Critical School Geography

Education for Global Citizenship

John Huckle

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The English schools hierarchy is as powerful as ever, with some choices only available to a select group of parents who can afford hefty fees, move to the catchment of a successful school, or pay for costly private tuition to pass high stakes entrance exams. Popular schools haven’t expanded to accommodate all comers, as pure market advocates predicted, and failing schools have proved hard to close down.

The complex interaction between choice, admissions practices, house price and performance measures has led to segregation typified by schools with radically different profiles from their local communities.

Fiona Millar, *Education Guardian*, May 8th 2018

This unit examines issues of secondary school provision, parental choice and social justice in one local authority area. The data presented is for Bedford Borough but is it hoped that teachers will research and use data for their own local area using the Bedford data as a guide.

It focuses on SDG 4 (quality education) and GCE topic 8 (ethically responsible behaviour).
Curriculum Plan

Key idea

School reform over recent decades has promoted parental choice. This has undermined the principle of comprehensive secondary education and led to sharper social and spatial divisions of schooling.

Inquiry questions

What is the ethically responsible way for parent/carers to choose a school for their son/daughter?

What is the ethically responsible and socially just way for politicians to provide secondary schooling?

What is the relationship between school performance and social class (as indicated by postcode) in the local area?

Key understandings

National government has passed laws that claim to give parents more choice as to which schools their children attend. These laws have reduced the powers of local government to plan school catchments and admissions in ways that promote community cohesion and make school intakes as mixed or comprehensive as possible.

A 'market' in schooling has been created by means of 'quality' indicators such as examination results, league tables, and inspection reports. This has widened spatial inequalities in schooling as rich parents buy houses close to 'good' schools and schools chose pupils from 'better' homes.

While Government policy claims to provide choice, such choice is not equally available to all parents. Some are privileged by virtue of location, income, status and other factors, whilst others are disadvantaged.

The key factor determining how well a child does at school is not the type of school they attend but the social class of their parents. Spatial inequalities in schooling can be reduced by restoring powers to local government so that it can manage provision in its area, and/or creating co-operative schools, and/or encouraging schools to share teachers, pupils and resources.
**Key concepts** social class, social geography, spatial inequality, spatial divisions of schooling, local democracy, co-operative schools

**Key values** social justice, democracy

**Key skills** Research location and performance of local secondary schools using internet. Research social geography (census data, house prices) of areas surrounding schools. Record and correlate data. Hypothesis testing,

**Learning outcomes** Pupils gain an understanding of the spatial division and politics of schooling in the local area. They consider whether the current ways in which schooling is provided and allocated is morally responsible and socially just and consider alternatives that claim to promote greater social justice.

**Learning activities** Researching schooling, social class and house prices in the local area. Researching the politics of education in recent decades, nationally and locally, and the policies of the main parties. Debating the results of the research and the desirability of alternative policies and provision designed to reduce social and spatial inequality.

**Assessment task** Write a parents'/carers' guide to secondary schooling in the local area explaining the spatial division of schooling and the impact of schooling on social inequalities
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDG 4</th>
<th>Quality Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive learning objective</td>
<td>The learner understands education as a public good, a global common good, a fundamental human right and a basis for guaranteeing the realization of other rights. The learner knows about inequality in access to and attainment of education, particularly between girls and boys and in rural areas, and about reasons for a lack of equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-emotional learning objective</td>
<td>The learner is able to recognize the intrinsic value of education and to analyse and identify their own learning needs in their personal development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural learning objective</td>
<td>The learner is able to publicly demand and support the development of policies promoting free, equitable and quality education for all, ESD and related approaches as well as aiming at safe, accessible and inclusive educational facilities. The learner is able to promote the empowerment of young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCE Topic 8</td>
<td>Ethically responsible behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning objective (12-15 years) Analyse the challenges and dilemmas associated with social justice and ethical responsibility and consider the implications for individual and collective action</td>
<td>Key themes: Different perspectives about social justice and ethical responsibility in different parts of the world and the beliefs, values and factors that influence them. How these perspectives may influence fair/unfair, ethical/unethical practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparation

Familiarise yourself with SDG 4 quality education, its aims and related facts and figures. Note the UN’s Covid-19 Global Education Coalition and its four aims.

Before teaching this unit you will need to decide whether you are going to use the data on secondary schools in Bedford that is provided or whether you are going to use data for your own area. The SchoolGuide website provides a means of comparing and mapping schools in any locality. It allows you to compare up to five secondary schools at a time using 14 measures. In addition to those used for the Bedford schools (Activity Sheet 2.2, page 87) it provides measures for A levels, pupil/teacher ratios, persistent absence happiness, pupils first language not English, and pupils on free school meals. Under view full data for each school it also maps the area from which a school draws its pupils. SchoolGuide does not provide data on the social grade of heads of households or average house prices in each school’s postcode. You will need to obtain these from streetchcheck and zoopla as suggested on page 91. Nomisweb provides data on the social composition of local authority areas while the ONS provides local census data. Your local authority may have a map of social deprivation similar to that on page 89.

Hopefully you or your students, or a combination of you and your students will be able to compile a table, like that on page 87, for you own local area.

Familiarise yourself with SDG 3, good health and well being; its aims, some basic facts and figures and progress in realising it.

Possible procedure

Begin by setting the unit in a global context. What do students understand by quality education? What are some of the characteristics of such education as Unesco defines it? How many children and young people in the world lack a quality education? What has been the impact of Covid-19 on schooling worldwide? Keep the objectives relating to SDG 4 in mind whilst you facilitating this and subsequent discussions (page 81).

Then switch focus to the local context. How does the quality of education vary in the local area? Are there good and bad schools? Better and less good schools? What determines the quality of the education that a school delivers? What
degree of choice do local parents/carers have over the school their daughter/son attends? Is the local system of school allocation fair? Is it democratic? Who gains? Who loses? Gather students’ views and introduce the inquiry questions.

Then carry out a values clarification activity (Activity Sheet 2.1). Pupils should indicate where they stand (with which of the two characters they most agree) on the values continua set out on this sheet by ticking one of the boxes in each row. Debrief this activity by exploring the values reflected by each the imagined parents/students and exploring with students why school choice can be considered a moral and political issue. Ask students for their own experiences of school choice and school allocation. Did they agree with their parents’ choice? Did they get the school they chose? Is the system of allocation fair? What has school choice to do with ethically responsible behaviour?

Now introduce or revise the concept of social class using resources from the Revise Sociology website.

Draw attention to the Registrar General’s five categories and its link to the social grades (A – E) used in the current census. This originates with the National Readership Society’s system of social grading that is based on the occupations of heads of households and distinguishes the upper and middle classes (ABC1) from the working classes (D2DE).

Since this system was devised, the composition of social classes has been transformed by deindustrialisation, globalisation and the rise of the precariat. Discuss the New British Class survey (further illustrated here) and the importance of a family’s cultural capital in determining how well a child succeeds in school.

Ask students what advantages students with parents in social grades A&B have over those with parents in social grades D&E when it comes to finding and choosing a secondary school. Why might choice work in favour of the already privileged? What do students think would be a morally responsible and socially just way to organise secondary school provision?

Now introduce the concept of the spatial division of schooling and the hypothesis that in any area there will be a hierarchy of schools reflecting the social geography (the distribution of social classes within the area). In general, the best performing schools will be in the areas of highest social status (highest house prices) and the less well performing schools in areas of lower social
status. This hypothesis can be tested by examining the relationship between school examination results and average house prices in postcodes surrounding the school?

Continue by substituting your own data for that from Bedford if you have chosen to do so.

See Activity Sheet 2.2 that provides relevant data for the borough of Bedford which includes both urban and rural (commuter village) schools. Background notes on Bedford are provided on Activity Sheet 2.3 and Activity Sheet 2.4 shows areas of multiple deprivation within the borough. If these are used, rather than similar sheets for the local area, the locations of the schools listed on 2.2 should be determined using Google Earth and then mapped onto sheet 2.4.

You may wish to introduce an element of questioning at this stage. How is the data on 2.2 used to guide parental and student choice? Is it a valid indicator of a ‘good’ school? How else might we measure or assess a ‘good school’? Note that educational researchers are sceptical about such measures:

There is ample evidence that the use of tests at secondary school level to create similar ‘value added’ measures (to those used in primary schools) does not lead to scientifically meaningful distinctions between schools and is of little use for parental choice of schools.

Professors Moss, Goldstein & Sammons, letter to The Guardian, 16th June, 2018

Local authority and school websites provide information on admissions policies and groups of pupils might research individual schools and give presentations designed to persuade parents to send their child to that school. Using the data table discuss with students where they might look for correlations to support the hypothesis that a school’s performance is related to the social class of its pupils (as indicated by postcode which in turn indicates average house prices). What can we conclude from analysing the table? Is there a clear relationship between the attainment of students in the schools and social composition (social grades of households) of the postcodes bordering the school? Between attainment and house prices? How may school choice be working to increase or decrease social inequalities? Does local school provision support Fiona Millar’s claim (on the title page on this unit) that the complex interaction between choice, admissions practices, house price and performance measures has led to segregation typified by schools with radically different profiles from their local communities?
Having investigated spatial divisions of schooling in their local area, students should debate alternative future scenarios including the establishment of more selective grammar schools, the abolition or end of charitable status for independent schools, the introduction of vouchers that parents can take to any school of their choice, the desirability of common (comprehensive) schools for all pupils, the desirability of co-operative academies, the return of powers over the running of schools, their financing, catchments and management to local authorities.

Finally students might complete the assessment task outlined above or a similar task that they negotiate with you. Clearly there are follow-up opportunities to study schooling in other parts of the world as suggested by the relevant Unesco guidance on ESDGC. Curriculum unit three examines the contribution of schooling, along with other factors, to the happiness of citizens in Finland.

When reporting on schools Ofsted provide data on the percentage of parents who agree or strongly agree with the statement ‘My child is happy at school’. The majority of the Bedford schools listed on page 87 score in the 80s and 90s with Bedford Academy the exception with a score of 55 (SchoolGuide, August 2018).
### Activity Sheet 2.1  As parents and students seeking a secondary school – where do you stand?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Comprehensive Colin.</strong> I want my daughter to be educated with a mix of students some bright, some less bright.</th>
<th><strong>Grammar school Gerry.</strong> Ideally my daughter will go to a grammar school and be educated with other bright students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mover Mary.</strong> We are moving house this year so that we will be in the catchment area of an outstanding school</td>
<td><strong>Stay put Susan.</strong> We cannot afford to move and it is important that Sam stays with the friends he has made at the local primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secular Shavan.</strong> We are looking for a school that promotes moral values but not religious faith.</td>
<td><strong>Religious Richard.</strong> We are looking for a faith school that reflects our religious beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outstanding Oswald.</strong> We are looking for a school judged outstanding by inspectors with good exam results.</td>
<td><strong>Caring Clive.</strong> We are looking for a caring school where student happiness and all round development is valued more than exam results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specialist Sarah.</strong> I want to be an engineer and it is important I go to an a specialist STEM academy.</td>
<td><strong>Generalist Geraldine.</strong> I want to keep my options open so it is important I go to a school with a wide and varied curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Susan</strong> We want our son to attend a state school. We do not believe in private education.</td>
<td><strong>Private Parveen We are paying for our son to attend a private school where they get better results.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democratic Duncan.</strong> I want to go to a school where students, parents and local politicians have a real say in how the school is run.</td>
<td><strong>Academy Alan.</strong> I want to go to a school run by an academy chain. These chains are run by expert managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford Academy</td>
<td>MK42 9TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford Free School</td>
<td>MK42 9AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biddenham Upper School and Sports College</td>
<td>MK40 4AZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastingsbury Business and Enterprise College</td>
<td>MK42 7EB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Rutherford School</td>
<td>MK41 8PX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharnbrook Upper School</td>
<td>MK44 1JL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Thomas More Catholic School</td>
<td>MK41 7BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wootton Upper School</td>
<td>MK43 9HT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All state funded schools in England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Bedford Borough urban                      | 33,434            |                               | 21                 |                   |                                |                   |                     |                                     |                          |
| Bedford Borough rural                      | 14,210            |                               | 32                 |                   |                                |                   |                     |                                     |                          |
| Bedford Borough total                      | 47,644            |                               | 25                 |                   |                                |                   |                     |                                     |                          |

Activity Sheet 2.2  Performance of state funded secondary schools in Bedford Borough and social composition of the Borough’s population.
Activity Sheet 2.3  Secondary schools in Bedford Borough

Bedford Borough consists of the towns of Bedford and Kempston and surrounding villages such as Wootton and Sharnbrook. Bedford is a unitary authority around 60 miles north of London and many residents commute to London to work. Bedford's population is ethnically mixed and it has some areas of significant social deprivation. The social composition (social grades) of rural and urban wards is shown on sheet 2.2 while 2.4 shows social deprivation in urban wards. In the 2011 census Asian/Asian British were the second largest ethnic group, contributing 15% of all 10 to 14 year olds.

In 2017 schools in the borough were being reorganised, moving from a three tier system with lower, middle and upper schools to a two tier primary/secondary system. Admissions were complex with some upper schools giving a degree of preference to pupils from feeder middle/primary schools and the religious school, St Thomas More, giving preference to Catholic pupils. Bedford also has three independent, fee-paying, secondary schools run by an educational charity, the Harpur Trust. They draw pupils from within and outside the Borough, including overseas, and have around 380 16 year olds on roll. Of the schools listed on the data sheet Biddenham and Hastingsbury were maintained schools at the time the data was collected, the rest were academies. In September 2017 Hastingsbury Upper became Kempston Challenger Academy.

The data on social grades within a school's postcode should be interpreted cautiously. Biddenham Upper School, for example, is on the edge of the high class suburb (former village) of Biddenham, but draws many of its pupils from Queens Park, a part of the town which is less privileged and contains many families of Asian origin. Bedford Free School was established in 2012, and takes some pupils whose parents were dissatisfied with education in Kempston.

The influence of social grade (social class) and house price on school attainment is best seen in relation to Sharnbrook and Wootton Upper Schools. Originally built to take pupils from rural areas, these schools now educate significant numbers of pupils who are bussed in from Bedford. Bedford Academy and Hastingsbury Upper have the most lower social grade households, and cheapest house prices, in their postcodes and this appears to correlate with lower attainment 8 and GCSE English and Maths scores and fewer pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate. Note however, that Bedford Academy has a progress 8 score well above the average for England.
Bedford Borough has 5 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) which fall within the 0-10% most deprived areas in England on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015. These are located in Castle (2), Cauldwell, Harpur, and Kingsbrook wards. There are a further 9 LSOAs within the 10-20% most deprived areas, and 11 LSOAs within the 20-30% most deprived. All 25 of these LSOAs are located in Bedford or Kempston Towns.

Activity Sheet 2.4 Areas of Multiple Deprivation in Bedford Borough
References

Data sources for Figure 2

House prices. Average price as shown on Zoopla in May 2017. These average prices are for postcodes MK40, MK41, MK42 etc, hence the same average price for areas surrounding three schools in MK42.

Social Grade. % of head of households below the age of 64 in occupational categories A & B (higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, or professional) and D & E (semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, those on state benefits/unemployed and lower grade workers). Data based on postcodes provided by streetcheck, and based on labour market statistics.

School performance data is from https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/compare-schools

Progress 8

This score shows how much progress pupils at this school made between the end of key stage 2 and the end of key stage 4, compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2. This is based on results in up to 8 qualifications, which include English, maths, 3 English Baccalaureate qualifications including sciences, computer science, history, geography and languages, and 3 other additional approved qualifications.

The average Progress 8 score for 'mainstream' schools in England is 0. Mainstream schools are schools that aren’t special schools or 'alternative provision settings' (for example pupil referral units). Most schools score between -1 and +1. If a school scores +1 and above, it shows that pupils made exceptionally good progress. If the score is below -0.5, the school may come under increased scrutiny and receive additional support.

A score above zero means pupils made more progress, on average, than pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Attainment 8

Schools get a score based on how well pupils have performed in up to 8 qualifications, which include English, maths, 3 English Baccalaureate qualifications including sciences, computer science, history, geography and languages, and 3 other additional approved qualifications.

Achieving the English Baccalaureate

The English Baccalaureate is not a test or qualification; it is a measure used to provide information about a particular range of qualifications. A pupil is considered to have ‘achieved’ the English Baccalaureate if they got a grade C or better in the following subjects: English, maths, sciences, a language and either history or geography.
Social Grade of Heads of Households in Bedford Borough from
http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/

Neighbourhood statistics from the 2011 census date are available at
http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadAreaSearch.do?a=7&r=1&i=1001&m=0&s=1493637120634&enc=1&areaSearchText=MK40+%A3SE&extendedList=false&searchAreas&nsjs=true&nsck=false&nssvg=false&nswid=1920

Information on social deprivation in Bedford is available at:

All data retrieved from websites listed in May 2017/

Bedford’s school transfer booklet can be downloaded from

Graphic on title page is from
http://neoliberalismeducation.pbworks.com/w/page/50187279/CURRENT%20RESEARCH%20ABOUT%20NEOLIBERALISM%20AND%20MARKETIZATION%20IN%20EDUCATION#NeoliberalismEducationIdeologyandPrinciples