

Ethnicity

& Educational Achievement

The Facts

Students from some minority ethnic groups

(particularly African-Caribbean, Pakistani & Bangladeshi students) :

- Often have below average reading ability
- Are less likely to achieve high GCSE grades
- African-Caribbean males are more likely to be labelled as special needs – learning difficulties, EBD
- Are over-represented in lower streams & sets
- Are more likely to leave school without qualifications

- Are less likely to stay in education post-16
- Are more likely to study vocational than academic courses
- Are less likely to gain A-levels and go to university

There are differences between minority ethnic groups – children from Indian & Chinese ethnic groups tend to achieve more highly than average

Social class & ethnicity

- Much of the difference in the achievement of children from different ethnic groups can be accounted for by social class:
 - Children from Indian and Chinese ethnic groups are more likely to be from a middle class background
 - children of Pakistani & African-Caribbean origin are more likely to be from working class backgrounds

- Social class factors affecting educational achievement contribute to educational differences between ethnic groups
 - Swann Report, Jones (1993), Drew (1995) (see Haralambos 5th ed, p.874)

However:

- Ofsted (2000) – *“when comparing pupils with similar class backgrounds there are still marked inequalities of attainment between different ethnic groups.”*

Other factors

■ Language

- English / Standard English may not be main language at home
- Swann Report (1985) – may hold some children back but not majority

■ Intelligence

- Jensen (1973), Eysenck (1971) – differences in achievement due to differences in IQ
- BUT – Pilkington (1997) – is “race” a meaningful concept?
- Swann Report – no significant differences

■ Family Life

- Degree of parental support & aspiration
 - Driver & Ballard (1981)
- Family structure – West Indian v. Asian
- Swann Report (1985), Pilkington (1997) – real cultural differences
- Contested by – Pryce (1979), Rex & Tomlinson (1979)

Caution!

- Pilkington (1997) – cultural explanations should be approached with caution
 - Boundaries between groups are fuzzy
 - Danger of ethnocentrism
 - Distracts from failings in education system

Further Reading

- Introducing Sociology for AS Level,
pp.239-242
- Sociology in Focus, pp.308-315
- Sociology Themes & Perspectives,
pp.777-784