

Assess the view that  
the education system  
serves to maintain  
the capitalist system...



The Marxists believe that capitalism involves two classes the bourgeoisie (ruling class) and the proletariat (working class). They say that the ruling class exploit the working class for profit. Marxists say that education maintains the capitalist system by giving children the skills they need for work, justifying inequality and by passing on ruling class ideology which supports capitalism. Althusser sees education as part of the ideological state apparatus.

This is where the government issues ruling class ideas through different institutions, or apparatus. This is needed by capitalism to transmit the idea that the inequalities in society are justified as society is meritocratic. Through this the working class children are taught to accept their future exploitation in the workplace therefore Althusser believes that education produces a docile and obedient workforce. Marxists say that meritocracy (mentioned above) is a myth and doesn't exist. Meritocracy is a functionalist view.

They say that social rewards are allocated by talent and effort rather than because of a position someone is born into as Marxists believe. Bowles and Gintis say that meritocracy is used to blame individuals for not being successful. Bowles and Gintis believe that there's a correspondence between pupil experiences and adult work (correspondence theory). For example at school pupils are motivated by grades to do boring work, at work they're rewarded with pay to do boring work. Bowles and Gintis also believe that education operates a hidden curriculum that socialises pupils into ruling class cultures and encourages them to accept exploitation.

The hidden curriculum involves not questioning authority and being on time. In contrast to Althusser, Willis said that education doesn't turn out an obedient workforce. Willis' study focused on the underachievement of 12 non-academic, working class boys, 'the Lads'. He found that 'the Lads' were happy to settle for a basic career, working in industry. This is therefore replicating capitalist social and economic structures. By forming an anti-school subculture 'the Lads' developed a way of coping with school and then adult work by mucking around.

This will therefore benefit the capitalist system. However the Marxist view can be criticised as it assumes people are passive victims of the inequality. It exaggerates how much working class students are socialised into obedience. As Willis' study shows some students actually resist authority therefore this does not benefit the capitalist system. Another criticism of the Marxist view is that it is very class based. It ignores other factors such as Gender and ethnicity. They also ignore attempts from government policies to get equal opportunities for working class pupils.