

## **IACR Conference 2025 – Birendra Singh (UCL)**

### **Title: Absence and Invisibility: Teenage children become murderers – how, and why?**

**These events took place in England.**

**“ Fourteen children aged between 11 and 14 years old have been arrested after a boy died in a fire at an industrial site.”**

**There were 11 boys and 3 girls involved.**

*- BBC News on 04/05/2025.*

**“Teenage Murderers - Boy and girl found guilty of killing 80-year-old dog walker in park attack.”**

**“A 15-year-old boy and 13-year-old girl have been found guilty of killing an 80-year-old dog walker who was filmed being assaulted before his death.”**

*- SOPHIE ROBINSON, THE STANDARD 8 April 2025 at 1:00 pm BST*

**“A 15 year old boy killed another boy at All Saints Catholic High School in Sheffield.”**

*- BBC News 28<sup>th</sup> April 2025*

These are just three examples of teenage children turning into murderers. These News headlines appeared between April and June this year.

In media coverage of the causes of these tragic incidences many factors are discussed, but one vital area is mentioned only in passing, – i.e. the lives of these children at school. This aspect of their lives remains ‘absent’ from virtually any discussion of why these teens become murderers.

The children involved are between 11 and 15. My question is - what sets were they in at their schools? Were they in the bottom sets?

If they were, then it's likely they would have had a poor education. England is a class based society and schooling reflects the class nature of the society. In her excellent book, 'Bottom Set Citizen' Paula Ambrosi describes how schools in England put children in ability groups almost as a habit, and as 'old habits die hard' this habit persists regardless of which government is in power. In 'Education for Democracy' the class control of education is described as follows:

“Throughout history the middle and upper classes, through their control of the economic, legislative and administrative apparatus, have given to the working classes as little and as poor an education as possible.” – Education for Democracy (Rubinstein and Stoneman, 1972, p.7)

My recent case study research and my half a century involvement in school science in England bear testimony to the class-based nature of schooling. Most discussions of schooling often take place within the class paradigm, so the 'real' becomes absent and so, invisible.

Secondary schools in England still adhere to Sir Cyril Burt's treble track ability grouping, first outlined in a memorandum written in 1925 and later published in his book in 1937. This stated that:

“The ideal plan would comprise a 'treble track' system – a series of backward classes for slow children, a series of advanced classes for quick children, both parallel to the ordinary series of standard for children of ordinary average ability.” White (2006, p.9)

Burt's thesis on I.Q. and Intelligence was based on his data from the so called 'Identical twins reared apart' study, which was discredited when the Times Newspaper of London revealed that he had doctored his data. He was finally declared a fraud by the British Psychological Society after his death in 1971, but by then the damage had been done. His theory of IQ and intelligence was being used all over the world and it is still alive and kicking in English secondary schools.

Ability grouping continues to be ruthlessly imposed and rigorously monitored. It is maintained using threats and fear, which Bourdieu would describe as 'Symbolic violence'.

It is quite possible that these children were victims of this 'symbolic violence'.

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