BOOK REVIEW
EDUCATION AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

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Education and the Middle Class can be considered as updating and complementing Education and the Working Class, first published in 1962. The original text, by Jackson and Marsden, examined in a detailed and personal way the "unexpected" scholastic success of 88 children from lower class backgrounds. This study, by Power, Edwards, Whitty, and Wigfall, examines "expected" success and, in particular, it discusses middle-class pathways to achievement in schools and in careers. Education and the Middle Class reports on 350 respondents in England, but it has relevance for many constituencies in a world that has increasingly become middle class.

The profound lesson about educational success (predicted or otherwise) is simple and reasonably self-evident: the families that achieve it are committed to it and they are prepared to work very hard, and to make substantial sacrifices, to ensure it occurs. Also very important are systems knowledge – which is typically provided as an educational inheritance – and connections between homes and competent schools. The fundamental and fairly predictable nature of these findings has parallels in contemporary psychological studies of resilience which contend that children who have done well in difficult circumstances have done no more, or less, than access universal protective systems. Central amongst these protective systems are facilitative relationships with caregivers (Masten, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Power et al. (2003) provide some surprising findings. While the middle classes very much follow the "prime trajectory" of school and university success, the experience at the individual level is often much more uncertain. Girls have an easier passage through secondary school than boys, but both genders experience difficulties at the tertiary level. The authors found that more than half of the people they interviewed had an interrupted and troubled progression from school to university graduation. As well, only a minority of the sample subsequently had clear career intentions and commitments.

Circumstances have moved beyond Jackson and Marsden's Huddersfield to an England where there are now significant and visible strata of educational success within the middle classes. Power et al. say that it is possible to rank English tertiary facilities, with the older institutions, like Oxford and Cambridge, at the top through to the new universities and the colleges of higher education. Some school graduates are far more successful than others in winning places at the best universities. Oftentimes, gaining a place involves only a few points at the A level but there can be important and enduring personal implications. The most prestigious programmes influence the range and level of occupations available to those students who are successful. These courses have consequences for subsequent earnings and they reliably deliver (in the authors' words) the "glittering prizes".

Education and the Middle Class, and Jackson and Marsden's original study of middle-class values, provide important lessons for New Zealand. We need to systematically address family factors if the Ministry of Education's stated intent to reduce underachievement in education (Ministry of Education, 2003) is ever to become reality. The pre-eminence of these variables has been acknowledged in another recently released official document (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003). Making a difference for (and with) families will be difficult but it is arguably more worthy than most current preoccupations in schools, such as learning styles, multiple intelligences, and even information and communication technology.

Power et al. are also instructive regarding the increasing differentiation of schools. New Zealanders are not immune to middle-class angst about choosing the "right" school (Walsh, 2003), but the game may be poised to become altogether more intense. The Government's new approach to distributing research funding ("PBRF" to the initiated) will probably result in a hierarchy of higher education institutions in this country. Some of our secondary schools are likely to compete even more vigorously for the top places and programmes, and identified primary schools will follow in their wake. In England, comprehensive schools constitute 85% of secondary schools but collectively they contribute only 20% of the entrants to Oxford and Cambridge. Jackson and Marsden were contemplating a possibility of

this sort when they said that it would be:

> ...the most enormous waste if that intelligent openness which properly belongs to 'culture' were to recoil beneath the inevitable academic and social pressures, turning softly back to enclose the chosen – but reflecting to most people no more than a hard, excluding shell. (1966, p. 247)

Education and the Middle Class is a significant contribution to the sociology of education. As the authors say, the middle classes have been ignored in research and yet they provide the points of contrast for working-class experiences. Power et al. also comment that there is a definite need for the development of some new constructs to help us to understand pupil progressions and trajectories. Interestingly, this is also a concern in the resilience literature where there are calls for research on the processes and mechanisms that promote successful adaptation to the environment (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 1999).

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