



Worksheet 8: Developing evaluation of theories answers

1 Evaluate the functionalist view of education.

Functionalists argue that schools are meritocratic. This means that all learners have equal opportunities to do well. Learners succeed or fail according to their talents and work ethic.

Evidence to support this is the introduction of free and universal education in many societies.

This shows that all children, regardless of their ethnicity, gender or social class background, have the same chances to achieve good qualifications which can lead to high status and well-paid jobs.

However, feminists disagree. They have shown that there is a gendered curriculum in school. This means that some subjects are still seen as 'masculine' while others are seen as 'feminine'.

For example, physics, maths and computer science are seen as hard subjects which boys should aspire to, while arts, languages and humanities subjects are seen as easier and girls are often channelled into studying these subjects.

This suggests that the functionalist view is incorrect because if learners are 'guided' and expected to study certain subjects there will be a knock-on effect in terms of the kinds of qualifications and future jobs that males and females get. It leads ultimately to gender inequality in the form of horizontal segregation in the workplace.

2 Evaluate labelling theory as an explanation for why some ethnicity minorities underachieve in school.

Labelling theory argues that some ethnic minorities are negatively labelled in school. This means that they are stereotyped on the basis of their ethnicity and this prejudice leads to discrimination by the teacher and/or peers.

Evidence to support this is Becker's theory of labelling in which teachers can attach a label to an ethnic minority. Learners may internalise it and then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. For example, if an Afro-Caribbean learner is labelled as low ability they may come to believe it is true and stop trying which in turn leads to poor achievement.

This shows that labelling can profoundly affect a learner's outcomes in school which then impacts on future life chances.

However, functionalists disagree. They argue that all learners have equal opportunities in school. This means even if they are labelled ethnic minority, learners have the power to create a self-negating prophesy.

For example, the same Afro-Caribbean learners can reject the stereotypes and use the support and opportunities in school to improve and achieve a successful outcome.

This suggests that the labelling view is incorrect because it is too deterministic and offers an overly pessimistic view of the power of individuals to create their own destiny.



3 Evaluate Marxist explanations for working class underachievement in education.

Marxist theory points to material deprivation as a main cause of working-class underachievement. Material deprivation is when someone is unable to afford basic resources, which can impact a learner's educational achievement. This can range from computers and books to food and housing.

Evidence to support this is the lower levels of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Children who live in cramped housing have no place to study properly; moreover, they may lack basic equipment such as computers or books which means they will struggle to achieve as well as middle class learners who do have such resources.

This shows that there is a big correlation between being materially deprived and doing poorly in the education system.

However, other sociologists disagree. They argue that many learners enjoy compensatory education. This means they receive extra help outside school hours to make up for any disadvantages they may experience.

For example, this may be with extra resources or tuition, 'breakfast clubs' or early intervention schemes such as Sure Start in the UK.

This suggests that the Marxist view is not totally correct because efforts are being made to tackle the deprivation issues to allow children in poverty to flourish and achieve well at school.

4 Evaluate the feminist view of education.

Feminists argue that education continues to support gender inequality in society. Evidence to support this idea is that in some societies girls do not have equal access to education due to cultural stereotypes about women's future role as housewife and mother.

Moreover, some girls have no access to education if they live in a country like Afghanistan where most are forbidden to go to school.

This shows that while there may be progress in some modern industrial societies there are still big differences across the globe in terms of girls' rights and access to education.

On the other hand, other sociologists argue that much progress has been made in improving girls' access to education in many societies and this is borne out by the fact that girls are nowadays often doing better than boys.

For example, girls are outperforming boys across a range of subjects and many girls are now receiving a university education and going on to get 'top jobs' in society.

This suggests that the feminist view is not totally correct because it is inaccurate to say that education continues to support gender inequality in society. In fact, it is doing the opposite and allowing many girls to improve their qualifications and therefore their life chances.