

GROWING UP IN THE 80's

During The 80's the environment within which children were raised continued to change. We have witnessed the impact of Television and the Mass Media upon their development, observed their emergence from repression and seen the effects of economic stringency and educational reform upon their lives in previous decades. By the 80's, however, some longer term demographic trends, which directly affected the young, were becoming increasingly apparent:

Marriage:	1970	410,000	Marriage Age			
	1980	355,000	Male: 1980	25 years	Female:	23
	1990	303,000		1990	27	“ “ 27
Households:	2 people.....	1980	32%	1990	38%
	1 Person.....	1980	25%	1990	34%
Age of 1 st Baby	1971.....	23.7 years			2007.....	27.5 years
Births outside of marriage		1986.....	22%		1992.....	32%
Lone Parent with dependent children		1980.....	5%		1990.....	6%
Lone fathers with dependent children			10% of lone parents			
Average family size:	1985.....	1.74				
Mothers Employment Rate:		1980.....	47.5%		1990.....	57%
Proportion of Under %'s in Schools:		1980.....	43%		1990.....	51%

Co-habitation increased sharply during the 70's and through much of the 80's. The average length of cohabitation increased from 20.3 months (1979) to 23.3 months (1989). The break-up rate for cohabiting relationships into which children were born was 65% (Ermisch 2001) The effects on children are difficult to quantify. However, an analysis by the British Household Panel Study indicated long term negative consequences for those children who grew up in one parent families, particularly if they occurred during pre-school years. These children had poorer educational outcomes and poorer employment and health outcomes as young adults.

The cultural and economic trends of the decade also changed the environment in which children were reared. Plainly the recession, unemployment, inflation, rising crime rates and rising violence in society, all avidly brought to public attention by the mass media, raised domestic stress levels. So too did the pressures of working life. They changed parental attitudes and behaviour towards their offspring. There was a movement towards protectionism, of curtailing children's ability to roam and of policing those who they came into contact with. Incentives were also raised to keep children safe at home by providing them with all that they needed for entertainment and education, especially high tech games consuls and computers etc. It ushered in a new age of indulgence for children driven also by the culture of one up-man-ship – such a feature of the 80's. Thus equipped they were left to their own devices more and more. The number of 'latch-key' children returning home from school to empty homes increased considerably and they were pushed more and more towards the television whilst their parents scrambled to cope. Whole family entertainment waned for want of time and opportunity. Dining became less formal and less demanding. The consumption of convenience food doubled in the 80's with comfort food and confectionary not far behind.

Children's awareness of the world continued to expand with the advance of the media. The technology to explore and reveal the little known corners of nature and life on the planet in all its complexities fascinated their inquisitive minds. They were also more aware of their place in the world, how they measured up to other children, and what was new and popular on the shelves of toy shops. Fashions came and went with lightning speed. The must-have culture grew. At Christmas it was not uncommon to panic, and even fight in the queues to obtain the latest hot craze toy. Soft toys for the very young were especially sought after. *Sindy*, *My Little Pony*, *Cabbage Patch Dolls* and *Care Bears* all topped the poll in the 80's.



My Little Pony



Cabbage Patch Dolls



Care Bears

Model toys, primarily for boys, which originated in Comic Books or TV Cartoon series also became popular. These included *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Star War Characters* and *Go Bots*.



Mutant Ninja Turtles



Star Wars



Go Bots.

By far the fastest growing market, however, was the emergence of electronic gadgets offering a range of educational and recreational functions. Chief amongst these were the Atari Games Consul, Game Boy, Simon Says, Speak and spell and the Casio Keyboard.



Speak and Spell



Game Boy



Simon Says



Atari Games Consul



Casio Keyboard

A large number of toys were revamped to include electronic functions. Dolls, for example, acquired the ability to ape many more human functions like talking, sneezing, blinking, even wetting themselves. Other toys gained automated features. Batteries flew up the must have list for children!

Electronic games were quick to become addictive especially for teenagers. The most popular games of the period were Space Invaders, Pac Man, Asteroids, Galaxian, Breakout and Football offered by Nintendo, Atari and Tandy. All of them urged the player to improve their scores and move to ever increasing levels of complexity. The market was, however, expanding rapidly as games began to build on video and animation. The 80's was just the beginning!

New board games like Trivial Pursuit, Guess Who and Hungry, Hungry Hippos joined the old favourites like Monopoly, Cluedo and Scrabble for more family entertainment.

Outside, the traditional games remained as popular as ever. Kick-about Football, Tag and chasing games of various kinds, Hopscotch, Skipping etc. were accompanied by particular fads for Hula Hoops, the Space Hopper and Yo-Yos. There were, however, changes in the subject of enactment games. Cowboys and Indians were, by this time, well eclipsed by Sci-Fi as the focus for death and destruction!

Within the local community provision for young people grew rapidly during the 80's. Concern about youth unemployment and listless, under-occupied adolescents causing trouble on the streets was enough to focus both minds and money. In the election manifesto of 1983 the Government proposed incentives for new sports projects offering a £1 for £1 subsidy for every pound Local Authorities spent. They also committed funds to Urban Aid and Derelict Land Programmes, some of which found its way into supporting various youth organisations. The result was a broadening of leisure opportunity on a wide front from re-vamped and updated Playgrounds for the very young to new Swimming Pools, Skating Rinks and Sports facilities for teens. School sports facilities were also opened up for public use and with the growing craze for health and fitness many adult clubs were openly more welcoming to new young recruits. In a world of increasing concern for the security of the young, supervised facilities was becoming an imperative. Urban families were well favoured. There was choice a-plenty. Not so for those that lived in the 'sticks'. For them the car became ever more essential.

Despite the improved opportunities, City life was far more difficult for young people. With the influx of a further 1 million immigrants across the decade, most of whom gravitated to the major metropolitan cities, communities were becoming increasingly divided by Race and Faith and the widening gap between the rich and poor. Tensions were never far below the surface as seen at Brixton and elsewhere. Gratuitous violence became commonplace and crime rates were rising. Young adolescents, in particular, were drawn together for self-protection and became increasingly prone to create and defend safe spaces. Thus developed an anti-social gang culture. Efforts to lower the temperature and encourage integration became a crusade for Schools, Council and Police alike. All pulled out all the stops to keep the young gainfully occupied, but it was an uphill struggle.

As society rode out the political and economic turmoil of the 70's and 80's so values and attitudes changed. Distrust of Government, anti-authoritarian sentiment, human rights and the power of dissent all rose to the fore and changed behaviour. The changes were passed down to the younger generation as the norm and children too began to feel more empowered, more defensive of their rights and more anti-authoritarian. Teachers schools and youth leaders lost respect and became more accountable. Corporal punishment began to be challenged and schools were forced to be more open, more transparent and more welcoming. The movement had been gathering pace since the 60's. However, school management was still:

1. Administered by the Local Education Authority and

2. Children were placed in their local school with no choice. Also
3. Teachers were free to teach anything they felt appropriate in any way they saw fit.
4. Children's progress was loosely tracked by yearly reports mostly, but not always based upon tests and exams. Formal external assessment of ability occurred for the majority of pupils at the age of 16 with C.S.E. or G.C.E 'O' Levels. The results were seldom made public.
5. The reputation of the school was largely dependent upon the Headteacher and the behaviour and 'turn-out' of the pupils.

In the mid 80's a tsunami hit the Education system! The Thatcher Government saw free-market competitiveness as the means to raise standards in schools. Under the 1988 Education Act, therefore, they devised an entirely new system which elevated parents to the status of customers with the right to select the best schools for their children. This would be achieved by creating a common 'National' curriculum for all schools with regular standardised tests for pupils to quantify the success or failure of each school to reach specified standards. League Tables would then be drawn up to place schools in an order of merit to allow parents to select the best. As a refinement, the system was to be policed by Inspectors providing detailed analyses of individual school performance which would be made available for public scrutiny. Schools deemed to be performing well would be allowed to expand to cope with higher demand, those deemed to be failing would either be forced to close or, more usually, be forced to replace the management team and placed in 'special measures' for improvement. For both teachers and pupils education was about to become a whole lot more serious.

Introduced in 1989 the National Curriculum is organised into Core Subjects: Maths, English and Science and Foundation Subjects across 4 Key Stages as follows:

Subject	Key Stage 1 (age 5–7)	Key Stage 2 (age 7–11)	Key Stage 3 (age 11–14)	Key Stage 4 (age 14–16)
English	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mathematics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Science	✓	✓	✓	✓
Art & Design	✓	✓	✓	
Citizenship			✓	✓
Computing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Design & Technology	✓	✓	✓	
Languages ^[b]		✓	✓	
Geography	✓	✓	✓	
History	✓	✓	✓	
Music	✓	✓	✓	
Physical Education	✓	✓	✓	✓

(As at 2014)

Programmes of Study were published detailing the topics to be taught for each Key Stage and Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) were introduced for all pupils at the end of each Key Stage at 7, 11 and 14. Assessment at 16 was to be achieved by a new national examination to be known as The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) which was to replace the

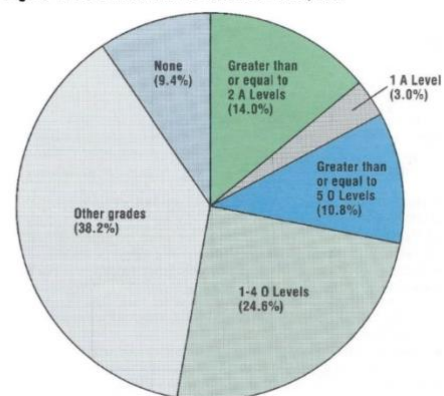
C.S.E. and G.C.E. 'O' Levels. All results were to be placed in the public domain. The Act also set out changes in governance and finance with greater independence for schools and greater involvement of parents (the consumer). Two new educational establishments were also created – The Grant Maintained School and the City Technology College to provide yet greater choice. Grant Maintained Schools were able to opt out of Local Authority control. They were to be directly funded by Central Government with some money coming from industry. They were to be self-governing with the ability to take decisions about employment of staff, the curriculum, the way pupils were to be selected, and the provision of goods and services. They were given the scope to specialise to become Science and Technology Schools, Arts or Sports Schools etc. The changes were seismic and would take several years to implement.

The National Curriculum was enforced from September 1989 with SATS following in 1991. The revolution in governance and finance, an equally fundamental overhaul of the system also took time to implement and did not occur until the early 1990's. Known as the 'Local Management of Schools' this essentially cut Local Education Authorities out of the loop with funding going directly to schools under a 'Formula Funding Scheme' based upon pupil numbers, £X per pupil with additional allowances for Special needs. Schools therefore became completely independent concerns buying in the services they required. They became 'businesses'.

For pupils in the 80's little changed. There were moves in Secondary Schools towards curricular relevance in response to criticism about the unpreparedness of children for working life. Many Schools seriously considered the introduction of 'vocational' courses as an alternative to academic CSE /GCE using new City and Guilds Foundation Courses and Technical College 'taster' courses as a base. But, they were largely small scale and made little impression on the system as a whole. The advent of GCSE in 1987 dampened any further attempt of development.

By far the biggest issue facing Secondary Schools in the 80's was youth unemployment. Whilst the pathways into the professions, Science, Technology and Engineering for the academically able remained open, entry to most other sectors of the economy were severely restricted by economic circumstances. Children became aware of the hopelessness of their situation and either gave up or stressed to achieve exam results which might give them a chance of getting a job. Either way, by the mid-80's 26% of 16 – 24 year olds were unemployed – an estimated 2.1 million people! The Government Youth Training Scheme occupied 370,000 16 -17 year-olds at its peak and many more opted to stay on at school. In 1980 42% of 16 year-olds stayed on at School. By 1993 this had reached 74%. Corresponding figures for 17 year-olds (1980 = 27% : 1993 = 58%) show how many saw this as a temporary fix. Examination results for 1987 indicate that almost half of 16 year-olds failed to achieve the grades at GCSE to

Figure 1.4: Qualifications of School Leavers, 1987



Source Material: Statistical Bulletin 13/88, London DES.

permit them to advance to 'A' Levels. Close to half either, did not sit the examinations, or achieved grades of very little value. Equally, only about 14% of school leavers obtained two 'A' Levels – the basic requirement for going on to higher education. Then 38 Universities provided for 68,150 students in 1980 growing to 77,163 in 1990. As a comparison by 2018, 165 Higher Education Institutions were accommodating 1.8 million undergraduates! The landscape of education was clearly very different. Too many children suffered dented aspiration at a critical time in their lives.

Despite the developing unease in trends most people reflect back on their youth in the 80's as a happy time. For them it was all normal and life with friends and family was carefree and exciting. Only the extreme minority fell into difficulties. Cultural changes are slow to develop. It is only in retrospect that their origins become apparent. In the 80's some of those changes which impacted upon children can be summarized as:

- The pace of life was accelerating. Stress on family life grew.
- Families became more insular
- Parents became less hands-on. 2-way parent / child relationships suffered. 1-way relationships with TV and technological gadgets grew.
- Children had fewer close 2-way relationships with adults both within the wider family and in the community.
- In compensation children began to be over-indulged. Love was expressed less in precious time, more in the provision of 'things'.
- The environment became less child friendly. Traffic levels grew and, with media hype of incidents of molestation and sexual abuse, so too did the fear for safety.
- Provision for children both at school and in the wider community improved.
- Child experience of the world through travel and holidays broadened.
- Children caught on quickly to digital technology. Aided by their sharing with large groups of friends and classmates they often led the way bringing the world of computers to the family.