
SOCIAL CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN MALTA*

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The promise that education holds out for many parents is that through a sustained effort and investment in school work on the part of their children, these can hope for a better quality of life than they themselves had. One of the predominant concerns of educational theory and research in the last four decades has been that schooling, rather than bringing about social equality and equity, serves to reproduce privilege from one generation to the next. This problem was also brought up at a political level when in the 1950s and 1960s in such countries as the USA, the UK, Sweden and Australia the prevalent belief was that schools and education could bring about an open society where effort and ability rather than accidents of birth would determine one's occupational future. Citizens would therefore move upwards or downwards socially according to their success at school rather than because of inherited privilege. It was for this reason that in those countries by the 1960s - and in Malta in the 1970s - schools were restructured through the introduction of comprehensivization

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and the removal of streaming and tracking to enhance an 'open' school system.¹

As Lee notes, such a liberal social democratic belief that education can 'equalize conditions and opportunities and even remove the basis of class'² has persisted up to the present despite a large number of studies which prove that one's social origins rather than one's abilities determine to a greater or lesser degree one's educational and occupational futures. While it is undeniably true that more highly educated persons are more likely to hold higher occupational positions, and in times of high unemployment, to get, keep and progress in a job, it is just as true that schools have little effect in bringing about greater equality in society. This is because, as influential studies such as the Coleman Report³, the path model studies of Blau and Duncan⁴, and the research by Jencks and his colleagues⁵ have shown, there is clearly a distinct pattern in the identity of the groups who do actually achieve educational - and eventually occupational - success. These groups are identified by their class origins, their gender and their race and/or ethnicity. Fitzgerald, drawing together the findings of a large number of studies, concludes in this regard that even when these groups do achieve, at great costs, educational success, they are generally unable to translate this into financial returns.⁶ It is not surprising that current thinking about the link between education and inequality - based on class, gender, or race and ethnicity - does not show the optimism

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- ¹ SAHA, L., 'Social Mobility Versus Social Reproduction: Paradigms and Politics in the Sociology of Education', *New Education*, vol .9 no .1 & 2 (1987) p.16.
- ² LEE, J., 'Social Class and Schooling', in COLE, M. (ed.), *The Social Contexts of Schooling*, (Falmer Press, Lewes 1989) p.90.
- ³ COLEMAN, J.S. et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1969).
- ⁴ BLAU, P.M. & DUNCAN, O.D., *The American Occupational Structure*, (Wiley, New York 1967).
- ⁵ JENCKS, C. et al., *Inequality*, (Allen Lane, London 1973).
- ⁶ FITZGERALD, L., 'On the Essential Relations Between Education and Work', *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, vol.28, (1986) pp. 254-284.

ebullient in the fifties and sixties which saw schooling as a panacea for many social ills. The belief today is that if equality is to be achieved, it will not be through indirect means such as educational reforms. Rather, 'equality [can] only come about by direct policy measures, for example, direct redistribution of wealth'.⁷

This paper traces the boundaries of the debate about class and educational achievement, highlighting the relevant issues by drawing on a variety of empirical research and locating Maltese educational practices within the contours of this debate. The issue of 'social class' is a very complex one indeed, and the reader is referred to another paper by the present author for a detailed introduction to class and a critical account of some of the debates about its manifestation in Malta.⁸ It is very rare indeed that researchers in education refer to 'class' in an elaborate manner as indicated in that paper, where both Marxist and Weberian traditions are drawn upon. Often occupational groupings - generally taking into consideration only the father's occupation of the students involved in the study - are referred to. In spite of this, even when class is interpreted in this restricted sense - as in the occupational groupings provided by the Maltese Census of 1985 for instance - Mortimore and Mortimore argue that:

social class still seems to measure something and is the best tool we have for seeing if there are important group differences in achievement in various aspects of our society.⁹

It is immediately clear that a major relationship between class and education is the question of disparate achievement. In other words, if, as intimated above and as asserted by Vassallo¹⁰ among

⁷ SAHA, L., 'Social Mobility...', op. cit., p.17; see also LEVIN, H.M., 'The Dilemma of Comprehensive Secondary School Reforms in Western Europe', *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 22 (1978).

⁸ SULTANA, R.G., 'Sociological Perspectives on Class in Malta', *Economic and Social Studies*, vol. 5, (1989/1990) pp. 1-24.

⁹ MORTIMORE, P. & MORTIMORE, J., 'Education and Social Class', in ROGERS, R.(ed.), *Education and Social Class*, (Falmer Press, Lewes 1986) p.2.

¹⁰ VASSALLO, M., *From Lordship to Stewardship: Religion and Social Change in Malta*, (Mouton, The Hague 1979).

others, education leads to social mobility in an 'open society', i.e. education breaks down the 'structuration' between classes, then we need to discover if there emerge any distinct patterns as to who achieves and succeeds at school and who does not. This leads to a second major consideration with regards for the relationship between class and education: if there are distinct class patterns of success and failure, why is this so and how does formal schooling reproduce or transform inequitable class structures?

CLASS, EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Miliband concludes his class analysis by referring to the pyramidal structure of modern class societies¹¹, arguing that

the people located at different points of the pyramid are not totally immobile: there is some movement, fairly limited, upwards, and some movement downwards, and the different levels of the pyramid are not separated by rigid lines of division. But neither social mobility nor blurred boundaries change the fact that the pyramid is a hard solid reality and that the differences between the class situated at the upper levels of the pyramid, and the classes situated at its lowest levels are very great indeed in terms of wealth, income, power, responsibility, style and quality of life and everything else that makes up the texture of existence.¹²

¹¹ HABERMAS [in DEWS, P(ed.), *Habermas: Autonomy and Solidarity*, (Verso, London 1986), p.42], provides a useful definition of modern class societies which, he argues, prevail in the East as in the West. In modern class societies, the state and the economy assume distinct forms. 'Class structures persist as long as the means of production and socially useful labour-power are deployed according to preferences' which reflect sectional interests in society. At any rate they do not express the universal interests of the population as a whole, or the compromises the population might be prepared to make. In state-socialist societies the bureaucratic élites which control the means of production form an opaque, complex system. This system is essentially authoritarian and has shown itself to be impervious to democratic decision-making processes with regard to the priorities of society as a whole. In late capitalist societies the power structures are even less transparent. To the extent to which the priorities of society take place in an unplanned way, as the secondary consequences of the strategies of private enterprise, class structures survive here too. Control over the means of production by political elites, on the one hand, and by private privilege on the other, are variant forms of class relations at the stage of development reached by modern societies.

¹² MILIBAND, R., 'Class Analysis', in GIDDENS, A. & TURNER, J.(eds), *Social Theory Today*, (Polity Press, Cambridge 1987) p.333.

Now, our task is to consider in some detail the role of education in strengthening, loosening or changing these class boundaries, and hence whether education in Malta is a transformative or reproductive force.

It needs to be said at the outset that there has been no full-scale study carried out locally to ascertain the extent of social mobility - upwards and downwards - or the relationship between class, educational achievement and social mobility. It goes without saying that this kind of 'origins and destinations' type of research, typical of Goldthorpe & Hope¹³ and Halsey, Heath & Ridge¹⁴ respectively, is urgently required. In the absence of that, however, it is possible to refer to a number of studies which have tackled various educational aspects - directly or at a tangent to the issues in question - and to analyse whether or not education has a tendency of acting as an equalizing force. I will do this immediately after reviewing the major findings by foreign researchers on the relationship between class, educational achievement and social mobility.

A 'Political Arithmetic' Approach: A large number of studies¹⁵ were carried out in the United Kingdom, the U.S.A. and other

¹³ GOLDTHORPE, J.H. & HOPE, K., *The Social Grading of Occupations: A New Approach and Scale*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1974).

¹⁴ HALSEY, A., HEATH, A. & RIDGE, J., *Origins and Destinations*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1980).

¹⁵ Among such studies, carried out before and after Kelsall and Kelsall's report [KELSALL, R. & KELSALL, H., *Social Disadvantage and Educational Opportunity*, (Rinehart and Winston Holt, London 1971)], see GLASS, D.V., *Social Mobility in Britain*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1954); WESTERGAARD, J. & LITTLE, A., 'The Trend of Class Differentials in Educational Opportunity', *British Journal of Sociology*, 15 (1964); BRONFENBRENNER, U., 'The Psychological Costs of Quality and Equality in Education', in ALLEN, W. (ed.), *Psychological Factors in Poverty*, (Markham, Chicago 1970); BOWLES, S. & GINTIS, H., *Schooling in Capitalist America*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1976); JENCKS, C., et al., op. cit.; BOUDON, R., *Education, Opportunity and Social Inequality*, (Wiley, New York 1974); BOURDIEU, P. & PASSERON, J., *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, (Sage, Beverly Hills, California 1977); HUSEN, T., *The School in Question*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1979); and HALSEY, A., et al., op. cit.

'western' countries from the 1950s onwards to first ascertain whether there were class differences in educational achievement and secondly to see whether such educational achievement in fact altered the class structure of their respective societies. A common link between these early studies - popular up to the 1970s - was their quantitative methodological approach which Purvis and Hales, among others, refer to as 'political arithmetic'¹⁶ - basically because such studies provide a measurable picture of what 'went into' schools, and what 'came out' at the end of the schooling process, and because these measures were utilized in a political manner to lobby for educational change. Kelsall and Kelsall provide a useful summary of the results of this body of research on the relationship between class and educational achievement¹⁷, clearly pointing out the strong correlation that exists in the following manner:

1. Children from lower classes enter school with initial 'handicaps' when compared with middle- and upper-class children.
2. Even when lower class children enter on the same footing as upper class children, differences in attainment soon appear.
3. These differences become greater as the school experience progresses, a phenomenon referred to by sociologists as 'cumulative deficit'.
4. Lower class children leave school earlier than other groups, irrespective of their ability or attainment.
5. Lower class children leave school with lower academic qualifications than other children.

¹⁶ PURVIS, J. and HALES, M.(eds), *Achievement and Inequality in Education*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1983).

¹⁷ KELSALL & KELSALL, op. cit.

This information¹⁸ is useful and important, even though it is couched in a 'deficit approach' characteristic of most of the educational literature that existed prior to the revolution in educational thinking which was brought about in the 1970s by the 'new' sociology of education. The studies which Kelsall and Kelsall refer to showed that schools were generally unjust and wasteful: unjust because students from working-class backgrounds eventually got working-class jobs (in spite of, and as the 'new' sociology was to argue, because of schooling); wasteful because there were able children from working-class backgrounds who were being kept back from higher educational achievement. There were of course some students from working-class backgrounds who did well at school and who therefore moved up the occupational ladder, and some students whose parents belonged to the 'upper' echelons of society, but who themselves got jobs in 'lower' occupational stratas. The overwhelming tendency was, however, for education to reproduce the privilege of one generation to the next. The reproductive trends associated with schooling were convincingly confirmed in the United Kingdom, for instance, by Halsey, Heath and Ridge.¹⁹ The authors embarked on a longitudinal study of the educational mobility of working-class boys. They distributed questionnaire among 8,529 men born between 1913 and 1952 and analysed their replies in order to find out the extent to which education was successful in changing the pattern of mobility in Britain. This sample was differentiated using a seven-category scale of social class which was frequently collapsed into three major divides, i.e. Class I and II as the Service Class (consisting of professionals, administrators, managers and proprietors); Class III, IV and V as the Intermediate Class (consisting of non-manual workers, self-employed artisans, technicians and foremen); and Class VI and VII as the Working Class (all manual workers). Their general conclusions were that:

¹⁸ quoted in RAMSAY, P.D.K., *Family, School and Community*, (George Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1984) p. 223.

¹⁹ HALSEY et al., op. cit.

(a) working-class boys were as likely to be missing from selective secondary grammar schools in the mid-1950s and 1960s as in the 1920s. While their absolute number in these schools had increased, the proportion of working-class to service and intermediate class students had remained the same;

(b) a similar pattern was evident at the sixth-form level, although the authors discovered that working-class boys were growing in number at this level;

(c) such a trend was however reversed when it came to analysing the class patterns of who went to University. Here the authors discovered that the working class had less representation when compared to the other classes.

They moreover concluded that the movement between classes inter- and intra-generationally was to be explained not because Britain had become a more open society, but rather due to economic restructuring which took place in the period under consideration. This meant that, for instance, the growth in professional, administrative and managerial positions had opened up new opportunities for the working class. Halls provides a useful literature review of other studies carried out throughout Europe which show as dismal a picture of the relationship between education and social mobility as that portrayed by Halsey, Heath and Ridge in the United Kingdom. His conclusion is that:

elites who will by the turn of the century occupy the top positions in society will only be slightly less middle-class than before. By this and similar yardsticks of success equality of opportunity will have been unattainable.²⁰

²⁰ HALLS, W.D., 'A Comparative Political and Sociological Analysis of Educational Opportunity in Western Europe, 1960-1980', in WATSON, K. & WILSON, R.(eds), *Contemporary Issues in Comparative Education*, (Croom Helm, Kent 1985) p. 123.

CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN MALTA

There is, in Malta, a clear link between educational achievement and occupational 'success'. The 1985 census²¹ shows that of the 2.4 per cent of the male and one per cent of the female working population who has never been to school, the vast majority (75.3 per cent and 74.3 per cent respectively) are in skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled employment categories. Of the forty per cent of the male and 20.6 per cent of the female working population who left school at the primary level, 71.3 per cent and 78.1 per cent respectively are in that same skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled category. Those who stay on at school at the secondary and post-secondary level do much better in the labour market. Status-wise, and perhaps financially, investment in education does seem to pay. Having said this, however, it is important to note that a significant percentage of those who never attended school end up in what are generally considered to be more economically rewarding occupational categories. Hence, 24.7 per cent of males and 25.7 per cent of females who never attended school became either employers, and more generally 'own-account workers'. While the link between educational investment and occupational success is relatively unproblematic,²² and therefore seems to point

²¹ *Census 1985*, Central Office of Statistics, (Govt. Printing Press, Valletta 1986), p.88.

²² This does not mean that the relationship is a simple or straightforward one. Berg [see BERG, I., *Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery*, (Praeger, New York 1971)] and Collins [see COLLINS, R., *The Credential Society*, (Academic Press, New York 1979)] have provided striking evidence that the fact that one has credentials does not necessarily mean that s/he will do the job s/he is qualified for better. Also, the skill requirements of many jobs in the economy are significantly lower than the educational requirements. As Hogan [see HOGAN, D., 'Education and Class Formation: The Peculiarities of the Americans', in APPLE, M.W.(ed.), *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1982) p.57] puts it, schooling can thus be viewed 'as a set of institutional rules which classify and allocate individuals to positions in society; it symbolically redefines graduates as possessing particular qualities and skills gained through attendance at school or college, and this occurs independently of whether or not any actual changes in competency, skill or values have occurred' (emphasis in original). The literature

towards a social structure where mobility is based on effort and merit (hence achieved status) rather than on accidents of birth (hence ascribed status) the issue does not stop here. We still need to ask if there are, in Malta, particular patterns in the identity of those groups who do invest and who do achieve success in education. If such an investigation points towards disparate class educational investment and achievement, then it will be necessary to re-examine the seemingly fair and meritocratic relationship between one's education and one's position in society.

The traditional way of discovering these patterns is through a systematic statistical analysis of participation and success rates by different social classes at different levels of the educational structure, with particular attention being given to University attendance, and even then, to particular courses at University. Class representation in medical courses, for instance, has always been considered to be a key indicator of democratization.²³ Access to information from official sources - such as education statistics - is often impossible, because no records are kept by the Department of Education regarding the social class (in this case, parental occupation) of its students at the different levels of schooling. On other occasions where such statistics are kept, such as at University, it has proven difficult to obtain permission to peruse the documents. The only other way is to carry out surveys among representative samples of students at different levels of the educational system. This has been done to a certain degree, although there are still a number of levels which have not yet

in this area also suggests that the link between educational achievement and income is problematic. In some countries, such as in the United States, while the gap between the least educated and the most educated, in years of schooling, has diminished, a concomitant reduction in the income gap between the richest and the poorest has not come about (BOWLES & GINTIS, op.cit.). In other countries, especially those experiencing a shift towards socialism, education, considered to be in the control of the élite classes, could be disassociated from higher incomes [see CARNOY, M. & SAMOFF, J., *Education and Social Transition in the Third World*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1990)]. It will be argued in a later section of this paper that elements of this situation existed in Malta under a Labour administration.

²³ HALLS, W.D., 'A Comparative Political and Sociological Analysis', op. cit., p.129.

been covered. We know next to nothing, for instance, about the social class composition of those students who attend nursery schools, i.e. prior to the compulsory school-attending age of five.²⁴

The studies that have been carried out locally show much the same patterns that studies done abroad have reported. It is quite clear that, as Davie et al., discovered in the United Kingdom for instance, students from working-class origins begin to experience difficulties soon after they enter the primary school.²⁵ While we do not yet have a longitudinal study that follows the achievement of working-class students as they go through the primary school, we do have a number of undergraduate research reports²⁶ that clearly show the disparate achievement of primary and secondary school students when parental occupation is taken into account.

²⁴ There is a recognition that such information is important, and that early experience in the nursery schools can effect later educational performance. This can be seen in the decision taken by the present Minister of Education to make kindergartens available free of charge to children from the age of three onwards. The aim was to offer children from lower socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity of getting used to some aspects of school life, such as learning in groups, and thus be on equal footing (theoretically at least) with their more well-off counterparts. Report 14th May 1988 - 13th May 1989 (Ministry of Education, Valletta 1989) p.1.

²⁵ DAVIE, R., BULTER, N. & GOLDSTEIN, H., *From Birth to Seven*, (Longman, London 1972).

²⁶ It is not usual academic practice to quote undergraduate research in papers such as these. Unfortunately it is unavoidable in this case since local graduate (Masters level) educational research began only in 1987 at the University of Malta. Only two post-graduate doctoral educational research reports of an empirical and sociological nature have been carried out locally [see FARRUGIA, C., *The Social Status of School Teachers in Malta*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, (University of London 1985); and DARMANIN, M., *Sociological Perspectives on Schooling in Malta*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, (University of Wales College, Cardiff 1989)]. In the absence of this research base, I have turned to undergraduate dissertations, choosing to refer to those particular studies which obtained a high grade when examined by a board of three University lecturers. Even then, in most cases I have consulted the faculty supervisor of each dissertation in question and discussed the validity of the claims made in the conclusion of each report. The research studies I quote use different occupational categories (e.g. the D.E.S. scale developed at M.C.A.S.T. [Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology]; or the Goldthorpe scale). However, while some occupations are placed in different categories according to the scale used, the so-called 'buffer zone' between the top

With regards to the primary school, Micallef carried out a survey in six primary schools from urban, sub-urban and rural Malta, with a sample of 389 Year 4 and Year 6 students.²⁷ He discovered that there was a relationship between the reading ability of these students and the father's occupation. Those students whose fathers were in the top three occupational categories had the highest reading scores while those whose fathers were in the lowest, or seventh occupational category obtained considerably lower scores in their reading tests. Bonaci and German looked at the attainment in Mathematics, English and Maltese of a sample of 492 students (265 boys and 227 girls) in their final year at the primary school level, and their first year at a state secondary school.²⁸ In both cases the results of the national annual examinations were used. They found that father's occupation correlated with pupil's attainment in all subjects at both the primary and secondary school level. More recently Vella obtained similar results with regards to the achievement of Year 5 primary school students (248 boys and 293 girls) from six state schools. In all three subjects i.e., Maltese, English and Mathematics, the highest mean scores in the annual examinations were obtained by students whose fathers belonged to the top occupational category.²⁹

Additional evidence of the relationship between parental occupation - as a rough indicator of class - and educational achievement in the primary school has been provided by Baldacchino, Gatt & Vassallo-Agius and Hili, all of whom have

occupational groupings and the bottom ones remains constant. One further caveat needs to be made. Many of the dissertations quoted are couched in a deficit approach to working class failure. Hence, while I find the statistical information collected useful, I generally disassociate myself from the interpretative framework used by these students.

²⁷ MICALLEF, C.S., *Parental Influence on the Reading Ability of the Child Aged 7-11*, B.Ed. (Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1981).

²⁸ BONACI, M. & GERMAN, P., *The Influence of Age, Family Size, Father's Occupation on Pupil's Attainment*, B.Ed. (Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1981).

²⁹ VELLA, J., *The Effects of Family Size, Father's Occupation, Age and Gender on Attainment*, B.Ed.(Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1986).

found that a working-class child is more likely to end up in a low stream.³⁰

There is also some empirical research available which focuses more directly on the achievement patterns at the secondary school level. Debono and Schembri analysed the mean scores obtained in English and Mathematics of a large sample of thirteen year-old boys and girls, who in 1981 were at form 2 level.³¹ Their sample was made up of 483 boys (21.7 per cent of all Form 2 male students in state schools) and 411 girls (16.6 per cent of all form two female students in state schools). In view of what has been said earlier, it is important to note that Debono and Schembri were denied access to data related to parental occupation of the form 2 students in the private schools that they contacted. They therefore had to focus on state schools only. Their analysis showed that exam success was related to father's occupation, with students whose fathers were in category 1 of their occupational scale doing significantly better academically than those whose fathers were in category 2 and 3. In his graduate research, Cauchi³² discovered a positive correlation between father's occupation and achievement in English essay writing when testing a sample of 343 fourth form students from four state and private schools.³³ Of all the empirical research that is available, it is only

³⁰ See BALDACCHINO, M., *The Relationship between Streaming and Home Background*, B.Ed. (Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1988); GATT, C. & VASSALLO-AGIUS, S., *A Study of the Knowledge and Attitudes that Primary School Pupils Have of Streaming*, B.Ed.(Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1988); and HILLI, J., *Social Class and Streaming*, B.Ed.(Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1988).

³¹ DEBONO, V. & SCHEMBRI, E., *The Relationship between Attainment, Family Size and Socio-Economic Status*, B.Ed. (Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1981).

³² CAUCHI, J., *Some Possible Psycho-sociological Determiners on Essay Writing in English at Form 4 Level*, unpublished M.Ed. dissertation, (University of Malta 1991).

³³ It would be especially important to discover if there are class-related patterns of achievement in the G.C.E. Ordinary Level examinations. A report by the English National Child Development Studies (1983), (quoted in MORTIMORE and MORTIMORE, 'Education and Social Class', op. cit.) shows that thirty-nine per cent of those who gained five Ordinary Level passes or their equivalents

that of Pace that provides evidence which contradicts what all the above studies have shown. Pace carried out a questionnaire survey and from the 232 responses he received from ex-fifth formers in nine state schools he could ascertain that educational achievement - measured as an average of all marks available for each individual student with each subject given a particular weighting³⁴ - was not greatly influenced by father's occupation.

Closely related to educational achievement is educational investment. A key indicator of educational investment - or lack of it - is the rate of absenteeism. In the U.K. Davies for instance found a difference of 7.2 per cent between the attendance of pupils from a non-manual family background, and those from the least advantaged section of the manual working class.³⁵ Locally, Scicluna-Calleja found that in trade schools - with, as will be demonstrated in another section of the paper below, an overwhelming working-class student population - absenteeism was very high indeed.³⁶ On average, each girl in these trade schools absented herself for 50.5 out of 148 days, an absence rate of thirty-three per cent. The frequency for boys stood at thirty-five days out of 148 and yielded an absentee rate of twenty-four per cent. A subject closely related to absenteeism is early school-leaving. During the academic year 1987-1988, the Department of Education approved 861 requests for permission to leave school before the age of 16.³⁷ The majority of these early school leavers were from trade schools, and hence from a manual working-class background.

came from non-manual socio-economic backgrounds, while only twelve per cent came from manual backgrounds. In Malta there is, as yet, no empirical research on this topic, a serious lacuna given that 'O' levels are a gateway to further education and occupational mobility.

³⁴ PACE, P., *The Effects of Paternal Occupation and Occupational Mobility on the Educational Attainment and Future Occupation of the Male Child*, B.Ed.(Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1981), p.10.

³⁵ DAVIES, J., *Perspectives on Attendance*, (ILEA, London 1980).

³⁶ SCICLUNA-CALLEJA, S. et al, *Absenteeism in Trade Schools*, unpublished report (mimeo), (Department of Education, Malta 1988).

³⁷ see the Maltese weekly, *It-Torax*, (Union Press, Valletta 12th August, 1990), p.17.

There is some local empirical research reporting on the proportional investment in post-compulsory schooling by students from different social classes, even though it is not as detailed as that provided by Halsey et al.³⁸ The latter demonstrate that for the United Kingdom three-quarters of working-class boys leave school by the minimum school-leaving age, whilst three-quarters of the boys from the service or professional classes stay on at school. The Robbins Report in the same country discovered that a person from social class 1 was thirty-three times more likely to end up in an undergraduate course at University than someone from classes IV and V.³⁹ In Malta, Vella set out to discover if educational reforms carried out by a Labour administration with the intention of equalizing educational opportunity had in fact succeeded.⁴⁰ To do this Vella carried out a questionnaire survey among 185 - or 81.14 per cent of all - students commencing their course of study at the University in February 1985. Vella attempted to compare the socio-economic origins of her sample with the relative proportion of numbers (of the Maltese population) within a variety of occupational groupings, as provided by the 1985 Census.⁴¹ Grouping the labour force under eight categories, she concludes that

students whose father's occupation falls in the minority group of Category 1 (Professionals), Category 2 (Managerial and Administrative) and Category 3 (Technical) are much more likely to succeed in entering University than students who come from families where the chief wage earner has a manual occupation. In spite of an attempt to equalize educational opportunities, the above results indicate that the proportion of university students from different social environments does not reflect the proportion of these people in the Maltese population.⁴²

³⁸ HALSEY et al., op. cit.

³⁹ Robbins Report, Cmnd.,2154 (HMSO, London, 1963).

⁴⁰ VELLA, I., *The Socio-economic Characteristics and Home Background of University Students*, B.Ed. (Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1990).

⁴¹ *ibid.* pp. 69-70.

⁴² *ibid.*, p.70.

Schembri found much the same pattern in the information he drew from the responses of his representative sample of 662 University students, and with reference to the 1985 Census categorization of employees into five levels.⁴³ A first general conclusion that is drawn is that the higher the father's occupation, the more likely is the child to enter University. Students whose fathers are in the two highest employee categories (i.e. Professional and Technical; Administrative and Managerial) are about seven times as likely to join full-time University courses as children from the lower two occupational groupings (i.e. the Skilled, Semi-skilled and Unskilled). A second conclusion is that sixty per cent of the University students sampled have at least one of the parents in occupational groups I and II, whilst only nineteen per cent have parents whose occupations belong to groups IV and V. Schembri also discovered significant differences in student representation at University when regions and localities of residence were taken into consideration. When these localities were grouped by social class prestige utilizing Boswell's classification⁴⁴, it became evident that the greatest percentage of students at university came from the higher prestige areas of Malta, such as Attard and Balzan, Sliema and Lija. Schembri also found that the choice of university course and faculty correlated with social class background. In fact, courses of Law, Medicine, and Architecture had the lowest representation of students from the working class, whilst those of Engineering and Education had the highest representation.

Such results do not necessarily mean, of course, that education in Malta does not provide some opportunities for social mobility. Tabone, for instance, discovered that in his sample of four hundred heads of families, there was a fair degree of intergenerational

⁴³ SCHEMBRI, C., *Students at the University of Malta: Origins and Orientations*, unpublished M.Ed. dissertation, (University of Malta 1991).

⁴⁴ BOSWELL, D.M., 'Patterns of Occupational and Residential Area Prestige in the Maltese Conurbation', unpublished paper presented at the *10th World Congress of Sociology* (1982).

educational mobility - Tabone misleadingly calls this 'social mobility'⁴⁵ - as follows:

	Illiterate	Elementary	Secondary	University
Respondent	3.48%	34.08%	40.42%	8.71%
R's father	9.95%	53.36%	15.42%	3.24%

Tabone also discovered that of thirty-five families having one of the children with a university degree, in only seven (twenty per cent) did the father have a university degree. 'There were seventeen (48.57 per cent) with a father who had a secondary education, ten (28.57 per cent) with an elementary education, and one (2.86 per cent) whose father is illiterate'.⁴⁶ While this improvement in participation rates independent of father's educational level cannot be denied, local intergenerational educational mobility is not as pronounced as is widely believed. Indeed, Schembri discovered that children whose father had tertiary or university education had about 10.6 times more chance of becoming University students than children of parents who had only an elementary (primary) education.⁴⁷

WHY IS CLASS RELATED TO EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT?

In the preceding section it has been established that a student's origins - in Malta as elsewhere - influence, if not determine educational achievement. In other words the higher the social class background of a student is, the more likely is s/he to remain at school and do well. It is now essential to explore the reasons for this, for it clearly does not necessarily follow that class disparity in education signals class inequality in education. As Murphy has convincingly argued, while quantitative and qualitative research has shown that class is related to achievement at school, it has not adequately dealt with the question of whether this is the result of inequality between

⁴⁵ TABONE, C., *The Secularization of the Family in Changing Malta*, (Dominican Publications, Malta 1987) p. 167.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 166.

⁴⁷ SCHEMBRI, C., *Students at the University of Malta...*, *op. cit.*

classes.⁴⁸ In other words, these studies have not given sufficient importance to the possibility that working-class students (and their parents) might differ from their middle-class counterparts in educational aspirations. They might choose to invest less in schooling which would account for a much lower percentage of working-class presence in tertiary education when compared to the middle class. Murphy therefore advances the following proposition:

Since it makes little sense in a pluralistic society to speak of inclusion or dispossession, unless there is evidence in the first instance that those 'excluded' or 'dispossessed' actually **wanted** what they are supposedly excluded from or dispossessed of, it appears by the same token a critical if minimal condition for converting class disparity in education into class inequality in education that, other things being equal, universal demand for such education be first documented, or if demand for education is less than total, that such differential demand be itself shown to be the product of structural or cultural inequality. (Emphasis added.)⁴⁹

This warning has relevance to the Maltese situation for, if working-class students are much less likely to be found at tertiary levels, we need to ask how much of this is due to exclusion or to 'choice'. Now, I depart from Murphy and agree with Bourdieu and Passeron when these argue that 'subjective expectations' and aspirations are the deterministic consequence of 'objective conditions'.⁵⁰ In other words, the school, as a middle-class institution, operates in such a way as to discourage and alienate working-class students who 'opt' - or experience themselves as 'opting' - out of serious and further investment in schooling. Having said that, it is however also important to consider the proposition that sixteen years of Labour administration reduced wage differentials between manual and non-manual labour as well as between different working grades,⁵¹ so that one needs to ask

⁴⁸ MURPHY, J., 'Class Inequality in Education: Two Justifications, One Evaluation But No Hard Evidence', in McNAY, I. & OZGA, J.(Eds), *Policy-Making in Education: The Breakdown of Consensus*, (Pergamon Press, Oxford 1985).

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p. 318.

⁵⁰ BOURDIEU, P. & PASSERON, J., *op. cit.*

⁵¹ ZAMMIT, E.L., *A Colonial Inheritance*, (Malta University Press, Malta 1984).

quite seriously - as I am persuaded many students do ask - whether it pays, in a narrow financial sense of course, to stay on at school. It is indicative that 37.1 per cent of 680 respondents to my Trade School Questionnaire thought that education in Malta does not necessarily lead to the best paid jobs: it might, and probably does lead to what they termed the more 'clean' or 'cushy' jobs, but they believed that skilled manual labour was highly rewarding financially. Even if this were empirically found out to be false, the proposition would remain valid as it is such perceptions which influence educational aspirations and investment. We need to keep that caveat in mind as we look at what key studies have found regarding reasons for the educational disparity between classes. In this context we will be looking at two approaches - the deficit view which holds that working-class students generally lack the level of intelligence and/or the cultural, psychological and personality characteristics required for success in schooling, and the 'structural exclusion' perspective which holds that an inequitable social structure requires that specific groups of students are 'cooled out' of school. Educational systems are hence seen to be predicated on failure in that they select and channel out of school (and into the least rewarding locations in the labour market) groups identified by their class, gender, race and ethnicity.

DEFICIT VIEWS OF THE WORKING CLASS

Genetic deficiency and sociobiological theories arose at the end of the last century within a Darwinist orientation to social and species survival. These theories surfaced at different periods in this century under a variety of forms. Prominent among these forms was Jensenism, a belief in a specific notion of intelligence as the result of heredity and which largely determines a child's intellectual potential - and that this potential is fixed, unchanging and subject to accurate measurement. Arthur Jensen's work promoted I.Q. testing, and a belief that working-class students consistently obtained lower scores on these tests than their middle-class counterparts.

Genetic deficiency theories have been generally discredited for, as Lee argues,

categories such as feeble-minded, educationally sub-normal, maladjusted, behavioural difficulties, etc., are socially constructed categories which depend on the values, beliefs and interests (usually middle-class professionals) making the judgements rather than congenital or intrinsic features of the child.⁵²

Indeed, one way of looking at the high working-class representation in separate schools or classrooms for 'remedial' attention is to consider it as a form of social control and vested interest - removing them from mainstream schooling so that this can function smoothly along middle-class norms.⁵³ As a number of studies have suggested,⁵⁴ I.Q. tests are generally suspect for their cultural bias. Moreover, it is difficult to define intelligence, as this is not a unitary capacity but multi-faceted, and it is only some of these facets that are recognized and rewarded by a given social formation. In other words, tests devised by professional psychologists are bound to value those intellectual qualities given esteem among their class, and what is social is given the value of a natural hierarchy of gifts.

Lee⁵⁵ suggests that genetic deficit theories of why working class children fail to do well at school, while apparently 'no longer

⁵² LEE, J., 'Social Class and Schooling', op. cit., p.98.

⁵³ These 'separate schools' - locally called, ironically enough, 'Opportunity Centres' - catered for 1,232 (742 boys and 490 girls) students in October 1988, (see Ministry of Education, op. cit.). We need to keep in mind that lower streamed classes in primary and secondary schools also form educational ghettos. Some would argue that trade schools serve a similar function. In an unpublished pilot project one of my students, working in collaboration with a school psychologist, discovered that as many as five out of 14 students in a class in a 'school for the educationally maladjusted' scored as highly in a Raven's Matrices Intelligence Test as their 'normal' mainstream counterparts. Delving into the past educational history of these five students she discovered that these had been channelled out of mainstream classrooms and schools because of behavioural, not cognitive reasons.

⁵⁴ cfr. NISBET, J. & ENTWISTLE, N., 'Changing Views on Ability', *Educational Analysis*, 4(2) (1982); and CHRISTENSEN, C.A., GERBER, M.M. and EVERHARD, R.B., 'Towards a Sociological Perspective on Learning Disabilities', *Educational Theory*, 12 (2) (1986).

⁵⁵ LEE, J., op. cit., p.100.

orthodox explanations of failure', are nevertheless present when we try to explain educational disparity in terms of what Mortimore and Mortimore refer to in their paper as 'individual factors'.⁵⁶ Both Lee and Mortimore and Mortimore conclude their survey of the literature in this area by agreeing that health problems, lower financial resources and poverty, smaller housing and larger family size - predominant characteristics of the working-class conditions of existence - do not necessarily cause failure at school. Rather, there are processes within the school, which we will be highlighting below, that ensure that schooling is translated into a negative experience for working-class students. As Richardson has argued, there is enough educational research to show that no longer can we locate 'the blame of educational failure...in the insular individual and his or her genetic endowment or personal environment'. The focus should be 'instead [on] the very social process which organized education represents'.⁵⁷

What Murphy calls 'cultural dispossession'⁵⁸ gained currency in the 1960s following the Plowden Report⁵⁹ and

while rarely denying the determinate influence of inequality in power and privilege, preferred for its part to focus in general on the cultural consequences of such structural influences and in particular on those emotional, psychological attributes which through extended habituation with poverty effectively deprived the working class of an equal chance. Acknowledged by the main architects of this account to be structurally generated, the immediate source of prevailing educational inequality was, however, identified as residing primarily in these cultural, emotional and psychological conditions.

⁵⁶ MORTIMORE, P & MORTIMORE, J., 'Education and Social Class', op. cit., pp.15ff.

⁵⁷ RICHARDSON, K., 'Ideology, Psychology and the Biological Sciences', in HARTNETT, A. (ed.), *The Social Sciences in Educational Studies*, (Heinemann, London 1982), p. 182.

⁵⁸ MURPHY, J., 'Class Inequality in Education...', op. cit., p. 316.

⁵⁹ PLOWDEN, L., *Children and their Primary Schools*. A report of the Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967.

The immediate result of such a perspective was a 'deficit' or 'deprivation' approach to the working class. The latter were considered to be lacking, if not in 'genetic strength', certainly in motivation, linguistic skills, adequate maternal instruction and paternal interest, inability to defer gratification and make sacrifices in view of obtaining long-term goals, and so on. 'Deficit theory' constructed working-class students and their cultural and value system as deficient when compared to that of the middle class - a referent which, as Bisseret has brilliantly described,⁶⁰ has acquired the status of what all should approximate to. The obvious answer within the terms of such a construction was to compensate for these deficits, and hence the proliferation of remedial education programmes in the 1960s and 1970s. It is interesting to point out that while such programmes have been discredited abroad, they are now gaining ground in our country.

These cultural/psychological explanations of the link between class and educational achievement went through two particular phases. While in the first phase the working class were constructed as deficient, in the second they were more likely to be seen as different but equal. A case in point is the question of linguistic deprivation. In the earlier interpretation of Bernstein's theory of linguistic codes the implication was that a working-class 'restricted' code was deficient when compared to the middle-class 'elaborated' code. Despite the fact that Bernstein protested that he had been misinterpreted,⁶¹ Bisseret is right to point out the imputation of deficit to the working class,⁶² when Bernstein uses such adjectives as 'rigid', 'simple' and 'limited' to describe the 'restricted code', pointing towards the need for the working class to learn the more 'delicate', 'subtle' and 'complex', 'elaborated' middle-class code. Subsequently the theory was modified to show that the 'restricted code' was equal to but different from the

⁶⁰ BISSERET, N., *Education, Class Language and Ideology*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston 1979).

⁶¹ BERNSTEIN, B., 'Education Cannot Compensate for Society', *New Society*, 26, (February 1970).

⁶² BISSERET, N., *op. cit.*, p. 102.

'elaborated code',⁶³ and to emphasise the connection between concrete social relations, i.e. the exercise of domination and subjection to domination, and social relations as symbolized in speech.⁶⁴ Similarly, with regards to the presumed 'difficulty' of working-class children to think in abstract terms, Mjelde⁶⁵ has taken up Jerome Bruner's work to suggest that there are three ways of presenting knowledge:

1. active presentation which is tied to practical work;
2. iconic presentation, tied to picture drawings and figures;
3. symbolic presentation, which is tied to formal symbols such as language. Mjelde points out that schools generally transmit knowledge in the iconic and symbolic forms of presentation, and this form of transmission

represents the cultural form of the middle classes and is foreign to the students of the working class.⁶⁶

Mjelde draws on the experimental work of Bruner and of Luria and argues that 'working-class students can go through complicated reasoning. They are just doing it in different ways from those found in the school system' by going from the practical concrete to the abstract theoretical level rather than the other way round.⁶⁷ Quoting from Luria⁶⁸ she concludes that

⁶³ EDWARDS, A.D., *Language in Culture and Class*, (Heinemann, London 1976).

⁶⁴ see BOURDIEU, P., *Ce Que Parler Veut Dire: L'Economie des Echanges Linguistiques*, (Fayard, Paris 1982); and BISSERET, N., op. cit.

⁶⁵ MJELDE, L., 'From Hand to Mind', in Livingstone, D.W.(ed.), *Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Power*, (Bergin and Garvey, Massachusetts 1987).

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 217.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ LURIA, A.R., *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1976).

The average middle-class child begins his/her schooling with the attitude that problems are something you solve first by talking about them and then doing it,[sic] while the average working-class child has learned that you solve the problem by acting and then talking about it.

Cultural dispossession accounts which do not fall into a deficit approach are best represented by Bourdieu and Passeron.⁶⁹ These have argued that failure comes about because the kinds of competencies and cultural activities which are born in the crucible of the structural, social, economic and political features of working-class life are not recognized or accepted by the school as legitimate. Instead, schools, predominantly middle-class institutions, impose a 'cultural arbitrary' of their own so that middle-class students find a continuation between the values, practices and priorities of home and school, while working-class students experience dissonance. When the latter, understandably resistant to this cultural imposition, react, teachers - themselves recruited from the middle classes - misconstrue difference for deficiency, and resistance at best as a 'behavioural problem', at worst a sign of ignorance. It is a process of 'symbolic violence' where style matters more than content and where, in Gramsci's words, the children of the working class have to pay with tears and blood to achieve that which comes 'naturally' to the children of the privileged.

STRUCTURAL ACCOUNTS

Accounts such as those of Bourdieu and Passeron as well as of the later Bernstein led to a more powerful 'structural' perspective to explain why working-class children fail at school. The basic argument underlying this approach is that schools are linked to capitalist society in a number of ways. Now, capitalist societies bring people together in a manner whereby economic groups dominate and exploit other groups. This class relationship is played out in schools as well, and the argument which we will be exploring below is that social structure effects schooling, and that schools feed into the social structure. The economy is structured

⁶⁹ BOURDIEU, P. & PASSERON, J., *op. cit.*

in such a way as to require that school 'warms up' some and 'cools out' others from further investment in schooling and certification. It becomes a selective device, channelling students to particular locations in the labour market according to their social class origins. Connell et al. draw clearly the distinction between the structural and deficit perspectives which tried to account for working-class failure when they argue that

While social scientists were focussing on homes and schools and their linkages, they were not looking at the larger social arrangements that made them the way they are. Very few researchers even posed the question of why we have a hierarchical schooling system in the first place.⁷⁰

Structural accounts grew out of a renewed interest in Marxist scholarship, and especially after the work of Baudelot and Establet in France⁷¹ and Bowles and Gintis in America.⁷² Especially significant was the rise of the so-called 'new' sociology of education in the 1970s, and the appropriation of phenomenological, interactionist and marxist discourse in the analysis of schooling. 'New' sociologists of education like Bourdieu, Keddie, Bernstein, Whitty,⁷³ argued that not only could schools not bring about equality between classes, but their very function was to reproduce inequality. Corrigan sarcastically refers to this as the 'Law of Thirds',

which applies almost exactly in England and Wales as in the U.S.A., as in Canada: a 'small' third go to significant post-secondary schooling; a large third obtain a school leaving certificate of some kind or other; a 'third' (of varying sizes) drop out or leave without any 'useful' certification at all. But then what social structure could 'cope with' one hundred per

⁷⁰ CONNELL, R.W., ASHENDON, D.J., KESLLER, S. & DOWSETT, G.W., *Making the Difference*, (Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1982), p.27.

⁷¹ BAUDELLOT, C. & ESTABLET, R., *L'École Capitaliste en France*, (François Maspero, Paris 1971).

⁷² BOWLES, S. & GINTIS, H., *op. cit.*

⁷³ *cf.* YOUNG, M.F.D. (ed.), *Knowledge and Control*, (Macmillan, London 1971).

cent 'A' students, all ready for university? How would schooling then 'sort', 'mark', 'park', and 'store' relevant labor power/social identities?⁷⁴

We have already considered one strand of this 'reproduction theory' of schooling in the brief description of Bourdieu and Passeron's account of 'cultural reproduction'. Two other strands are the 'ideological' and the 'economic' reproduction accounts which we will consider below. Within this structural approach to class and education there is sometimes implied a 'conspiratorial' view, one which argues that capitalists get together in order to influence the way schooling should be organized so that it feeds students into a segmented labour market.⁷⁵ Other accounts⁷⁶ draw on Althusser and refer to processes of 'structural causation', arguing that while there is indeed evidence of a capitalist 'conspiracy' with regards to schooling, what often happens is that

given the extant economic and political forms which now provide the principles upon which so much of our everyday lives are organized, this reproductive process is a 'logical necessity' for the continued maintenance of an unequal social order. The economic and cultural unbalance follows 'naturally'.⁷⁷

These 'structural exclusion' accounts of class differences in educational achievement highlight a variety of inequalities emanating or flowing from a society structured on inequality.⁷⁸ Hence, schooling is biased in favour of the dominant classes in society by providing different social experiences and relations, by giving the ruling-class children better access to the knowledge which counts, access to selective education, better educational resources, and a different classroom setting. I am presenting

⁷⁴ CORRIGAN, P.D.R., 'The Making of the Boy: Meditations on What Grammar School did With, To, and For my Body', *Journal of Education*, (Boston), 170 (3) (1988), p. 144.

⁷⁵ see BOWLES, S. & GINTIS, H., op. cit.

⁷⁶ APPLE, M., *Ideology and Curriculum*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1979).

⁷⁷ *ibid.* p.40

⁷⁸ MURPHY, J., 'Class Inequality in Education...', op. cit.

these factors schematically, drawing on Maltese research - when this exists - to illustrate the significance of each argument. First, however, it is important to draw the general contours of this 'structure of selection and exclusion' as it takes shape locally. It is only then that the different facets of this exclusionary process can be described in some detail.

THE LOCAL STRUCTURE OF SELECTION AND EXCLUSION

It was earlier argued that there is a relationship between class and educational achievement. This relationship is especially visible in those educational structures which, like ours, are differentiated into a tripartite system with students being selected, on the grounds of 'choice' or examination results, to follow a secondary grammar (our Junior Lyceum), a secondary modern (our area secondary schools), and a secondary technical (our trade schools). It is even more visible when the state educational system has a parallel competitor, a private school system which is made accessible only - or mainly - to those who can afford the fees charged.⁷⁹ Maltese schooling is in fact

⁷⁹ The distribution of students for October 1988 in private schools (total number in 1988 was 133) as compared to state schools, is as follows (Ministry of Education, op. cit. 1988):

	PRIVATE SCHOOLS	STATE SCHOOLS
Nursery	4,703	5,887
Primary	10,373	26,524
Secondary	6,742	14,291
Sixth Form	583	1,723
TOTAL	22,401	48,425

These figures indicate distribution for same services offered, i.e. the State Secondary School provides trade and technical education as well as a 'higher secondary', [a preparatory school leading to the sixth form] while the Private School system does not. When even these levels are taken into consideration, the percentage of students attending private schools hovers around the 30 per cent mark. It needs to be pointed out that local private schools are not the exclusive elite public schools we find in England. After the Church-State feud in the mid-eighties, the trend is not to charge fees - which of course means that government is subsidizing private consumption by using public funds — and when fees are charged, these tend to be quite low. There are

characterized by a very strong emphasis on stratification, using a variety of assessment strategies to sort and select, classify, allocate and distribute students among different curriculum tracks presumably on grounds of 'academic ability' or 'choice', but actually - and sometimes quite clearly - along class and gender lines. The strong classification between segments of the educational structure serves to intensify class segregation and differential achievement.

Selection takes place at various levels of the educational system, and while students have, in theory, some possibility of moving from one site of the educational system to the other (e.g. opting for, or out of private schooling or for or out of state schooling, or for or out of Junior Lyceums etc.,) - the general tendency is for the students to remain in the school types they begin their 'educational career' in.⁶⁰ In some cases the demarcation or selection is even more definite, as for instance it is extremely difficult and unlikely for a trade school student to transfer to a Junior Lyceum, and practically impossible - unless s/he takes private tuition - to go to University. What happens in the macro-structure of Maltese schools, i.e. the selection between different schools, also takes place within schools through the process of streaming. Indeed, it has been argued that even in those educational systems which introduced comprehensivization, streaming represented 'tripartitism in miniature'.⁶¹ Mixed-ability teaching is practically unpractised in Maltese schools unless these same schools have only one or two classes for each year group.

It is now appropriate to look at the details of how this structure of selection and exclusion works against the interest of students coming from working-class origins.

also differences between church private schools and other private institutions, and between what can be termed 'high status' and 'low status' private schools. This distinction will be addressed in greater detail in a later section of this paper.

⁶⁰ About seventeen per cent transfer from private schools into state schools, *Census 1985*, Central Office of Statistics, op. cit., p.44, 80.

⁶¹ CORRIGAN, P.D.R., 'The Making of the Boy...', op. cit.

1. **Different socialization:** The work of Bowles and Gintis⁸² has been very influential in suggesting that schools are selecting and sorting mechanisms which treat students from different classes differentially, directing dominant class students to dominant jobs, and working-class students to working-class jobs. Schools do this through providing different curricula, pedagogical relationships, and work tasks according to the class clientele they cater for. Drawing mainly from Marxist scholarship, Bowles and Gintis argue that in capitalist societies we have a segmented labour market which needs different kinds of workers organized in an hierarchical relationship with regards to each other, with regards to financial and status rewards, and with regards to those who own capital and the means of production. It is vital for the survival and reproduction of capitalist societies to somehow ensure that the population does not all end up in the same occupational stratas. Society needs a variety of socialization mechanisms to direct different groups towards particular locations in the labour market. While families and the media are powerful socialization forces, Bowles and Gintis identify schools as having the foremost influence in the selection and sorting of generation upon generation of children. By providing different kinds of educational experiences in different streams and schools, society ensures that working-class students end up with different - or no - qualifications, and that they are then channelled to corresponding jobs.

Bowles and Gintis put forth the following two propositions:

a. The structures, organisation and relationships prevalent in schools generally mirror the needs of the economy.

Capitalist work places have a number of characteristics, among these being an emphasis on hierarchical rather than participative relationships, the fragmentation of tasks which alienate the worker from his/her product and from colleagues, and the carrying out of tasks for the sake of an extrinsic reward (a wage). It is easy to see the correspondence between these characteristics and what takes place in schools. The Department of Education assumes the role of the expert, with students - and often teachers

⁸² BOWLES, S. & GINTIS, H. *op. cit.*

- having little or no say about the choice of curricula, as well as the pace and direction of learning. Students are alienated from a holistic understanding of the world they live in through a fragmented rather than integrated subject approach. They are alienated from each other physically (note the seating arrangements in most of our schools) and morally (competition rather than co-operation is the norm). Like workers, students are encouraged to give more importance to extrinsic rewards: it is grades ('wages') rather than the intrinsic satisfaction of learning which most often counts. As in factories, students are streamed in different locations which have a differential access to rewards in terms of both the quality of life and status.

b. Bowles and Gintis make a second point. Within this general framework of correspondence, different schools prepare specific groups of students for specific types of work. Elite schools catering for the children of executives and professionals are very different from working-class schools. Both encourage pedagogies, patterns of school work and styles of control which promote traits and skills required by executive and professional-type work, on the one hand, and manual-type work on the other. Anyon's research is of particular importance in this regard⁸³ because her observations in schools catering for different socio-economic groups (the elite executive class, the affluent professional class, the middle class, and the working class) provide qualitative and substantive evidence for Bowles and Gintis's arguments which were in the main based on statistics and formal theorizing.

Anyon's research suggests that the children of the American elite receive a schooling which involves them in a process of creative discovery of concepts and principles underlying knowledge. Teachers in these elite schools were observed explaining the procedures and purpose of every activity they organized, giving their students the opportunity to discuss the direction the lesson/unit would take. In these schools, students are encouraged to experiment, investigate, observe, draw conclusions, organize results and report them. They are given frequent and immediate

⁸³ see ANYON, J., 'Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work', *Journal of Education*, (Boston) 162 (1) (1980).

feedback, have ample opportunity for group and self-expression, and are exposed to a wide variety of teaching styles and contexts which include discussion, field trips and research projects. Control is generally exercised through negotiation with students, with reasons being given for every decision taken, encouraging students to develop their own class rules and to monitor their own behaviour. It is quite easy to note the correspondence between such a socialization and the traits of self-determination, authority, total conception of task, planning abilities and so on which are required by the executive, managerial and professional jobs in society.

In direct contrast are the patterns of school work, pedagogies and forms of control in schools catering for working-class students. Anyon notes that here the emphasis is on mechanical and rote learning, the blind following of pre-set tasks over which students have little control or choice. There is little done by teachers in these schools to encourage a holistic understanding of the nature of the tasks at hand, and the relationship of this to wider systems of knowledge and meaning. There is an overall emphasis placed on copying - students copy from the blackboard or stencilled notes during a variety of lessons - as opposed to the creative production of knowledge. Assessment depends not on whether the ideas expressed by the students are correct, but on whether they approximate the teachers' notes. Control is characterized not by negotiation, but by imposition on the part of the teacher, and resistance on the part of the students. This resistance to the curricula and pedagogy can be so aggressive that at times teachers capitulate, promising not to give any work as long as students remain quiet.

Here too, the correspondence between working-class schooling and the character of most working-class jobs is obvious. These students' present school work is preparing them for occupations characterized by routine and mechanical labour, where there is little control over the tasks being done, and where obedience rather than questioning, understanding, and participation is desirable. The conflictual rather than co-operative style of relationship with authority developed at school will last throughout their working career, where various types of resistance

including soldiering, slowdowns and sabotage⁸⁴ learned at school will be used again and again in reaction to exploitative and dehumanizing working conditions.

Bowles and Gintis' and Anyon's analysis - termed economic reproduction accounts of schooling - show how differential treatment in schools produces different kinds of workers. The emphasis is once again on the way groups of students, identifiable by their class origins, are structurally excluded from success in schools and in the workplace. These kind of processes have been identified and described by Darmanin⁸⁵ with reference to the pedagogies and management styles in private schools in Malta, and how these differ from those prevalent in state schools, as well as the consequence of such differences within the terms of economic reproduction theories as outlined above. Ethnographic material collected and analysed under my direction⁸⁶ also points to differential pedagogies being used in trade schools as opposed to junior lyceums and private schools, and in lower streamed classes in state primary schools as opposed to higher streamed classes in the same schools. The work tasks assigned, the relationships encouraged, the control techniques used - one and all exhibit a correspondence to the future occupational paths deemed 'realistic' for the students in question.

2. Access to knowledge: It was the work within a 'new' sociology of education perspective⁸⁷ that asked which knowledge did school curricula give legitimacy and currency to, and whether there were groups who had more or less access to specific forms of knowledge,

⁸⁴ cf. CARLSON, D., "Updating" Individualism and the Work Ethic: Corporate Logic in the Classroom', *Curriculum Inquiry*, 12 (2) (1982).

⁸⁵ see DARMANIN, M., *Sociological Perspectives on Schooling...*, op. cit.

⁸⁶ see MIFSUD, E., *Power and Politics in a Private School in Malta*, B.Ed.(Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1991); MIFSUD, J. & MALLIA, M., *Bells and Punchclocks: The Ideology of Work in Four Maltese Schools*, B.Ed.(Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1991); and GALEA, T., *Bottomless Buckets: The Experience of Lower Stream Pupils*. B.Ed.(Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1991).

⁸⁷ YOUNG, M.F.D., op. cit.

particularly that knowledge which could be translated into some form of power or status. Bernstein, for instance, argued that because of the different language codes and the system of the classification and framing of knowledge, there is a control over the transmission of knowledge within schools.⁸⁸ Inglis aptly summarizes the just reproach of critics of the school curriculum arguing that the curriculum was responsible for

favouring the language, characterizing thought-forms, and preferred subject-groupings of the professional middle classes and their children, and for devising time-filling and humanely time-killing activities for working-class children, which had neither content, status, nor purchasing power.⁸⁹

Apple⁹⁰ drew on Williams⁹¹ to argue that curricula represented a 'selective tradition' of knowledge, failing to provide a dynamic history of the working class and its contributions to cultural formation, hence enfeebling and inhibiting the development of working-class consciousness. Analyses of school textbooks also revealed that the knowledge presented to students glorified or left unquestioned the status quo,⁹² presented history from the point of view of the dominating class,⁹³ and gave a consensual rather than a conflict view of economic relations.⁹⁴ Schools are therefore seen to promote ideological reproduction in favour of the ruling classes.

⁸⁸ BERNSTEIN, B., *Class, Codes and Control* vol.2, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1977).

⁸⁹ INGLIS, F., *The Management of Ignorance: A Political Theory of the Curriculum*, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1985), p. 29.

⁹⁰ APPLE, M., op. cit.

⁹¹ WILLIAMS, R., *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford University Press, London 1978)

⁹² TAXEL, J., 'Justice and Cultural Conflict: Racism, Sexism and Instructional Materials', *Interchange*, 9 (1) (1978).

⁹³ ANYON, J., 'Ideology and United States History Textbooks', *Harvard Educational Review*, 40 (1979).

⁹⁴ WATTS, M., 'Ideology, Textbooks and the Teaching of Economics', *Theory into Practice*, 26 (3) (1987).

Some work has been done on aspects of differential class treatment with reference to access to knowledge. In their qualitative research on the way Maltese students are schooled for work, Mifsud and Mallia have discovered that both in Junior Lyceums and in Trade Schools the overt and covert messages given to students about work are hegemonic.⁹⁵ Baldacchino has argued that economics textbooks used in Maltese schools do not impart a critical economic consciousness, and fail - even at a University level - to encourage an economic literacy which deals with normative issues such as justice, equity, and respect for the environment.⁹⁶ It is highly significant that social studies does not feature as part of the formal curriculum in Maltese private schools, while Trade School students have only one social studies lesson a week - compared to two in other secondary state schools. Students from the ruling and ruled class groups in Malta therefore have a limited opportunity to develop a critical social intelligence.

3. Access to selective education: Selective education refers both to a private school system which exists parallel to the state school system, and to the latter system itself if this, as in the case of Maltese state schools, is organized on the basis of differential curricula according to streams and according to schools (e.g. secondary, junior lyceum and trade schools). In each instance we will be asking the same basic question, namely whether sections of the educational system cater mainly or overwhelmingly for different class groups, with subsequent advantage or disadvantage being suffered by these same groups.

We have as yet no local research to identify the social class origins of those who attend state or private kindergarten establishments. As has been noted earlier, there is more empirical evidence available to support the view that by the time children get into primary schools, they begin to be divided along social class lines, and receive differential treatment, pedagogy and curricula in the different streams in which they are placed.

⁹⁵ MIFSUD, J. & MALLIA, M., *Bells and Punchlocks...*, op. cit.

⁹⁶ see BALDACCHINO, G., 'Critical Economics', *Education*, (Malta) 4(3) (1990).

Similarly for the secondary sector. While there is as yet no research to inform us about the social class origins of those students attending either secondary schools, or junior lyceums, we do have evidence that the population of trade schools - 5,944 students in all in 1988 - is overwhelmingly made up of working-class students. Statistics obtained by the author from 680 questionnaires given out to all third year trade school students in Malta showed that close to ninety per cent of these students came from a manual working-class background.

The link between 'structural exclusion' type arguments and private schooling has been confirmed by a number of empirical studies in a variety of countries. Halsey, Heath and Ridge discovered that ninety per cent of the pupils in British private schools came from the service or intermediate classes.⁹⁷ It is no surprise that they saw such schooling as a 'bastion of privilege' for the élite, and that these schools represent structural differences in wealth, power and influence for those who entered them. The link between private schooling, class and educational achievement becomes clear if we find that

- a. the population of private schools is characterized by a relative absence of working-class students and a high presence of students from middle and upper middle class, as well as élite class origins
- b. a high percentage of those students entering Universities and higher educational establishments have been to private schools
- c. these schools enjoy better resources both in terms of teaching equipment and 'better' teachers. This puts private school students at an advantage.

While such links have been clearly established abroad,⁹⁸ there is still some controversy about the matter locally, with the Labour

⁹⁷ HALSEY, A., et al. op. cit.

⁹⁸ cfr. REID, I., *The Sociology of the School and Education*, (Fontana, London 1986); GRACE, G., *Teachers, Ideology and Control*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1978); GRACE, G., 'Education: Commodity or Public Good?', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 37 (3) (1989); and CONNELL, R.W., 'Curriculum Politics, Hegemony and Strategies of Social Change', *Curriculum and Teaching*, 3 (1 & 2) (1988).

Party claiming that such schools reproduce privilege and power from one generation to the next⁹⁹, and the Nationalist Party¹⁰⁰ claiming that élitism in local private schools was a myth.¹⁰¹

While these issues need to be disentangled with some care, it is important to point out that private schools have become increasingly more popular with Maltese parents. Tabone's quantitative research¹⁰² among four hundred families shows that 65.92 per cent of his sample preferred private schooling for their children, while 22.39 per cent did not. This is similar to a result obtained by a Gallup opinion poll carried out in Malta in July 1984 which found that sixty per cent wanted a private school, while sixteen per cent did not.¹⁰³ Tabone also found that 43.02 per cent of his sample preferred a private school because this provided a higher standard of education; 40.7 per cent thought that private schools gave a better religious formation, while 12.02 per cent felt that by placing their children in private schools, these would not mix with students from other social classes.

The issue is complex because private schools in Malta cannot be bundled together as 'élite institutions' without distinguishing between them. Some are more clearly élite than others in the clientele they attract, in the fees they charge, and in the ethos they promote. Darmanin points this out when referring to the statistics made available by the local church (1985) with regards to the occupation of parents whose children were attending church schools.¹⁰⁴ While Vassallo uses these statistics to argue that there

⁹⁹ *Dokumenti dwar Problemi u Tilwim bejn Knisja u Stat*, Department of Information, (Government Press, Valletta 1983).

¹⁰⁰ *L-Edukazzjoni f'Pajjizna*, Proceedings of a National Conference, Nationalist Party, 14-16th February, (Msida, Malta 1985).

¹⁰¹ See MONTEBELLO, M. & BORG, R., *The Case of Church Schools in Malta*, B.Ed. (Hons.) dissertation, (University of Malta 1989), for an account of the private schools dispute.

¹⁰² TABONE, C., *op. cit.*

¹⁰³ *The Times*, September 18, 1984, quoted in TABONE, *op. cit.*, p.170.

¹⁰⁴ DARMANIN, M., *Sociological Perspectives on Schooling...*, *op. cit.*

is a fair representation from the five occupational groups in the church schools,¹⁰⁵ Darmanin notes that this representation differs according to the school in question.¹⁰⁶ In other words, some church schools had a far higher percentage from groups 'A' and 'B' (i.e. head of the family being a member of the traditional professions, a top civil servant, or owning an important and established business concern). Such schools were obviously more élite than others, and Vassallo's blanket statement that private school élitism is a myth fails to take this into consideration. Another challenge to Vassallo's conclusion comes from Schembri's research on the social origins of students attending University courses in Malta.¹⁰⁷ Schembri correctly points out that when Vassallo concludes that there is a fair representation from both manual and non-manual occupational categories in church schools, he fails to distinguish between simple and proportional representation. In other words, if the proportion of manual to non-manual occupational categories, as given by the census of 1985, is kept in mind, the presence of children of manual category origin is significantly lower, proportionately, than those of non-manual category origin.

The link between selective private schooling and educational achievement as well as occupational 'success' can be seen clearly in other ways too. It is instructive to analyse the educational histories of the persons who feature in 'Malta Who's Who',¹⁰⁸ an alphabetical list containing information about the

origins, careers and interests of a wide cross section of men and women who affect the political, religious and social life of the country...persons who have a definite position from hereditary rank, as members of the professions and of the government, as members of the higher grades of the diplomatic, military, clerical or civil services, as members of the

¹⁰⁵ VASSALLO, M., 'L-elitizmu fl-Iskejjel Privati: Realtà jew Mit?' in *L-Edukazzjoni f'Pajjizna*, Proceedings of a National Conference organised by the Nationalist Party, 14-16th Februaury, (Msida Malta, 1985).

¹⁰⁶ DARMANIN, M., *Sociological Perspectives on Schooling...*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ SCHEMBRI, C., *Students at the University of Malta...*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ MANDUCA, J.(ed.), *Malta Who's Who 7e.*, (Progress Press, Malta 1987).

Parliament and of the press, and as leading members of the artistic, educational, banking and commercial worlds.¹⁰⁹

While the information provided is rather limited for our purposes, we can at least note that those people - mainly men, since out of 864 entries, only thirty-five are females, representing four per cent of the total - considered to be the élite in Malta have been educated in selective schools. Forty-six per cent (or 401 men and women) went to private schools, and thirty-three per cent (or 289 men and women) went to selective state grammar schools such as the Lyceum. Manduca did not collect information about the social class origins of these élite, or the educational histories of these individuals' parents.¹¹⁰ This severely restricts the possibility of drawing any conclusions about patterns of reproduction of class privilege in Malta, and the role of private and selective schooling in this process. Despite this limitation, however, the presentation of the above statistics makes it increasingly difficult to deny that selective schooling leads to the higher echelons of our society's occupational and status structure.

Data presented by Vella and Schembri¹¹¹ make it also increasingly difficult to deny that selective schooling, especially selective private schooling, caters overwhelmingly for the middle, upper middle and élite classes in Malta. Both authors - culling different statistical research which they carried out separately - arrive at the conclusion that a high percentage of University students had attended private schooling. Vella notes that from her sample of 185 first year students - or 81.14 per cent of that total year group - starting University courses in 1985, the highest percentage of students (46.49 per cent) had received all of their primary and secondary level education at a private school.¹¹² The lowest percentage (18.92 per cent) had attended state schools only,

¹⁰⁹ MANDUCA, J., (ed.) op. cit., p. vii.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ VELLA, I., *Socio-economic Characteristics...*, op. cit.; SCHEMBRI, C., op. cit.

¹¹² VELLA, I., *ibid.*

and 34.59 per cent had attended both types of schools. Vella concludes that

the fact that the majority of the students, that is 81.08 per cent have attended a private school at some time or another, suggests that there may be a relationship between the schools that one attends and the chances that one has of entering university.¹¹³

Schembri reports a similar pattern.¹¹⁴ Not only did he find that of his sample of university students, those coming from working-class families were more likely to have attended a state primary or secondary school, but he also found that 58.6 per cent had attended private primary schools and seventy per cent had attended private secondary schools.

4. Class differential provision - and consumption - of educational resources: This raises questions as to the structural inequality perpetrated against identifiable groups of students that could arise out of differential allocation of funds and educational resources. Ethnographic research carried out under the direction of the present author suggests quite strongly that in primary state schools, the better teachers (i.e. those who are best qualified, those with most energy and/or experience, those who show most commitment) are placed by Headmasters and Headmistresses with students in top stream classes with the hope that there will be a higher number of passes in the Junior Lyceum examination. It would seem reasonable to presume that at least in expenditure on resources, the educational system provides more capital per trade school student than, say, for other secondary school students because of the cost of materials used during workshop practice. It needs to be pointed out, however, that the real returns of this investment for the students involved needs to be carefully appraised, for it is common knowledge that male trade school students are still learning skills on out-dated machinery donated by the Italian government in the 1970s. In contrast, up-to-date computer technology is being made available

¹¹³ VELLA, I., *op. cit.*, p. 78.

¹¹⁴ SCHEMBRI, C., *op. cit.*

to students in junior lyceums, and is already in use in a number of private schools.

5. Different school processes: A final element which will be discussed in the context of structural factors which lead to the exclusion of the working class from success at school is what is being bundled together here under the title of school processes. Process approaches to schooling became popular in the early 1970s, and signalled a move away from the quantitative methodology of the political arithmetic tradition towards qualitative research strategies which set out to discover what really took place within schools. The political arithmetic approach, as Connell et al. argue, 'had done the job of collecting the awkward facts'.¹¹⁵ The contours of the map of inequality and differential achievement could no longer be denied. The facts were there for all to see. What was needed now was to try to get into the 'black box' that is the school to try to discover why it was that students from working-class backgrounds invariably did worse at formal education, or dropped out earlier of school, than their better off counterparts. In other words, it now became necessary to try to explain the figures that quantitative analyses churned out.

Researchers started to 'live in' schools, and using a variety of observational techniques uncovered other evidence to show that working-class failure in formal education was not a problem of 'family background' or 'motivation'. Rather, a number of school factors could be identified which functioned against the interest of working-class students. A number of these can be mentioned in this context. Thus, Rist found that pupils from different social class backgrounds receive differential treatment from teachers,¹¹⁶ not only in the way that Anyon, as has been outlined previously, suggests,¹¹⁷ but also in terms of having higher expectations for

¹¹⁵ CONNELL et al., op. cit., p. 29.

¹¹⁶ RIST, R., 'Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education', *Harvard Educational Review*, 40 (1970).

¹¹⁷ ANYON, J., 'Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work', op. cit.

their middle-class students. Rist also discovered that after only eight days in one particular kindergarten, a teacher had allotted permanent seating arrangements to her students according to her perception of each individual's academic ability. The teacher had not evaluated or assessed her students in any formal manner; interestingly enough, Rist discovered that the allocation of seating reflected the students' class, with the poorer children assembled around one table, the working-class children around another, and the middle class around a third. Rist noted that, over the three years that he spent at this school, the initial patterns established by the kindergarten teacher were repeated year after year.

Becker discovered, in a series of interviews with teachers in Chicago, that teachers operate with a definite image of the 'ideal pupil', defined as being moral, clean, healthy, well dressed, moderate in behaviour, exhibiting politeness and patience.¹¹⁸ These pupils were interested in lessons and worked hard at school. Becker argued that teachers were able to relate positively to students exhibiting such characteristics, and negatively to those who deviated from the ideal-pupil image. Grace has argued that teachers adopt a 'missionary ideology' when they interact with such non-ideal, often working-class students.¹¹⁹ Teachers, themselves brought up in a middle-class environment, or believing that the sets of values and cultural practices of the middle class have an absolute status, perceive their role as one of 'converting' working-class children to the middle-class cultural 'habitus'¹²⁰, adopting a social pathology and deficit view of working-class students. These implicit class assumptions have a devastating effect on students' careers in schools.

One such repercussion of teachers' categorization of students into different classes is that the former differentiate in the selection of content and in pedagogy between students who have been perceived as having a high or low ability. This selection can become formalized when students thus identified are placed in

¹¹⁸ BECKER, H.S., 'Social Class Variation in Pupil-teacher Relationships', *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 25 (8) (1952).

¹¹⁹ GRACE, G., *Teachers' Ideology and Control*, op. cit.

¹²⁰ BOURDIEU, P. & PASSERON, J., op. cit.

lower streams. Ball has argued that those students in the lower streams - often of working-class origins - form a 'counter-school' culture as a result of their being relegated into an 'institutional sub-world' of lower status within the school.¹²¹ This counter-school culture involves a withdrawal of investment in intellectual work, and as Willis has documented¹²², such resistance simply reinforces the structural channelling initiated by the school and leads even more surely to the reproductive process whereby working-class students get working-class jobs. Baldacchino has used similar arguments to explain the phenomenon of illiteracy in Malta.¹²³

While local educational research has been relatively strong in the 'political arithmetic', quantitative tradition, it has so far not provided much insight into what it is that takes place in the 'black box' of Maltese schools which promotes patterns of class inequality. Darmanin has made a start, and a selection of her school process research is presented in the following chapter.¹²⁴

CONCLUSION

The review of the literature which is presently available points towards one overwhelming conclusion, namely that in Malta as elsewhere, 'social class' - even when this is reduced to the nominal form of 'parental occupation' - affects one's educational achievement in our formal school system. Any view which unproblematically promotes education as 'the great equalizer' of chances needs, therefore, to be regarded with a fair degree of scepticism. Governments, whether liberal or radical, have

¹²¹ BALL, S.J., 'The Sociology of the School: Streaming and Mixed Ability and Social Class', in ROGERS, R.(ed.), *Education and Social Class*, (Falmer Press, Lewes 1986).

¹²² WILLIS, P., *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs*, (Saxon House, Farnborough 1977).

¹²³ BALDACCHINO, G., 'L-Illiterizmu. X'inhu? X'Ser Naghmlu Dwaru?', Paper presented at a *National Conference on Illiteracy* organized by *Fondazzjoni Gużè Ellul Mercer*, 22nd June, 1990 (Malta).

¹²⁴ DARMANIN, M., *Sociological Perspectives...*, op. cit.

attempted to deal with obvious class differences in the wider social order by addressing disparate achievement within educational systems. The argument was that equality of opportunity in education would construct a truly meritocratic society, where ability and effort would be rewarded. As Levin has so clearly argued¹²⁵, such strategies - which included the comprehensivization of the secondary school system in a number of countries - have largely failed to achieve their goal of equity and justice. Indeed, he concludes that once one system of stratification - what we have referred to as 'structure of exclusion' - has been dismantled, another springs up in place. Levin in fact concludes that with comprehensivization

the post-secondary institutions are increasingly taking on the role of stratification that was undertaken traditionally by the secondary school. Through restricted admission standards by field of study, creating new institutions to differentiate roles and functions within higher education, diluting the instructional resources through overcrowding, and stimulating higher levels of dropouts, the postsecondary educational sector is accommodating the need to prepare and allocate students to the different strata of the productive hierarchy.¹²⁶

The implication of Levin's study is that education cannot transform society into a more equitable and just entity until and unless there is a political will to bring about such equity and justice in the very structure of that same society - through such measures as a more equitable redistribution of wealth, and the doing away with the distinction between those who own wealth and property, and those who do not. In this regard, Bowles argues that

To discuss the egalitarian or growth functions of education...in the absence of rebellion against the capitalist order is worse than ideal speculation. It is to offer a false promise, an ideological palliative which seeks to buy time for capitalism.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ LEVIN, H.M., "The Dilemma of Comprehensive Secondary School Reforms...", op. cit.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ BOWLES, S., "The Labour Theory of Value and the "Primacy of the Political", *Economic Forum*, 13 (2) (1982).

Whether or not we agree with Bowles's and Levin's view will have a direct repercussion on the kind of 'educational politics'¹²⁸ we will become involved with or support as individuals or as members of such groups as unions, political parties, and/or social movements. Those who look to the school from what has earlier been referred to as the 'deficit' perspective will in all probability argue for forms of compensatory education for the working-class students who fail. Those who, on the other hand, recognize that such failure is not pathological or located in the individual, but is to be explained as a direct consequence of the organized inequality in the wider social structure, will be more likely to argue for social transformation rather than mere educational change. Obviously, one cannot dismiss any positive educational change while waiting for larger social transformations to occur. Indeed, progressive governments everywhere¹²⁹ - and this is to some extent true of Malta as well in the period between 1971 and 1987 - have embarked on their political programmes of wealth and power redistribution by tackling not only wage and property structures, but also educational structures.

Such educational politics could take a number of forms, with goals clearly articulated to the kinds of disadvantages that working-class students have been observed to suffer in the 'structural exclusion' account above. Hogan¹³⁰ draws what I am here calling 'educational-cum-class action' together under four headings, namely 'structural politics', 'human capital politics', 'cultural capital politics' and 'displacement politics'. By structural politics Hogan is referring to those actions

centred upon the nature and strength of the alignment of the school with the economy (for example, conflicts over differentiated and vocational education) and conflicts over the structure of authority relations within schools (for example, conflicts over the centralization of administrative authority, unionization and professionalism).

¹²⁸ HOGAN, D., 'Education and Class Formation...', *op. cit.*

¹²⁹ CARNOY, M. & SAMOFF, J., *op. cit.*

¹³⁰ HOGAN, D., *op. cit.*, pp. 52-3.

Human capital politics refers to those actions 'generated by the efforts of parents and communities to enhance the rates of return to their children or school population relative to other children or school populations'. Cultural capital politics refers to those kinds of conflicts created 'over competing definitions of legitimate knowledge, that is, conflicts over the distribution of symbolic authority in the society (for example, conflicts over curricula content or textbooks)'. Finally, displacement politics refers to those 'educational issues (often, though not always, conflicts of a cultural capital kind) [which] become proxies for other non-educational conflicts in the community'.

It is in the light of these four categories that the education-cum-class politics of the recent two decades need to be evaluated. In other words, how did the restructuring of education between 1971 and 1987, and from 1987 onwards, positively or negatively influence the class structure in Malta? Clearly, this is a question of great importance and will be addressed in a forthcoming publication¹³¹. What is being suggested at this stage

¹³¹ While the educational reforms carried out by the Labour government still need to be carefully analysed, it would be useful in this context to suggest that there have been a number of distinct stages in its approach. The general argument put forward by this government was that schools in Malta were reproducing class divisions, not removing them. The government therefore considered suspect the general belief that schools were meritocratic. The Labour government's educational reforms imply an appreciation of the fact that inequitable access to education leads to social stratification and the reproduction of class inequalities from one generation to the next. This the Labour government set out to eradicate in two ways. These two stages did not follow each other chronologically, but took place within roughly similar time-periods as the government attempted to achieve two apparently contradictory goals: a. an ideological goal of bringing about equity and equality in a class-stratified society, and b. a material goal of developing - and in many cases setting up - the country's industrial forces of production. In the absence of an industrial and entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, Mintoff argued that it was up to the worker's movement to set up an industry which would guarantee work and material well-being to one and all. It was in this environment that a package of reforms in a variety of state sectors were initiated. In attempting to fulfil its ideological goal of equality the Labour government fought strongly to eradicate private

is that it is political action on schools, rather than any notion of 'individual mobility' through educational investment and achievement, that needs to be addressed when considering the links between class and educational achievement. It is only in this way that the ideals of equity and justice will be served.

schooling and develop a system of access to University which ensured that working-class students would benefit from positive discrimination. Streaming in the primary schools, the 11+ examination, the tripartite secondary education system - one and all were removed in a series of top-down, often clumsily managed reforms which brought about an important series of 'obstructionist strategies' [(DARMANIN, M. 'Malta's Teachers and Social Change', in LAWN, M.(ed.), *The Politics of Teacher Unionism: International Perspectives*, (Croom Helm, Kent 1985)] on the part of some trade unions, teachers, parents, and students. It is important to note that in response to the material goal of developing a skilled, or at least semi-skilled, labour force for the setting up of new industries, the Labour government also set up Trade Schools in 1972 which were eventually to attract - and structurally entrap - an overwhelmingly working-class representation. The opposition the Labour government met in the implementation of its educational reforms finally led to a form of capitulation whereby the government adopted different tactics. This resulted in the setting up of junior lyceums, 'elite' academic secondary schools which could compete with private schools but which, being free, could cater for working-class students. Connell's (op. cit., p.67) remark is a fitting description of what has happened to educational politics locally: 'In many parts of labour politics we have reached the point where leaderships are unable to conceive of any form of working-class educational advancement *except* getting more of the dominant curriculum and institutions' (emphasis in the original).