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### The "attainment gap" in Scottish education policy a critique of policy values

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UWS JUNE 2022 RESEARCH FESTIVAL CONFERENCE PAPER

THE 'ATTAINMENT GAP' IN SCOTTISH EDUCATION POLICY  
A CRITIQUE OF POLICY VALUES

"Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct"

Max Weber <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber (1905/1970) Trans. Talcott Parsons *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Dover Publications Inc, Mineola.

## **ABSTRACT**

The discipline of psychology's ontological universe consists of individuals, not social class structures. Psychology has immense authority in the capitalist neo-liberal order. My argument is the latter 'lubricates' and justifies conservative political values through individualistic ideas of sources of merit and causes of achievement. The attainment gap in Scotland, it is argued, occurs as the outcome of sociological struggles whose outcomes are disproportionately adverse for the working-class. The policy-making educational establishment examined suppresses fundamental political questions about class structures and their implications in terms of education outcomes. Instead by privileging a Victorian mythology of individual effort policy enable the persistence of inequalities which it masks through psychological discourses of effortfulness. The limiting psychological framing of learners and their difficulties as just cognitive in origin is a convenient political theorization favoured by a cautious Scottish policy-making establishment. The history of the intelligence testing movement (also) supported the ideology that IQ was an objective measure of capacity. This movement's culturally biased testing methodologies legitimated the continuation of societal inequality. Max Weber's social closure perspective is a radically different theory affording insight into the attainment gap as a phenomenon of class conflict dynamics. The latter include opportunity hoarding and cognate exclusionary strategies disadvantaging poor children. These techniques of power maintenance prevent children from working-class backgrounds achieving their potential whilst sinisterly conveying the impression they are not working with adequate effort hence they are made blameworthy.<sup>2</sup>

**Key words:** attainment, sociology, Weber, class, closure, psychology

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Although not markedly historical a comment by a member of the Scottish policy elite guides the flavour of the concept Attainment Gap and surrounding schooling anxieties: Stewart Maxwell, MSP wrote on the sixteenth of December 2014 to Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Life-long Learning, Scottish Government in an email under the rubric EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE to inform her about progress in the attainment gap in schooling stating that "is a clear priority for Scottish Ministers...Given this, the Committee intends to take evidence from the Scottish Government and local authorities - ...on the outcomes of your efforts to improve attainment in school...Our Ambition To progressively reduce inequity in educational outcomes: consistently over an agreed period, to make progress in eroding the deeply embedded correlation found in the majority of Scottish schools between a child's relative point of social

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education>

deprivation/affluence and their educational attainment”<sup>3</sup>. In response published on the Scottish Government website on January sixteenth, 2015 Angela Constance empathised “tackling this gap is one of my top priorities” and argued that one strategy relied upon the Curriculum for Excellence “personalised approach to all children”. There is a long and unresolved backstory of these policy-makers ambitions which requires that we visit histories of Scottish education. The historian of Scotland Thomas C. Smout (1987: 218) comments:

*“That so few of humble origin, out of the great multitude, actually succeeded in climbing the class ladder on the rungs of educational opportunity tended to confirm the middle-class in their other comforting delusion, that it was moral weakness that kept the poor where they were.”*

It is important to the paper’s argument to establish that Scottish society is class structured despite pervasive received notions of ‘levelling-up’ meritocratic ideals. Beyond that policy ambit and this paper’s scope others have identified how schools are in fact geopolitical sites used by states to fashion the achievement of state goals (Lizotte, et al, 2020). International evidence from studies of schooling for impoverished areas of India reveals very similar dynamics of deep stratification involving schools and ‘labour class communities in a context of economic liberalism (Yunis, 2022).

McCrone (2001) argues it is undeniable that Scotland is a class society. And that Scotland’s history is largely over the past 100 years one of class politics and class conflict. Supporters of the independent school sector in Scotland deny their structural separation by class arguing they have “strong links with their local communities” and that private schooling benefits all (Pearson, 2000: 101). The individualistic ethos of the meritocratic myth of the Scottish ‘lad o’pairts’, part of a tradition of the myth of social equalitarianism, did not challenge inherited class divisions of Victorian Scotland or reflect opportunity available in a classless society (Anderson, 2000: 215; McCrone, 2000: 236; McCrone, 2017: 239).

Historians argue the Scots held different attitudes towards mass education from the dominant elites in England: universities, the system of parish and burgh schools in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century produced a literate and intelligent population.<sup>4</sup> By contrast it was argued in England that giving the Scottish rate aided school education to the labouring classes of the poor would ferment discontent with their lot and ferment insurrection through access to knowledge that literacy afforded (p. 209). Although Adam Smith supported the extension of education to the poor these common people were not judged to merit as comprehensive an education as their upper-class superiors; the working-class education should be restricted to the 3Rs, and so

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<sup>3</sup>[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EducationandCultureCommittee/Educational%2520attainment/SM\\_Cab\\_Sec\\_Attainment\\_OUT\\_20141216.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/Educational%2520attainment/SM_Cab_Sec_Attainment_OUT_20141216.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> T.C. Smout (1987) *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950*. (London: Fontana Press).

democratic equality of education for all was not supported by the ruling elite even in Scotland.

Scottish working-class education was endorsed by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century elites in Scotland as a means of stratified social control. Only an elite received prestigious training in Latin for preparation for their higher education and social milieu. In rural areas Smout described the mixing of classes over the 1880s (in some places), but less so in cities where social segregation was marked by area residence and the school attendance of very poor children was episodic. Smout indeed documents, how in mid-nineteenth century Scotland, education was “extremely inegalitarian” (p. 216). The typical Scottish school, the burgh school was the preserve of the middle-classes during 1860s. Social closure was embedded and entangled within a classicist system education, a system of differentiation that Smout described, (p. 218) engendering a “gigantic inferiority complex” among the working classes. The professional middle-classes in Edinburgh uses legal and funding changes to take control of the selective Merchant Company schools and those of the Heriot Trust narrowing working-class opportunities (Smout, p. 221).

Scottish education policy over 1885-1921 established a two-tier system that reinforced and reflected existing class segregation – at aged 11-12 pupils were judged as ready to be classified into ‘academic’ or ‘non-academic’ streams, and it was assumed the former would be middle-class and destined for the professions, the rest for badly remunerated and less secure manual working-class occupations (Smout, p.226). Smout describes the assumption that most children should remain in the social class to which they were born (p. 226). Into the 1960-70s Scotland’s segregated system of “senior” and “junior” Scottish secondary schools was justified on grounds of human differences in innate intelligence despite the fact that most poor children continued receiving the inferior non-academic ‘junior’ secondary school education preparing them for unskilled and skilled trades, and a social life that did not expect knowledge of the classics (pp: 227-228) – the system, Smout asserts remained “grimly authoritarian” (p. 228). Class status and benefits that accompanied it were legitimated as being fair through the ‘science’ of psychological technology.

Moving beyond historical analysis sociologists of contemporary Scotland argue that after 1945 affluence was greater and mobility, geographic and social improved (McCrone, 2001, 2017). Scots had a special commitment to ‘getting on’ especially through education, a sentiment with origins in a late nineteenth-century fiction which celebrated the virtues of small-town and rural Scotland. This Scottish myth of social advancement grew; its educational manifestation was in the ‘lad-o-pairs’, a talented youth (almost always male) who had the talent but not the financial means to improve himself. (p. 20). Paterson (2014: 403) recognised that despite educational reforms social mobility remains comparatively impervious to competition among those whose social class origins are humble. To foreground forces that stultify class mobility through differential attainment in schools it is necessary to demonstrate an evidence base for the phenomenon of class closure, the theme of the next section.

## SOCIAL CLOSURE AND ATTAINMENT

In Max Weber's conflict sociology, the groups or classes seek the monopolisation of strategically important resources to secure social closure and so protect their market advantage. Intergenerational disadvantage has temporal stability (Wiborg and Hansen, 2009). This paper attempts to demonstrate strategies used to maintain the dichotomy mentioned by Mills and why the conception of the attainment gap as conceived may aggravate not reduce class associated achievement differentials. Psychology, it is argued, offers critical resources and cultural authority to the vested interests of the power elite to maintain existing hierarchies. Culture, Collins (1979) argues, not ability determines prospects for entering higher positions, and it is acquired through group membership early in life. Max Weber predicted the caste exclusiveness involved. Jerome Karabel (2005) in his "vast tome" (Halsey<sup>5</sup>) '*The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*' describes as being "to render the strange familiar and the familiar strange". Viewed from the perspective of equalitarian sociology the notion that the attainment gap evidences a basically psychological causation is exceedingly strange. Attainment, we conjecture, cannot be separated from social stratification which, as Halsey, recognises has a global character in terms of the panning out in the context of social mobility through equalling relative class chances (Breen, 2004). This article is premised on the view that stratification maintenance is conducted through human action and gatekeeper discretion (Roscigno et al, 2007), this stance is applied to the theorisation of the attainment gap something that is not a feature of official Scottish Government reports about it.<sup>6</sup>

Scholarship based on social closure's theoretical orientations dwells on "the mechanisms and processes through which status inequalities are developed, unfold and are reified in the course of interaction and within cultural, institutional and organisational involvements" (Roscigno et al, 2007: 330). Murphy (1988) describes social closure as a process of subordination preventing other social groupings from the benefits of economic opportunities. As a status hierarchy develops power is projected downwards excluding those deemed a threat to acquired privilege (Lee, 2010). Access to high social closure networks are associated with educational outcomes (Carolan and Lardier, 2018). As argued below psychological research and the evidence it generates holds a very privileged status in relation to legitimating current political orthodoxy which as suggested is averse to the type of analysis of the attainment gap that social closure theory affords. A key goal of social democratic states has been to limit and reduce the effects of social origin on the life chances of individuals (Wiborg and Hansen, 2009: 379) and yet "intergenerational transmission of social disadvantage does not decline over time" a remarkable finding given

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<sup>5</sup> A.H. Halsey, *Selecting the Elites*, *European Journal of Sociology*, 2008, 49 (3): 550-555.

<sup>6</sup> The Scottish Parliament: Official Report: Education and Culture Committee. 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016, Session 4.

Norway's welfare state orientation; this discovery is consistent with mobility scholars' findings about the UK (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 2010).

By ideological design class inheritance and attendant privileges was the subject of elimination in the USSR. Titma et al (2003: 281) found social reproduction remained, but on a limited scale and concluded "Soviet society in its final years was quite open" though not meritocratic. In the West the democratic mandate valorises openness and meritocratic ideals, but does its state education system give these desired features material traction as opposed to reproducing an inequitable class structure? Breen and Karlson (2014) discovered that education plays a mediating role in intergenerational class mobility over the 20<sup>th</sup> century with class origins and destinations being roughly 50% mediated through educational attainment. But if personal merit is not the sole basis for how rewards in society are allocated this tells us other factors matter in the allocation opportunity. Educational credentials may be especially significant to class strategies to retain advantages especially for privileged families who monopolise opportunity structures and routes to accessing them and use those credentials they have acquired in order to secure advantages in life-chances are transmitted to their offspring. Patterson (2014: 406) describes how entry to high status positions in the occupational structure requires traits "over and above" educational attainment, otherwise known as "soft skills".

Social closure is associated with exclusion and the monopolisation of resources by a group, Max Weber developed it in *Economy and Society* (1978; Turner, 2006). Closure means relationships that are closed to those classified by the in-group as outsiders, or that entry of those on the outside is limited or made conditional. For Weber many relationships represent this logic of power: membership of elite clubs or societies, and historically access to an education at Oxbridge illustrate institutions that practice social closure. Forms of capital are required for membership of many elites, such as high income, aristocratic pedigree, the 'right' school background or general biography. Coleman (1987) uses the concept of social closure to explain the way in which norms that had developed amongst students in Catholic schools, where standardised test performance was higher reflected the transmission of norms for student behaviour which had been transmitted through the mechanism of closed social relations amongst the parents of these Catholic school students. According to Lemert (2006) "segregation is ubiquitous, occurring in virtually any social arrangement where there are identifiable marks of differences that can be used by those in power to enforce their social, economic or political advantages or to limit their contact with the disadvantaged", and its structural cause lies in the scarcity of social goods such as income and status.

Fasang et al (2014) demonstrate that whether social closure enhances attainment depends upon neighbourhood, closure in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods lowers school attainment, but in advantaged communities it enhances attainment. This is embodied in the structure of social relations. Fasang et al (2014) describe two types of closure, one is institutionalised through

schools and the belonging they seek to foster in various ways with all parents; the other type is less readily governable in that it is associated with informal ties that arise in neighbourhoods where opportunities and encounters led to the generation of social networks. It is networks of this character which are especially relevant to the generation of social closure processes where those deemed not to belong lose purchase on potentially enriching resources. Social closure increases the impact and power of a network. Importantly, Fasang et al discovered that the educational benefits of social closure arise exclusively in the more affluent not disadvantaged areas. When informal social closure occurs in areas of relative poverty this has the effect of reducing academic attainment. In each of these cases attainment differentials do not rest upon psychological processes and individual deficiencies whether in intelligence or diligence.

Coleman (1988) proposed collective norm enforcement arises through intergenerational closure and in this scenario parents are able to exercise authoritative discipline and values over their children's approach to school, that greater degree of control for Coleman fosters high educational attainment. Closure, Coleman argues, "locks" in norms and resources helping to reinforce the desired status quo. In cases where the parental network is pro-school this impacts on student attainment especially if the level of education held by these parents affords them the ability to support school work. Farang et al (2014) argue intergenerational closure in economically challenged communities "is a disadvantageous structure as one cannot easily opt out negative pressures" (p. 143). Preventing children from encountering negative pressures in areas of this type is more difficult; closure here can foster a downward mobility and scripts that reject school values and instead students favour choices for "making it" by recognising avenues to the future where school achievement is judged to be irrelevant. Harding (2010) and Paul Willis have theorised this situation of oppositional cultures which seem to unwittingly collude in fostering persistent class disadvantage concluding that it reproduces intergenerational inequality noted earlier in this paper. Social cultivation underlies closure choices which is why class practices in raising children help establish the grounds for practices of social closure as form of segregation.

Class differences identified through the textures of ethnographic research findings (Lareau, 2003) in socialisation methods and processes reinforce differences in closure on school attainment. Lareau discovered the parents of working-class children favoured "natural growth. Here, parental supervision was limited to discipline and did not entail the organisation of extensive extracurricular activity where networking flourished. That "concerted cultivation" typifies the lives of middle-class students. Fasang et al (2014) conclude that "network properties such as social closure is one of the mechanisms by which social advantages and disadvantages are reproduced" (p. 156). Buisson-Fenet, et al (2013) who found the high schools of students helped to generate social closure for entrance to the preparatory classes that supply the students for the prestigious French Grandes Ecoles. Those students

who entered the elite preparatory classes tended to come from a selective group of high schools, many were in Paris. In the US structural barriers exist around entry to Ivy League programmes connecting with school of origin (McDonough, 1997).

Fiel (2013) characterises closure as the process where social collectives aim to maximise rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligible's, and found school segregation to be a mode of exclusion emerging from group-based competition for scarce resources which generates educational stratification. Fiel identified inequalities across schools contributed to unequal student outcomes as Coleman (1966) in the report Equality of Educational Opportunity found the academic attainment of minorities in school was lower where there were high concentrations of disadvantaged minorities; this attainment gap grew with the passage of time with whites strategically moving away.

### **POLICY EPISTEMOLOGY'S PSYCHOLOGICAL BIAS**

Herman (2014) describes processes of quantification and measurement by psychometric techniques linked vocational schooling with educational selection into industry in the early twentieth-century. Professor Iran Siraj (London Institute of Education) was appointed to lead the expert review of the early year's workforce in 2014 in order to help ensure "the foundations for Scotland's future as the best place to grow up". The pages of this document are replete with psychological theories and concepts. The Scottish Government's policy called Growing up in Scotland: The Impact of Children's Early Activities on Cognitive Development (2009) is also psychological including citations of studies of brain development.

Furthermore, "developmental milestones", "learning outcomes" and the child psychiatrist John Bowlby's attachment theory inform the guidance directed at practitioners. In Section 5 of this document references valorise neurology: "regarding how the brain develops and the development of emotion and social skills" neurological pathways are highlighted with advice to practitioners being about the interpretation of "insecure attachments". In Section 6 of the sample national policy entitled Early Learning and Childcare – What do Children Need? There is a discourse of psychological developmental stages assumed as universal. The eminent Professor Iram Siraj is a co-researcher of the renowned developmental psychologists Professor Kathy Silva and Professor Melhuish whose collective expertise informed parallel policy related research in England where the "developmental trajectories of children in the EPPSE 3-16 study was undertaken for the Department of Education in 2010. Demonstrations of a contrasting analysis of educational outcomes and their origins are found in sociologies of schooling.

Ethnographies of state schools in England demonstrate that schooling sometimes impedes the progression of those from working-class origins. In the 1970s Paul Willis's Marxist analysis of state schooling entitled *Why Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs* brought our attention to the fact that British schools do not

necessarily move children on in life socially or occupationally, but instead re-ensconce them inside communities of class origin (see Keere et al 2019).. Glass (1954) argued that Britain was not an 'open' society as social class intergenerational relative mobility was rare with self-recruitment to elite positions in companies and professions being the norm. Goldthorpe et al (1987) identified fluidity had existed in Britain, but only in absolute rates of social mobility reflecting an expansion of the occupational structure; the relative chances of individuals of different social backgrounds moving upwards into higher occupational levels continued to embody inequalities; children of working-class origin continued compared with their middle-class peers to not move up the class structure. The attainment gap and the working-class has a notable heritage.

Sosu and Ellis (2014) canonical version of the attainment gap conjures it 'domestically': as being children from low income households in Scotland do significantly worse at school than those from better-off homes, a gap beginning at age 5 and continues throughout schooling. The purpose of this article is to offer a different theorisation of the putative gap in school achievement. The analysis utilizes Max Weber's concept of social closure and rejects suspect ideas of intelligence and individual effort (mantras of Victorian self-help). Definitions in official policy control what is thought and excluded from discourse when this gap is examined. Performing social closure requires power: Stephen Lukes (2005) portrays power as three dimensions: first the ability of a person or group to achieve compliance by others who change how they behave as a result of the power being exercised; second it is not only decision-making but setting the agenda that leads to the desired decisions; thirdly power is about the ability to control what people think as being 'right' leading to an acceptance of contestable decisions. "Social closure" refers to processes of drawing boundaries, constructing identities and groups in order to monopolise scarce resources for one's own group and so excluding others access to using them (Mackert, 2014: 1). Humes (2000: 75) refers to social closure in Scottish policy making where Her Majesty's Inspectorate used their "substantial powers of patronage" to control access into the 'assumptive world' of the elite policy community. Social closure operates is not unique to any particular context. The argument developed desires to interrogate the assumptions associated with a classist policy myth making. The argument is that psychological assumptions are foundational to the maintenance of the education system which legitimate a class divided society. Scottish Parliamentary business has devoted attention to what it describes as the "Educational attainment gap"<sup>7</sup>. The Education and Culture Committee has undertaken work on this subject, its response and evidence is published on the Parliament's website, 2015-16.

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<sup>7</sup>. The Scottish Parliament: School Attainment to be a focus for Education Committee, 12.1.2015. [www.scottish.parliament.gov.uk/news-and-media-centre](http://www.scottish.parliament.gov.uk/news-and-media-centre).

## DISCUSSION

Promoting greater social mobility has become the mantra of Government's social reform programme, underpinned by the establishment of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission under the former Coalition Government. While there is acknowledgement that the causes of inequalities of opportunity are complex and multifaceted, the policy focus has been largely on the perceived inadequacies of state education provision, coupled with pressures on state schools to reduce the so-called attainment gap through comprehensive improvement strategies supported by high-stakes testing, curricular prescription and a rigorous system of school inspection. Schools must bear a heavy responsibility for opening life-changing opportunities for children through quality and equality of provision. However, we contend that many causes of social and educational inequality of opportunity lie outside the direct control of state schools and require more radical approaches to understanding both the problems and possible long-term solutions. The class basis of attainment underpinned by the control over prestigious forms of capital, social and cultural, is overlooked.

Firstly, the paper deconstructed the concept of social closure from its inception in the work of Max Weber to more recent interpretations and applications of the term in respect to education. In its original conception, social closure referred to the 'process by which collectivities seek to maximise rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles' (Parkin, 1974, p.3). This most commonly operates through *exclusion*: pressure for closure downwards, epitomised in the closed shop and gaining admission through who you know rather than what you know. The disproportionate representation of privately educated and Oxbridge educated graduates in several leading professions (Cabinet Office, 2011) is testimony to the continuance of exclusion as a barrier to equality of opportunity and social mobility. Weeden (2002) unpicks five key closure devices to account for social and legal barriers to fair access to certain occupations in the US job market, including licensing, educational credentialing, voluntary certification, association representation and unionisation. Tholen (2016) has more recently applied a similar framework to an understanding of uncertainties and restricted opportunities in the graduate labour market, resulting in what he refers to as 'symbolic closure', aligned to Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence'.

Social closure also operates in the form of *solidarism*: pressure for closure upwards, 'in so far as claims upon resources threaten to diminish the share of the privileged strata' (Parkin, 1974, p.5). Solidarism can therefore be a reaction to exclusion, e.g. through pressure for positive discrimination and affirmative action, including recent strategies to pressure Russell Group universities to admit more state school students with good potential at the expense of some privately educated applicants. The counter forces of social closure pose a serious dilemma for policymakers. On the one hand, government has an ideological commitment to the creation of an 'open' society; but on the other hand, individuals have a desire to extend social privileges

for family members and others in their social networks because they face competition for livelihoods (Brown, 1995, 2003). Similarly, while the commitment to an open and democratic society would seem to include the right of parental choice of school, evidence suggests that this has disproportionately benefited middle-class families in getting the best for their children at the expense of the less privileged (Reay, 2004): a conflict between the promotion of self-interest and commitment to the common good. So-called affirmative action has therefore been condemned by the privileged groups as social engineering and has limited the extent to which social mobility can be achieved in practice (Calder, 2016).

Secondly, the paper critiques of the Government's policy attempts to promote equality of opportunity and social mobility through state education. The key weakness is perceived as an attempt to solve deeply rooted social problems through an educational prescription based almost exclusively on psychological mechanisms. There is nothing new in the idea that psychology is a panacea for most, if not, all social ills. It must be emphasised that the problem is not with psychology as a discipline, but what Jan De Vos (2013, pp.2-3) describes as 'psychologization': 'If something is not working in the education of our children, in our marriage, in our work situation, or more broadly in society as such, we turn to the psy-sciences and their knowledge'.

The emphasis on psychological solutions to the sociological problem of lack of social mobility, clearly places a heavy responsibility on schools, with an accountability that is both *cognitive* (achieving good test results and student outcomes through excellent teaching and student learning opportunities) and *conative* (in cultivating the right attitudes in students that will generate achievement motivation and the aspiration for intergenerational social mobility). It is right that schools should be held to account for their effectiveness and level of improvement, but it is also disingenuous to apportion a disproportionate amount of blame to schools for not helping to transform society into one that is more upwardly socially mobile. Indeed, there is strong evidence that government policies have been in some ways counterproductive: that high-stakes testing and accountability, coupled with enormous workloads have resulted in teacher recruitment, retention and workforce remodelling crisis (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2008; Jerrim, 2021; Thompson, 2006; Quicke, 2018). A more prescribed curriculum has tended to deepen social exclusion rather than broaden social inclusion (Goodson, 2014); and that efforts to improve opportunities for disadvantaged children in school have been undermined by government policies that have exacerbated child poverty, including cuts to welfare benefits.

Finally, the article proposes the concept of social closure as a component of class analysis. In our paper following Weber the phenomenon of closure designates a process of subordination, one group is theorised as monopolising advantages to itself which it judges to be consistent with its material and accompanying interests (Murphy, 1986; Parkin, 1979). Through the hoarding of opportunities and their denial

to outsiders it deems inferior or ineligible closure maintains the positional structure of society. Visible characteristics Weber argues such as social origin or academic credentials and attainment might be used to inform judgements about who merits classification as an outsider. Social closure therefore is a conceptual model that nourishes can involve projects concerned with the analysis of all types of domination. In our paper domination is polyvalent and involves class, academic attainment and how the latter is constructed through the hegemony afforded by scientific psychology. The exclusionary processes involved in domination entail the mobilisation of power to acquire, enhance or defend valued resources. Such power operates downwards from in our landscape from more affluent groups and knowledge workers supplying the scientific resources which give a cachet of objectivity and justice to this seemingly meritocratic social order.

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