

Cambridge AS & A Level · Sociology 9699 · Notes

Influences on the curriculum A2

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Last checked 6 October 2026

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What you need to know

By the end of this topic you should be able to:

1. **Explain the social construction of knowledge:** the idea that what schools teach as "knowledge" is selected and valued by people in society, rather than being a neutral record of the truth.
2. **Explain the factors that shape what goes into the curriculum:** power, status, culture, the demands of the economy, and gender.
3. **Explain how education takes part in cultural reproduction** (passing on, and so preserving, the culture of dominant groups), through the **ethnocentric** curriculum, the **gendered** curriculum and the **hidden** curriculum.
4. **Link the curriculum to cultural capital:** how a curriculum built around one group's culture gives that group's children an advantage.

How schools treat pupils more widely (labelling, streaming, marketisation) belongs to the attainment and mobility notes. Here it only counts when you tie it to **what is taught** or **what pupils learn** from school.

Understand it

What the curriculum is

The **curriculum** is what pupils are meant to learn at school. Sociologists split it into parts.

- The **formal (official) curriculum**: the subjects, syllabuses, textbooks and exams that are written down and planned, often set by the state (a **national curriculum**) or by exam boards.
- The **hidden curriculum**: the lessons nobody writes down but every pupil picks up from how school is organised: its rules, routines, rewards, rituals and relationships. **Jackson** (*Life in Classrooms*, 1968) gave it its name: he saw that pupils learn to live with **crowds** (waiting their turn, staying quiet), **praise** (being judged all the time) and **power** (doing what teachers say).
- The **hierarchy of subjects**: some subjects (academic, abstract, written) have more status than others (practical, vocational, creative), and pupils are steered towards them unequally.

The big question in this topic: **who decides** what is taught, and **who benefits** from that choice?

The social construction of knowledge

Knowledge in school can look like a fixed list of facts. The sociological view is that it is **socially constructed**: people with particular interests choose which knowledge counts, how it is divided into subjects, and how much status each subject has.

- **Weber** pointed out that education often reflects the culture of a **status group**. In imperial China, officials (the literati) were chosen by exams in classical literature, so learning that culture was a badge of belonging to the elite rather than training for the job.
- **Young** (*Knowledge and Control*, 1971) argued that those in power define what counts as **high-status knowledge** and keep it for those thought most able. High-status knowledge tends to be **written** (rather than spoken), **abstract** (theory, not everyday practice), **individual** (each pupil assessed alone) and **unrelated to daily life**. Academic subjects therefore outrank vocational ones, and the groups who already hold power do best in them. He called this the **stratification of knowledge**.
- **Keddie** (*Classroom Knowledge*, 1971) found teachers gave top-stream pupils abstract, theoretical knowledge and lower streams simpler, practical knowledge, so class background shaped which knowledge pupils were even offered.
- **Apple** (*Ideology and Curriculum*) argued the curriculum is a **selective tradition**: some histories, books and viewpoints are put in, others left out, and the choice tends to favour powerful groups.
- **Bernstein** showed that schools teach and assess in the **elaborated code** (explicit, formal language), the speech style of middle-class homes, so working-class pupils raised mainly in the **restricted code** find school knowledge harder to reach.

Functionalists see this differently: the curriculum passes on the knowledge and **shared culture** a society needs, so its content reflects a broad **value consensus** rather than the interests of a few.

What influences the content of the curriculum

The syllabus names five factors. Learn one example and one sociologist for each.

Power. Governments decide national curricula, approve textbooks and sometimes **cancel** topics (for example, banning books, or deciding which version of national history is taught). Marxists see this as ruling-class control: **Althusser** calls education an **ideological state apparatus** that passes on ruling-class ideas as if they were common sense. Exam boards, universities and powerful lobby groups also shape what is assessed. Against this, teachers and subject experts have professional influence over syllabuses, and in some countries local communities or religious bodies do too.

Status. Academic knowledge has higher status than vocational knowledge (Young). Elite and private schools teach subjects (classical languages, debating, leadership through prefect systems and team captaincy) that prepare pupils to lead. Low-status **vocational** courses are aimed mainly at working-class pupils: **Bates and Riseborough** found training schemes funnelled working-class young people towards working-class jobs.

Culture. The curriculum reflects the culture of whichever group defines the nation: its language, religion, literature, art and version of history. **Durkheim** saw this as useful: teaching a shared history builds **social solidarity**, a sense of belonging to something bigger. Critics reply that a single "national" culture leaves out

minority cultures (the ethnocentric curriculum, below). **Ball** called the English National Curriculum of 1988 a "curriculum of the dead", looking back to an imagined past of English greatness.

Economic demands. Governments shape the curriculum to supply the workforce the economy needs.

- **Vocationalism:** from the 1980s many states added work-related courses and training; the **New Right** say this makes schools serve the economy and raise standards. Marxist critics (**Finn, Cohen**) reply it trained young people to accept low-paid work and taught attitudes and discipline more than real skills.
- **The knowledge economy and globalisation:** emphasis on STEM subjects, computing and English as a global language, and international curricula used across many countries.
- **Bowles and Gintis' correspondence principle:** the routines of school mirror those of work (hierarchy, rewards from outside the task, fragmented tasks, lack of control), so the curriculum prepares an obedient labour force for capitalism.

Gender. Who designs the curriculum, and whose achievements it celebrates, has historically been male (the gendered curriculum, below). Feminist pressure and equal-opportunity laws have changed this in many countries, which shows that the curriculum is contested, not fixed.

Cultural reproduction and cultural capital

Bourdieu explains how the curriculum helps the dominant class keep its position across generations, which he called **cultural reproduction**.

- **Cultural capital:** the knowledge, tastes, language and attitudes of the dominant class (knowing about classical music and literature, visiting museums, speaking in the school's style). The curriculum treats this culture as "real" knowledge and rewards it.
- **Habitus:** the outlook and dispositions a child absorbs at home. Middle-class habitus fits school; working-class pupils may feel school is "not for people like us".
- **Symbolic violence:** by treating dominant culture as superior and other cultures as lacking, school makes working-class pupils' failure look like their own fault rather than the result of a biased curriculum.
- Cultural capital can be **converted** into qualifications and then into well-paid jobs, so class advantage looks earned.

Sullivan found pupils who read widely and took part in cultural activities did better in exams, and these pupils were more often middle class. The curriculum is not "the same for everyone" if some pupils arrive already owning much of it.

The ethnocentric curriculum

A curriculum is **ethnocentric** when it presents the culture, history and viewpoint of the dominant ethnic group as normal or superior, and leaves out or misrepresents other groups.

- **History** taught from the dominant group's view (for example, empire told as a story of progress, little on colonised peoples' perspectives).

- **Literature, art, music and science** mostly by dominant-group figures, so minority pupils rarely see people like themselves as role models.
- **Religion**: only the dominant religion taught or practised in assemblies and festivals.
- **Textbooks and reading schemes** that show minority groups rarely, or only in stereotyped roles.

Coard (1971) argued that the British curriculum taught Caribbean children that their culture and history were inferior, damaging their self-esteem and results. **Troyna and Williams** saw the ethnocentric curriculum as part of institutional racism. **Tikly** and colleagues found that Black history was often reduced to a short themed month rather than built into the curriculum. **Multicultural education** tried to add minority cultures, but **Troyna** criticised it as token ("saris, samosas and steel bands") because it did not challenge racism itself. **Anti-racist education** went further.

Ethnocentrism can also appear in **how schools act**, beyond the written curriculum: teaching only in the majority language while pupils' home languages are ignored, teachers' stereotypes when guiding subject or career choices, racist labelling, or racism from other pupils. These count when a question asks about **schools**; when it asks about the **curriculum**, keep to what is taught.

The gendered curriculum

The **gendered curriculum** is the way both the formal and hidden curriculum treat boys and girls differently and pass on gender stereotypes.

- **Formal curriculum**: in the past girls were taught domestic subjects and boys technical ones; many countries still show strong gender patterns in subject choice. **Kelly** argued **science** was presented as masculine (examples, images and teachers mostly male). **Spender** (*Invisible Women*) argued school knowledge was largely written by men about men, so women's achievements were left out.
- **Textbooks and role models**: **Lobban** found reading schemes showed girls in domestic, passive roles and boys in active, adventurous ones. **Taboas-Pais and Rey-Cao** found physical education textbooks showed far more men than women, and mostly white people. The gender of staff matters too: if most head teachers are men and most junior teachers are women, pupils learn who leads.
- **Hidden curriculum**: **Stanworth** found teachers gave boys more attention and expected more of them; uniform rules, sports (**Paechter**: PE linked to masculinity) and classroom roles (girls helping, boys leading) teach what is "normal" for each sex. **Careers advice** can steer pupils into gendered jobs.

Change: policies such as **GIST** (Girls Into Science and Technology) in the UK, gender-neutral textbooks and girls' success in most subjects suggest the curriculum is less gendered than it was. Some argue the curriculum is now **feminised** (more coursework and language-based work), which may disadvantage boys.

The hidden curriculum: two views

The same hidden lessons are read in opposite ways.

What pupils learn	How school teaches it	Functionalist reading	Marxist or feminist reading
Respect for authority	the hierarchy of head, teachers and prefects; obeying instructions	prepares pupils to fit into adult roles	teaches obedience to bosses (Bowles and Gintis)
Following rules and norms	punctuality, uniform, detentions and rewards	shared norms bind society together	trains a disciplined workforce
Shared values and belonging	assemblies, anthems, school rituals, house systems	social solidarity (Durkheim)	ruling-class ideology made to look natural (Althusser)
Teamwork and cooperation	group projects, team sport	interdependence for a society with a division of labour	
Competition and individualism	exams, rankings, prizes, competitive sport	universalistic standards and achieved status (Parsons)	blame for failure placed on the pupil, legitimising inequality
Working for external rewards	grades and certificates, not interest in the task	motivation through recognition	alienation, like working only for a wage
Gender roles	teacher attention, staff roles, uniform and sport		patriarchy reproduced (Stanworth, Spender)

Illich added that school teaches pupils to be **passive consumers** of whatever institutions hand them, and to confuse being taught with learning. **Giroux** and **Willis** show the hidden curriculum does not always work: pupils can see through it and resist.

Evaluating "the curriculum serves the powerful"

For (Marxist, feminist, anti-racist and Bourdieu): Young's stratification of knowledge; Althusser's ideological state apparatus; Bowles and Gintis' correspondence principle; Bourdieu's cultural capital, habitus and symbolic violence; Bernstein's linguistic codes; vocationalism for the working class; the ethnocentric and gendered curricula.

Against:

- **Functionalists**: the curriculum transmits a **value consensus** and social solidarity (Durkheim, Parsons) and teaches skills every modern economy needs, which benefits everyone.
- **Social democrats**: national curricula give all pupils a **common core** of knowledge and an equal entitlement; good teachers want pupils to think critically, not obey.
- **Professionals and teachers** have real control over syllabuses and teaching, so the state does not simply impose the content.

- **Reform:** anti-sexist and anti-racist policies have changed textbooks and subject access; girls and several ethnic minority groups now do very well despite the curriculum's past bias.
- **New Right:** unequal outcomes come from individual effort and family choices, not the content of the curriculum.
- **Postmodernists (Usher and Edwards):** the idea of a single body of "official" knowledge is breaking down; there are many valid kinds of knowledge (grand narratives have lost authority), more choice of courses, modular and online learning, so no one group controls it.
- **Alternative schools** (such as **Steiner** schools, with arts, crafts and no early formal reading) and home schooling show the curriculum can be designed around children's needs, not the elite's.
- **Resistance** (Giroux, Willis): pupils are not passive, so the hidden curriculum's effect is weaker than Marxists claim.

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in Sociology. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Key term	Status
Formal curriculum (planned subjects, syllabuses, exams); hidden curriculum (lessons learned from how school is organised; Jackson: crowds, praise and power)	Learn it
Social construction of knowledge: Weber (status groups, Chinese literati), Young (stratification of knowledge; high-status knowledge is written, abstract, individual, unrelated to daily life), Keddie (abstract knowledge for top streams), Apple (selective tradition)	Learn it
Five influences on content: power (state, censorship, Althusser), status (academic over vocational, elite schools), culture (Durkheim, Ball's "curriculum of the dead"), economic demands (vocationalism, knowledge economy, Bowles and Gintis), gender	Learn it
Vocationalism: New Right for it; Finn, Cohen and Bates and Riseborough against	Learn it
Cultural reproduction (Bourdieu): cultural capital, habitus, symbolic violence; Sullivan (cultural activities and results); Bernstein (restricted and elaborated codes)	Learn it
Ethnocentric curriculum: history, literature, religion, textbooks, language; Coard, Troyna and Williams, Tikly; multicultural versus anti-racist education	Learn it
Gendered curriculum: Kelly (science as masculine), Spender (<i>Invisible Women</i>), Lobban (reading schemes), Stanworth (teacher attention), Paechter (PE), Taboas-Pais and Rey-Cao (PE textbooks); GIST	Learn it
Hidden curriculum: functionalist (solidarity, universalistic values, interdependence) versus Marxist (correspondence principle, Althusser) and feminist readings; Illich (passive consumers); Giroux and Willis (resistance)	Learn it
Against the "powerful" view: Durkheim and Parsons, social democrats (common core), teachers' professional control, reform, New Right, postmodernists (Usher and Edwards), Steiner schools	Learn it

Key term	Status
Paper 3: Question 1 $2 \times 2 = 4$; Question 2 $2 \times 4 = 8$; Question 3 $2 \times 6 = 12$; Question 4 essay AO1 10, AO2 6, AO3 10	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 13 questions for this topic (2021–2026, all from Paper 3), 11 different (Paper 31 repeated Paper 33 in November 2022 and November 2023). None mix two types.

Question type	Questions
Describe two examples or ways (4 marks)	9
Evaluate a view about the curriculum (26-mark essay)	2
Explain two ways (8 marks)	1
Give two arguments against a stated view (12 marks)	1

1. Describe two examples or ways (4 marks) (9 questions)

Always Question 1. Asked about (counting tagged questions): what is learned through the hidden curriculum (3); how the hidden curriculum contributes to socialisation (1), to social cohesion (1) or reinforces gender stereotypes (1); how schools or the curriculum may be ethnocentric (3).

Each example earns **1** for identifying it and **1** for describing how it works, so $2 \times 2 = 4$.

1. Write two bullet points. No introduction and no definition of "hidden curriculum": it earns nothing.
2. Start each with the example in a few words ("**Respect for authority**").
3. Then one sentence on **how** school teaches it and how that fits the question's exact focus (socialisation, cohesion, gender stereotypes, ethnocentrism). Saying "this reinforces gender stereotypes" without showing how loses the second mark.

Ready-made examples:

- **What the hidden curriculum teaches:** to defer to people above you, because head, teachers and prefects form a chain of command (**respect for authority**); to turn up on time and follow rules, because bells, registers and detentions enforce them (**punctuality**); to work for grades and certificates rather than interest, which Bowles and Gintis call **external rewards**; to put yourself first, because exams and sport rank pupils against each other (**competition and individualism**); to cooperate, because projects and team games need it (**teamwork**); that everyone is judged by one standard, because all sit the same exams under the same rules (Parsons' **universalistic values**); to belong, because uniform and assemblies mark pupils as one community; and what boys and girls are "meant" to do (**gender roles**).
- **How it builds social cohesion:** a shared **uniform** and common rules make pupils conform to one set of norms; obeying staff prepares them to accept authority in adult life; team games teach them to rely on each other; assemblies, anthems and other religious or secular **rituals** give a sense of belonging

(Durkheim's solidarity); choosing **specialist** subjects readies them for a division of labour in which everyone depends on others. A Marxist answer also counts: the "cohesion" is really **ideological control**, keeping the working class in line.

- **How it reinforces gender stereotypes:** stories and textbooks that cast men as leaders and women as carers; male heads and female junior staff, which shows pupils who is in charge; teachers who call on boys more and discipline the sexes differently (Stanworth); careers advice and option choices that **steer** each sex towards "suitable" subjects and jobs; different uniform and sports for boys and girls.
- **How the curriculum may be ethnocentric** (what is taught): **history** told from the majority's side; set books, artists and scientists drawn mostly from the majority, so few minority role models; only the majority **religion** taught or celebrated; minority groups absent from, or stereotyped in, **textbooks and reading books**.
- **How schools may be ethnocentric** (for **schools** only, beyond the curriculum): teaching only in the majority **language** while pupils' home languages are ignored; **guidance** into subjects or careers based on ethnic stereotypes; teacher **labelling**; racism from **peer groups**.

2. Evaluate a view about the curriculum (26-mark essay) (2 questions)

Always Question 4. Views asked: the school curriculum **benefits the privileged** within society (1); the school curriculum **reflects inequalities** in society (1).

Marked **AO1** knowledge and understanding 10, **AO2** interpretation and application 6, **AO3** analysis and evaluation 10, so $10 + 6 + 10 = 26$.

1. **Introduction** (two or three sentences): define the curriculum (formal and hidden) and say whose view this is (Marxist, feminist, Bourdieu).
2. **For the view** (4–5 paragraphs), each a point backed by named material and tied to the **curriculum**: knowledge socially constructed (Weber, Young); Althusser's ideological state apparatus; Bowles and Gintis' correspondence principle; Bourdieu's cultural capital and habitus; Bernstein's linguistic codes; vocationalism (Bates and Riseborough); the ethnocentric curriculum (Coard, Troyna and Williams); the gendered or patriarchal curriculum (Spender, Kelly, Stanworth).
3. **Against the view** (4–5 paragraphs), written as criticisms: functionalists (Durkheim, Parsons: consensus and solidarity); social democrats (common core and equal entitlement); teachers' and professionals' control over the curriculum; reforms against sexism and racism (GIST, multicultural education); girls' and some minority groups' success despite bias; meritocracy and access by ability; New Right; postmodernism (Usher and Edwards); alternative education (Steiner).
4. **Conclusion**: how far the view holds, for which groups, and in which kinds of schools or countries.

3. Explain two ways (8 marks) (1 question)

Question 2, asked once on this topic: two ways the interests of the powerful can influence the curriculum. Each way is out of 4, so $2 \times 4 = 8$: **1** for the point, **1** for explaining it, **1** for relevant material (a study, concept, theory or evidence) and **1** for explaining how that material supports the point.

1. Write two paragraphs, one per way.

2. Sentence 1: the way. Sentence 2: why it serves the powerful. Sentence 3: the sociologist or concept.
Sentence 4: how that material backs the point.

Ways the powerful can shape what is taught, each with its sociologist:

- **Status of knowledge** (Young): those in power rank abstract, academic subjects above practical ones, because that is the knowledge their own children are best prepared for.
- **Preparing workers** (Bowles and Gintis): school routines mirror the workplace, because employers gain from an obedient, disciplined labour force (the **correspondence principle**).
- **Whose culture counts** (Bourdieu): the content rewards middle-class **cultural capital**, because the dominant class defines what "educated" means.
- **Whose history counts** (Coard): an **ethnocentric** curriculum puts the majority group's culture at the centre, because that group controls the state and its schools.
- **Whose knowledge counts** (Spender): a **gendered** curriculum built mainly around men's achievements keeps **patriarchy** going, because men have long written the syllabuses.
- **Elite schooling**: private and selective schools teach **leadership** (debating, prefects, team captaincy), because they groom the children of the powerful to rule.
- **The state** (Althusser): governments set national curricula, approve textbooks and can **ensor** topics, because education is an **ideological state apparatus**.

4. Give two arguments against a stated view (12 marks) (1 question)

Question 3, asked once on this topic: two arguments against "the school curriculum gives all pupils an equal chance to fulfil their educational potential". Each argument is marked by levels out of 6: **5–6** for a clear, developed argument with sociological material whose relevance is made clear, so $2 \times 6 = 12$.

1. Two separate paragraphs, each a **different** argument against the view; nothing in support of it.
2. Each: the argument, the material (sociologist, concept or evidence), how it works, and a final sentence linking back to **the curriculum** and the view.

Arguments against "equal chance", each with its sociologist:

- **Ethnicity** (Coard): minority pupils who never meet their own history or culture in lessons can lose self-esteem and interest, because the **ethnocentric** curriculum treats the majority's culture as the norm.
- **Boys** (the **feminisation** debate): more coursework and language-heavy assessment may suit girls' learning styles better, because the way subjects are assessed has shifted.
- **Girls** (Kelly, Spender): girls may avoid science and technology, because those subjects are presented through male examples and male teachers.
- **Class** (Bourdieu): working-class pupils start behind, because the curriculum rewards the **cultural capital** and **habitus** of middle-class homes.
- **Language** (Bernstein): pupils raised mainly in the **restricted code** find lessons and exams harder to follow and may switch off, because school knowledge is taught in the **elaborated code**.

Worked examples

Example 1

Describe two examples of how the school curriculum may be gendered. [4]

- **Science presented as a male subject (1)**: if textbooks, examples and most science teachers are male, girls learn that science is not for them and are less likely to choose it later (Kelly) (1).
- **Women missing from what is studied (1)**: when history and literature courses study mostly male leaders and writers, pupils learn that important knowledge is produced by men, which supports the idea that men lead (1).

Two examples, each identified and described: **4 marks**.

Example 2

Explain two ways economic demands can influence the content of the curriculum. [8]

Way 1. One way is that governments add vocational courses so that schools supply the skills employers want (1). This changes the curriculum from general education towards training for particular jobs (1). Marxist critics such as Finn studied training schemes of this kind (1), and argued they mainly taught young people to accept low-paid work, showing the economy, not pupils' needs, shaped the content (1).

Way 2. A second way is that the routines of school are organised to match the workplace (1), so pupils learn the habits workers need, such as punctuality and doing what they are told (1). Bowles and Gintis called this the correspondence principle (1): the hierarchy and rewards of school mirror those of work, which shows the needs of capitalist employers shaping the hidden curriculum (1).

Two ways, each with a point, explanation, material and link: **8 marks**.

Example 3

Evaluate the view that the school curriculum reflects the culture of the dominant ethnic group. [26]

Introduction. The curriculum includes both what is formally taught and the hidden lessons of school life. Anti-racist and Marxist sociologists argue that it presents the dominant group's culture as the norm; functionalists and postmodernists disagree.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Knowledge is socially constructed**: Young and Apple argue the powerful select what counts as knowledge, so the history, literature and religion taught are those of the group that defines the nation.
- **History and literature**: national history told from the dominant group's view leaves out or belittles minority groups' pasts; Coard found this lowered Caribbean pupils' self-esteem.
- **Institutional racism**: Troyna and Williams saw the ethnocentric curriculum as part of racism built into the education system, not just individual prejudice.

- **Cultural capital:** Bourdieu's ideas apply to ethnicity as well as class: pupils whose home culture and language match the curriculum arrive already "knowing" what is rewarded.
- **Token change:** Tikly found Black history often confined to a themed month, and Troyna called multicultural education tokenism, suggesting the core curriculum stayed ethnocentric.

Against the view (AO3).

- **However**, functionalists such as Durkheim argue a shared curriculum builds social solidarity for everyone, so teaching a common national culture benefits minority pupils too by helping them belong.
- **Change:** many countries now teach multicultural or anti-racist content, world religions and global history, so the view describes the past more than the present.
- **Achievement:** several ethnic minority groups outperform the majority in many countries, which is hard to explain if the curriculum works against them.
- **Postmodernists** (Usher and Edwards) argue knowledge is now plural, with choice of courses and international curricula, so no single ethnic culture controls it.
- **Class and gender cut across ethnicity:** middle-class minority pupils may hold much of the cultural capital the curriculum rewards, so class may matter more than ethnicity.

Conclusion. The curriculum still gives most space to the dominant group's history and culture, so the view holds for the content of subjects such as history and literature. But reforms and minority success show this does not decide pupils' results, and its strength varies between countries and over time. The view is largely true about **content**, less true about **effects**.

How it would be marked. A wide range of detailed points with concepts and studies (AO1 9–10), applied throughout to the curriculum and to ethnicity (AO2 5–6), with each counter-argument weighed and a justified conclusion (AO3 9–10). In the exam, make each bullet a full paragraph.

Common mistakes

- **Writing about education in general, not the curriculum.** Examiners report many answers that drift into labelling, streaming, school types or inequality in general. These only earn marks when you show how the inequality comes from **what is taught** or learned.
- **Explaining what the hidden curriculum is, at length.** A 4-mark question wants two examples; a long definition earns nothing.
- **Naming an example without the "how".** "Punctuality" or "textbooks reinforce gender stereotypes" earns 1 mark at most; the second mark needs a sentence on how school teaches it or how it has that effect.
- **General hidden-curriculum examples for a specific question.** When the question is about gender stereotypes or social cohesion, an example of the hidden curriculum in general, not linked to that focus, scores nothing.
- **Confusing the curriculum with other parts of school.** For "how the **curriculum** may be ethnocentric", teacher racism or the language spoken at school are not about what is taught; give content examples (history, literature, religion, textbooks). Many candidates did not know the term "ethnocentric" at all: learn it.

- **Material named but not linked.** In the 8-mark question, the fourth mark of each way needs a sentence on how the study or concept supports the point.
- **Only Marxist points.** Ethnocentric and gendered curricula are less often used but just as relevant to "the powerful" and "the privileged"; use them for range.
- **Juxtaposition in essays.** Describing other functions of education after the Marxist case, with no weighing, stays in the lower AO3 bands; turn each point into a criticism of the view.
- **Treating old systems as current.** Long accounts of the old UK tripartite system as if it still shaped today's curriculum lose focus.

How to get the marks

- **"Describe two..." (4 marks):** two bullet points; name the example, then one sentence on how it works, aimed at the question's exact focus.
- **"Explain two ways..." (8 marks):** four moves per way: point, explanation, named material, and how the material supports the point.
- **"Using sociological material, give two arguments against this view" (12 marks):** two different, developed arguments, each with named material, each ending with a sentence on why it weakens the view. Nothing in favour of the view.
- **"Evaluate..." (26 marks):** AO1 10 for a wide range of detailed points with concepts and research; AO2 6 for keeping every paragraph on the **curriculum** and the question's group (privileged, unequal, dominant); AO3 10 for explicit, sustained evaluation and a conclusion that weighs the evidence. A good descriptive account of the other side stops at the 7–8 band for AO3.
- **Sociological material** means a named sociologist (Young, Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis, Althusser, Bernstein, Coard, Spender, Stanworth), a theory (Marxism, feminism, functionalism, postmodernism) or a concept (hidden curriculum, cultural capital, correspondence principle, ethnocentric curriculum, stratification of knowledge).
- **Use your own society:** examiners credit relevant examples of what is taught where you live, such as which history, languages or religions are on the curriculum.

Quick check

1. What is the difference between the formal and the hidden curriculum?
2. Which sociologist is linked to each idea? (a) Gave the hidden curriculum its name, in a study of crowds, praise and power. (b) High-status knowledge is written, abstract and individual. (c) The British curriculum taught Caribbean children their culture was inferior. (d) School knowledge is largely written by men about men. (e) Symbolic violence.
3. Give two ways functionalists say the hidden curriculum promotes social cohesion.
4. What is cultural capital, and how does it explain why a curriculum that is "the same for everyone" can still be unequal?
5. In the 8-mark "Explain two ways" question, which four things earn the marks for each way?

Answers

1. The **formal** curriculum is the planned, written content (subjects, syllabuses, exams). The **hidden** curriculum is what pupils learn without it being taught directly, from how school is organised (rules, routines, rewards, rituals).
2. (a) Jackson. (b) Young. (c) Coard. (d) Spender. (e) Bourdieu.
3. Any two of: shared rules and uniform teach common norms; assemblies and rituals build belonging (Durkheim's social solidarity); respect for authority; teamwork; universalistic standards; specialisation preparing pupils for an interdependent division of labour.
4. **Cultural capital** (Bourdieu) is the knowledge, tastes, language and attitudes of the dominant class. The curriculum is built around that culture, so middle-class pupils arrive already owning much of it and look more able, while working-class pupils must learn it from scratch: the same content is not an equal start.
5. Making the point (1), explaining it (1), giving relevant sociological material (1) and explaining how that material supports the point (1).

Past questions to try

- [9699/32/O/N/22 Q1](#): two examples of how the curriculum may be ethnocentric.
- [9699/32/M/J/22 Q1](#): two ways the hidden curriculum reinforces gender stereotypes.
- [9699/32/M/J/21 Q3](#): two arguments against the curriculum giving all pupils an equal chance.
- [9699/32/M/J/23 Q4](#): essay on whether the curriculum reflects inequalities in society.