

New 2015 Specification

AQA
Sociology
EXAM NOTES

For A Level (Year 1) & AS Level

Education

Research Methods (including Methods in Context)

Families and Households

BOOK 1

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About the Exam Notes

Written with examination success in mind!

- These exam notes have been written by Sociology examiners and experienced teachers, with only one purpose in mind— **exam success**. Using these exam notes will help students achieve the best possible grade in their Sociology exam.
- We have provided the depth of information required for your Sociology examinations, both in terms of knowledge and evaluation, which makes these exam notes more concise than general Sociology text books, and more comprehensive than standard revision guides (which often lack the depth of evaluation required to achieve an A grade).

We have focused on the 'evaluation' part.

- Contrary to popular belief, learning and memorising lots of facts and theories will not get you a grade A or B in your exam. The exam requires you to be able to 'analyse' and 'evaluate' sociological knowledge, this does not mean jotting down a few brief criticisms at the end of your essay. The analysis and evaluation that you make, needs to be expanded upon and explained in an effective manner. With this in mind, we have written a lot of the evaluation points using the three-step-rule: identify, expand and conclude. We have done this for you in this book to demonstrate what a 'developed' evaluation point looks like. Please try and remember this technique and demonstrate it in your exam.

Exam questions

- We have given you lots of exam questions at the end of each exam note to practise. We have covered most of the different types of questions you may be asked for each topic both at AS and at A Level. If you are taking the A level course, it is a good way of testing and practising both your knowledge and examination skills. You may realise some of the questions require the same answers, but are worded differently, this was deliberate, just so you are familiar with the different way the questions can be worded.
- Please visit www.sociologyzone.co.uk for exam notes, exam questions, mark schemes, model answers and much more.

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Section 1

Education

AQA Specification

Education

AQA

Students are expected to be familiar with sociological explanations of the following content:

- the role and functions of the education system, including its relationship to the economy and to class structure
- differential educational achievement of social groups by social class, gender and ethnicity in contemporary society
- relationships and processes within schools, with particular reference to teacher/pupil relationships, pupil identities and subcultures, the hidden curriculum, and the organisation of teaching and learning
- the significance of educational policies, including policies of selection, marketisation and privatisation, and policies to achieve greater equality of opportunity or outcome, for an understanding of the structure, role, impact and experience of and access to education; the impact of globalisation on educational policy.

The AQA specification: Education

- The relationship the role and functions of the education system, including its relationship to the economy and to class structure.

The exam requires that you are able to:

- ▶ Describe and evaluate the functionalist perspective on education.

Keywords

- **Social solidarity** refers to the bonding/integration of people together into society through shared values, and a common culture and understanding.
- **Meritocratic** means that status or position in society is achieved through your own abilities and efforts rather than because of your class, ethnicity or gender, or the family you were born into or who you know.

Functionalist perspective on education

- Functionalists argue that for society to function effectively, there must be social order and stability (ie, an absence of disorder, conflict and tension), otherwise society will collapse. In order for society to survive, society needs **social solidarity** – everyone sharing the same norms and values (**value consensus**).
- Functionalism is seen as a **structural theory** because it claims that social structures (ie, social institutions) such as religion, family and school perform a number of positive 'functions/roles', both for society as a whole and for individuals, in order to help maintain social solidarity. Therefore, functionalists are mainly interested in the positive functions performed by education. There are two key functions:
 - **The socialisation function.** The school system helps socialise students into society by teaching individuals about the accepted behaviour and rules of society, which helps achieve social solidarity.
 - **The economic function.** The school system plays a key role in slotting people into 'appropriate' future occupational positions in society.

Durkheim: social solidarity

- **Education promotes social solidarity.** Durkheim (1903) claims that the education system teaches students the shared values and norms of society which create social solidarity. The school, with its rules, rituals and regulations, teaches students the importance of social constraints and cooperation; in some respects, school is 'society in miniature', creating tolerant and law-abiding future citizens who will cooperate with each other.

Parsons: universalistic values and meritocracy

- **Education teaches universalistic values.** Parsons (1961) argues that school helps prepare us for society by moving us from particularistic to universalistic values. Particularistic values are taught during primary socialisation within the family, in which parents treat their children as if they are special regardless of their achievement. Society cannot act in this way but must function on universalistic values: everyone has to be treated equally. Students must learn that success and achievement (or status with respect to the law) does not depend on where you come from or who you know, but on individual merit (see below). Learning these universalistic standards enables students to more easily make the transition from particularistic values (family) to universalistic values (society) which are essential for cooperation.
- **Meritocracy.** Parsons also sees the education system as playing the role of socialising individuals into accepting the shared values of a meritocratic society. Firstly, this means that everyone achieves their place in society through their own efforts and abilities, rather than through any inherited status. Secondly, every individual is given an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential without being discriminated against on grounds of social class, ethnicity or gender. Therefore, the education system teaches pupils to understand the values of achievement and of equal opportunity. Parsons sees the school as a miniature version of 'society', as both are meritocratic. In school, individuals succeed or fail depending on their own ability and effort. This prepares them for life in modern society and its economy, which is competitive and individualistic.

Davis and Moore: role allocation

- **Role allocation.** Davis and Moore (1945) see the education system's main function as one of selection and the allocation to students of their future work roles. It does this by carrying out a filtering process of 'sifting and sorting out' individuals so that the most talented get the best qualifications and are allocated to the most important jobs. Individuals have different abilities and skills. Davis and Moore see some work roles as more complex than others and requiring greater skill. For society to function efficiently, the most talented individuals need to be allocated to the most important jobs. Higher rewards are offered for these jobs to motivate everyone to strive for them. A meritocratic education system allows everyone to compete equally. As a result, society is more productive because the most able people do the most important jobs.

Human capital theory

- **Human capital theory** was developed by Schultz (1971) and suggests that high levels of spending on education and training (hence 'human capital') are required as these develop people's knowledge and skills which in turn helps produce an efficient and successful economy. Functionalists argue that greater investment in human capital has led to the expansion of higher education courses to meet the demands of modern technological advanced society. The meritocratic education system is more important than ever as it is the best way to make sure the best-qualified and most highly-skilled people get the best jobs. This ensures greater economic productivity for society and a higher financial return for the skilled individual.



Evaluation

X Meritocracy is a myth. Marxists argue that the meritocratic education system is a myth. This is because, in reality, some social groups such as the working class and ethnic or gender groups are often discriminated against or under-achieve for reasons outside school influence (eg, material deprivation). This would suggest that the education system is not totally based on equal opportunity for everyone, as suggested by the functionalists, as the success of some students can be influenced by factors such as class, ethnicity and gender.

Marxists would also argue that the education system works in favour of the ruling class because it transmits the values and ideological views of that class rather than society's shared values, as claimed by the functionalists.

X Social class, gender and ethnicity are influential. Evidence has shown that most people in middle-class occupations have middle-class backgrounds, and that working-class jobs are often filled by people from working-class backgrounds. Equally, females and certain ethnic/colour groups (eg, Bangladeshi or Black) are less likely to be in well-paid jobs. This would suggest a person's class background, ethnicity and gender are more important in determining their income later in life than is their achievement in school.

X Education is not linked to job skill. It is difficult to see a direct link between the subjects studied at school and what is required of workers in their jobs. It could be argued that beyond basic standards of literacy and numeracy, and university courses in a few subjects, such as law or medicine, most formal education is not closely related to the skills required for an efficient workforce. This would suggest that education does not necessarily equip people for future work roles.

X Most functional jobs are questionable. Davis and Moore assume that the most important functional jobs are given to those best qualified for them, and that they are rewarded financially for them. However, in real life this is not the case. For example, footballers (eg, David Beckham) are exceptionally well-paid; does this mean that being a footballer is functionally more important for society than being a doctor, teacher or nurse, because they are paid less?



Practice exam questions

AS level exam questions

1. Define the term 'meritocracy'. [2 marks]
2. Define the term 'value consensus'. [2 marks]
3. Define the term 'social solidarity'. [2 marks]
4. Define the term 'universalistic norms'. [2 marks]

5. Outline **three** functions that the education system might perform according to the functionalist view. **[6 marks]**
6. Outline **three** ways in which school prepares pupils for work. **[6 marks]**
7. Outline and explain **two** criticisms that may be made of the functionalist view of the role of the education system. **[10 marks]**
8. Using material from **Item (...)** and your knowledge, evaluate the functionalist contribution to our understanding of the role of the education system in society. **[20 marks]**

A level exam questions

1. Outline and explain **two** roles that education fulfils according to functionalists. **[4 marks]**
2. Outline **two** ways in which schools are 'based on meritocratic principles'. **[4 marks]**
3. Outline **three** criticisms that sociologists may make of the functionalist view of the education system. **[6 marks]**
4. Outline **three** ways in which school prepares pupils for work. **[6 marks]**
5. Applying material from **Item (...)**, analyse **two** ways in which education is 'based on meritocratic principles'. **[10 marks]**

The AQA specification: Families and Households

- The nature of childhood, and changes in the status of children in the family and society.

The exam requires that you are able to:

- ▶ Describe and assess how childhood has been socially constructed.
- ▶ Assess whether childhood has improved or not in contemporary society.
- ▶ Describe and assess the different views of the future of childhood.

Key term

- **Childhood** is viewed as the early stage of human physiological and psychological development, typically the time period from infancy to puberty, or before people turn 13 (although some consider it to last until people are 18 and considered legally adult). In contemporary Britain, childhood is considered to be a distinctive stage in life that is experienced before becoming an adult.
- **Social construct** means that certain things, in this case 'childhood', have been created and defined by society, rather than being a natural biological development.

Is childhood a social construct?

Childhood is viewed as a distinct and separate period of life, a time of innocent vulnerability that requires protection from the harsh realities of the adult world. It goes without saying that children are younger and biologically less developed than adults, but sociologists argue that notions of childhood are *socially constructed* (see above). This is because the responsibility, treatments, laws and status of children:

- vary between different cultures (eg, western, non-western and developing countries).
- vary even in the same societies (eg, as regards class, ethnicity and gender).
- have changed through history (eg, pre-industrial, industrial and modern/future periods).

Childhood in different cultures

There is a wide variation in how children are viewed and treated across the world. For example, in European societies, the period of childhood is usually longer. In non-European and developing countries, childhood is a much shorter period, with some children taking on adult roles as soon as they are physically able. For example, approximately 150 million children (aged 5 -14) are involved in child labour with the largest number coming from Africa and China and boys and girls in this age group almost equally affected (International Labour Organisation, 2015). Even more disturbing is the use of children as soldiers in Africa, for example in Uganda, Chad, Congo and Somalia (www.warchild.org.uk). There are an estimated 250,000 child soldiers in the world today. It is estimated that 40% of all child soldiers are girls, often used as 'wives' (ie, sex slaves) of the male combatants.

Childhood in the same society

Experience of childhood is not the same even in the same society. In contemporary Britain, inequality based on social class, ethnicity and gender means that not all children have the same experience of

growing up. For example, girls, particularly Asian girls, will often have a more restricted childhood than boys. Government statistics show that 27% of children living in Britain (2014) are defined as poor. Poorer children are likely to suffer more ill-health and disability and have fewer educational qualifications than those who are better-off.

Historical changes in childhood

Children in pre-industrial society (pre-1760)

Phillipe Ariès (1960) argues that in pre-industrial European society, childhood did not exist. His analysis through secondary sources such as letters, diaries and historical documents as well as medieval paintings demonstrated that children were treated no differently from adults: they were seen as 'little adults' and made to work as young as 7 or 8 years of age alongside adults (or be apprenticed out to learn a trade). Children were seen as **economic assets** rather than as a focus of love and affection. In the eyes of the law, 7- and 8-year-olds were seen as being criminally responsible. This means that they could be tried and punished for crimes such as stealing on a similar basis to adults. Ariès argued that two factors explain why society did not regard children as objects of love and devotion:

- **High level of infant mortality.** There was a very high level of infant mortality, which may have led parents to be indifferent towards infants.
- **Financial reasons.** Children had to work in order for the family unit to survive, which in turn meant they were given adult responsibilities at a younger age.

Children in industrial society (1760-onwards)

Ariès argues that it was industrialisation that influenced the social construction of childhood, that is, changed our attitude towards children. By the 19th century, laws and social changes had resulted in the emergence of 'childhood'. For example, laws were introduced that included banning children from working in mines and factories and which isolated most children from the 'real world' of adult work and responsibilities. The government also introduced a law to provide education for children up to the age of 10 (the Elementary Education Act 1870) and raised the age of sexual consent to 16, to cut down on child prostitution. Improvements in health, sanitation and diet led to a decline in infant mortality rates. This gradually led to children becoming objects of love and devotion, regarded as vulnerable and in need of protection, rather than economic assets. However, some working-class children ignored the new laws and continued to work in mines and factories, since their families were often dependent on their children's wages for survival (there being no welfare or state pensions).

Once the idea of childhood had been established in the 19th century, different notions of children and childhood emerged. Wendy Rogers (2001) argues that two dominant images of childhood emerged in the 19th century and remain with us today: that of the sinful child and that of the innocent child:

- **Innocent child.** The innocent child view suggests there is something wholesome and precious about childhood and that children should be protected from the nasty adult world and allowed the freedom to enjoy their time of innocence.
- **Sinful child.** The sinful child view assumes children are essentially selfish and unable to control

their selfish desires. This is associated with the 'control view' of childhood, in which the job of adults is to control, regulate and discipline children.

Childhood in modern society (1960-present day)

It was not until the late 20th and early 21st century that major changes took place whereby children are now seen as a distinct category from adults. British society has become more child-centred in the post-war period, which means the welfare of children is very important in society: we spend large amounts of time, effort and money on a smaller number of children. In a child-centred society, children are seen as naive, vulnerable and in need of protection from bad things (eg, murder, death, violence and conflict). Parenting children the right way also became a concern for most adults who have children. A large amount of money and time is invested in children academically, socially and physically to prepare them for adulthood, and a string of laws have been passed to provide protection for children.

Why did the position of children change in the 19th and 20th centuries?

- **Industrialisation.** Formal schooling developed as a direct response to industrialisation. The 1870 Education Act introduced a basic system of primary education with the hope that literate educated workers would create a skilled workforce.
- **The decline of infant mortality rates.** More infants surviving meant parents had fewer children and made a greater financial and emotional investment in the fewer children they had.
- **Advances in specialist knowledge about children.** Advances in the field of psychology during the 19th and 20th centuries meant the promotion of ideas about the importance of the early years of child development.
- **Laws banning child labour.** From the 1840s, children changed from economic assets to economic liabilities, financially dependent on their parents.
- **Compulsory schooling.** The Elementary Education Act of 1870 made education compulsory from the ages of five to ten; this created a period of dependency on the family and separated children from the adult world of work. With the later expansion of education, children were obliged to spend a minimum of 11 years in school.
- **Contraception.** The availability of contraception means parenthood is now a matter of choice rather than economic necessity or biological accident. Families can have fewer children, investing more time and care in them.
- **Children protection and welfare laws.** The expansion of social welfare services and a number of acts have given children greater protection. For example, the Children Act (1989) sets out parents' 'responsibilities' and protects children who are thought to be at risk, mandating action if necessary by involving the social services and the police. The Child Support Act (1991) is designed to protect children's welfare in the event of parental separation.
- **Laws about social behaviour.** The minimum age of a wide range of activities, from sex to smoking and drinking alcohol, reinforces the attitude that children are different from adults.

Has childhood improved?

Many would argue that the lives of children in the western world have greatly improved compared to the lives of children in earlier centuries and those of children in many other parts of the world.

Positive view

The 'march of progress' sociologists take a positive view of childhood and argue that, over time, the lives of most children have improved, and that the family, including society, is child-centred. This is because:

- Children's welfare has improved, in terms of their education, psychology and health.
- Infant mortality rate has declined; most babies now survive.
- Smaller family size means parents can afford to provide for children's needs
- Children are protected from harm and exploitation by laws against child abuse and child labour.

Negative view

- **Conflict theorists** (eg, feminists and Marxist) argue that the 'march of progress' view is idealised, and take a more negative of childhood. They highlight points such as:
 - **Gender differences:** (the way we see and treat girls and boys). Girls are more likely to perform domestic duties and parents often are more protective of girls, allowing them much less independence.
 - **Ethnic differences:** for example, Asian parents (eg, Muslim, Sikh and Indian) are more likely to be strict towards their daughters than white parents.
 - **Class inequalities:** for example, poor children tend to lack many of the experiences that middle-class children may enjoy (holidays, day-trips and activities).

Firestone (1979), a **feminist**, argues that childhood has not improved because inequalities exist between children and adults. Children are controlled and dominated by adults. For example, children do not have the freedom to choose whether they can work, what they do with their time, what they wear and eat, and whether they want to go to school or not.

Marxists would also point out the class differences in definitions of childhood over the years: it was mainly working-class children who were expected to work long hours in the 19th century, whereas upper-class children were the first to be 'coddled'. They would also argue that how we treat children is likely to depend on the economy and the needs of the means of production.

- **Functionalists and the New Right** see childhood as a natural stage in development and a time where children are vulnerable and under threat, requiring protection from the adult world. However, Melanie Phillips (1997), a journalist who supports the New Right view, argues that in modern society the culture of disciplined parenting is breaking down. She sees two trends as the reason for this:
 - **Liberal ideologies.** Liberal ideas that children have rights (eg, not to be punished by smacking) have undermined the ability of parents to establish authority over children, which in turn has undermined children's respect for parenting (and authority).
 - **Media.** The media and peer groups are becoming much more influential in shaping a child's

identity than parents.

Philips argues that the above two trends are detrimental to childhood as they have encouraged children to become adults faster and simultaneously undermined the ability of parents to regulate their children's passage into adolescence and adulthood. As a result, the period of childhood innocence has been shortened as children are made to mature at a much earlier age, causing all types of problems, such as inability to cope with choices, leading to psychological disorders (eg, suicide and eating disorders).

- **Family relationships.** Childhood can be damaged by family disruption such as divorce, reconstituted family arrangements, and sexual and physical or emotional abuse. For example, the Child Protection Register contains approximately 50,000 names of children vulnerable to abuse, mainly from family members. Their dependency on adults and their inability to obtain legal paid employment mean they have little opportunity to escape unhappy family life.
- **Mass media.** Some sociologists argue that in modern society, children have lost their innocence and their childhood has been shortened through exposure to adult issues such as sex and death through the mass media and the internet. The media has also influenced many young girls' behaviour by encouraging them to envisage themselves as sexual beings at a much younger age than previously.
- **Children in other countries.** Children in developing countries will often experience childhood differently from those in developed or Western societies. Factors such as the trafficking and prostitution of children, child pornography, child military service and child labour will mean that children often experience their childhood negatively.

The future of childhood

Neil Postman in 'The Disappearance of Childhood' (1983) argues that childhood is disappearing in the 21st century and children are becoming more like adults. This is mainly due to mass media (eg, internet and TV) on which children are being exposed to the adult world, (eg, sex, drugs and violence) at younger and younger ages. The formerly secret aspects of adulthood have been revealed to children at a much earlier age, forcing them to grow up more quickly.

Palmer (2006) argues that rapid changes in technology and social attitudes are damaging children's development (eg, junk food, computer games, intensive marketing to children, testing in education and long hours worked by parents). As a result, children are deprived of a genuine childhood.

Nick Lee (2001) suggests that childhood has not disappeared but has just become more complex and ambiguous (unclear). Children are dependent and independent at some points during their growth. This is due to the increasing similarities between adults and children, which have led to a new social construction of childhood which at present is unclear. On the other hand, Grossberg (1994) argues that much of adult culture now increasingly enjoys aspects of 'youth culture', with many people in their 30s and 40s refusing to let go of their youth.

Conclusion

It is clear that being a child in the past was very different to being a child today, although how children experience their childhood will depend on the country they are born in, and what class, gender and

ethnicity they belong to. Changes in the UK since the 19th century have led to the emergence of a child-centred society, which has had a positive impact on the experience and development of children. Changing technology and social attitudes now mean children are maturing much faster, but this may come at a cost. For example, UK youth are at, or near, the top of the international league table for obesity, self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and teenage pregnancies, which suggests they are not ready to cope emotionally and psychologically.



Evaluation

- X Cognitive development.** Psychologists such as Piaget have shown that children develop mentally (cognition) through a number of different stages and are not capable of thinking in the same way as adults. The process of socialisation also indicates that 'childhood' is a learned concept: the young person learns how to be a 'child' and the adult learns how to create a 'child'.
- X Childhood not all a social construct.** It could be argued that childhood is not completely constructed socially. The physical and mental development of the young human being helps to define the roles and responsibilities they can take, and also the treatment they receive. The physical boundaries of age must play some part in determining what a child can do.
- X Exaggeration of children's lives in pre-industrial times.** Ariès has been criticised for his interpretation of childhood in pre-industrial society. It has been argued that in certain respects, children in medieval Europe were seen as different from adults. For example, there were laws prohibiting the marriage of children under the age of 12.
- X Poverty in less developed countries.** Although childhood is experienced differently in less-developed countries, this is mainly for economic reasons, that is, that children are essential for the economic survival of the family, rather than because they have a different social construction of childhood. For example, poverty and lack of decent work for adults forces many children into work, a factor preventing them from going to school and equipping themselves with literacy skills, even if being illiterate will further propel the poverty cycle.
- X Child abuse.** The child-centeredness of society does not necessarily mean that childhood has improved. Child abuse still exists, whether physical, sexual or mental. For example, the NSPCC claims that in 2014, nearly 50,000 children were on the Child Protection Register because they were said to be at risk of significant harm from family members. These figures emphasise the dark side of family life, of which children are victims.
- X Child-centered society.** Frank Furedi (2000) argues that a child-centered society has led to an age of 'paranoid parenting': an over-exaggerated level of constant fear and paranoia of the potential threats their children face in terms of health, safety and welfare (eg, parks, foods, cots, baby-sitters, pedophiles, gangs or drugs). This has caused parents to be over-controlling and more restrictive of children's activities (eg, playing in the park). This restrictive approach towards play stifles children's initiative and desire for play/adventure, which is important for the child's social and cognitive development. For example, for children to become responsible, they have to learn to make decisions for themselves, something they can never do under a parent's watchful eye.



Practice exam questions

AS Level type questions

1. Define the term 'child-centred society'. [2 marks]
2. Define the term 'social construction'. [2 marks]
3. Using **one** example, briefly explain how the difference between adults and childhood may be becoming less clear. [2 marks]
4. Using **one** example, briefly explain how there may be a 'loss of childhood' in contemporary British society. [2 marks]
5. Outline **three** ways in which adults may control the activities of children. [6 marks]
6. Outline **three** ways in which adults control children's time, space or bodies. [6 marks]
7. Outline **three** reasons why children have less power in society than adults. [6 marks]
8. Outline **three** ways in which the position of children can be said to have improved over the last one hundred years. [6 marks]
9. Outline **three** ways in which differences between childhood and adulthood are becoming less clear in society today. [6 marks]
10. Outline **three** ways in which childhood may not be a specially protected and privileged time of life. [6 marks]
11. Outline **three** reasons why the experience of childhood may differ between children in contemporary British society. [6 marks]

AS & A Level type questions

12. Outline and explain **two** reasons why childhood as a separate age-status is a 'relatively modern invention' [10 marks]
13. Outline and explain **two** changes in society which may be reducing the distinction between 'childhood' and 'adulthood'. [10 marks]
14. Applying material from **Item (...)** and your knowledge, evaluate sociological explanations of changes in the status of childhood. [20 marks]
15. Applying material from **Item (...)** and your knowledge, evaluate the view that contemporary families have become more child-centred. [20 marks]
16. Applying material from **Item (...)** and your knowledge, view that childhood is being lost in society today. [20 marks]

A Level type question

17. Applying material from **Item (...)**, analyse **two** arguments against the view that childhood is a fixed, universal stage. [10 marks]
18. Applying material from **Item (...)**, analyse **two** changes in the position of children in society over the last 100 years. [10 marks]