



International School

## Chapter 4: Education

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### 4.3 Influences on the curriculum



# Key concepts in 4.2

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- **KC 1 – Inequality and opportunity**
- **KC 2 – Power, control and resistance**
- KC3 – Social change and development
- KC4 – Socialisation, culture and identity
- KC5 – Structure and human agency



**The key concepts for Cambridge International AS & A Level Sociology**





# The social construction of knowledge

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- Weber (1922): all societies develop beliefs about what 'is worthy of being known'. This suggests that knowledge is not something that is simply 'out there', waiting to be discovered, taught and learnt.
- Knowledge and 'truth' are created by members of society in particular social situations and group settings.

Schools as modern institutions originally developed to meet the needs and requirements of modern industrial societies.





# Factors influencing the content of the curriculum

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- Marxists: Schools are places where particular relations of power and control flow from the nature of economic relationships in capitalist societies.
- Althusser - cultural reproduction, education as ideological state apparatus
- Cultural institutions are seen as instruments of oppression and domination of through the power they have over what people learn and how they learn it.
- Through formal education
- Access to knowledge is restricted through control of the curriculum.
- Different levels of knowledge - reinforced through testing.
- Academic knowledge has more value than practical knowledge
- Some forms of knowledge are more valid than others
- Children must learn to accept authority
- Commodification - knowledge has economic value. -achieved through qualifications





# Factors influencing the content of the curriculum

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Young (1971): educational knowledge always has an ideological dimension. Knowledge is socially constructed from a particular viewpoint and for a particular purpose. How school are organised reflects the idea that knowledge can be:

- Categoricalised in terms of 'subjects' that have their own unique body of knowledge.
- Presented in particular ways through a formal curriculum.
- Validated through examination.

Formal school curriculum reflects the interests of ruling class in capitalist societies in the way that knowledge is:

- Selected: which subjects appear on the curriculum and the content of each subject
- Stratified within the classroom, school and society. Theoretical vs practical knowledge. Academic and vocational subjects are separated by curriculum





# Factors influencing the content of the curriculum

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## Demands of the economy

- Functionalists: education system has a role of producing the right number of trained and qualified workers that economy needs

## Gender

- Different subjects are associated with males (masculinity) and females (femininity)
- Teachers tend to teach different material within the subject, or teach it differently, depending on whether they are teaching boys or girls or both.



# The ethnocentric curriculum

**Ethnocentric curriculum:** school curriculum based on the cultural norms, values, beliefs and history of a single ethnic group. In a multicultural society, an ethnocentric curriculum is likely to favour the majority ethnicity.





# The gendered curriculum

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For feminists, the way economies are structured sends messages to students about how different occupations are gendered.

- Girls vs boys choice of subjects

**Gendered curriculum:** a situation in which males and females choose, or are given, different subject studies.

Differences in subject choice at school translates into differences at undergraduate level. **Self and Zealey (2007):**

- More women than men studied subjects linked to medicine
- More men than women studied business and administrative services...







# The gendered curriculum

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**The Equal Opportunities Commission (2007), UK:** girls consistently outperform boys at all levels of the UK education system - educational achievement doesn't help women to get well-paid jobs.

**Gender stereotyping:** the practice of assigning particular characteristics to whole gender groups, such as males and females, regardless of their individual differences.

**Warrington and Younger (2000):** male and female career aspirations often reflect traditional gender stereotypes, such as

- Girls - childcare, nursing, hairdressing and secretarial
- Boys - computing, accountancy, plumbing





# The gendered curriculum

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Gender stereotyping is most fully built in the school curriculum in vocational education and work-based training. **Mackenzie's (1997) study** found that:

- 45% of girls were allocated to caring placements, but these did not always reflect their choices
- Boys who didn't get their preferred placement tended to be allocated to neutral or traditional male occupations.
- Girls who were unsuccessful in their preferred placements were allocated to traditionally female occupations.

**Kampmeier (2004):** greater stereotyping in vocational education, academic education doesn't guarantee a lack of stereotyping and segregation.

Gender segregation didn't reduce in European labour market - the role vocational education is to reinforce gender and class stereotypes and divisions





# The gendered curriculum

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**Feminists:** traditional assumptions about masculinity and femininity continue to influence both family and work relationships in areas such as:

- Textbooks and stereotyping: males appear more frequently and more likely to be shown in active rather than passive roles. **Best (1992):** pre-school texts designed to develop reading skills remain populated by sexist assumptions and stereotypes.
- Subject hierarchies: both students and teachers appreciate that some subjects are more important than others. Gender hierarchies these subject hierarchies with males choosing higher-status subjects.

**Norman et al. (1988):** teacher expectations, especially in early-years schooling, emphasise female roles related to the mother/carer.





# Hidden curriculum

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**Hidden curriculum:** the things that students learn through the process of attending school. These may be both positive, such as how to make and keep friends, and negative, such as learning the consequences of not obeying adult authority.

**Informal education:** the things that students learn through the process of attending school that are not part of the formal curriculum. These include ideas about the value of learning, norms of behaviour, within the school, attitudes to authority and so on.

Two dimensions of messages in hidden curriculum:

- Intended consequences - the things teachers do (encourage and discourage certain values)
- Unintended consequences - messages students receive through the teaching and learning process. E.g. messages relating to beliefs about ability: 'natural' or the product of 'hard work'.





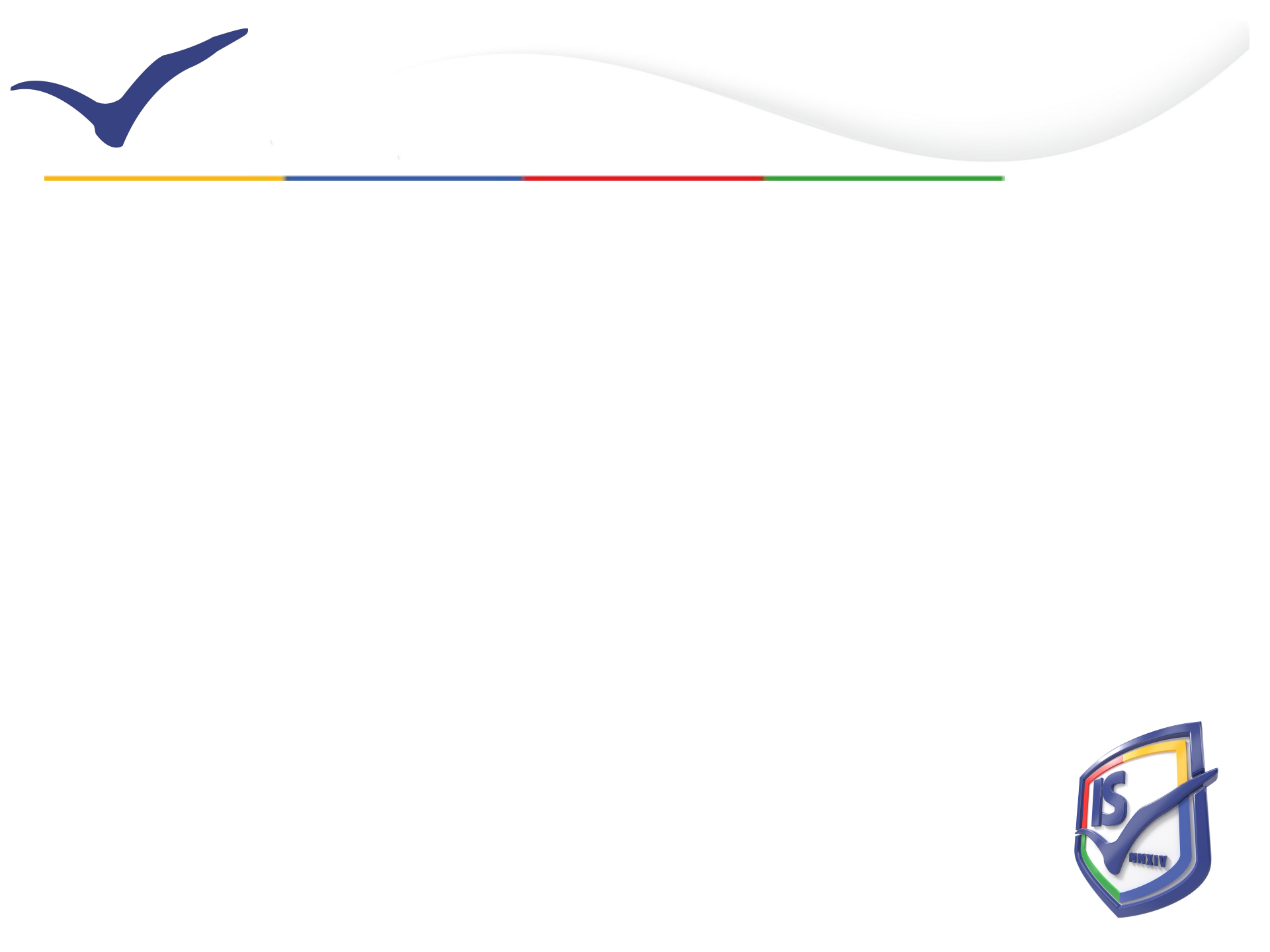
# Hidden curriculum

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Messages transmitted within schools as part of hidden curriculum fall into two broad categories:

1. Socialisation messages - what is required from students if they are to succeed in education
  - a. Individualism: learning should not be shared
  - b. Competition: demonstrate that you are better than your peers
  - c. Knowledge: to pass exams, students must conform to what the teachers present as valid knowledge
2. Status messages - what students develop about their 'worth'
  - a. The type of school child attends
  - b. Segregating children into different streams, bands and sets
  - c. The idea that academic and vocational subjects have different statuses







# The curriculum and the concept of cultural capital

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- **Traditional Marxists:** economic capital is the key of social and economic inequalities
- Neo-Marxists, such as **Bourdieu:** cultural capital provides significant mechanism for cultural reproduction that is carried out by the education system.
- **Otsuka (2005):** Indo-Fijian culture (high value on education), ethnic Fijian culture has a greater communal orientation (becoming good member of community)
- **Crozier et al. (2004):** middle-class parents are able and willing to invest more time, money and effort in their children's education
- Bourdieu's concept of **habitus**
  - Schools are 'natural habitat' of the middle and upper classes
  - Working-class children experience **culture clash**

