

1. Inner London was run as a single educational authority by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) so parents could choose a school across the ILEA area – this was particularly important if you lived in a gentrifying formerly working class area such as Hackney or Islington;
2. Many of the parents were themselves teachers at some of the ‘progressive’ schools such as Islington Green or William Tyndale and this meant that there was a generally middle-class atmosphere amongst a few key schools in each borough – which was all part of the ‘pioneer spirit’;
3. The middle class still generally retained confidence in its ability to reproduce itself either through its social networks or the deployment of economic and/or cultural capital. If all else failed, this meant their children could go private, religious or find a school in the outer London boroughs. At the time, there were still relatively few restrictions on head teachers and parents about offering places ‘out of area’.

The history of the intervening years (ie since the 1980s) has been one of the increased marketisation of housing but particularly of education in London and the convergence of these two markets in an atmosphere of increased anxiety about both – the London housing market continues to rocket ahead in contrast to the rest of the country. In what follows, I draw on three studies that I have undertaken on social change and the middle classes in London since the early 1980s. These have become increasingly focused on schooling and less on gentrification. I want to argue that space has become the means by which the former (ie access to education) is rationed and is now in some respects driving the latter (ie gentrification or more accurately the housing market).

Tony Blair famously said

### **Blair Quote**

'Ask me my three main priorities for government, and I tell you:  
education, education, education.'

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This soundbite from his keynote speech to the Labour Party Annual Conference in the year before New Labour won the 1997 General Election arguably set the tone for the whole 'New Labour Project' – in a word it signalled that 'aspiration' was to replace 'solidarity' at the heart of the party's approach to the electorate. Aspiration continued as an enduring theme whilst New Labour consolidated its electoral hold over the governance of Britain in the closing years of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty first. Despite (or perhaps because of) their other differences, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair could agree on the importance of aspiration and the role that education played in enabling it. For example, Brown makes aspiration a central part of his 'new year message' in an article penned in the *Observer* on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010

### **Brown quote**

'This is a country of aspirational individuals who, given half a chance,  
want to get on and not simply get by.'

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Brown then proceeds to assert the crucial role New Labour's educational reforms have played in delivering on this aspiration – as my colleague Mike Raco has shown there has been a move from a culture of *expectation* to one of *aspiration* which has been engineered to win consent for the framing of what might be termed 'neo-liberal' welfare policy. The juxtaposition Brown poses between 'getting on' and 'getting by' has been central to what was the largely successful attempt by New Labour to steal the Conservative Party's traditional clothes and distance itself from its own past. Labour's core appeal has traditionally been to a sense of *collective social progress* in contrast to the Conservatives' emphasis on *individual mobility* and achievement – although as Tony Judt (amongst others) has pointed out there was some convergence between the two in the post war years of 'one nation politics'. In the language of social capital adopted by Brown, what New Labour did was to 'up its game' by encouraging a more aggressive and assertive notion of 'getting ahead' rather than sticking to

its traditional (Old Labour) notion of promoting policies in support of those needing to 'get by'.

Thus, in London, the middle classes' 'place in the sun' was in danger of being swamped by the new and wider culture of aspiration and the middle class could no longer, as of old, guarantee their children's social reproduction by passing on their relative social advantage through knowing which schools 'one' should send one's children to and deploying whatever cultural or economic capital was necessary for the task. Increasingly, as sociologists of education have shown, the middle classes were forced into a far more explicit culture of strategising in order to identify appropriate routes into the high-achieving schools - whether in the state, private or faith sector - and in investing considerable amounts of time as well as economic, cultural and emotional capital to realise these strategies.

A situation in which middle-class privilege was relatively effortlessly passed on through the education system therefore began to change in the 1980s. The change process was partly a function of the increasing size and diversity of the middle classes and partly 'pushed' by the increased competition between schools fostered by the publication of school performance statistics, a results-driven financial model and an increasingly tough inspection regime by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) whose early director Chris Woodhead, did not flinch from criticising poorly-achieving schools in very robust and public terms.

This situation was particularly acute in London where competition for places in well-performing schools has intensified as more middle-class parents chase relatively fewer places in a city whose education system – as I have argued - remains dominated by its working-class heritage. Although the middle classes have traditionally exercised choice of schooling both within and between the state and private sectors, the notion of school choice only became formally enshrined in public policy with the 1988 Education Act which recognised the right of parents to send their children to their school of choice. However, just as the right for all to do what the middle class had always done was recognised, like all positional goods it became increasingly difficult to achieve because of the growing pressure on the system with the result that choice, in many parts of London, has now become the means by which demand for the insufficient supply of popular school places is rationed. Distance from school has become the arbiter of who gets what. Whilst the origins of this lay in the 1988 Act increasingly 'where you live' has come to determine 'what you get'; previously, as many studies have shown, the

middle classes were able to negotiate their way around such restrictions – increasingly, this is no longer the case.

Many first, and indeed second-generation, gentrifiers were much more relaxed about where to live than would now be possible. Increasingly housing and education markets in London have become entwined; those able to access the rapidly-inflated house prices in the catchments of popular schools are the ones best able to exercise choice of school for their children. Having obtained this for one child, the 'sibling [priority] rule' generally ensures that this extends to younger brothers and sisters.

In the time that I have left today, I want to examine how middle-class parental aspirations for their children's education have hardened over the last 25 years in London by reference to three studies of social class change I have undertaken in both inner and outer London. These were conducted respectively in the late 1980s, the late 1990s and the middle years of the first decade of the present century. These studies and the research monographs which resulted are summarised in Table 1 and represented in Figure 1:

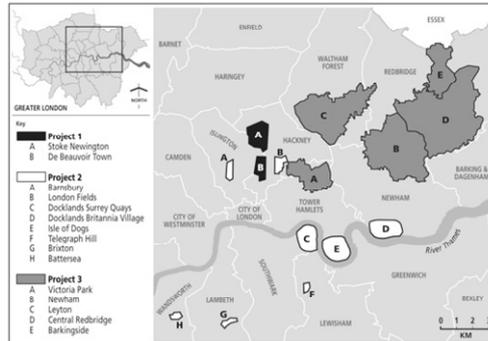
### The evidence base

Title of Study	Dates	Area of study	Data	Key output	Funder
'People Like Us: gentrification and the service class in Hackney'	1984-8	Stoke Newington; De Beauvoir Town	Face-to-face survey – 245 respondents	Butler (1997)	Self
'Middle Classes and the future of London'	1998-2001	Barnsbury; Brixton; Telegraph Hill; Battersea; London Fields; Docklands	Face-to-face survey -75 respondents per area	Butler with Robson (2003a)	ESRC
'Gentrification, ethnicity and education in East London'	2005-8	Victoria Park; East Ham/Forest Gate; Leytonstone; Seven Kings; Barkingside	Secondary analysis; face-to-face survey (300 respondents); 100 in-depth interviews	Butler and Hamnett (2011)	ESRC

## The research areas

### Research London's middle class

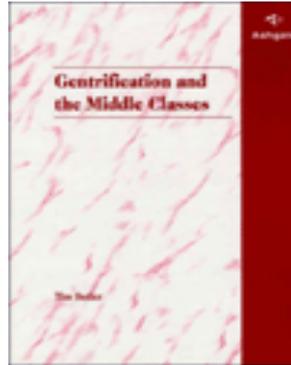
Figure 1. London showing research areas.



Since the late 1980s, middle-class parents have become increasingly anxious about achieving the best schooling for their children and not simply at secondary school level. The kind of 'circuits of schooling' argument that Stephen Ball and his colleagues proposed have become increasingly hedged about so as to constrain schools from offering places to all but the most clearly-entitled which increasingly means the financially, and hence geographically, privileged. Our argument (which is spelled out in some detail in my recent book with my colleague Chris Hamnett) is that, within the state non-selective sector, choice has invariably come to mean 'no choice'. The overall result of this has been to increase the sense of failure (and dissatisfaction) amongst parents, children and schools themselves. This we suggest accords with increasing tendencies at a policy level to transfer the responsibility from the state to the individual.

## The 'Pioneers'

### Slide: Gentrification and the middle classes



In the first study that I undertook in Hackney in the mid 1980s I noted that there were growing numbers with pre-school age children – despite this most respondents claimed that they were attracted to the area because of its housing and its 'counter cultural' ambience; education was almost never offered as a reason. Most had lived in the area for some time, often arriving as graduate students and working their way up through shared student flats, to their own flat shared with a partner or friend, to a bought flat and then perhaps a house. Their attachment was to 'people like us' and, if the subject of schooling was broached, they were confident that they could negotiate a satisfactory outcome or ultimately 'buy their way out of trouble'. Some respondents were teachers, many worked in and had a commitment to the public sector or, if not, they had the resources to make alternative plans; what they shared was a confidence in being able to negotiate the pitfalls in ways with which they were comfortable.

With hindsight, they were amazingly confident about their ability to make the world in their own vision and to use their skills and cultural capital to shape the system to their needs. They believed that - individually or collectively with others in the same situation - they could make the system work for themselves and, at the same time, they could add value for those less fortunate. The fear of the 'other' who would 'drag their children down' never appeared in the narratives. The problem was seen to lie in the class nature of the education system and the solution lay with progressive educational practices – whole-class teaching, child-centred education and middle-class goodwill that would overcome the traditional deficits associated with working-class education.

When I re-interviewed one of my first interviewees in the mid 1990s - a successful TV producer who had now become quite wealthy and had moved from Hackney to Islington - he remarked that they were sending their child to the local school (although they clearly could

have afforded to have 'gone private') because they didn't want her to become detached from a sense of 'belonging' to a local community. She had been cared for in her pre-school days by a local childminder who had looked after her with her own children. And they didn't want to break that link. He argued that they were not seeking 'the best' for their child but rather what he termed the 'optimal' solution and social relations were a key part of this. I have no idea if they followed through on this but my point is that this attitude was typical of my 1980s respondents but increasingly atypical in the 1990s.

### Thatcher's children?

#### London Calling



By the mid 1990s – notwithstanding the severe recession of the early 1990s which called the concept into question with several writers - gentrification had become an established pattern of life in London and the pioneers were no longer the 'trendy apes' of Mark Boxer's caricature. The second study had, as a specific focus, an investigation of the interaction between the middle classes and their local communities across a range of gentrified neighbourhoods in inner London. What was striking was how children and schooling was now a key concern. Partly this was demographic – the singles and dinkys were partnering up and breeding and their children were of school age with many approaching the secondary transition – but it was more than simply demographic and class change. There was also an increasingly explicit moral imperative 'to do the best' for their children which cut across the ethos of a 'middle-class conscience' which was apparent amongst the 1980s' cohort. We uncovered high levels of anxiety about the inadequacies of local schools which usually had