoxy that girls are doing better than boys masks the complex messiness of gender relations in which, despite girls better educational attainment, within this peer group, the prevalent view is that it's better being a boy'. Across many studies, white middle class masculinity is idealised, with academic middle class boys being the most popular in class. This is especially true if the boys concerned are thought to achieve academically without working hard, what Renold (2001) referred to as boys positioning themselves as 'knowers'. In her study, high achievement for both boys and girls was problematic, often involving 'crossing traditional gender boundaries and/or being positioned outside conventional modes of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' (p586).

#### Key Figure 4 – Diane Reay

Possibly the most prolific current British sociologist of education, Diane Reay, an ex-primary school teacher, is now at the University of Cambridge. She has worked with a number of other key writers, notably Stephen Ball amongst those discussed here. She used to co-convene the British Sociological Association's Education Study Group with Ball. A leading thinker and writer on Bourdieu (key figure 6), Reay's research usually revolves around issues of social justice, and she has written about class, ethnicity and gender inequalities across all sectors of education. She is on the editorial board of BJSE (see key journal) amongst several other publications. You can see a summary of her interests and access many of her recent publications via this link to her university homepage: <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/people/staff/reay/>

#### *Forms of femininity*

Reay (2001) wrote of 'Nice Girls' – middle class, hard-working and well-behaved, who 'exemplified the constraints of a gendered and classed discourse which afforded them the benefits of culture, taste and cleverness but little freedom' (p158). Nice girls were seen as a 'contaminating presence', excluded from social activities by boys and considered boring by other girls. This is a recurring theme, Renold (2001) wrote of 'Square Girls' for instance, whilst the anti-academic working class girls identified have been variously labelled 'Spice Girls' (Reay 2001) and 'Girlies' (Hey 1997).

#### *Forms of masculinity*

As with studies of femininity in primary schools, there have been recent studies of boys and masculinity, though the classic ones have tended to be of secondary schooling. The key one is Paul Willis' 1977 study of 'The Lads' – see key text box below.

#### Key Text 2

Paul Willis (1977) *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*  
Farnborough: Saxon House

This key book demonstrates how education performs its function of reproducing social inequality. It is interesting methodologically. Willis, broadly speaking a Marxist sociologist, rather than simply doing one-off interviews with his participants, followed a group of boys intensively for an extended period. The book details how a group of anti-school white working class boys 'the lads' subverted school rules to increase their enjoyment of time in school. Whilst they disliked school and its authoritarian structures intensely, they enjoyed the social activities it offered. Their whole approach was geared towards 'having a laff', and they enjoyed challenging teachers and other authority figures. They treated those outside their

group with disdain, particularly the hard-working group 'the ear 'oles', working class boys studying hard, in an attempt to achieve social mobility and a better life than their parents enjoyed. Notions of 'manual' work being masculine and 'mental' work feminine was clearly embedded in the Lads' world view, boys happy to leave school then join their fathers, uncles and other male relatives working in local factories. They considered work something to be endured rather than enjoyed and a central tenant of masculinity. Whilst they recognised similarities between work and school (see box on Bowles and Gintis and the Correspondence Principle) they were desperate to earn money at work, and used school like a training ground for practising subverting and challenging the authority structures they would face at work.

Mairtin Mac an Ghail (1994) undertook a later study of masculine forms in a socially mixed comprehensive school, contrasting Willis' study of a school in a predominantly working class area. He found four clear forms of masculinity amongst the boys:

- 'Real Englishmen'. Upper middle class boys who considered themselves as more intelligent than the teachers, and high in what Bourdieu (see key figure 6) would consider valuable cultural capital. They sought to achieve academically, but without being seen to work hard. Often studied subjects like drama and English which do not necessarily equate with traditional working class forms of masculinity.
- 'Academic achievers'. Hard-working boys from upper working or lower middle class backgrounds. Like Willis' 'ear 'oles', they saw education as means to achieving social mobility and a better paid, higher status job than their parents had.
- 'New Enterprisers'. These were also hard-working, but generally studying topics such as computing and business studies, neither of which were available when Willis was writing. They generally came from lower middle or upper working class families, and from white or Asian families
- 'Macho lads'. Working class boys with an anti-academic attitude, similar to Willis' 'Lads'. They too expressed their masculinity through primarily physical prowess.

A general conclusion from this range of studies is that different forms of masculinity and femininity are available to boys and girls in school, and that whilst they are usually associated with particular class groupings and ethnicities, each is difficult to achieve, requiring effort to 'perform'.

#### Activity 8

Think back to your schooling, both primary and secondary. How familiar are the characterisations identified by the various writers mentioned above – Willis, Reay and Mac an Ghail? Now consider your current college or university – are there such forms of gendered identity amongst students there too? This is an under-researched area of study, and perhaps one you could consider looking at if you have the chance to take an independent study or project on your course.

## 5. Education and the middle classes

This section looks at work reopening discussion of social reproduction (i.e., how people come to fill the roles they do in society) by focussing on ways that reproduction is 'enacted' by the daily activities of parents and children. The focus is on actions of middle class parents, the importance of which led writers including Bernstein (key figure 5) to argue the need of 'a sociology of the middle classes'.

### *The middle classes and social closure*

Early work on social closure (the ability to restrict access to desirable resources including high status, well paid jobs) drew on the work of Weber who, like Marx and Durkheim (see section 1 above), was another 'founder of sociology'. Weber wrote of how rationalisation and bureaucracy were key features of modern society, and the rational pursuit of profit a key feature of capitalism. Weber's 'ideal type' bureaucracy is the most rational type of organisation possible. Bureaucracy's impact was to make formal qualifications necessary to take up positions in businesses or government offices. As Giddens (1971: 158) suggests, 'recruitment is based upon demonstration of specialised competence via competitive examinations or the possession of diplomas or degrees giving evidence of appropriate qualifications'.

For Weber an individual's class situation equated to their market situation, as defined by property and skills. The advantage of this approach is it permits clearer understanding of the situation of middle class groups, whose position may be defined solely in terms of their skills or educational qualifications – doctors or university lecturers for instance. This section of the middle classes has no significant property or wealth to pass to its children, so transmitting their privileged position to their children is through ensuring they gain the necessary qualifications to stay ahead in the race for social privileges.

As outlined in section 2 above and throughout this chapter, the major response from sociology to class reproduction issues in education was focussing on working class failure, or on social and cultural reproduction. The former was criticised for 'blaming' working class children for their failure as a 'deficit' model. The latter focussed on social structure, leaving little place for individual's actions; i.e. structure is prioritised over agency.

### **Key Figure 5 – Basil Bernstein (1924-2000)**

The most influential British sociologist of education, not least because of the vast numbers of his ex-students going on to work within the discipline. His early thinking shaped the discipline of socio-linguistics through work on speech codes, whilst later writing on the structuring of knowledge and pedagogy is central to the sociology of education. He was, with Michael F.D. Young (see key figure 3), a key figure in the New Sociology of Education movement (see above), and was also perhaps the first leading sociologist to call for the sociological study of the middle classes, work that many others including notably Stephen Ball (see Key Text 1), continue to this day.

#### *Bernstein's language codes*

For ex-A Level Sociology students, Bernstein's work on speech codes is likely to be an area of familiarity. Bernstein's notion was that middle class children spoke in a more readily understood 'elaborate code' with a wider vocabulary than their 'restricted code'-speaking working class counterparts, whose language may lack comprehensibility to 'an outsider' unfamiliar with the slang or specific vocabulary. The code spoken (which is learnt from parents through socialisation) acts as a marker of social identity, but more importantly affects how people assign meaning and significance to the things they speak of. However, later in his career he distanced himself from this aspect of his early work, though that fact is not as well known.

#### *Bernstein's coding of knowledge*

Bernstein also wrote of how knowledge itself is 'classified' and 'framed', with classification referring to relations of power regulating relations between contexts or categories of knowledge, and framing referring to relations of control within the contexts or categories of knowledge. The school curriculum for instance offers clearly defined subjects such as maths or English with a strong classification or framing, and others such as humanities where different disciplines (e.g history, geography etc.) are integrated. The subject of 'education' is

also an example of this weaker classification and integration at HE level, as witnessed by the various chapters of this book!

More recently the question has been posed differently. Social mobility statistics show some middle class children, who in terms of tests do not seem especially bright, still manage to gain qualifications and middle class positions. Simple ability is insufficient in explaining their success; they draw on other assets than ability in achieving privilege. Similarly 'gifted' working class children will quite likely remain in that class. So the question now asked is 'how the middle classes pass on their advantaged position to their children' rather than 'how working class families breed failure'. Recent work has given us a much clearer view of the strategies employed by the middle classes to maintain social closure. Stephen Ball (see key text 1) also highlights strategies adopted to this end (e.g. 2002), whilst writers including Power *et al.* (2003), demonstrate how the process of transmitting social advantage is not always straightforward in practice.

As witnessed in section 3 above, in the post-war educational system, their social advantages were exploited in a number of ways; by ensuring their children gained entry to grammar schools (or buying private education if not), or by getting to the best comprehensive schools where there were no grammar schools. This period until the late 1970s was one of economic expansion, where developments in occupational structures meant there were plenty of middle class jobs for middle class children and for bright working class students (the 'ear 'oles' of Willis's study for instance).

Since the 1980s the context has altered in a manner threatening middle class advantage. Changes in the occupational structure have increased the insecurity of some middle class jobs, and a decade into the new millennium as I write this, the situation is worsening still. Comprehensive schools have increased the participation of children in education for longer, and higher education (HE) has expanded significantly over the last 25 years, meaning greater competition for both education and graduate-level jobs. When I went to university in 1984, only about 15% of young people did so, but now about three times that number do. Middle class parents needed to respond to this new context by devising strategies preserving their children's advantages. We will now focus upon HE to explore how they do so.

#### Activity 9

List the reasons why people choose the university and course they do. You can use your own experience or that of your friends if you wish. Once you have finished this, see how your list fits with the ideas in the next section.

## 6. HE choice: *habitus*, risk and the self

In recent decades in the UK and beyond, the issue of widening participation in HE has come to the fore. For instance, soon after coming to power in 1997, the New Labour Government set a target of 50% of young people experiencing HE by 2010, with several policy initiatives directed towards achieving this, including additional monies for universities, and the Education Maintenance Allowance paid to young people from poorer families staying in education beyond 16. This target was successfully met in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but missed in both England and Wales. However, large strides were taken in opening up universities to people whose families had never experienced it before. I was one of those benefitting from an earlier phase of this expansion in the mid-1980s, perhaps you have been too? A consequence of this move towards a system of mass higher education is a closer examination of the effects of social

class in shaping HE participation, since the expansion has largely occurred in the working and lower middle classes who traditionally did not continue in school beyond the earliest leaving age.

One area generating a lot of sociologically-inspired research is the process of university choice. This has been based not on the quantitative data government tends to deal with, but on qualitative work, often longitudinal in nature. This work tackles sociological concerns and develops concepts and theories to understand data generated through interviews, and it forms the basis of this section. Whilst writing this chapter, I am just starting a large three year project with colleagues following undergraduate students studying the same subjects at the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England (from the same city). Check the website: [www.pairedpeers.com](http://www.pairedpeers.com) and see what our methods and latest findings are.

### Key Text 3

A.H. Halsey, Hugh Lauder, Phil Brown and Amy Stuart Wells (eds) (1997) *Education, Culture, Economy and Society* Oxford: OUP

This is a heavyweight (over 800 pages) compendium containing more than 50 contributions from key thinkers and writers in the sociology of education. It contains an extensive editorial outlining the major theoretical approaches within the discipline, and an assessment of their contribution to understanding its changing social, cultural, economic and political context. The book is divided into six parts: *Education, culture and society*; *Education, the global economy and the labour market*; *The state and the restructuring of teachers' work*; *Politics, markets, and school effectiveness*; *Knowledge, curriculum, and cultural politics*; *Meritocracy and social exclusion*. Lauder, Brown and Halsey collaborated with another editor, Jo-Anne Dillabough, to produce a later edited collection with the same publisher in 2006, *Education, Globalization and Social Change* (nearly 1200 pages this time!), although whilst it is of a similar excellent standard, this later collection has yet to achieve the status of the earlier book. As with the earlier version, the individual chapters are rarely an easy read, but they are well worth persisting with!

### Theorising Choice

On the face of it, like much sociological study, the issue of whether to go to university, and, if so, what and where to study, is a simple issue facing young people in particular. 'Commonsense' would suggest it is a rational process of considering all available information; however, evidence suggests HE choice is more than this rational appraisal of abilities, matching attainment at school to available opportunities. Look back at the list of reasons for your HE choices above and think again about why you made the decisions you did, or why others might.

Ball et al. (2002) suggested decisions regarding HE choice were pragmatic and based on partial information located in the 'familiar' and the 'known'. They claim that family background, culture and life histories of the young people exerted enormous influence within the process, and decisions at best were only partly rational, being further influenced by feelings and emotions.

One aspect of 'non-rationality' is that students may not have the information needed to make rational decisions e.g. about the ranking of universities. Most students know there is a hierarchy of institutions, with for e.g. Oxford and Cambridge at the top and some of the so-called 'new' universities, (especially the ex-colleges of HE) at the bottom. For potential students who are more HE 'savvy', the choice of *which* university to go to is an important one. 'Lindsay' a mature student I interviewed for a research project had applied to study Law at both the local 'new' university and the nearby 'elite', highly selective one. A single mum living very close to the new university, 'Lindsay', whose children went to school just half a mile or so away, felt it would be really convenient to go there. The new university was also reputed to be excellent for mature students, and its law school was considered one of the country's best, with a higher quality of teaching than the older university. However, the new university itself was lower status than its



'elite' neighbour, and although she felt it would have caused difficulties doing so, had the elite university offered her a place she would have taken it:

*If they had offered I would have probably gone there, but I don't think I would have enjoyed it, I think I would have struggled, and...I probably would have had more chance of being a failure there than I would at [new university]...(however) any lawyer would say 'if you have the chance to go to [old university], go...you'll just do so much better with it on your cv'.*

However, unlike 'Lindsay', not all students know about the perceived hierarchies within universities, particularly if they come from families, schools and communities where people generally do not attend HE; for them the choice is often *whether* to go to university, rather than which one to attend. 'James' a working class student from another study exemplifies this:

*'I don't really know anybody who has completed university....so I suppose that's maybe why I don't know about...(their) reputations...or things like that, apart from what I was told by the prospectuses, the brochures, computers, what my teacher told me. I sort of worked it out as I went along really, played it by ear.*

James's decision was a more conscious one. Like many working class people he exhibits doubts, ambivalences and deliberate decision making. These are 'choice biographies'. For Ball *et al.* (2002:53), working class students in HE are 'lucky survivors', and 'in terms of educational trajectories and aspirations, they are already exceptions'.

### *Risk*

For many working class and other 'non-traditional' students, HE choice involves considering the potential risks of participation. Various studies of non-traditional learners identified a perception of significant risk as common amongst their working class, mature and/or ethnic minority student participants. HE was seen as boring, involving hard work, high stress and periods of poverty (Archer and Hutchings 2000). The most commonly identified risk was the possibility of failure, with interviewees in Archer and Hutchings' study for instance, assuming failure rates much higher than they actually were. The graduate job market was also commonly perceived as overcrowded; that is the case as I am writing this in 2010, but it was not back when their research was undertaken. Other risks include financial ones (i.e. will the outlay on tuition fees and loss of potential earnings for the period of study be recouped in a higher salary, and to relationships – 'will my friends, family, partners or community still accept me if I become a student?'. And, equally importantly, 'I want to change my life by going to university, will I still want the same people?'. See an article I co-wrote for a further discussion of this area (Brine and Waller, 2004).

### *Family and institutional habitus*

Bourdieu's (key figure 6) concepts of *habitus* and cultural capital have been employed to understand the choice processes described above. *Habitus* refers not merely to the external markers of social position, such as occupation, education and material wealth, but also to embodied dispositions (i.e. the beliefs and values that are an essential part of our make-up) generating thought and action. It is acquired through a gradual process of 'inculcation', that is, 'absorbed' from the family, community, school and other influences around an individual, mainly during childhood. *Habitus* gives a sense of how to respond, orients actions without strictly determining them, gives a 'feel for the game'. Diane Reay (key figure 4) called family *habitus* 'the deeply ingrained system of perspectives, experiences and predispositions family members share' (Reay 1998: 527). Actions (including HE choice as discussed above) therefore cannot be seen as a simple outcome of conscious calculation, but something far more nuanced and subtle.

### Key Figure 6 – Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

Bourdieu is an important thinker in a range of sociological areas, and quite possibly the most important ever sociologist of education. He proposed a number of key theories and ways of understanding and analysing the world that still influence the thinking of many sociologists of

education. His idea of *habitus* (see section 6 above) is a powerful one, referring not merely to our defining external markers of social position, such as occupation, education and material wealth, but to the factors influencing our internal thought processes. *Habitus* is acquired through socialisation by our family, community and other influencing factors including schools and peer groups around an individual. *Habitus* gives us a sense of how to 'naturally' respond to situations and directs our actions which can no longer for Bourdieu be seen as the result of rational calculation. Bourdieu's work on forms of 'capital' are equally influential. Of particular importance to his ideas is that of cultural capital– what you know. Everyone has extensive cultural capital, but some forms of it are of greater benefit than others in a given setting. Middle class children may well be taken to places like museums by their parents, an activity offering a form of cultural capital of direct benefit to learning in the classroom, and offering the middle class child an advantage in terms of formal learning. However, an encyclopaedic knowledge of popular music or football offers another form of cultural capital that may help the same middle class child integrate with other children in the playground. Both forms of cultural capital are valid, and both are valuable in different settings.

Schools and universities have an institutional *habitus*, independent of the student's family; 'perceptions and expectations of choices are constructed over time in relation to school friends and teachers' views and advice and learning experiences' (Ball *et al.*, 2002: 58). The effects of *habitus* and cultural capital are seen within the choice process. When looking at universities, students 'get a feel' for how they would enjoy being there. Students may reject universities that do not feel 'right', or where they do not feel 'at home'. In all narratives of rejection by university the pattern of student intake is the dominant factor. Ball and Reay talk of 'class aversion' to high status institutions by working class students, institutions not seen as 'for people like us'. This self-exclusion derives from feelings about what is 'right for me' rather than a rational calculation of what is best.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to offer an overview of some of the key issues in the sociology of education. As suggested previously, no such account can be definitive, and readers may feel some important areas have been neglected unnecessarily given the inclusion of others. Whilst little is included here on ethnicity and education for instance, or the specifics of differential attainment rates across various demographic cohorts, that is, different groups within the wider population. The idea here was to offer pointers as to where such information could be obtained, and I hope that is what this chapter has achieved.

## Websites

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education>

The education site of The Guardian newspaper, probably the best media coverage of key issues in education home and abroad. You can sign up for the useful weekly summary *The Cribsheet* from this site.

<http://socofed.com/>

The new (November 2010) sociology of education website edited by David Mellor and me, the BSA Education Study Group's co-convenors. The site is unofficial in that it is not endorsed by the BSA. This includes links to lots of other useful sites and opportunities to contribute to current topics via the message board.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology\\_of\\_education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology_of_education)

The Wikipedia site, with links to various writers and ideas. Be wary of the quality of the site's content though – the very nature of Wikipedia means it is open to anyone to put something there!

## Key Journals

### *British Journal of Sociology of Education (BJSE)*

Although not always easily accessible in terms of its content as it tends to be rather theoretical, this is the key journal for the sub-discipline of sociology of education. (See key journal box above for a more detailed outline).

### *British Educational Research Journal (BERJ)*

Not strictly sociological as such, but the journal of the *British Educational Research Association*, and as such a useful indicator of key themes and issues for academics and educational practitioners alike.

### *Gender and Education*

The journal of the *Gender and Education Association*. This has a more 'international' flavour than BERJ, and features articles covering issues including social class, sexuality, mature students and identity as well as those indicated by the title.

## Further Research

Think of some of the issues raised in this chapter and how they may form the basis for your own research project. You could for instance consider the issue of gender identities amongst HE students, the educational biography of your own family members, including how it may have been affected by issues like social class, or how the twin notions of 'social structure' and 'agency' have impacted on the educational opportunities of someone you know. Enjoy it!

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