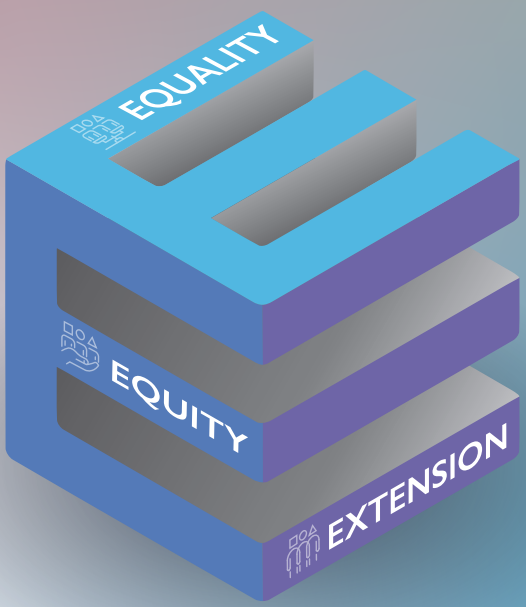
THE WORKING CLASSROOM

How to make school work for working-class students



Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith

PRAISE FOR *THE WORKING CLASSROOM*

This book identifies the colossal barriers youngsters living in poverty face and then expertly weaves in the authors' life experiences, observations from the classroom and academic research as ammunition for 'everyone being exceptional'. It is a practicable collection of approaches for those of us at the chalkface who battle day to day for better outcomes for children living in poverty. This is a vital read for anybody working in schools providing the reader with a greater understanding of the complexities and difficulties youngsters living in poverty face and the strategies to overcome them. Living in poverty needs to be the tenth protected characteristic!

Mark Ayers, acting head teacher, Appleton Academy

Excellence in any context is a judicious mix of high intention, sincere effort and intelligent execution. This is an excellent book: very well referenced, analytical, packed with stories and providing a commanding compendium of practical ideas for the classroom. The section on speaking, reading and writing is as succinct and authoritative as any teacher could wish for.

The experienced authors assert that 'much of this book has been written in anger … angered at how unequal our society has become'. They channel their anger skilfully in producing a text to support teachers and leaders who wish to make a particular difference for 'the forgotten third' in our schools. It is fifty years since I first entered a Brixton primary classroom – it is inspiring to read Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith's contemporary, compelling narrative about changing children's lives.

Roy Blatchford, chair of ASCL's *The Forgotten Third*
and author of *The A–Z of Great Classrooms*

This book deepens the understanding of the reasons why the odds are stacked against the working class in education and provides practical solutions to make a positive difference for these pupils in their classrooms. It can be a read-all-at-once book or, more usefully for busy school practitioners, it can be dipped in and out of, to find strategies that have already been identified as making a difference elsewhere.

Sue Bourgade, head teacher

As schools across the country grapple with the impact of both the cost of living crisis and deepening social inequality, this important book could not be more timely. It is an educational call to arms which is full of practical ideas and solutions to close the poverty-related attainment gap and enable all young people to thrive.

Christine Downie, head teacher, St Luke's High School

The Working Classroom is a thought-provoking and challenging read. It unpicks the ways in which working-class students are disadvantaged by an education system designed without them in mind and looks at some practical ways in which we as a profession could be doing more to improve the life chances of the disadvantaged. We all go into teaching in the hope that we can make a difference but Andy and Matt challenge those ideals by suggesting that unless we change what we are doing we are likely to be simply contributing to an educational regime which continues to fail those who start their learning journey in last place. Doing what we've always done perpetuates a system which is designed by the middle class for the middle class and continues to see the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' widening.

Duncan Jacques CBE, CEO, Exceed Academies Trust

A compelling and important read. The justifiable anger that the authors feel about the inequities of our society and education system fizzes through the book. As they say, 'We need to do more; we need to take affirmative action'. And *The Working Classroom* gives the educator scores of practical and inspiring ideas about what they can do to effect change, with uplifting case studies, planning templates, reflective questions and model lesson plans. This book is well-researched, comprehensive, readable and well-timed. A must-read!

Rachel Macfarlane, Lead Adviser for Underserved Learners, HFL Education and author of *Obstetrics for Schools* and *Unity in Diversity*

A book that feels in touch with reality. Based upon sound research, with absolute relevance to schools in challenging areas that serve a unique community.

Lots of strategies to support working-class pupils in making progress and overcoming obstacles to achieving their true potential. Focus on parental engagement and the importance of the curriculum – key highlights.

Tony McGuinness, head teacher, All Saints Catholic High School, Kirky, Liverpool

The Working Classroom should be essential reading for anyone concerned about the disadvantage gap in schools. It is both sensitive and punchy: sensitive in its framing of the considerable disadvantages for many pupils and punchy in its bold, yet workable, suggestions for addressing these.

Mary Myatt, education writer, speaker and curator of Myatt & Co

This ground-breaking book achieves two vitally important objectives. First, it puts the elephant of social class firmly back in the centre of the room by clearly outlining the many reasons we should pay attention to inequalities of social class in education. Second, it tells the reader what we can do, as teachers and educators, to address those inequalities. In *The Working Classroom,* Bromley and Griffith present bold and innovative plans that recognise and address the long-neglected need for affirmative action if we are to tackle the extensive class discrimination in education.

Professor Diane Reay, University of Cambridge

Bromley and Griffith have produced a masterpiece with *The Working Classroom*. The investigation of injustices in our contemporary world, and how it is skewed against working-class people, has a depressing whiff of familiarity, but to offer practical solutions for educators to start to deliver social justice from within is a stroke of genius from the authors. The balance of championing working-class culture in the classroom against the very real risk of thereby encouraging classism, is beautifully done. Read the book. Then be angry. Then, well, then let's change the world.

Ant Sutcliffe, Associate Director, Higher Horizons, Keele University

This book gives an excellent account of the role that social class plays in schools, the inequalities it causes, and ways that those in the education system can support students in reducing the inequalities they may face.

The book is laid out in easy-to-read sections that are filled with anecdotes, ideas to improve practice and questions to allow for practitioner self-reflection. Whether you are looking to teach your students about social classes, start an extra-curricular club, become a more adaptive educator or enhance your current curriculum, this book contains all the ideas to help level the playing field and mitigate some of the effects of classism faced by your students.

Everybody working in an education setting who wants to make a difference to their students' lives should read this book.

Laura Tonge, Keele Hub Manager, Higher Horizons

This is a book that is on the side of the group of youngsters for whom the traditional classroom and the learning it offers is difficult to understand. Hard-hitting, poignant, methodical and practical, it helps the teacher look through the eyes of the people they teach and see how they could make the way they work enticing for the pupils and more enjoyable for themselves.

Persuasive insights are supported with analysis of research and well structured advice ... a must for every staffroom and teachers who really care.

Mick Waters, educationalist and author

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Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith

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FOREWORD

It has been more than a decade since I appeared on Channel 4's fly-on-the-wall documentary *Educating Essex*, but its legacy means I am privileged to be asked to appear on TV news reports and to review colleagues' books. Being a busy school principal means I usually say no to such offers, but when Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith asked me to contribute the foreword to this book, I read an early draft and simply couldn't refuse. It was too important. As you will soon discover for yourselves, Matt and Andy's backgrounds, which are not dissimilar to my own, have been a driving force in its conception. Their passion for improving the lives of young people springs from the page.

The class system in the UK is a trigger for much anger and frustration. I know that I am not unusual in being a teacher from a working-class background. But when I started teaching thirty years ago, I was convinced that I was going to be a lone voice – the maverick teacher who alone believed in what working-class students could achieve. My armour and white horse were both at the ready.

The experience of leading a school during COVID-19 demonstrated the massive class divide that still exists in our society – and the complete lack of insight of many of our political leaders who are blinded by their privilege. Politicians expected schools to move seamlessly to online learning almost overnight. Lord Adonis, for example, was vociferous in telling schools that hadn't moved online that they were failing their communities. The fact that over 600 students at my school, Passmores, didn't have a suitable device or access to Wi-Fi, and that many lived in accommodation where finding a quiet place to learn was difficult, didn't cross his mind. When I explained to my local MP that staff were creating packs with a month's worth of work, which we were posting home with all the resources required to complete it, along with a stamped addressed envelope, you could see the error 404 message flashing across his face.

Class privilege is so ingrained that we are somehow comforted by the fact that most of our MPs sound more like Jacob Rees-Mogg than Angela Rayner. However, our governments would be so much better if they were populated by people who saw their £86,000 annual salary as sufficient motivation to do a good job and not simply as a stepping stone to the higher paid corporate gig that follows.

When you read *The Working Classroom*, you may feel angry, perhaps even powerless. Wanting to make a difference isn't the same as making a difference. Despite millions of pounds and millions of hours being thrown at the attainment gap, it has barely narrowed.

Matt and Andy argue that our 'education system is rigged in favour of the privileged', so you might be forgiven for thinking there is no point in reading a book like this one if inequality is systemic. This is logical only if you ignore the huge societal changes that have taken place over the last three or four decades regarding same-sex marriage and gender identity. Society and its norms can change, but it requires a collective effort.

In September 2023, the National Centre for Social Research published its fortieth annual British Social Attitudes survey, exploring people's social, political and moral attitudes.[1] What was clear from the results was that the concept of social class has far from disappeared. In fact, the report's authors argue that the propensity to identify as middle class or working class is much the same now as forty years ago. What's more, people who identify as working class are more inclined than ever to accept the view that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to move between classes.

The inequality of opportunity that is inherent in our class system remains a driving force for my work as a teacher. The research highlighted by Matt and Andy in this book shows that 50% of people would be defined as working class, so until half of our MPs and business leaders come from working-class backgrounds, there is much work to be done.

The Working Classroom is in three parts. Part I is full of evidence that classism is real, which left me feeling incredibly frustrated. If you find it hard to read too, be reassured that the remainder of the text motivated and reinvigorated me to keep doing what I can. As Matt and Andy explain, their advice is focused on the aspects of our world that we do have influence and control over as educators.

If you are convinced that classism remains an issue in our society and in our schools, then you will also be convinced that we must continue to do all we can to lessen the damage it causes. This book is a good place to start. Take the ideas in it today and start making a real difference tomorrow.

Vic Goddard

Principal, Passmores Academy

1 See https://natcen.ac.uk/british-social-attitudes.

ANDY

I'd like to acknowledge and thank the following people who have supported me with ideas, resources and suggestions:

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INTRODUCTION

WHY SHOULD YOU READ THIS BOOK?

To answer this question, let's pose another: why do you work in education? And don't say it is for the money. Sure, we all need to earn a crust to cover the mortgage and feed the children, but let's be honest: there are easier ways of paying the bills than working in a school. So, why don't you do one of those easier things? Why did you decide to go into teaching? What is your purpose? Your raison d'être?

If, like us, you decided to enter the teaching profession – or work in another role in the education sector – to 'make a difference', then what difference did you hope to make, and why was that important to you? More pointedly, perhaps, do you feel you *have* made a difference?

We will share our personal stories with you shortly and explain our raisons d'être, but, for now, let's assume that all of us went into teaching to help change lives. For some, that might have been by equipping students with a love of your subject as well as good qualification outcomes. For others, it might have been to help the least fortunate in society – the most disadvantaged and vulnerable – to have a fair chance and to ensure that a child's birth doesn't become their destiny.

In whatever way you intended to change lives, has it worked? Do you feel a sense of achievement? There can be no greater feeling, professionally speaking, than knowing you have helped a young person to fulfil their potential and leave school more able to compete and succeed in life than when they started school.

We have experienced this feeling several times in our careers, and it is what continues to drive us now. We both come from working-class backgrounds and were economically disadvantaged as children. That is why our purpose in writing this book has a very personal resonance. It is also why, predominantly, we support schools in deprived areas and help disadvantaged students.

But we also feel certain that we could have done more to help working-class students like us to succeed in school and then in life. Furthermore, we feel that more action is needed now than was the case when we were at school because disadvantage and the causes of disadvantage have got much worse since 'our day'. Far from 'levelling up', successive UK governments since 2010 have made the gaps between rich and poor,

privileged and disadvantaged, wider and therefore social mobility more difficult.

Our intention, then, is to help you make more of a difference more of the time. To achieve this, we will draw on the research evidence, although we don't want the text to be a heavy read. Rather, we want it to be practical and easy to dip into when help and advice are needed most. We will also draw on our own experiences of working in and supporting schools in challenging circumstances, including working directly with working-class students and their parents.

Our main argument is this: working-class students are disadvantaged by the education system, not by accident but by design. As such, those of us who work in the education sector must do something – and urgently – to address the situation. We simply cannot stand by and let the class and wealth divide continue to grow. We cannot continue to live in a society and work in schools where wealth and social status, rather than ability and effort, dictate educational attainment and success in later life. It is immoral and indefensible. It angers us *and* inspires us to do more.

We need to be deliberate in how we design our core curriculum, how we plan and target curriculum interventions, how we design curriculum enhancements, and how we train staff and interact with parents and other stakeholders.

We also argue that, while classism exists in society at large, not just in schools, the UK education system is rigged to fail a third of students. We don't think our society can afford for this to continue; it is a waste of resources, and it perpetuates poverty and social exclusion.

While all of this is somewhat depressing, we firmly believe that education can be a powerful tool for change and that schools can help to create a more equitable society. We can and must do something.

The Working Classroom explores some practical ways that schools can mitigate some of the effects of classism and help working-class students to get a better start in life, so that ability and effort, not where you are born and how much money you inherit, dictate success in school and in later life.

WHY HAVE WE WRITTEN THIS BOOK?

We both have very personal reasons for wanting to write this book. Our stories are what drive us, and our histories are what brought us together with a common purpose, not just to say something but to do something.

We would like to start by sharing those stories with you, not as some self-indulgent act of naval gazing, but as a way to explain why the subject matters so much to us, and as a means of exploring some of the issues we intend to address. We discuss the power of story in Lesson 3, so it seems apt to start by telling our own.



MATT'S STORY

I was born and brought up in a depressed northern town in the shadow of dark satanic mills and disappointment. My family and I lived in a terraced house in a row which stuck out from the valley side like needles on a hedgehog's back. And life was just as spiky.

My childhood, although happy, was one of hand-me-downs and making do. And my primary school – in the days before 'serious weaknesses' and 'special measures' had become the de facto vocabulary of educational failure – was what we used to call 'shit'.

When I wasn't pretending to paint while surreptitiously sneaking a peak at the page 3 model on the newsprint laid out to protect the tables, I sat cross-legged on a threadbare carpet while the teacher strummed his guitar and sang 1960s songs. (And yes, dear reader, he closed his eyes when he hit the chorus.)

As a result, when I transferred schools aged 9, I was unable to construct a sentence. It was only thanks to a determined and dedicated Year 5 teacher who inspired a love of reading that I caught up with my peers.

This story, like all good stories, I suppose, was repeated years later when my Year 9 teacher – an inspirational writer and poet who had lived in Peru and taught me how to bet on horses – recognised and nurtured my talent for writing.

This tale was told once more when my A level English literature teacher – a fierce and frightening man, hump-backed like Richard III, but one of extraordinary talent who ignited my love of Shakespeare – set me on a path to university.

You know how the story goes: I was the first in my family to get to university and lucky enough to be awarded a full grant at a time when the state recognised its duty to educate all, not just those born to privilege. But my grant didn't go far, barely covering course fees and accommodation, so I worked round the clock – stuffing envelopes for a bank and being sworn

at on a complaints line – to pay for books and stationery and food and drink. Mainly drink.

On the last day of my first year, I was badly injured playing football and had my right foot set in plaster. I was instructed by A&E to keep my leg elevated and rest for three weeks. Had I followed these instructions, I would be able to walk without pain today, nearly thirty years later. But I had no option: I simply had to work if I was going to afford to return to my studies. Consequently, I walked on crutches to and from the bus stop every day that summer. I took as much overtime as I could get, working seven days a week. And I have lived with the consequences every day since; my foot never healed and it causes constant pain, which is slowly getting worse as arthritis sets in.

POVERTY REMOVES AGENCY

You see, poverty forces people to make tough choices. Actually, that isn't true: poverty removes choice; it denies people agency and opportunity.

Writing in *The Guardian* in June 2022, the food writer and poverty campaigner, Jack Monroe, powerfully describes the consequences of poverty:

> Poverty is exhausting. It requires time, effort, energy, organisation, impetus, an internal calculator, and steely mental fortitude. And should it not kill you, in the end, from starvation or cold or mental ill health, should you scrabble somehow to the sunlit uplands of 'just about managing', I'm sorry to tell you that although your bank balance may be in the black one day, so too will your head.[1]

Monroe goes on to explain how 'years of therapy has alleviated some of [the worst effects of living in poverty, such as panic attacks], some of the time, but [their] physical and mental health will probably never make a full recovery'.

Monroe now suffers from 'complex post-traumatic stress disorder, arthritis exacerbated by living in cold homes, respiratory difficulties from the damp, complex trauma, an array of mental health issues, a hoarding problem, and a slow burning addiction brought to an almost fatal head

1 J. Monroe, Poverty Leaves Scars for Life – I'm Still Scared of Strangers at the Door and Bills Through the Letterbox, *The Guardian* (16 June 2022). Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/16/poverty-scars-life-impact-cost-of-living-crisis-felt-for-years.

last year'. However, they argue that their story is by no means unique or exceptional because 'short-term exposure to and experience of poverty – whether fuel poverty, food poverty, period poverty, or the root cause of all of them, the insufficient resources with which to meet your most fundamental human needs – has long-term and disproportionate effects for years to come'.

Childhood exposure to poverty falls under the umbrella of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which, according to Monroe, are 'on a par with domestic abuse, childhood sexual assault, [the] loss of a parent, parental incarceration, violence and neglect' and increase the risk of trauma later in life, both mentally and physically.

In fact, exposure to ACEs leads to less favourable health outcomes, a negative impact on general well-being, increased likelihood of risky or criminal behaviours, poor educational and academic outcomes and financial difficulties. We know that children who experience food insecurity, even short term, are more likely to fall ill and need hospital admission and have a slower recovery rate.

ACCESS DENIED

Poverty led to me making tough choices that I live with even now. But I know I was lucky; as well as state-funded support that enabled me to go to university, I had good teachers and loving, supportive parents who provided me with a safe and happy home. But it could easily have been so different. As I mentioned, I was the first in my family to go to university – and that was not uncommon in the mid-1990s because access to higher education had begun to widen. I was, as I say, lucky.

Danny Dorling, professor of human geography at the University of Sheffield, says the fact that the majority of additional places at universities were taken up by children living in the poorer half of British neighbourhoods 'may well be seen … as the greatest positive social achievement of the 1997–2010 government' and that it was achieved 'not at the expense of upper- and middle-class children [but because] the education system as a whole expanded [and there were] massive increases in funding per child in state secondary schools'.[2]

Dorling says the lessons of the pre-2010 era are clear: 'Spend more per child and they will gain better GCSE results, they will then go on to attend university in greater numbers.' There are two other factors: firstly, the introduction of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) 'which

2 D. Dorling, *Fair Play: A Daniel Dorling Reader on Social Justice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2012), p. 180.

enabled many young people from poorer areas to be able to afford to stay on at school' and, secondly, government funding of university places, which is 'the ultimate determinant of what young people's chances are'.[3]

Sadly, these improvements in access to higher education for working-class children have not been sustained. Writing in 2012, Dorling said progress would likely be 'reversed following the Comprehensive Spending Review of October 2010'. He was right: EMA was scrapped in 2010 and the spending review cut up to 75% of government funding in higher education. Even before these cuts – made under the auspices of 'austerity' – 'access to good schools, universities and jobs remained far more socially determined by class and place of birth in Britain, than in almost any other affluent nation'.[4]

THE FEAR OF BEING DIFFERENT

When I went to university, for the first time in my life, I found myself living and socialising with people from vastly different social circles. And – despite the fact that my fellow freshers' higher social status, wealth and expensive education had led them to the same university and that I went on to gain a better degree than many of them – they looked down on and ridiculed my hometown, my accent, and my lack of what we might now call 'cultural capital'. They travelled to lectures in cars bought for them by their parents; I walked or cycled on a second-hand bike I had repaired and repainted. They never had to worry about where their next meal was coming from and never had to say no to a night out or stay in halls while those around them partied, because to go out would have meant being unable to afford the books that were essential reading for their courses.

When I left university, having worked on the student newspaper as a sports and features writer – a post I had to fight hard to get because I didn't have the right school tie – I pursued my chosen career in journalism on my hometown paper. Or, rather, I tried to. Internships were awarded to those whose father knew the editor or proprietor. Although, through sheer tenacity and – more crucially – offering my services for free, I was able to get freelance gigs, there was no hope of a salaried job without a postgraduate qualification in journalism – a requirement of joining the National Union of Journalists.

With student debts from my undergraduate course and no possibility of working for free forever, I had no choice but to find paid alternative employment. For months, I tried to balance the two: working nine to five

3 Dorling, *Fair Play*, p. 180.
4 Dorling, *Fair Play*, p. 72.

for a telecoms company and then walking to the newsroom to work evenings for free. But, eventually, paid work had to take precedence and the prospect of overtime and paying off my debts won the day. And, thus, my dreams of a career in journalism slowly died. Not because I lacked the talent, but because I didn't have the money and 'secret knowledge' needed to get a foot in the door.

Telecoms wasn't so class driven, thankfully, and I was lucky to get in at the time that mobile phones were becoming mainstream. I quickly proved my worth and climbed the corporate ladder to senior management. The pay was good, as was the lifestyle; I was in my mid-twenties, working hard and playing harder. All seemed right with the world. But it wasn't. Cue existential crisis.

One day, at the dawn of the millennium, I woke up and realised I needed a greater purpose in life. So, it was a brand-new millennium and a new-brand me – I was going to be a teacher and help build the future. Sadly, my epiphany was short-lived. Soon after starting my self-funded PGCE, my dreams of 'O Captain! My Captain!' fell apart at the seams.

It didn't help that I went from earning a decent salary to paying for the privilege of teaching. I had saved enough money in the years prior to scrape through the course, but it was tough living like a student again. Nor did it help that I was several years older than most of my fellow trainees. But the worst of it was my first school placement, and therefore my first foray into the classroom. To be fair, I was warned. My course tutor told me the university had considered taking the school off its books because it was in special measures and they'd had complaints, but because I was older and had leadership experience, they thought I would be able to cope.

The school had been in special measures for a while by the time I arrived, and staff turnover was high. As a result, many post-16 classes were cancelled and other classes were combined, with students often left to watch television in the canteen. Hence, at the end of my first week, my school-based mentor and head of department (who also quit before the end of my placement), said she thought I was ready to go solo rather than waste my time observing her or team-teaching with more seasoned colleagues. And so I found myself, two weeks into my 'training' and after just one week in a school, teaching a full timetable without any help or support.

Student behaviour was 'challenging'. The canteen was like a scene from *Fight Club*. Staff cars were routinely vandalised, and the fire alarm sounded fifteen times a day – not because some cheeky young scamp had smashed the glass to get out of class but because some cheeky young arsonist had set fire to the building. You might say my early teaching experience was a baptism of fire.

It didn't help my mood when winter set in and the nights grew long and dark. Snow fell early and deep that year, meaning weeks of indoor play. All of which made me think of quitting teaching every single day. Pathetic fallacy or just pathetic, I am still not sure.

I remember struggling out of bed at the call of my bedside alarm feeling sick to my stomach, and the lonely commutes home, feeling lost and alone, out of my depth, utterly exhausted. Although I told no one, I deeply regretted my risky change of career and yearned for a return to my cushy corner office and generous expenses account. But I was scared to admit to anyone else that I had got it wrong. And I was still driven by a desire to do what my teachers had done for me: to give disadvantaged students a fair start in life, to reverse society's ills, to mitigate – albeit in some small way – the consequences of poverty and of living in an unequal, unfair society that privileges the privileged and rewards wealth with wealth.

Against all odds, I persevered and survived to the end of my placement and then to the end of my course. My university tutor wrote a glowing report based not, I suspect, on my teaching ability but on the simple fact that I was not dead. The school even offered me a job. Unsurprisingly, I turned them down.

Having passed my initial teacher training year, I got a job in a school in a deprived area of a northern town, and I stayed there for eight happy years, rising from newly qualified teacher to assistant head teacher. I saw in those 'sink estate kids' (not my phrase but one used liberally and insultingly to describe the students I taught) an earlier me reflected back; I saw students set on a path to failure in need of a teacher who could turn disadvantage into advantage. I had found my vocation – and I have never looked back.

I have never considered leaving the profession. Yes, I have changed course – I have moved from teaching to leadership and from leadership to consultancy – but each move I made has been an attempt to do more for disadvantaged children, to increase the size of my classroom and thus the impact of my actions.

This commitment has driven me for over two decades, as a teacher, middle leader, senior leader, head teacher, multi-academy trust director and now school improvement advisor. And this commitment has brought me here to write *The Working Classroom*. I have authored several other books of which I am proud but, to quote the movies, this time it's personal.

And I have found a like-minded co-author in Andy Griffith. To prove it, here is his story.



ANDY'S STORY

I was born in Edmonton, North London, and went to primary school in Tottenham. My real father was a magician: he disappeared when I was 8 years old, and I haven't seen him since. He took out a second mortgage on our family home and gambled it all away. He was working as an insurance agent for a company called Prudential collecting money door to door, as they did in those days, and gambled that away too. I have a memory of him taking me to his office on the day he was sacked from his job; I guess he was trying to use me as a reason for the firm to keep him on. That tells you something of the man's character.

What followed for me, my mum and brother were bailiffs, temporary accommodation, a council flat, a spell in hospital for me with pneumonia and pleurisy, and quite a lot of stress. Well, they do say that moving house is stressful.

Some years later, my mum met a guy who eventually became my stepfather. His name was Emerson Griffith, and he was originally from Barbados in the West Indies. He was part of the Windrush generation. When I went to secondary school, I took my stepdad's surname and, after a few years, began calling him 'dad'. He had a lot of good qualities and valued education. He initially started as a welder for British Oxygen before becoming a lorry driver for the Post Office (or GPO as it was then known). Outside of work, he was a football official. In the 1980s, he became the first Black linesman in the football league and refereed for many years at semi-professional level.

When I wasn't playing football, I went to his games and watched from the stands. We became close, and I guess learning about his life really opened my eyes to how racist people could be. All the way through his life, Emerson had some significant mental health issues to contend with and he also had a problem with gambling. What are the odds on that! When he retired from his job at the GPO, he gambled away his lump sum of over £25,000 in the space of about six months and then proceeded to blame the world and his wife, my mum, for his errors. It is a long story, but he ended up kicking my mum out of the house, and a few months later setting fire to it as a protest against a court ruling, consequently invalidating much of the insurance.

Anyway, I would rather talk about my mum. All through my childhood, my mum was a constant source of encouragement and supported every interest I had. Despite the fact there wasn't much money, she would always

bring home magazines such as *Look and Learn* and *World of Wonder*, take us to the local library, and on trips to museums and famous London landmarks, always on the bus or train as we didn't have a car.

My mum, like many working-class children of her generation, had to leave school at 15 before she could take O levels. I have no doubt she would have excelled. As testament, she has got a book at home that she was awarded for winning the prize as the best historian in Peckham School for Girls. Mum had to get paid work in order to support her family. Her mum, my nanny Alice, was disabled and unable to work. She transferred this love of learning, especially history, to her sons; every qualification I have achieved since, I dedicate to her.

IGNITING A SPARK

Every child needs at least one encourager or 'sparker' in their life, someone who opens up future possibilities and helps them to see what might be possible. Later in the book, we will talk about lucky kids, a metaphor borrowed from early years specialist and author Penny Tassoni.[5] I want to make it clear that, like Matt, I consider myself lucky to have had a mum who read to me, took me places, talked with me and set boundaries for me. But what about kids who don't have someone like that in their lives? Should schools deliberately try to make up for that? My view is, yes, they should.

I went on to a comprehensive secondary school in London where I was pretty well-behaved bar the odd fight here and there. I might have been kicked out of a modern day 'no excuses' school, but I was regarded as an asset: captain of the football team, top sets, high grades and so on, and one of the few students who went on to university.

My school was a true comprehensive: a mix of people from all social backgrounds, religions and races. I had some working-class and some middle-class friends – some whose parents were reasonably wealthy. They are still my friends to this day. We have helped each other over the years, and one friend in particular has helped me through some difficult times. I would be worse off if I had closed myself off from having friends from middle-class backgrounds.

During these years, I also represented my borough, Haringey, at football. Like school, I had to travel to training and matches by bus. This was a gift because I enjoyed travelling and used that time to read. One experience playing for Haringey has really stuck with me. The team went to Holland

5 P. Tassoni, *Reducing Educational Disadvantage: A Strategic Approach in the Early Years* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

on a football tour, and I was the only one who didn't go as my family couldn't afford it. All the other lads came back with new kit and shared experiences; I have never felt so left out.

FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH CLASSISM

It was at Manchester University that I first experienced what I have come to understand as 'classism' – some people treating me as inferior because I was from a working-class household. It is easy to internalise that feeling of being 'less than' because your family cannot pay for branded clothes. I always got my jeans and school trousers from Edmonton market. Even at university, I was still wearing hand-me-down clothes from my cousin – even underwear, and she wasn't even my size! That feeling of being poor never leaves you. Even now, when I have the money to make a major purchase, I still go into a cold sweat of thinking I cannot afford this.

It was at Manchester where I first met people from private school. They seemed to be much more self-confident. It took me over a year to realise that confidence doesn't equate to intelligence. One tutorial stands out for me still. A guy started talking and a bulb lit up in my head. I realised that he wasn't bothered if he was right or wrong – in fact, he was an idiot. Me? I was scared of saying anything that might be incorrect.

Like most working-class students, I had to work while I was at university. Luckily for me, being from London, I could always pick up jobs during the holidays, such as working as a bin man or road-sweeper (I was very good, by the way, and if I had stuck at it, I could have won the prestigious Golden Broom). My jobs didn't affect my studies, but these days working-class students face a very different labour market. They have to work evenings and weekends in bars or supermarkets, which inevitably reduces their study time.

After university, the advantage of coming from a wealthy family really kicks in. Working-class graduates simply don't have the connections and networks to apply for certain career pathways that are dominated by the more affluent. Some do break through into the professions as barristers, doctors and so on, but it is a far tougher path. This lost talent is a massive waste to both the economy and to the well-being of those who could have had a different life path.

When I left university, I went into teaching. From 1989, I taught for twelve years in two different state sector secondary schools. I taught subjects such as economics and business studies to Key Stage 4 and 5 classes; lots of exams and lots of marking. I enjoyed teaching, but I didn't enjoy the restrictive exam syllabuses. It felt like I was training students to pass exams, not to understand the subject. Still, I proved to be pretty good at

this. However, with each passing year, my enjoyment of being a teacher 'in the system' went down and down.

In the last few years of my full-time teaching career, I got the break that I was looking for – to work with students on a curriculum of my own design. My school decided to take the opportunity to 'disapply' some students from the national curriculum – that is, to remove certain Year 10 and Year 11 students from lessons such as languages and get them doing something else. These were generally statemented students; many had poor motivation and poor behaviour.

I offered to create a programme for them called Lifeskills, where I taught them for two hours a week over two years. These students learned how to analyse a film, how to revise, how to talk about yourself confidently, how to recognise your own strengths, how to cook at least five different dishes and how to present to an audience. Pedagogically, there wasn't much writing, plenty of discussion and lots of one-to-one work (the students created career portfolios and scrapbooks); nearly all the students gained in terms of confidence, and they gathered a few certificates too.

In 2001, I left full-time teaching and became self-employed. This was during the New Labour years when it felt like there was more money in education. The experience of creating the Lifeskills course was something I wanted more of. Initially, I started training teachers in areas such as careers education and citizenship (I was on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) writing team for citizenship). I created numerous different training courses, and eventually ended up creating a course that thousands of teachers attended called Outstanding Teaching. Its sister course, Embedding Outstanding Teaching, aimed at school leaders, was also very popular. Both have subsequently been turned into modular school programmes involving the video analysis of teachers and strategies for leaders to get the best out of staff.

Being on the training circuit has been an interesting experience. There are lots of talented people out there, but it is surprising that some of those most respected in education are actually snobs. Some have real disdain for working-class people and working-class places. You will have to buy me a pint or two for me to reveal more.

I am now in the autumn of my career. My shampoo is called Back and Shoulders, and it is taking me longer and longer to wash my face every morning. I am now working in places like Kirkby in Merseyside, Bradford in Yorkshire, Newham in London and Fleetwood in Lancashire. I seriously love my working life. I work with great colleagues who are motivated by social justice every day. I decided a few years ago to only work in certain places and only with certain people. I have made a commitment to these communities. In each case, I am just an extra resource, a friend of the school. The core work is done by the leaders, teachers and support staff,

but I hope my training and coaching with adults and young people adds something too.

There are some great individuals working in and across schools. They are motivated by fairness, justice and compassion. They are continually trying to close gaps and take daily action to support disadvantaged families. To be around them is inspiring – and you won't get that from most other career paths.

If you are at all motivated by issues such as fairness and justice, I hope you get something from this book. I am sure you are already helping many people in your career, but my hope is that this book will influence you to help even more. Maybe you are a bit worn down by the system or the school you are in? In that case, I hope it will reinvigorate you for a few more years.

Although Matt and I were both touched by poverty in our early lives, we have written *The Working Classroom* to inspire everyone involved in education and from every social background. Indeed, for us, it is even more impressive when education professionals from middle-class backgrounds involve themselves in this work. In many ways, they 'get it' much more than some working-class people who have, by their own reckoning, progressed into being middle class and consider this was purely through their own merits.



OTHER STORIES

Those are our stories, but there are other stories too. This book is peppered with the stories of individuals we have met along the way. We have changed some of their names to protect their anonymity, but their accounts are real.

These 'other stories' are more important than ours because they represent some of the people whom this book hopes to support. There will be tales of struggle, success, enlightenment and more.

HOW HAVE WE WRITTEN THIS BOOK?

As we have mentioned, we firmly believe the education system is rigged in favour of the privileged. Working-class students are disadvantaged from day one: all too often their birth is their destiny; they start at a disadvantage and end at a disadvantage.

The only way to truly fix inequality is, of course, by reducing inequality. As Imran Tahir, a research economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), says: 'Instead of being an engine for social mobility, the UK's education system allows inequalities at home to turn into differences in school achievement. This means that all too often, today's education inequalities become tomorrow's income inequalities.'[6]

While we acknowledge that, because inequality is systemic, to truly tackle it society at large must change, we will focus on actions that school leaders and teachers can take to help working-class students compete equitably at school and in later life.

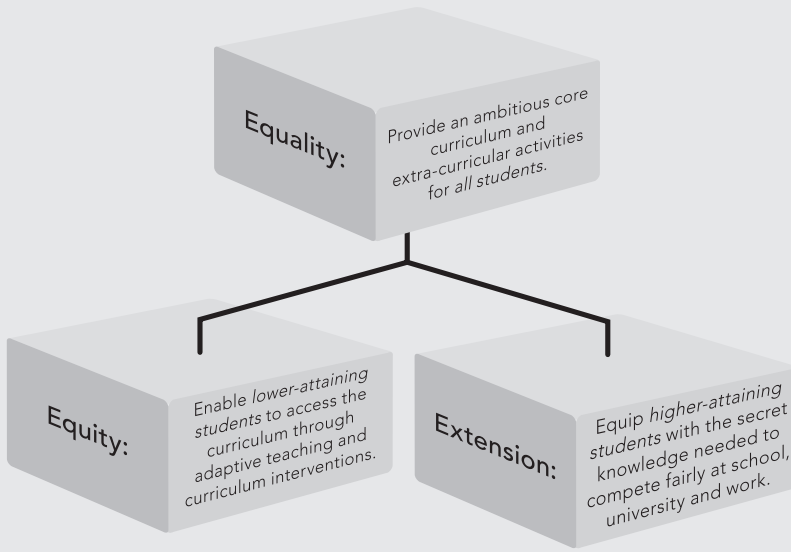
We will focus on three strands of support that schools can offer to help counter the classism that is inherent in the education system:

6 I. Tahir, The UK Education System Preserves Inequality, *Institute for Fiscal Studies* (13 September 2022). Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/the-uk-education-system-preserves-inequality.



EQUALITY, EQUITY AND EXTENSION

1. Equality through the core curriculum and extra-curricular activities.
2. Equity through curriculum adaptations and interventions.
3. Extension through curriculum extras and enhancements.



1. EQUALITY THROUGH THE CORE CURRICULUM AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The core curriculum is made up of the programmes of study that all students are taught, usually in subject disciplines via timetabled lessons. They are traditionally academic in nature and include, as a minimum, the foundation subjects stipulated in the national curriculum.

Extra-curricular activities, meanwhile, are the activities that some students participate in outside of the academic timetable. These are typically voluntary and may include sports, the arts, music or theatre groups, community service projects and so on. Participation in extra-curricular activities provides students with opportunities to develop new skills, make new friends and build self-confidence; they can also help students to become well-rounded individuals and widen their experiences and knowledge of the world. We regard the purpose of extra-curricular activities as being threefold: meeting new people, exploring new places and doing new things.

Together, the core curriculum and extra-curricular activities are the first strand of support we can use to counter classism in education because when we get these things right all students benefit, and there is less need for additional interventions and support later on. As they (whoever 'they' may be) are wont to say, a rising tide lifts all ships.

2. EQUITY THROUGH CURRICULUM ADAPTATIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

Curriculum adaptations and interventions are inclusive teaching approaches and additional support strategies, including but not limited to one-to-one and small group tuition, designed to help lower-attaining working-class students access the same experiences as their peers by converting the causes of disadvantage into tangible classroom consequences, so these barriers may be overcome. The most effective curriculum interventions are short-term, intensive, tailored and focused.

Curriculum adaptations and interventions are the second strand of support because, while a rising tide may indeed lift all ships, some students' survival at sea is rigged because they sail boats full of holes. Interventions, when thoughtfully and strategically designed, can plug the gaps in the hulls of these vessels.

3. EXTENSION THROUGH CURRICULUM EXTRAS AND ENHANCEMENTS

Curriculum enhancements are carefully designed enrichment activities specifically targeted at high-attaining working-class students. They provide long-term opportunities for them to acquire the secret knowledge and skills otherwise denied them because of their position in society, as well as to develop behaviours, attitudes and values that allow them to compete with their more advantaged peers.

This is the third strand of support because, while a rising tide lifts all ships and interventions can plug the holes in the hulls of some students' vessels, others are left frantically swimming against the tide because they didn't inherit a boat at birth. Curriculum enhancements provide the life raft needed to survive a storm.

In Part II, we will explore each of these three strands in detail. In Part III, we will offer some lessons that you can teach your students in order to turn the theory into practice. But first, in Part I, we want to examine the ways in which secondary schools are classist.

ICONS USED THROUGHOUT THE BOOK

At the start of each chapter, we will pose key questions which we will attempt to answer in the pages that follow. You can use these questions to provoke discussions in your school.



IDEAS

We want this book to be practical, to arm you with the tools you need to make a genuine difference to the working-class students in your charge.

Accordingly, wherever you see the 'ideas' icon, you'll find a list of suggestions you can put into immediate practice in your school.



KEY QUESTIONS

At the start of each chapter, we will pose key questions which we will attempt to answer in the pages that follow. You can use these questions to provoke discussions in your school.



REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

In writing this book, we don't just want to *say* something, we want to *do* something. We want *The Working Classroom* to lead to real change. Wherever you see this icon, you'll find some self-evaluative questions to help you assess your current practices and identify your next steps.



STORY

As we say above, this book will be full of stories. Look for this icon to read case studies and reflections from all those people who've inspired us or helped us write this book.



TEMPLATE

Another way in which we want this book to be practical is by providing you with planning templates to help you design and deliver effective interventions and enhancements. We provide more templates on our website at www.theworkingclassroom.co.uk.

PART I

WHY ISN'T SECONDARY SCHOOL WORKING FOR WORKING-CLASS STUDENTS?



CHAPTER 1

WHO ARE THE WORKING CLASS AND WHY DO THEY UNDERACHIEVE?



KEY QUESTIONS

In this chapter we will answer the following questions:

- How is the working class defined, and what are the causes of their educational disadvantage?
- What is classism, and how does it contribute to working-class underachievement?
- Why is reducing the effects of classism in all our best interests?

WHO ARE THE WORKING CLASS?

There are many different constructions of class, and many schemas and labels exist to determine who falls into which social category.

For thousands of years, people have been ranked or divided into their place in society – for example, religions produced rankings not dissimilar to social classes. Each person's place within the hierarchy was due to the will of God. Individuals were expected to defer to those above them and command those under them. The English poet Robert Southey wrote: 'That appointed chain, / Which when in just cohesion it unites / Order to order, rank to rank, / In mutual benefit'.[1]

Meanwhile, revolutionaries like Thomas Paine, not to mention Karl Marx, saw society in dichotomous terms: two classes, us and them. Paine wrote:

1 R. Southey, *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Southey* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1851), p. 212.

'there are two distinct classes of men in the nation, those who pay taxes, and those who receive and live upon the taxes'.[2] For Marx, it was the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

The two most common social classifications of people today are a tripartite system of upper, middle and lower classes, and a system of five categories based on occupation from A to E. Let's explore the latter.

Sociologists tend to classify people according to five categories (one of which is subdivided): A, B, C1, C2, D and E. Indeed, this is the system used every ten years for UK Census data, which defines 16–64-year-olds based on employment status, qualification, tenure and whether they work full-time or part-time.[3] ABC1 and C2DE are often used as shorthand to refer to the middle classes and working classes respectively.

In 2013, the BBC's Great British Class Calculator divided society into seven categories: elite (6%), established middle class (25%), technical middle class (6%), new affluent workers (15%), traditional working class (14%), emergent service workers (19%) and the precariat (15%).[4] The survey rejected the usual occupational labels that can indicate a person's social position. Instead, the authors placed a much greater emphasis on social capital – the occupations of your social acquaintances or network.

Even more confusingly, your social class can be affective. People can define themselves as working class if they *feel* working class, even if they are in occupations that sociologists would describe as middle class. Katie Beswick, in a paper entitled, 'Feeling Working Class: Affective Class Identification and its Implications for Overcoming Inequality', says that 'care and nuance in our methods for understanding class and labelling class inequality [are] important'.[5]

We have turned to Professor Danny Dorling for some help in defining the working-class students we seek to assist. In 2013, he said: 'Two statistics will broadly suffice to work out what class you are in: your household income and your family wealth. Often your postcode can reveal a great deal about these.'[6]

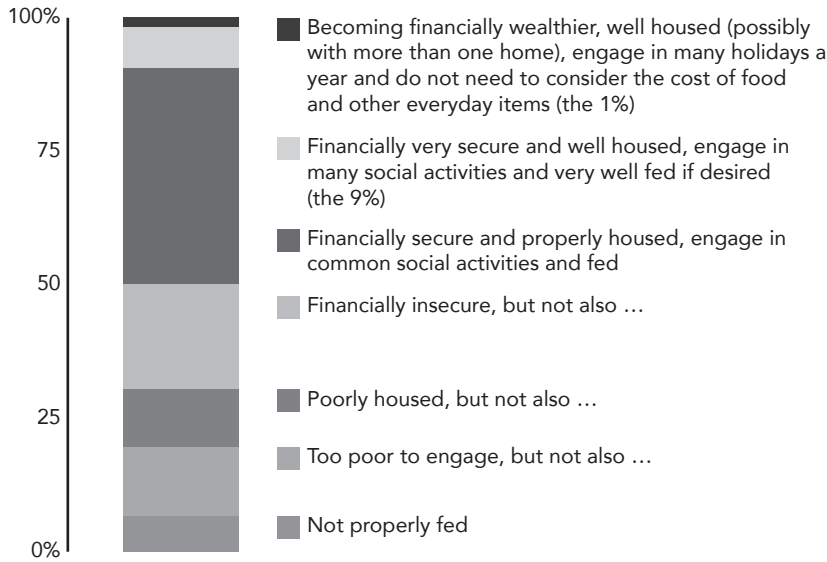
2 T. Paine, Letter Addressed to the Addressers, on the Late Proclamation (London: H. D. Symonds and T. C. Rickman, 1792). Available at: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/31270/31270-h/31270-h.htm.

3 See https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatisticssocioeconomicclassificationnssecrebasedonsoc2010.

4 P. Kerley, What is Your 21st Century Social Class?, *BBC Magazine* (7 December 2015). Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34766169.

5 K. Beswick, Feeling Working Class: Affective Class Identification and its Implications for Overcoming Inequality, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 40 (2020), 265–274 at 265.

6 D. Dorling, How Social Mobility Got Stuck, *New Statesman* (16 May 2013). Available at: https://www.newstatesman.com/business/economics/2013/05/how-social-mobility-got-stuck.



Social divisions of poverty and wealth among people in Britain by status (2013)

In this book, we will define the working class as anyone who is from a household in the last four categories in the graph above. This roughly corresponds to 50% of the population, which loosely maps to the social class category of C2DE. We feel that this description of social class better enables us to focus on a person's current economic circumstances.

Note: this definition may make you, the reader, feel that you aren't part of the working class. However, like us, you could have working-class origins that make you sympathetic to the issues of underachievement and disaffection. Or your origins might be from a social class such as A or B, but you live by a value system that makes you care about unfairness in society. Or you could be someone reading this who right now is worried about where the next meal or rent payment is coming from. You are all welcome to come on this journey with us.

Now that we have shared our definition of working class, let's move on and explore the notion of class inequality.

WHY ISN'T SECONDARY SCHOOL WORKING?

Class inequality relates to injustices throughout society where people from the so-called 'lower classes' are discriminated against. This leads to underachievement and under-representation. Class inequality is intersectional; its impact is entwined with other social injustices such as racism and sexism. For example, the class pay gap is worse for women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. The Labour Force Survey found that women from working-class backgrounds earn on average £19,000 a year less in elite occupations than men from privileged backgrounds. The figure is even higher for non-white women.[7]

Statistics show us that working-class people are less likely to have a degree, go to a Russell Group institution, work in professional employment or be an academic compared to those from more elite backgrounds. For their book, *The Class Ceiling: Why It Pays to Be Privileged*, Sam Friedman and Daniel Laurison conducted almost 200 interviews across a range of elite occupations. Their conclusion: working-class employees not only find it much harder to gain access to these careers, but once there, they fail to progress as fast as their more privileged peers, earning, on average, 16% less.[8]

Evidence of working-class underachievement is vast, and we will only scratch the surface in this book, but let's start with underachievement in the education system itself before we turn to other areas, such as the workplace.

EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Working-class students (particularly boys) are among the lowest performers in our schools, and the link between household income and attainment is multiracial. If you are a high-ability student from a low social class, you aren't going to do as well in school and in later life as a low-ability student from a high social class. To put it another way, it is social class and wealth – not ability – that define a student's educational outcomes and their future life chances.

7 See S. Friedman and D. Laurison, The Class Pay Gap: Why It Pays to Be Privileged, *The Guardian* (7 February 2019). Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/feb/07/the-class-pay-gap-why-it-pays-to-be-privileged.

8 S. Friedman and D. Laurison, *The Class Ceiling: Why It Pays to Be Privileged* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2019).

For proof of this, look at the recent research carried out for the IFS entitled the Deaton Review of Inequalities.[9] The review concludes that disadvantaged students: 'start school behind their better-off peers, and the education system isn't succeeding in closing these gaps. Educational inequalities result in substantial differences in life chances, leaving millions disadvantaged throughout their lifetime.' The report finds that:

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those who have not been successful at school are left behind by an education system that doesn't offer the right opportunities for further education.

It finds inequalities, such as the disadvantage gap at GCSE, have barely changed over the last twenty years and are likely to increase following the COVID-19 pandemic, which looks to have hit the attainment of poorer primary school children twice as hard as their peers'.

Key findings from the report show that today's education inequalities are tomorrow's income inequalities:

- Inequalities by family background emerge well before school starts. Just *57% of English pupils eligible for free school meals reached a good level of development at the end of Reception in 2019*, compared with 74% of their better-off peers. These inequalities persist throughout primary school. [Whether or not you regard eligibility for free school meals as a suitable proxy for being economically disadvantaged or not, these children are all from working-class households.]
- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds also make slower progress through secondary school. Fewer than half of disadvantaged children reach expected levels of attainment at the end of primary school, versus nearly 70% of their better-off peers. And of those who do achieve at the expected level, *just 40% of disadvantaged pupils go on to earn good GCSEs in English and maths versus 60% of the better-off students*.
- The relationship between family background and attainment isn't limited to the poorest pupils: *at every step up the family income distribution, educational performance improves*. For example, while just over 10% of young people in middle-earning families (and fewer than 5% of those in the poorest families) earned at least one A or A* grade at GCSE, over a third of pupils from the richest tenth of families earned at least one top grade.
- Ten years after GCSEs, *over 70% of those who went to private school have graduated from university* compared with just under

9 See https://ifs.org.uk/inequality.

> half of those from the richest fifth of families at state schools and *fewer than 20% of those from the poorest fifth of families*.[10]

CAREER UNDERACHIEVEMENT

The Deaton Review also highlighted that:

> educational inequalities translate into large future earnings differences. By the age of 40, the average UK employee with a degree earns twice as much as someone qualified to GCSE level or below. In part, this reflects very slow earnings growth for the low-educated: *the most common annual salary for 45- to 50-year-olds with at most GCSEs is between £15,000 and £20,000*, which is exactly the same as for 25- to 30-year-olds with these qualifications.[11]

Despite only 7% of students going to private schools, this cohort are disproportionately overrepresented in many professions. These findings were presented in *Elitist Britain 2019*, a report by the Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission.[12] The report charts the educational backgrounds of leading figures across nine areas: politics, business, the media, Whitehall, public bodies, public servants, local government, the creative industries and sport.

In a press release, the Social Mobility Commission states that 'power rests with a narrow section of the population – the 7% who attend private schools and 1% who graduate from Oxford and Cambridge. The report reveals a "pipeline" from fee-paying schools through to Oxbridge and into top jobs.' Private school alumni dominate many public bodies such as senior judges (65%) and civil service permanent secretaries (59%). In politics, at the time of writing, 57% of those currently sitting in the House of Lords and 29% of MPs in the House of Commons were privately educated.

10 C. Farquharson, S. McNally and I. Tahir, Lack of Progress on Closing Educational Inequalities Disadvantaging Millions Throughout Life, *Institute for Fiscal Studies* [press release] (16 August 2022) (original emphasis). Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/press-release/lack-of-progress-on-closing-educational-inequalities-disadvantaging-millions-throughout-life.

11 Farquharson et al., Lack of Progress on Closing Educational Inequalities (original emphasis).

12 Social Mobility Commission, *Elitist Britain 2019: The Educational Backgrounds of Britain's Leading People* (24 June 2019). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elitist-britain-2019/elitist-britain-2019-the-educational-backgrounds-of-britains-leading-people.

The media also has some of the highest proportions of privately educated people of any employment sector. 'Of the 100 most influential news editors and broadcasters, 43% went to fee-paying schools. Similarly, 44% of newspaper columnists were privately educated, with a third – 33% – attending both an independent school and Oxbridge.'

In the TV, film and music industries, 'a substantial number – 38% – attended independent schools with our bestselling pop stars at 30% and top actors at 44%'.

In sport, '37% of international rugby players and 43% of England's cricket team' went to private schools.

> Across the thirty-seven categories of the nine broad areas surveyed in the report, it was only among men and women footballers that the privately educated were under-represented.[13]

Your social background helps you in almost every sector of employment. According to the Office for National Statistics, only 10% of those from working-class backgrounds reach Britain's higher managerial, professional or cultural occupations. You are seventeen times more likely to go into law if your parents are lawyers, while the children of those in film and television are twelve times more likely to enter these fields.[14]

One reason for this is unpaid internships. The Sutton Trust report, *Pay As You Go?* found that 'the highest proportions of unpaid internships were in retail (89%), the arts (86%) and the media (83%)',[15] meaning they can only be afforded by those whose inherited personal wealth (or that of their parents) can fund this. And yet these internships are a gateway into paid employment. Another reason for this is personal connections. Most internships aren't advertised, so awareness of their very existence is dependent on connections and inside knowledge.

13 Social Mobility Commission, Elitism in Britain, 2019 [press release] (24 June 2019). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/elitism-in-britain-2019.

14 See https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatisticssocioeconomicclassification nssecrebasedonsoc2010.

15 *BBC News,* 'Most' Internships Unpaid in Retailing and the Arts (21 November 2018). Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-46315035. See also: C. Cullinane and R. Montacute, *Pay As You Go? Internship Pay, Quality and Access in the Graduate Jobs Market* (London: Sutton Trust, 2018). Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/internships-pay-as-you-go.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF WORKING-CLASS INEQUALITY?

Who is to blame for working-class underachievement and under-representation? Some argue it is the working class themselves.

Michael B. Katz, writing about American history, argues that socio-economically deprived people are viewed as 'undeserving of sympathy' because they caused their own poverty through 'laziness and immorality' or being 'culturally or mentally deficient'. In other words, poverty is the result of a personal failure. It is caused by the deficiencies of the individual. The notion of the undeserving poor:

> stretches from the late eighteenth century through to the present. Poverty, in this view, results from personal failure and inferiority. The historical record shows this idea in the past to have been scientifically dubious, ethically suspect, politically harmful, and, at its worst, lethal. That is why we should pay close attention to its current resurgence.[16]

The 'individual versus society' argument is also strong in the UK, where we are based.

There is, of course, an endless list of possible causes for working-class underachievement. This would include poor parenting, genetics, decline of pride in being working class, poor teaching, an inappropriate curriculum, undiagnosed special educational needs, low aspirations, low motivation, fear of failure, low impulse control – the list goes on.

Our contention is that, of all these possible causes and any more you wish to cite, we educators must focus on what is within our control and discount causes that arise from dubious evidence.

16 M. B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013 [1989]), p. 1.



REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

At this juncture, as well as at various points throughout the book, we would like you to reflect on the following questions:

- What do you consider to be the main causes of working-class underachievement?
- Do your views clash with those of your colleagues?
- What do you suspect your colleagues' views are?

WHY ARE THE WORKING CLASS UNDERVALUED?

Working-class underachievement and under-representation are a long-standing problem. Writing as long ago as 1958, Michael Young argued that students from poorer areas often had to work much harder than upper-class youngsters to get into university.[17] Over sixty years later, this is still the case. At least in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, working-class students were supported by the state in the form of free university education, grants and bus passes, as well as through the benefit system.

Sadly, as we discovered in Matt's story in the Introduction, these improvements in access to higher education for working-class children haven't been sustained. Slowly and steadily, we have seen the removal of free education, grants and free travel passes.

Also note that during this period changes in the economy have left some parts of the UK behind. Fewer people now work in jobs that were thought of as traditional working-class occupations, such as miners, dockers, steel-makers and so on. Those jobs were often dangerous and dirty, but they also gave working-class people a great sense of pride. Workers knew that they were doing something of great economic and symbolic value to the country. The wages derived from those jobs were increased through

17 M. Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Publishers, 1994 [1958]).

being part of a strong trade union. People also spent a large percentage of their wages within their community.

As the jobs went, the local income went with it. Many of these left-behind areas are located in the outer-urban neighbourhoods of Northern England and South Wales and in our coastal towns. The money that was drained from these areas has never been replaced. What were once proud communities are now hollowed out; what were once thriving neighbourhoods are now places of misery.

Within all these communities are local heroes who work tirelessly to support others who, without intervention, will literally die. From running food banks and boxing gyms to sports teams and social clubs, local people are being supported by their neighbours in these difficult times but neglected by their elected representatives.

We digress but, as educators, it is important to know some basic history and economics. This should be taught on every teacher training course. Some of our students come from households that feel devalued by society, and some are made to feel ashamed. It is hard not to internalise that narrative.

And inequality is getting worse. Nearly one in three children in the UK (31%) grows up in poverty, and it is on the increase. According to government figures, there were 4.2 million children living in poverty in 2019. During the pandemic, this rose to over five million and is now rising even further due to the cost-of-living crisis.[18]

So, what, if anything, can be done to help? Commenting on the IFS Deaton Review we cited earlier, the former Department for Education advisor Sam Freedman has said that 'Politicians, from all parties, love the idea that education is the answer to inequality,'[19] but we can only truly tackle inequality by providing financial support to those who need it.

We agree with Freedman, but we are also of the view that we can take some action within the current system before or alongside the systemic changes that desperately need to happen. We simply cannot afford to wait for society to change. To wit: upcoming chapters in this book will consider how we can redesign the core curriculum and extra-curricular activities, utilise adaptive teaching approaches, design and deliver curriculum interventions, and develop innovative curriculum enhancements which make a difference.

18 See https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures and Children's Commissioner, Fact Checking Claims About Child Poverty (22 June 2020). Available at: https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2020/06/22/fact-checking-claims-about-child-poverty.

19 S. Freedman, The Truth Is That Schools Do Little to Reduce Inequality, *Financial Times* (22 August 2022). Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/da6ba133-a2ec-40f3-8f81-260c582cb22e.

The problem of working-class underachievement is too big for us to tackle alone. But just because the causes are societal and systemic, and just because the challenge is vast, it doesn't mean that as educators we shouldn't try to do more to help, albeit in a small way.

There are lots of matters outside our control, but by zooming in on one possible cause of working-class underachievement we might make our schools more equitable places. In this book, we will focus on classism.

WHAT IS CLASSISM?

Classism or class discrimination is bias, discrimination, prejudice or oppression directed towards a person or group of people based on social class or socio-economic status. This form of discrimination isn't covered by the Equality Act 2010, which provides employees with protection against discrimination and harassment in respect of nine protected characteristics, including sex, race and disability.[20] It is the forgotten prejudice.

Despite class discrimination being unprotected by law, research shows that 'a staggering 67% of Brits think social class is an issue for people when it comes to securing a job; with one in three (29.3%) feeling discriminated against during their job search because of their class'.[21]

According to the Social Mobility Commission's 2019 poll, 77% of people feel there is a large gap between the social classes in Britain today.[22] However, there are no provisions for class or socio-economic status despite 60% of the British population identifying as working class. It is therefore technically legal to discriminate against candidates due to their accent or home address, and for individuals to perpetuate negative stereotypes of working-class people with disparaging and offensive comments.

Earlier, we argued that the system fails working-class students by design rather than by accident. You may be dubious. You may think that everyone has our best interests at heart and that no one would want to fail working-class students. But you would be wrong. Just as some acts of racism are

20 See https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents.

21 CV Library, Brits Believe Class Is an Issue When Securing a New Job (28 January 2020). Available at: https://www.cv-library.co.uk/recruitment-insight/class-issue-securing-new-job.

22 Social Mobility Commission, *Social Mobility Barometer: Public Attitudes to Social Mobility in the UK, 2019 to 2020* (21 January 2020). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-barometer-poll-results-2019/social-mobility-barometer-public-attitudes-to-social-mobility-in-the-uk-2019-to-2020.

deliberate while others are accidental, some forms of classism are deliberate, not accidental. Some classism is intentional – and some of it exists in your school.

William Ming Liu identified four forms of classism: downward, upward, lateral and internalised.[23] The concepts most relevant to this book are that of downward classism and internalised classism.

Downward classism occurs when people in higher social class groups discriminate against or marginalise people whom they perceive to be in a lower social group. Downward classist behaviours and attitudes often take the form of micro-aggressions – that is, everyday interactions that intentionally or unintentionally degrade, insult or diminish the humanity, customs or values of people in non-dominant groups.

Internalised classism is the acceptance and justification of classism by working-class people themselves. Examples include feeling inferior around higher-class people, deference to the values of higher-class people or shame about your family background or heritage.



REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Once again, we would like you to reflect on the following questions before continuing:

- Do you have any personal experience of classism?
- Do you agree that society seems to undervalue working-class people? If so, how?
- Is there any evidence that there is some bias against working-class families in your organisation? If so, how does that bias show itself?

23 W. M. Lui, *Social Class and Classism in the Helping Professions: Research, Theory, and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2011).

WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE OF CLASSISM IN EDUCATION?

We believe that classism is embedded in all aspects of education. For example, many universities remain the preserve of middle- and upper-class students and aren't representative of modern society. By way of illustration, think of the lack of working-class representation on courses such as medicine. In 2016, the King's Fund found that only 4% of doctors in the UK come from working-class backgrounds.[24] As the occupational figures we cited earlier show, it is no accident that the elites have the best opportunities, jobs and incomes.

Classism most rears its head when elites fear that their territory is being threatened by interlopers from the lower social classes. From passive-aggressive behaviour to downright bullying, many (but by no means all) of the more privileged will put barriers in the way of those who aren't like them. They will make certain spaces unwelcome. Classism as a deliberate strategy is something we will return to later. We think that educators cannot undo all aspects of classism, but we can be similarly deliberate in the way we respond to it.

In this book, we will tackle the classism inherent in the secondary school context. In the next chapter, we will focus on three areas within the control of school leaders and teachers, but first let's drag the elephant into the middle of the room.

One reason why the classroom isn't working for working-class students is money. According to Professor Diane Reay's research, working-class students do less well simply because less money is spent on them.[25] Reay and others highlight that the funding deficiencies suffered by state schools have led to a marked decline in art, drama, dance and music provision. Less affluent families cannot afford to pay for their children to experience these activities outside of school.

There has been a funding crisis in the state sector for many years. Head teachers like Vic Goddard have campaigned tirelessly for more funding and to help the general public understand the extent of the problem. His school in Harlow, Essex cannot afford to buy textbooks for their

24 A. Heller, Diversity in the Medical Workforce: Are We Making Progress?, *The King's Fund* (3 February 2020). Available at: https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2020/02/diversity-medical-workforce-progress.

25 D. Ferguson, 'Working-Class Children Get Less of Everything in Education – Including Respect' [interview with Diane Reay], *The Guardian* (21 November 2017). Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/nov/21/english-class-system-shaped-in-schools?

students.[26] We want to give readers of this book ideas for what we will call 'the extra and the different' for working-class students in your school community but, as Goddard explains, many schools cannot even afford the basics, let alone the extras.

Every government makes economic choices. Policies such as austerity have clearly led to schools being underfunded. Meanwhile, in the private sector, fee-paying schools continue to be exempt from paying VAT due to their dubious charitable status.

Earlier, we defined the working classes according to the social class category of C2DE. In doing so, it is important to note that the category is broad and that the working class aren't therefore synonymous with those living in poverty. Many working-class people don't, in fact, live in poverty.

But it is equally important to note that all those who do live in poverty are, by definition, working class because the class system is based not solely on the type of work you do but on relative affluence; to be middle class you must be more affluent than the working classes. In addition, a high proportion of those in poverty are also in work.

At the time of writing, more than one in five of the UK population are classed as living in poverty, which equates to a staggering 13.4 million people. Of these, 8.1 million are working-age adults, 4.3 million are children and 2.1 million are pensioners. Child poverty continues to rise with almost one in three children in the UK (31%) living in poverty. To put that into context, that's an average of nine students out of a class of thirty. Some 75% of children in poverty live in a household where at least one person works.[27]

According to the charity Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), 'pupils experiencing poverty in England are financially excluded from full participation in a wide range of school subjects and activities, including PE, music, swimming and art and design'. In addition, 'Day-to-day practices in England's schools often unintentionally draw attention to family incomes and make children feel embarrassed and different. These include expensive uniform policies, non-uniform days and requests from school to bring in material possessions like pencil cases.'[28] Some schools' food policies mean that children living in poverty are not afforded the same lunch options as their peers.

26 C. Jones, Essex School Cannot Afford Textbooks Due to Cost of Living Crisis, *BBC News* (8 September 2022). Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-62828555.

27 See https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/key-facts.

28 Child Poverty Action Group, *The Cost of the School Day in England: Pupils' Perspectives* (March 2022), p. 5. Available at: https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/briefing/cost-school-day-england-pupils-perspectives.

We agree with Professor Diane Reay's claims that, 'If you're a working-class child, you're starting the race halfway round the track [because] less affluent children […] get a more restrictive educational offer' and are denied an education in art, drama or dance because 'their parents can't afford to pay for them to do those activities out of school'.[29]

To help working-class students catch up in the race, we therefore need to offer them more than their more affluent peers.

WHY IS IT IN ALL OUR BEST INTERESTS TO CHALLENGE CLASSISM?

There are two main arguments for tackling classism. Firstly, there is the *mutuality* argument. A 2014 report from the Private Equity Foundation Impetus says that the high number of NEETs (not in education, employment or training) costs the UK economy 'in excess of £77 billion a year'.[30] This figure is arrived at through calculating lost taxes and additional associated costs that come from youth crime and poor health.

In a briefing for the Centre for Economic Performance, the authors of *What Do We Know and What Should We Do About Social Mobility?*, Lee Elliot Major and Stephen Machin, argue that 'Greater social mobility would mean less talent unfulfilled, more representative elites and a boost to the national economy.' The authors go on to say that 'if levels in Britain were improved to those in Canada, it … would lead to an annual increase in the country's GDP of around 4.4%'.[31] In other words, it is in all our mutual interests to tackle classism because we will all reap the economic benefits.

Secondly, there is the *justice* argument. An elderly woman Andy used to know when he was growing up in London had a big influence on him. Her name was Bess Calvert. Over a cup of tea in a crowded cafe, Bess passed on some wisdom: 'Listen to people and don't judge them.' Bess's sage advice echoes that of cognitive behaviour therapy expert Dr Paul Hauck who has written a self-help book called *Hold Your Head Up High*.[32] The book offers a three-step approach to feeling better about yourself: (1)

29 D. Ferguson, 'Working-Class Children Get Less of Everything in Education'.
30 Impetus, *Make NEETs History in 2014* (London: Impetus, 2014), p. 4. Available at: https://www.impetus.org.uk/assets/publications/Report/Make-NEETs-History-Report_ImpetusPEF_January-2014.pdf.
31 L. E. Major and S. Machin, *Social Mobility* (Centre for Economic Performance 2019 Election Analysis Series) (November), p. 7. Available at: https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/ea045.pdf.
32 P. Hauck, *Hold Your Head Up High* (London: Hachette UK, 1991).

never rate yourself and others, (2) develop performance confidence and (3) make people respect you.

To put a working-class spin on this advice, you should aim to become a nicer, happier person by trying to excel at something in life and not judging others too harshly. The advice is a recipe for feeling neither superior nor inferior.

Our contention is that reducing the impact of classism will help society. As Dorling writes:

> We live in an increasingly hierarchical society. We talk about some people being way above and others being way below other people. And yet we are not that different from each other. This sham hierarchy has been created by elitism, exclusion, prejudice, and greed. The end result is increasing amounts of despair, not only among the poor, but also among groups like the children of aspirational parents. If we want a content and happy society, we are currently going in the wrong direction.[33]

Of course, not everyone will be happy with this suggestion. There are many with vested interests who will oppose our ideas. It will be a long, hard but exciting road. If you want to make the journey with us, we think you will need to be equipped with a bit more understanding of the main problems that classism causes. Our next chapter seeks to do just that.

33 D. Dorling, An Introduction to Injustice: Why Social Inequality Still Persists (2010). Available at: https://www.dannydorling.org/books/injustice/injustice-anintroduction.pdf.