

“A” Level Sociology

Teaching Notes

Education and Training

2. The Role of Education in Society (Marxist Perspectives)

Marxist Theories of Education

1. In these notes we will be looking at three main ideas:

a Schools as agencies of *ideological transmission*.

- The idea that schools do not just select, allocate and differentiate children in the interests of “society as a whole” (the basic Functionalist position). On the contrary, schools are *agencies of socialisation* that transmit an ideology beneficial to the basic interests of a ruling class.

b. The *correspondence* between work and education:

- This develops the idea of ideological transmission and, through the work of both Althusser and Bowles and Gintis we will see how the “fit” between these two institutions corresponds to the interests of an economically-dominant social class.

c. The *dominant ideology* thesis:

- To round-off the theme of ideological transmission, we will consider the nature of ideological transmission and criticisms of the idea that schools alone are responsible for socialising their pupils into an ideology that serves the interests of a Capitalist ruling class.

2. Like Functionalists, Conflict Structuralists stress the importance of understanding the nature of the relationships that exist between *social institutions* in any society. This primary focus on institutional arrangements and relationships stems from the fundamental belief (or domain assumption) that *social structures* in society condition (and frequently determine) the nature of *social action* (or individual consciousness).

4. The most fundamental initial distinction to be made between structural Functionalist and Marxist Conflict theorists concerns the basic purpose (or function) of an education system.

- For Marxists, the role of education is considered in terms of the idea that there is always a basic “conflict of interest” in Capitalist society. The most-fundamental conflict is between Capital (*the owners of the means of production*) and Labour (*people who sell their labour power* in exchange for money). Marxists try to relate all other forms of conflict (*gender, age, racial*, etc.) to the economic sphere.
- Marxists are mainly concerned with analysing the way education involves the transmission of ideas and beliefs about the nature of the social world. The reason for this is that education is a process that enables a ruling class to *reproduce* its domination of other social classes. It does this by trying to *socialise* children with ideas that legitimise the nature of society “as it is”; that is, a society in which there are fundamental inequalities of wealth, income, power and status.

5. The concept used to express this idea is that of *structured inequality* (inequality that stems from the nature of relationships within Capitalist societies). Inequality is structural in origin because it is fundamental to the economic system. We cannot have a Capitalist society that involves economic equality for its members, since the very basis of Capitalism as an economic system is the unequal struggle for access to economic resources.

- A *ruling class*, if it is to continue in power, must ensure it reproduces itself over time. People have to be socialised into accepting the basic ideas of Capitalism, (ideas such as structured inequality, wide disparities of wealth and income and the like). Thus, for a ruling class to maintain its economic domination, power and influence, it is vital that the education system reproduces:

a. The basic ideology of Capitalism:

- People have to be socialised into an acceptance of Capitalism as the best of all possible systems.

b. The economic domination of a ruling class over time.

- A Capitalist class must find ways of convincing people that economic inequality is right and inevitable. People have to co-operate in their own *exploitation*.
- The perspective here is a macro, structural, one. Under a Capitalist economic system it doesn't matter who the individual members of a Capitalist class are. All that matters for the continuation of the system is that a Capitalist class exists.

6. On the micro, individual level, of course, it matters a great deal to individual Capitalists that they continue to maintain their privileged position in society (one that can also be passed down to their sons and daughters).

- *Political and ideological institutions* in society (those institutions charged with the maintenance of order and stability - the army and police, the media and education system, for example) are dominated by a Capitalist class. This *domination* is exploited to propagate both a particular ideology (or *belief system*) and to try to maintain a particular set of political and economic relationships.
- For example, if we look at the idea of “training” from a Marxist perspective, children do not simply have to be “trained” for their *future adult roles*; they also have to be “trained” to accept the basic ideas of Capitalism. One aspect of educational training is to socialise children into an acceptance of ideas like:

**Different academic capabilities,
Individual competition,
Inevitable inequality,
Different reward systems, etc.**

7. These ideas are powerful forms of *social control*. If people believe them it will *legitimise* both Capitalist economic forms of production and, most importantly, the *hegemony* (legitimate political leadership) of a Capitalist ruling class.

- The relationship between economic production (work) and the education system (an agency of ideological transmission) is one where the needs of the economic system are dominant. Work in Capitalist society is based around structured inequality and, if this basic inequality is to be maintained and reproduced (to the advantage of a ruling class), people have to either be socialised into an acceptance of this state of affairs or feel *powerless* to change it.
- If work involves structured inequality then the institution that prepares people for that world (education) must also reflect and perpetuate this structured inequality.

8. Why are people not simply forced, by a powerful Capitalist class, to accept these ideas? The answer is that people not only have to be made to believe in Capitalism, they have to willingly participate in its continued *production and reproduction*. For this reason the role of the education system is important.

- The educational process has the *appearance* of fairness and *merit* (whilst, fundamentally, it is deeply unfair), which means that *success* (for the minority) and *failure* (for the majority) can be rationalised as a failure of the individual rather than the system as a whole.

The Structural Relationship between Education and Work

1. The *economic base* of any society (the way work is socially organised) is of fundamental importance in terms of the way the rest of society is institutionally organised. In a Capitalist society, for example, work is the focal point for a number of other institutions, either directly (as with education) or indirectly (as with the family).

- It is either the major activity in peoples' adult lives or the activity that people devote their time to ensuring that others are able to work.

2. For Marxist Conflict theorists, *economic power* (such as owning the means of production) gives people:

a. *Political power*:

- The power to direct the lives of others.
- The power to influence society that comes from wealth.

b. *Ideological power*:

- The power to direct the way in which people are socialised (through education, for example).
- The power to influence the way people see and experience the social world (through ownership of the mass media, for example).

3. The ability of an economically dominant class to translate this dominance into political and ideological power is the key to understanding the role of cultural institutions such as education in Capitalist society.

- We can look at the work of writers such as Althusser and Bowles and Gintis to help us understand the particular ways the relationship (or correspondence) between the institutions of work and education can be specified.

Louis Althusser: “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, 1972.

1. Althusser argues that if Capitalism is to survive over time, it has to solve the “problem” of *reproduction*. That is, the ideas that underpin Capitalist forms of production have to be continually *internalised* (believed) by succeeding generations of *employees* and *employers*.

- Education is a vital part of this reproductive process, since it is through the education system that successive generations learn the things that will be needed in the world of work. These things are not simply skills, but also ideas and “ways of seeing”. For Althusser, therefore, the role of education is that of:

a. The teaching of basic *literacy and numeric skills*.

b. The *structuring of knowledge* to mirror the separation of knowledge in the production process. For example, this involves a separation between such things as:

- Science and literature,
- Vocational / technical and academic skills,
- Valid and invalid forms of knowledge.

c. The teaching of the *rules of good behaviour*, involving such things as:

- Maintaining a level of order that is required for the continuation of economic production.
- Respect for and deference to legitimate authority.
- How to take and give orders.

2. Schools have two main interrelated roles, both of which are directed towards the maintenance and reproduction of ruling class domination in society:

a. *A technical differentiation of knowledge*:

- Knowledge, in this respect, can be translated into economic power (that is, people can sell their knowledge in the market place).

b. *The teaching of norms and values* relating to the individual’s future adult role.

- People have to be socialised not simply for a *general future adult role* but rather for *specific future roles*. A ruling class has to develop ways of limiting the ambitions and expectations of the working class.

3. Education is seen by Althusser as being an *Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)*:

- “Ideological” because it’s role is to mystify the way people are encouraged to see and experience the social world.
- “State” because Althusser sees the *State* (government, Civil Service, Judicial system) as representing one arm of the political power of a ruling class. The State, in this respect, governs in the broad interests of a ruling class.

4. These ideas are critical of Functionalist theories of education because Marxists are arguing that to understand the role of *cultural institutions* such as education we cannot accept their role at face value. We can only understand this role if we look at *social class relationships* in society and, by so doing, see the reality of this role.

5. Education systems do not exist simply to “educate the population” so that the most able can rise to the top of society. On the contrary, the role of education is:

- a. To give people the impression the educational system is based on merit.
 - To encourage them to participate and compete in the (mistaken) belief that they are competing on level terms.
 - b. To control and limit people’s expectations by defining *valid knowledge* in such a way as to ensure that the sons and daughters of the *bourgeoisie* have an in-built advantage over all other classes in society.
- Through various ISA’s (religion, education, the media), the hegemony of a ruling class is maintained and the main agents of ideological reproduction within the school are teachers.
6. For Althusser, a key feature of the ideology of schooling is *social learning*. He notes that this involves teachers playing a crucial part in *transforming the consciousness* of pupils. Orientating them towards an acceptance of “the realities of life” and, by implication, an acceptance of ruling class domination / hegemony.
- Through social learning (which we might also see as part of a *hidden curriculum*), Althusser argues a Capitalist class is able to ensure the reproduction of Capitalism (as an economic system) and its political leadership (hegemony) over time.

Bowles and Gintis: Correspondence Theory

1. Herbert Bowles and Samuel Gintis (“Schooling in Capitalist America”, 1976) have proposed a *correspondence theory* of the relationship between the nature of work and the education system in Capitalist societies. The role of an education system is to integrate people into various aspects of the Capitalist production process.

- Bowles and Gintis show how various aspects of economic production (work) have corresponding features in the education system. The organisation of the education system explicitly mirrors the way work is organised in Capitalist societies.

2. Jane Thompson (“Sociology”, 1982) sums-up Bowles and Gintis’ basic theoretical position thus:

- The education system exists to produce a labour force for Capitalism. This involves teaching qualities and skills needed the attitudes and values likely to endorse Capitalist practices.
- The function of education is to anticipate and reproduce the conditions and relationships which exist between employers and workers in the workplace. Education is used to maintain order and control.
- Schools are about “inequality” and “repression”. Capitalism does not require everyone to fulfil their educational potential or become highly qualified. Any of these indicators of educational “success” would on a large scale seriously challenge the distribution of employment, profit and power in a Capitalist society.
- People have to be educated “just enough” to become dutiful workers, citizens and consumers, but “not enough” to understand, or seriously challenge, the prevailing economic and social system”.

3. The education system contains what might be termed a hidden agenda - one that involves the reproduction of docile, “just educated enough” people.

4. In drawing attention to the correspondence between school and work, Bowles and Gintis note such things as:

a. The school disciplines students to the demands of work. What they term the “crucial ingredient of job adequacy” involves such things as:

- **Personal demeanour,**
- **Self presentation,**
- **Self-image,**
- **Social class identification.**

- b. Social relationships within the school replicate the relationships found at work:
- Teaching staff arranged in a hierarchy of importance.
 - Teachers have authority over pupils.
 - Older pupils seen as superior to younger pupils.
 - Education of males seen as more important than education of females.
- c. As in the world of work, where the labourer is alienated from the product of his / her labour, so too is the pupil alienated in terms of:
- Lack of control over the educational process as a whole.
 - Lack of control over the content of education.
 - The motivation for learning is generated through a grading system, rather than through the learning process itself (knowledge and understanding are seen as being less important than the gaining of qualifications).
- d. The fragmentation of the production process (where workers have little say or control over their work) is reflected in “destructive, institutionalised, competition” and a “meritocratic” ranking system.
- e. Correspondence is maintained at various levels of the education system. Thus:
- For those destined for the lower levels of work, rule following is emphasised in the classroom (students are given little responsibility, made to do simple, repetitive, tasks and so forth).
 - For those destined for middle levels of work, “dependability” and some ability to work independently is emphasised.
 - For those destined for the higher levels of work, the emphasis is on making the pupil believe in the significance of what they are doing. The ability to work independently and to take some level of (guided) control over their academic work is also emphasised.
5. In addition, various forms of streaming, setting and banding reflect the correspondence between education and work:
- Those in the lowest streams - destined for low skill, low-wage, manual work - will be most closely supervised in terms of their work and behaviour.
 - For those labelled as “low ability” or “non-academic”, vocational training, rather than academic education is emphasised. By this is meant the idea that “lower ability pupils” are trained to do specific types of work, whilst “higher ability pupils” are encouraged to develop theoretical, academic, skills that can be applied to a range of higher status occupations.

Criticisms.

1. Dennis Wrong (“The Over-Socialised Conception of Man in Modern Society”, 1980) has questioned the extent to which people can be seen to be “socialised into conformity” in the way that theorists such as Althusser, Bowles and Gintis argue. In Wrong’s view, this perspective sees people as having no real control over their lives.

- Studies such as “Learning to Labour” by Paul Willis have shown that people may have some understanding of the way they are treated in school and they may try to resist in various ways. This brings into focus the debate within Marxism about the role of cultural institutions such as education.

Orthodox Marxism tends to see cultural institutions such as education and religion as the means through which a dominant ideology is transmitted to the mass of the population (this, for example, accords with Althusser’s view of education as an Ideological State Apparatus).

Modern or Neo Marxism, on the other hand, tends to see the ideological role of education differently. For writers such as Willis, education is mainly a means through which a ruling class comes to identify and put into practice the various interests that bind it together. From this viewpoint, it is immaterial whether or not working class children are secondary socialised into an acceptance of the political and economic status quo (whether or not they actively buy into the Capitalist Dream). The reality for those who fail in the education system is unemployment, low paid, low status, work - the “market discipline” that effectively keeps them in their low social place.

- If working class children do buy into the Dream, then all well and good. If they do not - if they see through it as the kids in Willis’ study saw through it - their lack of economic and political power produces a fatalistic acceptance of their inability to change things. Willis argues that many working class children do resist the ideological messages transmitted through the education system, but the extent to which such “resistance” is effective is open to doubt.

2. Although Bowles and Gintis outline a clear correspondence between education and work in modern industrialised societies, it is not clear how Capitalism managed to survive for the 150-odd years in a society such as Britain prior to the creation of a universal system of education.

- One answer might be to argue that something like religion served a similar corresponding function, or that the apprenticeship system that operated in the early period of Capitalist development provided the corresponding functions that were subsequently taken-over by education.

3. A more-damaging criticism is that such analyses neglect to consider the way in which experience of work itself is a powerful socialising influence in people's lives.

- In Willis' study, for example, the "lads" he observed were well aware of the type of work they were destined to perform. For them, education was something to be endured as painlessly as possible, mucking about when you could, having a "laff" and generally marking time until you could go to work.
- In this respect, a contrary argument might be that the education system, far from producing docile, well-socialised, future workers may actually produce people who are well-aware of the limitations of education and work - people who "see through" the system, for example and consciously rebel against it.
- Willis' study it is difficult to see how "the lads" experience of education socialised them into an acceptance of the ideology of Capitalism. On the contrary, for the vast majority of people, it is only through the experience of work that people are pressed into ideological submission by the fact that they believe themselves powerless to change anything.

4. There is a tendency to underplay the idea that teachers may be well aware of what is happening within the system and may make conscious attempts to improve the quality of the education their pupils receive. In addition, much "liberal education" is not totally directed towards the specific requirements of the workplace - people are taught the ability to think independently, to question their surroundings, to criticise and so forth.

- If the correspondence between work and education is as close as Bowles and Gintis claim, it is difficult to see how these modes of thinking could be allowed to develop.
- It may be less a case of teachers "playing-out their allotted ideological role" as agents of ideological transmission than the fact that many of their pupils realise that they are destined for low status work and see little point in learning the kinds of things on offer in the education system.

5. Although we can criticise the ideas put forward by Marxists such as Althusser:

- Schools basically function as institutions charged with the transmission of ideas and practices favourable to a Capitalist ruling class)

and Bowles and Gintis:

- There is a clear, enduring and necessary correspondence between the needs of a Capitalist economic system and educational institutions).

there are a couple of further theories put forward by Marxist sociologists that we can now usefully examine.

Modern Marxist Perspectives: The Concept of Relative Autonomy

1. As we have just seen, one branch of Marxism stresses the idea that the role of education - ranging from what is taught to how it is taught - is determined by the nature and demands of the economic system. Another branch of Marxism, however, argues that there are two main problems we can identify with this theory:

a. It underestimates the level of conflict there may be between different classes in the educational system.

Writers such as Bowles and Gintis put forward a basically Functionalist type of argument (from a left-wing perspective), whereby the needs of the economic system are transmitted directly to the individual through the educational system. There is little sense, therefore, of people resisting or shaping the socialisation process.

b. It does not satisfactorily explain how a Capitalist ruling class is able to ensure that its sons and daughters generally succeed in education whilst the sons and daughters of the working class generally fail.

This type of theory has a conspiratorial approach to the understanding of the relationship between work and education in Capitalist societies. The problem here is how to explain the fact that upper and middle class children are consistently more successful than working class children in a system that, whilst not meritocratic in the Functionalist sense, does seem to allow a certain proportion of working class children to succeed and a certain proportion of middle class children to fail.

2. This form of Marxism (sometimes called Structuralist Marxism to differentiate it from the Instrumental Marxism of writers such as Althusser, Bowles and Gintis and the like), is characteristic of writers such as Nicos Poulantzas and Henry Giroux.

- These writers argue that the relationship between institutions such as work and education is more complex than that put forward by Bowles and Gintis. In particular both, in their slightly different ways, were concerned to answer the criticism that Marxism overstated the nature of the relationship between work and education in modern Capitalist societies.

3. Poulantzas began with an Orthodox Marxist interpretation, namely that there was a relationship between the organisation of work and the education system in Capitalist societies. This was a reflection of a standard Structuralist interpretation that social institutions:

a. Are related to one another to produce an overall sense of social structure.

b. Set out the basic rules of behaviour into which people are socialised.

Poulantzas saw it as mistaken to argue that:

a. This relationship was simple and direct. The education system is not consciously designed to enable middle / upper class children to succeed and working class children to fail. If this were the case only a small minority of working class children would ever succeed educationally - and this is simply not the case.

In Britain, studies such as the Oxford Mobility Study in the 1970's showed that 25% of children whose origins are in the working class can expect to move into the middle class at some point in their lives.

b. A ruling class was somehow able to consciously impose its specific interests upon both society as a whole and the education system in particular.

4. For Poulantzas, this implied a giant conspiracy amongst the ruling class that was:

- Impossible to sustain in democratic societies.
- Unnecessary, since there were ways of explaining this situation that did not need to resort to an unsustainable conspiracy theory.
- Thus, we have a situation where, from a Marxist perspective, two things are clear:
 - a. On an objective level, Capitalist economic systems clearly required an educational system that produced workers who were socialised into an acceptance of inequality, competition and so forth.
 - b. On a subjective level, a ruling class needed to ensure that its members continued to enjoy the fruits of their economic and political domination of other social classes.

5. The problem, for Poulantzas, was how could a ruling class ensure its continued domination whilst presenting a picture to people generally that the education system was based upon merit? To resolve this problem, Poulantzas argued that:

a. The interests of a Capitalist ruling class were not always the same. There were basic divisions within this class, such as those between Financial Capitalists (bankers, for example) and Industrial Capitalists (manufacturing industry, for example). These divisions, whilst not as wide as those between a ruling class and other classes in society, were nevertheless significant.

b. The general interests of a Capitalist ruling class - the need to ensure that the capitalist system continued, for example - were such as to ensure that the education system broadly reflected the demands of a Capitalist economy. If these demands were met, therefore, it would automatically follow that the overall interests of a Capitalist ruling class could be safeguarded.

6. Both Poulantzas and Giroux used the concept of relative autonomy to explain how this process could work.

- The education system had, in a Capitalist society, to be generally related to the needs of a Capitalist economy. Children had, for example, to be exposed to secondary socialising influences that stressed things such as:
 - Competition as an efficient means of organising society.
 - The idea of legitimate authority and power.
 - The opportunity to succeed in educational terms.
 - The differentiation of pupils on the basis of achievement.
- The educational system was structurally constrained by a number of general aims that it had to fulfil. Children, for example, had to be socialised to be:
 - Literate and numerate.
 - Aware of the nature of power and authority in society.
 - Competitive and so forth.
- The behaviour of teachers was constrained by the need to follow certain curriculum objectives (in particular, the need to differentiate pupils).
- By tying educationalists (teachers, administrators, etc.) into a structure of rules, a Capitalist ruling class did not need to oversee the day-to-day teaching and learning process. It did not really matter what went on in schools - how teachers taught, how pupils responded and so forth - as long as the overall objectives of the educational system were being met.
- Teachers were free to teach what and how they wanted as long as they succeeded in meeting the broad ideological objectives of the educational process. They enjoyed a sense of relative autonomy in their day-to-day working lives.

7. This process, therefore, relied on the idea that if the general objectives of an educational system could be specified and policed, then the participants would be forced to behave in ways broadly favourable to the interests of a ruling class.

- While the participants had a measure of choice about how they behaved within the educational system, they would know that any deviation from the general aims of the process would lay them open to social sanction:
 - Teachers who failed to teach their pupils the types of knowledge required or who failed to efficiently differentiate between pupils ran the risk of negative sanctions such as lack of promotion, losing their job and so forth.
 - Pupils who failed to learn or who were disruptive would ultimately be sanctioned by a probable failure to secure educational qualifications (whether they viewed such sanctions as important is, in terms of this theory, insignificant).

8. Although the use of the concept of relative autonomy does provide a more sophisticated way of analysing the nature of schools as cultural institutions within Capitalist societies, its use also generates a couple of problems:

- Firstly, writers such as Poulantzas and Giroux do not adequately explain the precise relationship between education systems and the economy. When it suits their (Marxist) perspective, for example, they assert that the influence of economic interests is paramount in determining the nature of education.

On the other hand, they also argue that whilst economic factors are of primary significance, teachers and pupils have an unspecified degree of freedom to work out their own particular educational solutions within the constraints imposed by the economic system (and the interests of a ruling class).

- The main problem that we have here is that we have no real way of testing whether or not such a situation exists in our society. This follows because it is difficult to conceive of a situation which the theory cannot accommodate (short of a complete breakdown of the education system itself). Thus:

a. Pupils who co-operate with the aims of the education system are considered to have been socialised into the dominant (social and educational) ideology.

b. Similarly, pupils who do not co-operate - those who are unruly, play truant and generally do not conform - are not a problem since their behaviour will be contained within the system. They are, in short, likely to be employed in low skill occupations where a lack of qualifications is not a drawback. It is difficult to see how this socialisation process - where children basically rebel against their education - serves a useful purpose for a ruling class.

- Secondly, even though the kind of secondary socialisation process this theory proposes is different to that put forward by Bowles and Gintis, it is clear that the education system is still seen as a primary vehicle for the socialising of children into a dominant political and economic ideology - even if this ideology is very general and not particularly well-defined.

This is itself a problem, since it is not clear how people are supposed to be socialised into such an ideology if it is not particularly well-defined).

The Dominant Ideology Thesis

1. A second idea that we need to briefly examine is one put forward by Urry, Abercrombie and Turner (“The Dominant Ideology Thesis”, 1975) which questions the way Marxists generally have looked at the role of cultural institutions such as education within Capitalist societies. Most Marxists, according to Urry et al, tend to assume that a ruling class maintains its position in society by being able to socialise the members of other social classes into:

- a. An acceptance of their subordinate position in society.
- b. The basic ideological beliefs of Capitalist society.

2. A ruling class is able to impose ideas favourable to itself upon all other classes in society and one effective vehicle for this is the educational system. A ruling class is able to transmit a dominant ideology to all other classes in society.

- If schools are agencies of ideological transmission and participants in a system that systematically limits the majority of pupils’ powers of self expression and self realisation, there must be a coherent ideology to transmit to pupils. However, the process may not be as straightforward as Marxists such as Althusser have suggested. When we consider this idea, a number of things become evident.

a. Few would argue that schools do not transmit ideas. Schools transmit a wide variety of ideas, both intentionally and unintentionally, to their pupils.

- What concerns us here, however, is the nature and purpose of ideological transmission - in effect, the question “what did you learn in school today?” takes on a whole new dimension if we can show that “learning” involves not only specific subjects like English and Maths, but also general ways of thinking and behaving. As we have seen, both Functionalist and Conflict sociologists agree that this does - indeed must - occur.
- Parsons makes the hidden curriculum a central part of his argument. Schools are first and foremost agencies of secondary socialisation. This function of education is justified for reasons of system maintenance (social order) and value consensus.
- For Bowles and Gintis, on the other hand, the hidden curriculum is more sinister; its primary purpose seems to be to persuade people into accepting, as an unchangeable fact of life, that inequality is both justified and justifiable.

3. Whatever the merits of these two types of answer (and your evaluation will depend on the assumptions you make about the nature of the social world) the question we have to resolve here is the extent to which schools are responsible - as part of a hidden curriculum - for the transmission of values and norms that are fundamental to the continued reproduction of the interests of a ruling class.

4. That schools transmit some form of culture to their pupils is undeniable. Language, how to behave, what it means to be “British” and so on are all part of the remit of an education system. What we need to know, however, is the extent that schools are:

a. Primarily responsible for the transmission of ideas favourable to the interests of a ruling class.

b. Guilty of the uncritical transmission of a dominant ideological belief.

5. For Urry et al, some form of dominant ideology does exist within Capitalist society in the sense that Capitalist economies are characterised by certain roles, statuses, values and norms. However, the purpose of such an ideology is not to somehow directly socialise subordinate classes. Rather, it exists to give social cohesion to a ruling class. That is, such an ideology functions to give members of a ruling class a sense of where their general interests lie.

- As Abercrombie (“Contemporary British Society”) notes:

“Loosely, the ‘dominant ideology’ refers to a set of beliefs, attitudes and dispositions which presuppose that Britain is the best of all possible worlds. It is argued that the dominant ideology has the effect of persuading subordinate groups and classes that they owe allegiance to existing laws, institutions and practices. Put another way, schooling legitimises the existing social order and each individual’s location within that social order”.

- This thesis, by giving schools primary responsibility for the transmission of such an ideology, ignores the fact that children are exposed to many different, contradictory ideas about the nature of society and their place in it.
- It is very difficult, if not impossible, to find empirical evidence of a general belief in a single ideological system of beliefs. People, in short, do not seem to subscribe to any clear-cut set of consistent ideological beliefs.
- Abercrombie concludes by noting:

“The variety and inconsistency of most people’s beliefs...should make us sceptical of accepting any simple view of the process of the transmission of a dominant ideology. Indeed, it would be surprising if the educational system transmitted the same kind of knowledge and norms to all students when their future lives are likely to be widely different. It might then be argued that the most important ideological effect of the schooling system is to persuade people to accept their own place in the division of labour in an unequal society...Those who obtain well-paid jobs or positions of power claim to deserve their privilege. This disguises the social distinctions of class, gender and ethnicity which lie behind examination performance”.