

Chapter 2 Education

Topic 1 Class differences in achievement (1) external factors

Page 24

Activity: Research

Investigating cultural capital

Learning objectives

At the end of this activity you should be able to:

- Identify the impact cultural capital on the education of different social classes.
- Analyse results of your primary research to draw conclusions about the impact of cultural capital on the education of different social classes.
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of using questionnaires to study the impact of cultural capital on the educational achievement of different social classes.

A. Using pages 23-24 of your textbook and the guidance notes below, as a whole class design a questionnaire to investigate cultural capital and educational achievement.

Your hypothesis will be: 'Cultural capital determines the achievement level of GCSE students'.

You will score the students on (i) their educational achievement and (ii) their cultural capital in order to discover if a correlation exists between the two. You will also find out about their parents' level of education, in order to test Sullivan's finding (page 24) that for those students with the same level of cultural capital, middle-class students do better.

Guidance notes

1. Ask how many GCSEs and what grades your respondents have. This will be your measure of educational achievement. Ensure they give you all their qualifications to get an accurate total.
Use the following system: A* = 8 points; A = 7 points; B = 6 points; C = 5 points; D = 4 points; E = 3 points; F = 2 points; G = 1 point.
 2. Include a question that will ask about their parents' educational level.
 3. Include a series of questions with scores to determine their cultural capital. These will use a scale with a maximum of 5 and minimum of zero. The questions should ask:
 - a. What do they like to read? Award high scores for complex fiction, lower scores for magazines.
 - b. What types of television programmes do they watch? Higher scores for documentaries, lower scores for soap operas or reality TV.
 - c. How often do they visit art galleries and museums? Award higher scores for more frequent visits.
 - d. How often do they go to the theatre? Award higher scores for more frequent visits. These questions will give a maximum score of 20 and a minimum of zero. The higher the result, the greater their cultural capital.
- B. Distribute the questionnaire to students in your school/college who have completed their GCSEs. Make sure you get at least 50 results for the whole class.
- C. Combine and summarise your results as a group. Plot a graph of educational achievement against cultural capital. Does the data show a correlation?

- D. What conclusions can you draw about the impact of cultural capital on educational achievement in your school /college?
- E. How do your conclusions compare with the research findings described in this topic?
- F. Now rank the results in order of cultural capital score. Are there differences in the achievement scores for those of the same cultural capital score? If this is the case, compare the levels of education of the parents. Do your findings agree with those of Sullivan?
- G. Did you encounter any problems with your research?
- H. From your experience of doing this activity, write a brief summary of the strengths and limitations of using questionnaires to study the impact of cultural capital on the educational achievement of different social classes.