



International School

## Chapter 4: Education

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### 4.2 Education and social mobility



# 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**





# Equal opportunity and the idea of meritocracy

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**Social mobility:** the ability to move up or down the class structure.

- The ways to measure relative social mobility:
  - Inter-generational mobility
  - Intra-generational mobility
- Individual's position in society is not fixed, but earned on the basis of educational qualifications - meritocracies.
- Functionalists - education systems are bridge between the family and the economy
  - Social mobility is functionally necessary - The occupational and social structure
  - Upward mobility is earned through demonstrations of individual merit





# Equal opportunity and the idea of meritocracy

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- Mass education - differentiation in objective ways
- Rewards are earned through individual abilities and efforts in education system  
- such system are competitive, but competition must be based on equal opportunities.



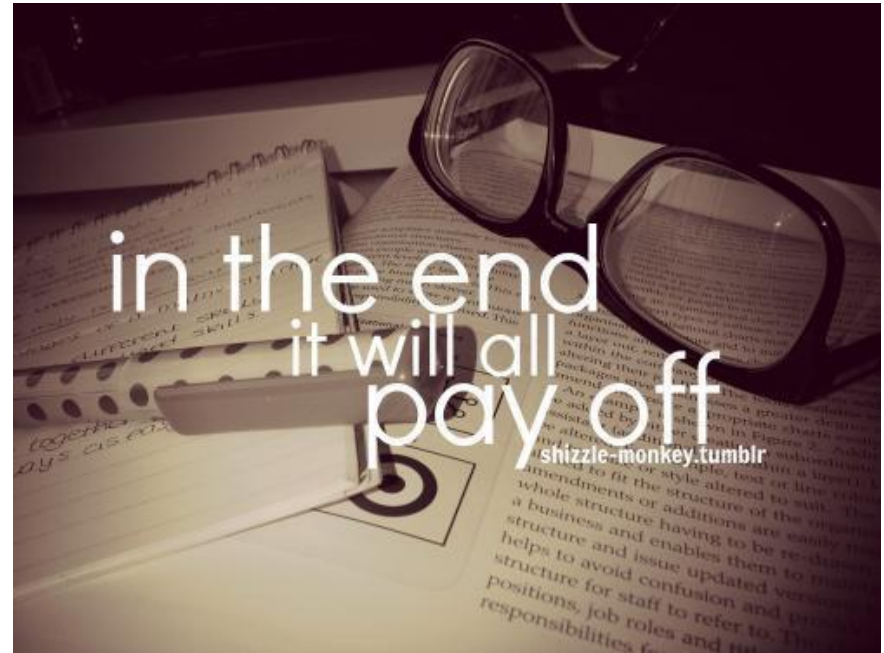
Meritocratic systems involve inequalities in outcome

- Objective tests that everyone has an equal opportunity to take and pass.
- Role allocation system - most intellectually able and talented achieve work roles that the highest rewards in terms of income, power and status.



# Equal opportunity and the idea of meritocracy

- **Harris (2005):** social mobility develops out of the way people are encouraged to perform different roles, some of which are more important, skilled and difficult to learn than others. The promise of higher levels of status, income and job satisfaction by working for educational qualifications represent necessary motivations and rewards.



- **Davis and Moore:** the inequalities that flow through social mobility represent 'an unconsciously evolved device by which societies ensure the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified people'.



# The extent to which education systems are meritocratic today

- **Paterson and Iannelli (2005):** in Scotland, education and acquisition of educational qualifications - means through which middle-class families pass their economic and social advantage to their children.
- **Bowels and Gintis:** education systems are characterised by 'sponsored mobility'.

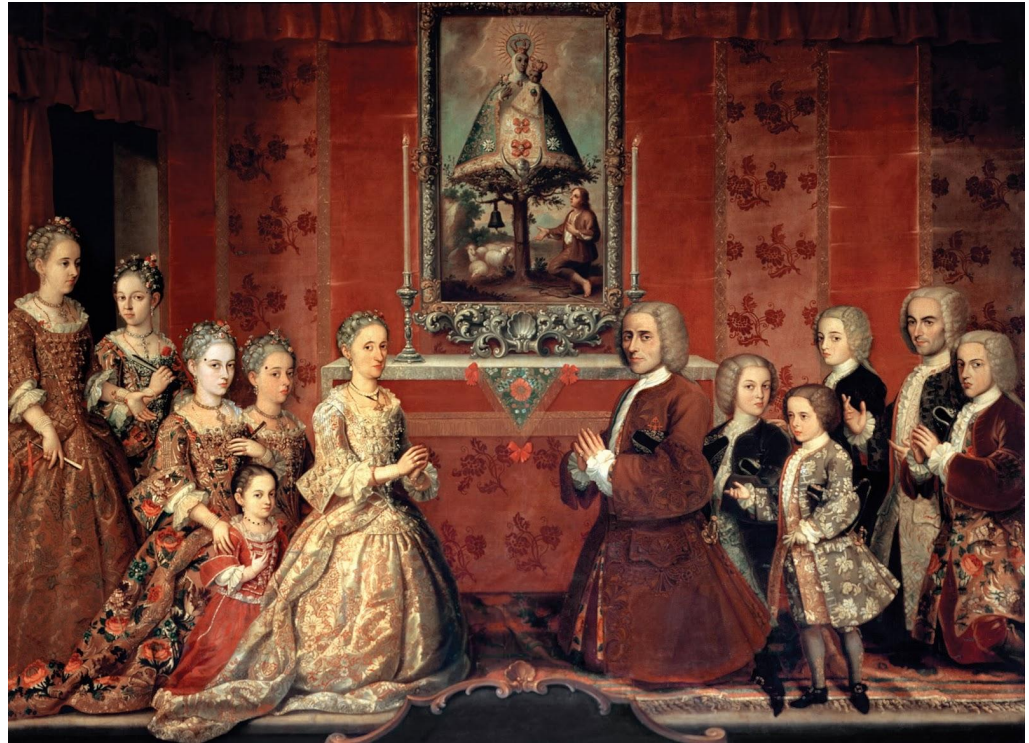


<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/27/social-mobility-good-education>



# The extent to which education systems are meritocratic today

- **Breen (1997):** competition occurs at the lower levels of society, while higher social levels are marked by social closure which is related to **social capital**.



**Social capital:** the extent to which people are connected to social networks (who you know) and how this can be used to individual's advantage.





# The extent to which education systems are meritocratic today

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- **Althusser:** reproduction of capitalism involves each new generation being taught the skills, knowledge and ideas required in the workplace.
  - School do not select, allocate differentiate children in the interest of society
  - Their role is to help children of the ruling class to achieve the levels of education required to follow in their parents' footsteps.
  - Most people - 'just enough', few 'more than enough'
- **Aldridge (2004):** social closure causes upward intra-generational social mobility to decline.
  - Children get better educational qualifications than their grandparents, but the economic value of these qualifications declines.





# The extent to which education systems are meritocratic today

- **Bowels and Gintis (1976, 2002):** cultural reproduction is secured through correspondence between workplace and educational inequality. Education is not so much test of ability as a test of conformity.
- **Traditional Marxists:** education is a tool used by ruling class to maintain its domination and control.
- **Neo-Marxists:** relationship between education and cultural reproduction is based on legitimate leadership with the 'consent' of the led.
  - Ruling-class control of the media
  - Overcoming barriers - accepting values the system is based on.

Belief in school meritocracy as a system-justifying tool for low status students



# The extent to which education systems are meritocratic today

- Willis's study of working class 'lads'.

Use the internet to research the educational background of the top politicians, business people and celebrities in your society. Find out which schools and other institutions they attended.

What does your research tell you about the relationship between education and social mobility?





## The importance of education influencing life chances, and the consequences of educational underachievement for the individual and for society

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- **New Right:** educational success or failure results from the different choices people make. **Saunders (1996):** 'winners and losers'

**Marketisation:** process by which the supply and consumption of educational goods and services are opened up to private and public competition.

**Parentocracy:** parents with wealth and resources are able to influence their child's education, so that achievement is the result of the influence rather than of the child's ability and efforts.

**Cultural capital:** anything in the individual's cultural background that gives them advantages over others. Higher educational qualifications, for example, are a form of cultural capital the individual tries to exchange for advantages in the workplace, such as highly paid, highly skilled jobs.





## Evidence and arguments about the links between education and social mobility

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- **Shepherd and Rogers (2012)** - analysis of Christian faith schools that allowed to select students on the basis of parental faith.
  - Less working-class students
  - Consumer choice is available to those who have the money
- Selection through interview and test - middle-class parents
- **Saunders (1996)**: middle-class students are more intelligent

