Equalising Educational Opportunities
Improving the achievement of learners from low socio-economic status backgrounds

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Centrifugal force (away from centre)                  Centripetal force (toward the centre)
Socio-economic status (SES) refers to an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on:

- income
- education
- occupation

Poverty is a subset of SES
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Theories of distributive justice:
• strict egalitarianism
• libertarianism
• utilitarianism
• Kant’s rationally determined moral principles
• Rawls’s difference principle
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Economic arguments for narrowing the gap between low income students and the rest

- US GDP would be $400-670 billion higher (=3-5% of GDP)
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• Wilkinson and Pickett’s 2010 book, *The Spirit Level*: the bigger the income gap in a country, the greater the number and degree of social problems encountered, including poor educational achievement
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Economic arguments for narrowing the gap between low income students and the rest

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- Wilkinson and Pickett’s 2010 book, *The Spirit Level*: the bigger the income gap in a country, the greater the number and degree of social problems encountered, including poor educational achievement
- Thomas Piketty *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*: main driver of inequality is the tendency for returns on capital to exceed the rate of economic growth
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Pierre Bourdieu

- Children who come from a social class whose cultural capital differs from the prevailing norms and expectations of schools can be seriously disadvantaged.
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- Children who come from a social class whose cultural capital differs from the prevailing norms and expectations of schools can be seriously disadvantaged.
- Teachers valorise middle-class rather than working-class cultural capital, and perceive the latter as deficient.
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Children brought up in low-SES homes often
• lack language and communication skills
• have differential access to books, internet and private tutoring
• have poor diet
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Their parents may
• have low aspirations for their children’s achievement
• provide inadequate role models for their children
• have low involvement in school activities
• lack knowledge of how to make their way around educational system
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SES and achievement

- UK: social class remains the strongest predictor of educational achievement
- OECD data: students from low SES backgrounds are twice as likely to be low performers
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SES and achievement
- UK: social class remains the strongest predictor of educational achievement
- OECD data: students from low SES backgrounds are twice as likely to be low performers
- Hattie: contribution of SES to student achievement: effect size of 0.57
- Low achievement in schools where most from low-SES backgrounds
- Ability grouping disadvantages low-SES children
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Children exposed to poverty
• have poorer cognitive outcomes
• are at higher risk for antisocial behaviors and mental disorders
• Poverty in early childhood has a negative impact on brain development at school age
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An ecological perspective on SES
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Caveats

• Students from similar SES backgrounds are heterogeneous: some are resilient

• Schools serving low-SES communities are heterogeneous.

• Most educational programmes that are beneficial for students from low-SES backgrounds are beneficial for all students.

• Some students from high-SES backgrounds may have educational needs similar to those from low-SES backgrounds

• Addressing SES issues in education should form part of wider societal approaches, particularly measures to address income inequality.
SES interacts with ethnicity and gender to influence achievement

Strand (2014):
Lowest achieving groups in UK were
• low-SES Black Caribbean boys
• low SES White British boys
• low SES White British girls
SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS

Reduce poverty
- adjust taxation rates
- provide welfare benefits
- provide housing subsidies
- provide paid parental leave
- make quality child support arrangements
- manage the costs of childcare and health care
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SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS II
Provide high quality teachers
• appropriate teacher education
• mentoring for novice teachers
• supportive working conditions
• professional development
• financial and career incentives
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SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS III

Employ appropriate funding strategies
- Use weighted funding formula
- Funding should be:
  - transparent
  - adequate
  - efficient
  - equitable (horizontal and vertical)
  - robust
  - free from unintended consequences
SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS IV
Provide free or subsidized meals
Evidence that they improve
• attendance
• concentration
• memory
• mood
• test scores
SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS V
Introduce full-service schools
integrate education, medical, social and/or human services on single campus
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SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS VI
Develop wraparound services
Focus on early intervention
(a) from birth through preschool
(b) early identification and remediation for children not making adequate progress or showing signs of behaviour difficulties
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SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS VIII
Reduce class size – if accompanied by evidence-based measures
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SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS IX
Build smaller schools
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SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS X
Manage school choice to avoid de facto segregation
SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS X
Eliminate grade repetition
SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS XI
Avoid early tracking/streaming of students
SYSTEM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS XII
Design alternative, equivalent upper secondary pathways
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SCHOOL-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS

Develop and sustain effective school leadership
SCHOOL-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS II
Encourage family engagement
SCHOOL-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS III
Develop parent training programmes
(a) Parent Management Training
(b) Incredible Years
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SCHOOL-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS IV
Reflect on school values and practices
- eliminate biases and prejudices
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SCHOOL-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS V
Address any anti-school subcultures
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SCHOOL-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS VI

Develop and maintain rigorous monitoring systems
- careful monitoring
- tailored interventions
SCHOOL-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS VII
Implement School-wide Positive Behaviour Support programme
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SCHOOL-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS VIII
Implement ICT access policies
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SCHOOL-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS IX
Avoid streaming and ability grouping
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CLASSROOM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS

Follow universal-design principles with curriculum
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CLASSROOM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS II
Set high, but realistic, expectations
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CLASSROOM-LEVEL ACCOMMODATIONS III
Employ evidence-based teaching strategies