

**Addressing Working Class
Underachievement**

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Introduction

This research was commissioned by Multiverse to explore the ways in which working class underachievement is addressed in schools and in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Despite the prominent inclusion agenda in education, the social class dynamics of the processes of schooling remain largely invisible, obscuring the need for the development of teaching strategies for inclusion by social class. In this report we outline empirical work that set out to explore how social class is being addressed by teachers in schools and in ITE. The data for the project was collected by a group of student teachers/trainees who volunteered to participate. Student teachers/trainees were drawn from Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and Education Studies courses run at the University of Sussex. All of the trainees from Education Studies were also employed as teaching assistants (TAs). Eight of the PGCE student teachers/trainees chose to use the data collected for this research project as the basis for their Special Study, the final written assessment of their course. Most of the student teachers/trainees had not had any previous input on their training courses in relation to social class and education.

This school-based research was developed to contribute to research on underachievement and social class by exploring multiple perspectives on this relationship. While the research focus was within a particular school, subject and teaching group it also engaged trainee teachers in several of the TTA QTS standards (see Appendix 1) and provided a context for them to reflect on teaching practices related to social class inclusion.

This research suggests that teachers define underachievement in different ways, adopting different types of strategy to address it and that these strategies may be influenced by perceptions and expectations of pupils which may be linked (unconsciously) to their social class. It provides evidence that teachers and trainee teachers often hold stereotypical ideas about pupils and parents according to their social class and lack opportunities to reflect upon these in their own practice. Whereas pupils identified aspects of teaching and learning in school as barriers to successful learning, teachers often located the source of a pupil's underachievement within the pupil or the home. This research indicates that a focus on individual underachieving pupils and on individual solutions tends to conceal inequalities related to social class as a broader educational phenomenon.

Background

The current political commitment to inclusion and improving the lives of the poorest children in society has been evident in initiatives like *Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools* (DfES, 2004). Education is seen to have a key role to play in lifting children out of poverty and social exclusion. The emphasis on poverty rather than on social class has presented certain difficulties. Even though research has demonstrated clearly that inequalities exist in relation to social class and education. (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Marshall, 2002), unlike other areas of discrimination, legislation provides no protection for inequalities related to social class.

A lack of consensus over social class classifications has also made research on education and social class difficult in the past. More recent conceptualisations of social class as a 'process' now provide another useful means for understanding and talking about social class and social class inequalities (Reay, 1998; Skeggs, 2004). Social class has been shown to have a significant effect on educational outcomes and future life chances even where educational achievement is high (Marshall, 2002). Working class pupils are less likely to achieve 5 A* - C passes at GCSE than their middle class peers and are less likely to go on to Higher Education (Office for National Statistics, 2005; OFSTED, 2005). They are also less likely to attend a popular and successful school (Sutton Trust, 2005).

Teacher-pupil relationships have been identified as of considerable importance (Corrie, 2002; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Munn et al, 2002). In addition, research has suggested that institutional structures and practices lead to pupils from different social classes experiencing school in different ways (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Working class pupils are more likely to be excluded from school (Munn et al, 2002) or to self exclude (Osler and Vincent, 2003). The tendency in schools to adopt an individualised focus on pupils helps to conceal and perpetuate inequalities (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Problems faced by working class girls are unlikely to be recognised (Osler and Vincent, 2003). Understandings of the experiences of working class pupils which also take account of gender (Lucey and Walkerdine, 2002; Osler and Vincent, 2003), poverty (Munn et al, 2002) and ethnicity (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005) are likely to be more informed. There has also been a great deal of research demonstrating that middle class parents are likely to have access to advantages which a working class parent may not have access to (Lareau, 2002). These advantages contribute to the more favourable position in the education system experienced by the children of middle class

parents (Gewirtz, 2001; Todd and Higgins, 1998, Vincent, 2001). Working class single parents are particularly disadvantaged in the education system and are often represented as failing to provide adequate support for their children at school (Standing, 1999).

Methodology

Project aims

The aim of this research was to use the voices of student teachers/trainees, teachers and pupils to explore the relationship between social class and underachievement in order to extend our understanding of barriers to learning experienced by underachieving working class pupils in the classroom. The research and analysis has been used to make recommendations about how Initial Teacher Education Providers (ITE) could equip future student teachers/trainees to address the underachievement of working class pupils more effectively and to provide sample materials which could be used by ITE providers.

Research questions

1. How do student teachers/trainees and practicing teachers understand social class?
2. What strategies are used by teachers to address underachievement in the class room and the barriers to learning encountered by working class pupils?
3. What are underachieving pupil perspectives on barriers to their learning?
4. What do the project findings suggest about how Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers might better equip student teachers/trainees to address working class underachievement?

Research Design:

The data for this study was gathered by PGCE students from within their training schools. They collected data on a year 9 class with in their own subject specialisms which included: Mathematics, Science, Music, History and English. From seventeen teacher trainee volunteers recruited initially, only twelve submitted school based data for the project. In a three phase design both qualitative and quantitative methods were used and included interviews with subject teachers, Heads of Year, pupils and school data and documentation. The data analysed and discussed in the findings is drawn from all three stages of the research design.

Stage One: ITE. Outlining the project:

The first stage of the research project involved the student teachers/trainees attending a two hour focus group session in which they outlined their ideas

about the relationship between social class and education. The difficulties with social class categories were discussed as well as the limitations of using Free School Meals (FSM) as a proxy measure. Student teachers/trainees were informed that FSM data would help to identify children living in poverty and was not to be simply equated with being working class.

They were then given a copy of the Project file devised by the project leaders which contained all the research instruments and documents; guidance on how to collect the data for the project; background notes on social class and education; and some suggestions for further reading. Following this they participated in a role play exercise to prepare them for carrying out Pupil Focus Group interviews as part of the project.

Stage Two: In school. Data collection:

The data collection had five parts and was carried out by the trainees in the following order:

1. A 'diversity audit' (see research materials attached) which involved collecting data from the school's information systems about each pupil in the year 9 group selected. This provided information about the attainment and circumstances of the pupils.

2. Consultation with the Year 9 group subject teacher who were asked to:

- i) indicate which pupils in the group were underachieving
- ii) identify the social class of each pupil.

3. In- depth interviews with the subject teacher about a sub-set of these pupils that was to include at least one pupil on FSM or whom the subject teacher had identified as working class. The interviews addressed why the subject teacher had identified each pupil as underachieving and the strategies the teacher was using to address the pupil's underachievement. Teachers were also asked about their knowledge of the pupil's social class, home circumstances and level of family support.

4. A focus group session with a maximum of three pupils that had been discussed by the subject teacher. Pupils were asked to identify strategies which were supportive of their learning and anything they perceived to be barriers to their learning. To avoid reinforcing negative self images, student

teachers/trainees were asked not to use the term underachievement when talking with pupils and were given an interview schedule to use.

5. Interviews with the year head or senior teacher about at least one of the pupils from the focus group. This allowed the information collected on the pupil from the subject teacher to be verified, extended or challenged.

Stage Three: ITE Feedback:

The final stage of the project involved student teachers/trainees attending a second group session to see if they had extended their understanding of working class underachievement. Student teachers/trainees were asked to reflect on the research process and the research materials and to identify any key learning points. They were also asked whether they could identify any issues for ITE in addressing working class underachievement.

The Sample

Twelve trainee teachers completed the data collection and project report in nine secondary schools. In total 12 subject teachers and 10 senior teachers were interviewed. The student teachers/trainees provided quantitative data on a total sample of 327 Year 9 pupils and conducted focus group interviews with a sub-set of 38 pupils. Teachers were interviewed about 51 pupils who had been identified as underachieving and further interviews with year heads concerned 27 of these 51 pupils.

These schools had levels of children on FSM ranging from 4% to 18%. The numbers of pupils from black and minority ethnic groups attending these schools were extremely low. Four of the Year 9 teaching groups were mixed ability and contained some high achieving pupils. Six groups were in sets (2 high and 4 low). Two other groups were formed by mixing the remaining pupils once the top sets had been removed. These were incorrectly identified as mixed ability groups by student teachers/trainees. In five of the twelve year 9 groups there were no pupils on FSM. In contrast, in one bottom set Mathematics group the level of pupils on FSM was 33%, more than double the national average and almost twice the school average.

Research findings and analysis

Section 1: Teachers' identifications of underachievement:

Data collected for this project suggest that teachers identified working class pupils and boys as underachieving. Of the 51 pupils identified as underachieving, 65% were boys and six (12%) were in receipt of FSM, although these pupils comprised only 23 (7%) of the whole sample. About one third of the pupils identified as underachieving had Special Educational Needs (SEN). Three pupils had Statements of SEN, eight pupils were on School Action or School Action plus and four pupils had Pastoral Support Plans.

In contrast, pupils belonging to groups known to be particularly vulnerable to underachievement were not necessarily identified by teachers as underachieving. For example, two of the 327 pupils covered by the diversity audits were Looked After Children. Although both pupils had a reading age below their chronological age and relatively low attainment data or gaps in their attainment data, neither pupil was identified as underachieving by the teacher. Similarly, a pupil with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and a reading age of 9.3:13.11 was also not identified. Low attendance also did not necessarily mean that a pupil was identified as underachieving, as in the case of a pupil with 18.4% attendance. One pupil who was identified as underachieving had an attendance level of 53% and was also a carer.

Criteria used by teachers in identifying underachievement varied although a number of teachers used a pupil's failure to achieve at an expected level as the basis for identifying a pupil as underachieving. The data collected about the 51 underachieving pupils included Key Stage 2 Standard Achievement Test (SATs) results for Literacy and Numeracy and Cognitive Achievement Test (CATs) scores and showed a broad range of attainment. This data however was not available for all pupils. Reading ages were also only available for 15 of the 51 pupils identified by teachers as underachieving. The lowest recorded reading age for a pupil in the underachieving sample was 6.9 (chronological age at time of test not provided) and the highest was 15.1:13.11. This variation in levels of attainment within the teacher identified underachieving sample can be partially explained by the fact that the pupil sample was drawn from different kinds of teaching groups and by the fact that teachers used varied definitions of underachievement.

Of those pupils identified as underachieving those with high CAT scores were also likely to be identified as middle class. Two pupils identified as working class were said by one teacher trainee to be *'overachieving'* against previous attainment data, although underachieving against age related criteria.

'I believe there is a danger in setting low expectations of a child. If a child already does not expect to do well the last thing a teacher should be doing is reinforcing that view.' (Special Study - Teacher trainee 4)

This data suggests that teachers' judgments about which pupils are underachieving do not necessarily relate to high or low levels of prior attainment but to teachers' perceptions of potential attainment. There were five cases in which a year head either disputed a subject teacher's identification of a pupil as underachieving or said that he/she was unaware that this was the case. There were also two cases of pupils being identified as underachieving only as a result of the student teacher/trainee's questioning. In addition, one teacher initially identified no pupils as underachieving:

'It was the teacher's view that if a child has a low CAT score, then their receiving low marks is not underachievement - just a reflection of low potential.' (Special Study - Teacher trainee 4.)

Teachers' judgments about who was underachieving appeared highly subjective and their perceptions of a pupils' potential appeared to be higher for middle class pupils than for working class pupils.

The most common factors mentioned in teachers' descriptions of pupils' underachievement related to pupils' behaviour. Teachers referred to pupils' lack of concentration and motivation and poor attitude. Poor motivation was seen to be a cause of underachievement rather than a response to it. This may account for the higher number of boys than girls who were identified as underachieving:

'Pupils that were identified were the pupils that gave stress to the teacher.' (Teacher trainee Group Feedback Sheet)

Where underachievement was perceived to relate to poor motivation and disruption, strategies to address this relied on classroom management practices such as seating pupils in groups, or with high achieving role models

or away from negative influences. Pupils also identified issues of classroom management as a barrier to their learning, but emphasised the role of teachers, especially teachers shouting or failing to keep control of the class. For one pupil the ideal teacher should be:

'Not a horrible voice or shouting and doesn't get angry and shouting and helps you with your work and interesting and does fun activities once in a while and can control the class.' (Pupil 41: working class)

Other strategies (which were viewed positively by teachers) included mentoring and pastoral support. Report systems and detentions were strategies used but were not always seen by teachers, or pupils, to be successful. Strategies of this type indicate a focus on the pupil as an individual problem rather than on the learning on offer to the pupil within the group.

Section 2: Teachers' identifications of social class:

Teachers often did not feel comfortable talking about the social class of pupils, nevertheless, 23 pupils (45%) of the pupils identified as underachieving were also identified as working class. The social class of 11 pupils was not identified, either because teachers refused to identify social class or because they did not know enough about a pupil to make a judgment. This reluctance to talk about pupils' social class obviously makes attempts to address inequalities in achievement linked to social class very difficult. In two cases conflicting social class identifications were made by the subject teacher and the year head. Another teacher, reluctant to identify the social class of pupils, chose to identify the whole group as working class:

'This seems to highlight a general feature of the problem of class definition; it is something we all do internally/unconsciously, yet are often less than comfortable admitting although it plays an important part in the way we position others.' (Special Study - Teacher trainee 4.)

Some teachers described the level of family support for school and a pupil's home circumstances rather than explicitly identifying a pupil's social class. Many teachers identified living in a single parent household as a contributory factor in a pupil's underachievement.

Teachers and year heads made 26 references to pupils' home circumstances which can broadly be described as negative. One trainee researcher summarised this as an:

Attitude of 'blame the parents'. (End Point –Teacher trainee 8)

Negative references included: problems at home and with other siblings; a lack of discipline in the home; the lack of a male role model and not supporting the school. Seventeen of these references were to pupils identified by teachers as working class and two were to pupils identified as middle class:

'Poor attendance, as family don't value schooling.'
(Teacher interview. Pupil 11: working class)

and:

'Little home support. Single parent who does not support child or school. Refuses to accept there is a problem. Working class.'
(Teacher interview. Pupil 10: working class)

Teachers made 16 references to pupils' home circumstances which can be broadly termed positive. These included: attendance at parent's evening; paying for extras such as music lessons and being supportive of the school. A greater proportion of positive references were to the homes of pupils identified as middle class. Teachers held stereotypical views and attitudes about pupils and their parents which favoured the middle class:

'Middle class parents very often have respect for teachers - in a way which working class parents may not.'
(Transcript notes. Teacher interview. Teacher trainee 10.)

and:

'Middle-class students on the whole, value ideas as they have been taught to do so before they even reach the school gates.'
(Special Study- Teacher trainee 3.)

There were three cases in which teachers' judgments about the supportiveness of the home circumstances of a pupil identified as working class differed. In one case a year head identified the parent as supportive but the teacher judged that there were difficulties in the home:

'Little home support, little discipline at home. School only place where encounters discipline.'

(Teacher interview. Pupil 9: working class)

and:

'Supportive, single parent, working class, no external agency involvement.'

(Year Head Interview. Pupil 9: working class)

This suggests that teachers may have different levels of knowledge about a pupil and have formed quite personalised judgments about them and their homes. Whether parental support was identified positively or negatively is important as teachers frequently suggested that contact with parents was a strategy used to address the underachievement of pupils. Where teachers felt that pupils' home lives were particularly a source of stress, even in the cases of the small number of pupils identified as middle class, this was seen to be a barrier to academic achievement and future life chances.

Teachers were asked about their expectations for the academic and future careers of the underachieving pupils. Teachers made a distinction between academic and vocational futures and had no difficulty placing pupils within an occupational hierarchy:

Average ability. Probably getting a job - doubt he'd do A levels. Probably blue collar work, but as presentable could push up in to white collar.'

(Teacher interview. Pupil 21: working class)

The majority of pupils identified by teachers as working class were judged to be unlikely to go on to higher education or to achieve five or more A* to C GCSE passes. They were identified as being more likely to go on to college and vocational courses or to employment. In a small number of cases teacher expectations included early pregnancy and crime. Although some teachers had low expectations for the future for some pupils, these pupils had aspirations for themselves:

'I want to do well even though I talk in class and stuff.'

(Pupil 41: working class)

and:

'By 21 I'll be a builder earning a living instead of sitting in Tesco's.'
(Pupil 21: working class)

In contrast, the majority of pupils identified as middle class were judged to be likely to go on to university or professional occupations:

'Pupil expected to enter HE and pursue a career in education.'
(Teacher interview. Pupil 6: middle class)

Failure to access higher education was only seen to be a poor outcome in the case of a pupil identified as middle class:

'This student is very disappointing. He may achieve C/D and possibly drift through an A level or two, but will get a poor job before (hopefully) deciding to sort himself out.'
(Year head interview. Pupil 45: middle class)

Teachers' aspirations for pupils' futures related closely to their perceptions of *appropriateness* and were linked implicitly to a pupils' social class. Ideas of appropriateness were also important in teachers' assessments of pupils' underachievement. In two cases, the underachievement of pupils identified as middle class was attributed to being inappropriately placed in too low a set. Some teachers considered the setting of extension work an appropriate strategy to address the underachievement of pupils identified as middle class. Entry to a lower level paper was cited as an appropriate strategy only in the case of working class pupils.

Section 3: Pupil perspectives on barriers to learning:

Pupils interviewed by the student teachers/trainees for this project expressed clear preferences in relation to their own learning. Pupils made little reference to their home circumstances except to indicate that help had been available with homework and option choices. Pupils reported parents making an active contribution even in cases when teachers said that there was little support for education within the home:

"I made the choices but my mum sort of helped by explaining what would happen if I did something or didn't." (Pupil 21: working class)

Pupils frequently said that they disliked homework or had difficulties completing it, sometimes because the task was not accessible once they had left the classroom:

'I think it is pointless because if the teacher explains something you understand, then you go home and don't understand, you can confuse yourself and it makes it more complicated to understand.'
(Pupil 42: working class)

Not all parents were able to support pupils with homework effectively. Student teachers/trainees identified this as an area where additional support was essential:

'In year 7 my parents used to help but my step dad takes so long to explain things I just got bored and I used to say I knew it when I didn't.' (Pupil 41: working class)

Providing homework which is accessible is important; failure to complete homework may lead to disciplinary consequences, weaken a pupil's relationships in school and contribute to underachievement. Student teachers/trainees noted that underachieving pupils generally had little involvement in school. Positive aspects of school mentioned by pupils were seeing friends and taking part in sports:

'It appears that underachieving students often fail to make any strong relationships (either with peers or teachers).' (Teacher trainee 5.)

Pupils were asked to draw and describe the ideal teacher. Their ideas about the ideal teacher were very similar and emphasised personal characteristics such as good humour and being approachable. The ideal teacher was someone who explained things clearly. Not understanding something undermined the relationship with the teacher:

'I try to learn but she shouts at me a lot when I don't understand.' (Pupil 32: working class)

Pupils strongly identified successful learning with positive relationships:

'[The ideal teacher] is fair. Don't treat us like crap.'
(Pupil 16: working class)

Successful teachers maintained an orderly classroom environment and were calm and predictable even under pressure. Underachieving working class pupils were likely to be more aware of pupil disruption and teachers not coping well under stress as they were disproportionately located in lower sets.

Pupils also identified the key role of the teacher in providing tasks which engaged attention and were accessible. Barriers to learning identified by pupils included work which was '*boring*', set at an inappropriate level or involved too much writing:

'Myself sometimes, if the work is too hard or I'm not interested in it ... Too much reading and writing.'
(Pupil 22: working class)

and:

'Doing stuff like practicals in Science or acting out helps - anything that's not writing coz I just don't get it in to my head.'
(Pupil 21: working class)

This preference for practical activity was noted by most of the student teachers/trainees in their Special Studies:

'However, one very clear message from all the pupils interviewed is that they are somewhat alienated by traditional academic teaching styles involving board work, textbooks etc (i.e. they find it 'boring' or not 'fun') ... It would seem to mean developing strategies and resources that are visual, aural and kinesthetic' (Special Study - Teacher trainee 2.)

It is apparent from this research that pupils were able to identify aspects of teaching and learning which contribute to their underachievement. Pupils' comments highlighted aspects of good practice in teaching which are by no means new or surprising. They also indicated that pupils, whilst identifying factors within themselves that impeded their progress, also saw external barriers to their achievement. Many of these were embodied in the behaviour of the teacher:

'Interestingly however, none of the students interviewed appeared to have or consider themselves as having a significant lack of motivation, further more many were extremely focused on their future career expectations.' (Special Study - Teacher trainee 1.)

Section 4: Student teachers/trainees and ITE

At the start of the project the student teachers/trainees had little opportunity to reflect on issues of social class in their own training. One trainee had attended a previous session on social class and had been stimulated to reflect on her own practice:

'[The session] made me realise that I wish to learn more about diversity within the classroom and how to work with it constructively ... [social class is] not something I think of intentionally, but I do find myself pigeon-holing people unintentionally. [It is] something I feel quite uncertain about.' (Starting point - Teacher trainee 6.)

Some student teachers/trainees, like the teachers they interviewed, were reluctant to identify the social class of pupils:

'I don't like putting people in to categories.' (Teacher trainee 5)

Like the teachers interviewed, they also drew on deficit models of the working class in their comments:

'The lower the social class the less educated or the less education is deemed important.' (Starting point - Teacher trainee 7.)

The individual was seen to be active in creating his/her own opportunities within the education system:

'[Education] can help (the willing) to move upwards.'
(Starting Point - Teacher trainee 1.)

By the end of the project those student teachers/trainees who had attended the two research sessions and collected data for the project had, in most cases, developed their understandings of the relationship between social class and education:

'People in general are unwilling to accept/define social class. Generally I would say lower social classes lose out in education.'
(End Point – Teacher trainee 7.)

In contrast to the teachers interviewed, student teachers/trainees were able to identify aspects of their own institutional contexts and practices that contributed to the underachievement of some working class pupils:

'Another feature of our sample group is that they are all placed in a low mixed-ability set. This factor in itself may contribute to their lack of motivation and self-esteem as they are labeled as 'failures' before they have even started.' (Special Study - Teacher trainee 3.)

Student teachers/trainees had also developed an awareness of the role of teacher expectation in the underachievement of working class pupils and the ways that teachers sometimes used social class (unconsciously) to position pupils and their parents:

'Having interviewed the class teacher it seems there is little sympathy for pupils' individual circumstances, with condescending remarks such as 'lack of parental control' (pupil no.20), or 'possibly he is a husband substitute for her' (pupil no.22). Describing one as 'perfectly able, but she doesn't bother', the teacher went on to label her 'probably working class with unsupportive parents' (pupil no.26), without any acknowledgement of the effect this may have had on her motivation in education. This factor suggests that as teachers we must be aware of the effect of our own norms and values.'
(Special Study - Teacher trainee 3.)

Student teachers/trainees involved in this project used the opportunity to reflect on their own understandings of social class and to address some of their preconceptions. They were able to use this increased understanding to identify aspects of practice which could be addressed. These student teachers/trainees are likely to become more inclusive practitioners, more aware of their own role in recreating and addressing inequalities.

'Social class is a way of positioning ourselves - and others ... Education also plays a part in the process of perpetuating notions of class' (End point - Teacher trainee 4.)

By the end of the project, student teachers/trainees were less likely to adopt a purely deficit model of working class pupils and parents. In particular they felt that the information they had collected about pupils for the project had given them insight in to the home circumstances of some pupils and that, although these were sometimes *'quite horrid'* (Group Feedback Sheet), they had developed a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by a minority of pupils within the home. They were more able to balance an awareness of pupils' home circumstances with an understanding that there are also other explanations for the underachievement of working class pupils.

Although some trainees found arranging a time to carry out the pupil focus group interviews quite difficult, trainees said that talking to pupils had been revealing and reported that this was one the strengths of the project. Through involvement with the project, the student teachers/trainees had improved their own understanding of how to meet pupils' diverse needs. They said that more input in the PGCE about both social class and differentiation would be valuable. They also highlighted the challenge to their ideas raised by engagement in the research:

'Evidence gathered for this study does seem to support the view that working-class children do under-achieve by the end of Key Stage 3, but that there are numerous reasons why this should be the case. Firstly, there seems to be a distinct lack of support in their home lives which, in turn, impacts on their attitude to both schoolwork and homework. Secondly, the teacher's expectations of the pupil may determine how they behave, like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thirdly, these expectations are indicative that the teacher assumes a different set of cultural values which do not reflect the values or abilities of the pupil. Fourthly, that setting, or streaming, of pupils may be counter-productive due to its divisive nature and negative effect on self-esteem. Finally, we must endeavour to establish strong inter-departmental strategies for addressing the needs of these pupils as soon as they come into secondary school, so that they can be reinforced at every level in all subject areas.' (Special Study - Teacher trainee 3.)

At the end of the project, the student teachers/trainees suggested that understanding working class underachievement and implementing strategies to address it is complex and 'multi layered' with some solutions lying outside the scope of the individual teacher.

Reflections and Recommendations

This project demonstrates that deficit views of working class children and their parents are deeply ingrained in the teaching profession. It also shows that the research activities undertaken by the student teachers/trainees can begin to highlight and address this. Despite the relatively short engagement in the project and the obvious need for more time to explore the issues, the experience has encouraged reflective practice and prompted the student teachers/trainees to ask more questions about the needs of their pupils and how best to meet them. The participating student teachers/trainees made changes in their understandings of social class which left them better equipped to identify and address the underachievement of working class pupils. As a result one of the main recommendations of this study is that all student teachers/trainees should be provided with information about social class and education and given an opportunity to extend their understanding of the issues.

Student teachers/trainees who have not been provided with an opportunity to explore their own preconceptions about pupils and parents in relation to social class are likely to perpetuate inequalities which contribute to the continuing educational disadvantage experienced by some working class pupils. Those who have developed some 'social class awareness' are likely to be more inclusive and tolerant practitioners and less likely to make assumptions based on their own experiences. This is particularly important when high levels of parental contact are required, for instance when a pupil is at risk of exclusion.

Student teachers/trainees should be encouraged to find out what information is available about pupils in schools and how they can access it. This will provide student teachers/trainees with a more informed understanding of pupil's needs and how to meet them. Engaging in an activity such as the 'diversity audit' makes the student teachers/trainees more aware of pupil differences and encourages them to develop inclusive practice. For instance, student teachers/trainees who are aware of a pupil's reading age will be better equipped to support those pupils facing this barrier to learning in the classroom.

Further work needs to address the deficit views held by many teachers and student teachers/trainees about working class pupils and their homes. Promoting more positive and diverse images of working class pupils and families would help to raise expectations and promote change.

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Appendix:

TTA QTS Standards which trainees who participated in this research were able to demonstrate engagement with:

Standards relating to raising trainees' expectations of pupils:

1.1 Have high expectations of all pupils; respect their social, cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds; and are committed to raising their educational achievement.

Standards emphasising the need for inclusive practice:

3.3.1 Have high expectations of pupils and build successful relationships centred on teaching and learning. Establish a purposeful learning environment where diversity is valued and where pupils feel secure and confident.

2.4 Understand how pupils learning can be affected by their physical, intellectual, linguistic, social, cultural and emotional development

3.1.1 Set challenging teaching and learning objectives, which are relevant to all pupils in their classes....

3.3.4 Differentiate their teaching to meet the needs of pupils, including the more able and those with special educational needs

Standards emphasising the need for reflective practice:

3.3.14 Recognise and respond effectively to equal opportunities issues as they arise in the classroom, including stereotyped views

1.7 Able to improve their own teaching by evaluating it, learning from the effective practice of others and from evidence...

3.2.4 Identify and support more able pupils, and those who are working below age-related expectations, those who are failing to achieve their potential in learning, and those who experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

3.2.2 Monitor and assess as they teach, giving immediate and constructive feedback to support pupils as they learn. Involve pupils in reflecting on, evaluating and improving their own performance

Standards relating to raising trainees' awareness of issues connected with the home and learning:

1.4 Communicate sensitively and effectively with parents and carers, recognising their roles in pupils' learning, and their rights, responsibilities and interests in this.

3.3.12 Can provide homework and other out-of-class work, which consolidates and extends work carried out in the class and encourages pupils to learn independently