

accept the positions they find themselves in after schooling, even though it is disadvantages arising from social class background that create inequalities in educational success.

The work of Althusser: education as an ideological state apparatus

The Marxist Althusser (1971) saw the main role of education in a capitalist society as the reproduction of an efficient and obedient labour force. This involves two aspects:

- the reproduction of the necessary technical skills.
- the reproduction of ruling class ideology (the dominant beliefs and values) and the socialization of workers into accepting this dominant ideology (this is known as false consciousness).

Althusser argues that, to prevent the working class from rebelling against their exploitation, the ruling class must try to win their hearts and minds by persuading them to accept ruling class ideology. This process of persuasion is carried out by a number of ideological state apparatuses, such as the family, the media, the law, religion and the education system. Althusser argues that, in contemporary Western societies the main ideological state apparatus is the education system, which:

- passes on ruling class ideology justifying the capitalist system.
- selects people for the different social classes as adults, developing the right attitudes and behaviour; for example, workers are persuaded to accept and submit to exploitation, and managers and administrators to rule.

**Bourdieu and the reproduction of class inequalities**

Bourdieu (1977) regards a key role of the education system in capitalist societies as legitimizing (justifying) class inequalities and reproducing the class structure. Bourdieu argues that each social class possesses its own cultural framework or set of ideas, which he calls a habitus. This cultural framework contains ideas about what counts as good and bad taste, good books, newspapers, TV programmes and so on. This habitus is picked up through socialization in the family. The dominant class has the power to impose its own habitus in the education system, so what counts as educational knowledge is not the culture of society as a whole, but that of the dominant social class. Those who come from better-off middle- and upper-class backgrounds have more access to the culture of the dominant class. Bourdieu calls this advantage cultural capital. He therefore suggests success in the education system is based on the possession of cultural capital and of access to the habitus or culture of the dominant social class.

Pupils from lower social classes do not in general possess cultural capital, so the educational failure of the majority of these pupils is inevitable. However, the dominant ideology (as seen in the functionalist view) is that success and failure in the education system is meritocratic, based on individuals' talents and hard work, and those who succeed are seen to deserve their higher places in the class structure. However, success and failure are really based on the possession of cultural capital, and the education system devalues working-class culture and regards it as inferior to upper- and middle-class culture. This makes it very difficult for pupils from lower social classes to succeed in the education system, while the upper and middle classes have an in-built advantage and much greater chances of educational success before they even start school. This makes it easier for higher-class individuals to stay in the class they were born into, and legitimizes the higher social class positions which they go on to hold as adults. In this way, Bourdieu argues, the education system legitimizes and reproduces class inequalities from one generation to the next.

There is more discussion of Bourdieu and cultural capital on pages 60–1

**Schooling, repression and hegemonic control: Illich and Freire**

The Marxist idea of education reproducing inequality and a conformist, submissive and obedient working class is reflected in the work of Illich (1995). Illich argues schools are repressive institutions which promote conformity and encourage students into passive acceptance of existing inequalities and the interests of the powerful, rather than encouraging them to be critical and to think for themselves. Illich suggests schools do this by rewarding those who accept the school regime

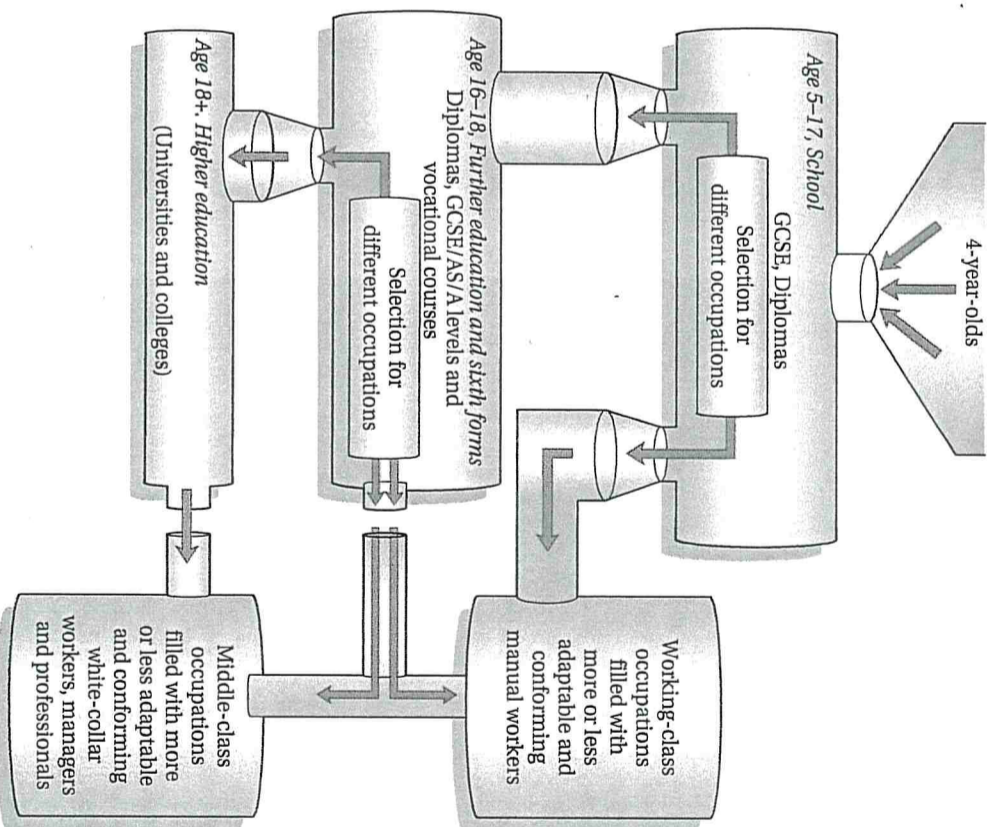


Figure 2.1 Education and the class structure

**False consciousness** failure by members of a social class to recognize their interests.

**Ideological state apparatuses** agencies which spread the ideas and justify the power of the dominant class.

**Habitus** is the cultural framework and set of ideas possessed by a social class, into which people are socialized and which influences their cultural tastes and choices.

**Cultural capital** is knowledge, language, manners and forms of behaviour, attitude and values, taste and lifestyle which gives the upper-class student and consent to them who possess them the rest of society. In-built advantage. **Hegemonic control** middle-class control where control of the education system/working class is mainly achieved through the hegemony and acceptance of ruling class ideas

with qualifications and access to higher levels of the education system and better jobs. Those who don't conform, or who question the authority of teachers or the value of the education provided by schools, are excluded from further progress in education, and end up in lower-level jobs. Illich suggests the solution to this is to abolish schooling altogether – what he calls deschooling. Freire (1996) sees schools as repressive institutions, where learners are conditioned to accept oppressive relations of domination and subordination, and to listen to their betters, for example through obeying teachers and deferring to their superior knowledge. The work of Althusser, Illich and Freire suggests that the education system plays an important role in producing the hegemony and hegemonic control of the ruling class – convincing the rest of society to accept the truth and superiority of the ruling class's set of ideas over others, and winning their consent to continued control by the dominant class.

**Activity**

- 1 Refer to figure 2.1. Suggest the attitudes and values that might be required by those leaving the education system at different stages for different levels of employment.
- 2 Can you think of values or ideas that are passed on through the education system which might be in the interests of the dominant groups in society rather than in the interests of all?



Bowles and Gintis: schooling and the 'long shadow of work'

Bowles and Gintis (2011 [1976]) argue, like Althusser, that the major role of education in capitalist societies is the reproduction of labour power – a hard-working, submissive and disciplined workforce. Bowles and Gintis argue that such a workforce is reproduced in two main ways:

- 1 Through the hidden curriculum of schooling and the correspondence, or very close similarity, between the social relationships at school and at work – in particular, the way schooling operates in the 'long shadow of work'.
- 2 Through the role of the education system in legitimizing or justifying inequality and the class structure.

*Schooling and the 'long shadow of work'* Bowles and Gintis argue that the world of work influences the organization of education. They suggest this is like work casting a long shadow over education, with the hidden curriculum in schools corresponding closely to many features of the workplace. Table 2.2 on the next page illustrates some elements of this correspondence between the hidden curriculum at school and relations at the workplace.

*The legitimization of inequality* Bowles and Gintis argue that the educational system:

- helps to maintain, justify and explain (legitimate or legitimize) the system of social inequality and the class structure in capitalist society.
- helps people to come to terms with their own position in it.
- therefore helps to reduce discontent and opposition to inequality.

Bowles and Gintis reject the functionalist view that social class inequalities in capitalist society arise from fair competition in education, in which everyone stands an equal chance. In contrast, they argue that social class background, ethnicity and gender are the main factors related to success or failure in education and the job market. People from upper and upper middle-class backgrounds (and who are white and male) tend to obtain higher qualifications and better jobs than working-class children of similar ability. Bowles and Gintis see both equality of opportunity and meritocracy as myths that promote the idea that failure in education arises from lack of ability or hard work, when in most cases it arises because of social class and family background. Education is therefore seen as acting as a kind of confidence trick, that hides the fact that it maintains and reproduces the existing pattern of social class inequalities between generations, and in most cases simply confirms individuals' class of origin (the one they were born into) as their class of destination (the one they end up in as adults).

**Activity**

- 1 Describe in detail five features of the hidden curriculum found in your school, or the one you once attended, which reflect the expectations of employers and the demands of the workplace after school.
- 2 Drawing on your own experiences at school, what features of your education do you think prepared / will prepare you most for life after school? Think of particular subjects studied and activities undertaken, and the features of the hidden curriculum in table 2.2 which were/are found in your school.
- 3 Using examples from your own school life, to what extent do you agree with Bowles and Gintis that schooling operates in the long shadow of work?
- 4 The features of the hidden curriculum shown in table 2.2 are mainly influenced by Bowles and Gintis's Marxist approach. The functionalists also see the hidden curriculum as an important means of teaching students the culture and values of society so that a value consensus can be built and society can be kept stable and harmonious. Suggest ways that functionalist writers might alter the second column in table 2.2. (What is being taught?) to give it more of a functionalist than a Marxist 'flavour'.

**Table 2.2 The hidden curriculum**

Features of the hidden curriculum	What is being taught
Privileges and responsibilities given to sixth formers	Respect for elders and superiors/managers
School rules, detentions and exclusions, rewards like merit badges, prizes, good marks, etc.	Conformity to society's rules and laws, whether you agree with them or not
School assemblies	Respect for religious beliefs and the dominant moral values
Males and females often playing different sports, having different dress rules, and being counselled into different subjects, further education courses, and careers; many teachers having different expectations of boys and girls	Males and females being encouraged to conform to gender stereotypes and work in different jobs; for example, women being encouraged into taking primary responsibility for housework and childcare
Competitive sports and competition against each other in class rather than cooperating together; students being tested individually – being encouraged to rely on themselves rather than others	Workers having to compete for jobs and wages, and individuals having to stand on their own two feet – not joining with other workers to take action
Respecting authority of teachers regardless of what they say or do; pupils always having to justify where they're going and why, and do as they're told	Respect for those in authority, such as bosses at work and the police
Punctuality/being on time – time belonging to the school, not the pupil	Good time-keeping at work – the employer pays for the worker's time, so it belongs to the firm, not the worker
Concentrating on schoolwork, whether or not it's boring and whether or not you want to do it	Workers having to accept boring, menial and repetitive jobs
Value being placed on hard work and getting on	Everyone being able to make it to the top if she or he tries hard enough
Grading by ability, and exam success/failure	The differences in pay and status between social classes being natural and justified – those higher up are more intelligent and better qualified
Rewarding (by high grades) qualities of dependability, punctuality and acceptance of authority	Workers' duty to be dependable, be punctual and accept bosses' authority
Different streams and bands	Getting used to accepting the different levels of the job market, such as professional, managerial, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, which are seen to be based on ability
Pupils lack power and control about the subjects taught or how the school is run or the school day organized	Workers' lack of power and control at work
The authority hierarchy of the school, involving pupils fitting into a complex organization of heads, deputies, heads of department, year heads, etc.	Messages about being placed in the hierarchies of power and control in society and accepting it – for example, in the authority hierarchy at work
The school curriculum being broken up into separate subjects which are clearly separated from one another	Work is divided into many separate jobs (the division of labour) which keeps the workforce from having knowledge of the whole process
Schools aim to motivate pupils by marks, grades and qualifications	Working for pay in unfulfilling and powerless jobs

**Criticisms of Althusser, Bourdieu, Illich, Freire, and Bowles and Gintis**

These theorists have been criticized on three main fronts:

- There is a lack of detailed research into schools. Althusser, and Bowles and Gintis, for example, assume the hidden curriculum is actually influencing pupils, but pupils are often not passive recipients of education, and, despite what Illich and Freire suggest, pupils often have



little regard for teachers' authority and school rules and discipline (as Willis's research below shows).

- Bowles and Gintis, Illich and Freire ignore some influences of the formal curriculum. This does not always seem designed to promote the ideal employee for capitalism, and to develop uncritical, passive and unquestioning conformist behaviour. The humanities and subjects like sociology produce critical thinkers, while work-related courses remain of relatively low status. Employers often complain that the education system does *not* produce the well-qualified and conformist workers with suitable skills that Marxist writers suggest it does.
- They tend to be somewhat deterministic, in the sense that they assume people have no real ability to make choices or have control over what happens to them, and they don't really explain how and why many working-class children are successful in education.

The work of Willis

Paul Willis's work, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1977), helps to overcome some of the weaknesses of more traditional Marxist approaches like those of Althusser and Bowles and Gintis. Willis adopts a Marxist approach, but also draws on the interactionist perspective.

Willis recognizes that schools do not produce a willing and obedient workforce – a quick glance at almost any secondary school provides evidence that students do not always obey teachers, that they can be disruptive and challenge the school. Willis says it is easy to understand why middle-class young people willingly go into secure and well-paid middle-class career jobs, but what is more difficult to explain is why working-class young people go so willingly into dead-end, low-paid and boring manual working-class jobs.

Willis studied a group of twelve working-class male pupils he referred to as 'the lads' in a school on a working-class housing estate in Wolverhampton in the 1970s. The lads developed an anti-school or counter-school subculture opposed both to the main aims of the school, and to the 'ear 'oles' – conformist pupils who generally conformed to school values. 'The lads' attached little value to the aims of the school, such as gaining qualifications, and their main priority was to free themselves from control by the school, to avoid or disrupt lessons, to have a 'laff' and to get into the world of work as soon as possible.

Rejecting schooling and wanting to leave school as soon as they could and escape from the 'pen-pushing' of the 'ear 'oles', the lads did not see school as relevant to them. Their priorities were to get their hands on money, to impress their mates, to keep up with older drinkers in the pub, to impress the girls, and to show they could 'graff' in male manual jobs as well as the next man.

In this context, school was boring, pointless and irrelevant to their lives, and stopped them smoking, drinking, going out at night, getting a job and cash, and involving themselves in the 'real' world of male, manual work.

Willis found a similarity between the counter-school culture and the workplace culture of male lower working-class jobs, such as sexism, a lack of respect for authority and an emphasis on 'having a laff' to escape the boring and oppressive nature of both school and work.

Willis's research suggests that schools are not directly preparing the sort of obedient and docile labour force required by capitalism which Althusser and Bowles and Gintis suggest. Young, working-class males are not forced or persuaded by the school to leave and look for manual jobs, but actively reject school through the counter-school culture and willingly enter male semi-skilled and unskilled work the minute they leave school.

Activity

- 1 To what extent do you think Willis's research might be true of all schools? Do you think there are any reasons why there might be uncertainty about this given the size of Willis's study?
- 2 What evidence is/was there at your own school of an anti-school or counter-school subculture like that of 'the lads'? Give examples of the types of behaviour displayed by such students, and suggest reasons for it.

A comparison of functionalist and Marxist perspectives on education

Similarities between functionalist and Marxist views of education

- Both see schools playing a role in legitimizing (justifying and explaining) social inequality.
- Both are macro (large-scale) theories concerned with the structural relationship between education and other parts of the social system, such as the economy and social inequality.
- Both see education as serving the needs of industrial and/or capitalist society.
- Both see the education system as a powerful influence on students, ensuring they conform to existing social values and norms.

But they have differences, too, summarized in table 2.3.

Criticisms of both Marxist and functionalist perspectives

- They both place too much emphasis on the role of education in forming students' identity, and they pay too little attention to the influences of other agencies of socialization, such as the family, the media and work.
- They don't fully consider the way students react to schooling in ways that aren't necessarily 'functional' for the social system or capitalism. For example, pupils disrupt schools, play truant and don't learn, and workers' earlier experience of schooling does not stop them from going on strike. (However, note the exception of Willis's work here.)
- They both see too tight a link between education and the economy, and exaggerate the extent to which schools provide a ready, willing and qualified labour force. The new emphasis on vocational education and pressure to drive up school standards are a direct response to employers who criticized schools for not providing a suitably disciplined and qualified labour force.

Table 2.3 Differences between functionalist and Marxist views of education

Functionalist	Marxism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education serves the needs of an <i>industrial</i> society with an advanced division of labour.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education serves the needs of a <i>capitalist</i> society divided into social classes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education serves the needs of the social system by socializing new generations into society's culture and shared norms and values, leading to social harmony, social cohesion, stability and social integration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education serves the needs of capitalism by socializing young people into the dominant ideology (ruling-class norms and values), leading to an obedient workforce and the stability of capitalism.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The hidden curriculum helps to prepare society's future citizens for participation in a society based on value consensus.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The hidden curriculum helps to persuade society's future citizens to accept the dominant ideology and their position in a society based on inequality, exploitation and conflict.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education provides a means for upward social mobility for those who have the ability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the exception of a few individuals, education confirms individuals' class of origin (the one they were born into) as their class of destination (the one they end up in as adults). Education therefore contributes to the reproduction of present class inequalities between generations, and does not provide a means of upward social mobility for most people.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education justifies and explains (legitimizes) social inequality, as roles are allocated according to meritocratic criteria such as educational qualifications, in a society in which all have equality of opportunity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education legitimizes social class inequality by persuading working-class individuals to accept that their lack of power and control at work and in society generally is due to their lack of academic ability, effort and achievement, when in fact they do not have the same opportunities as those who are more advantaged.</li> </ul>

A subculture is a smaller culture shared by a group of people within the culture of a society. Some ways differ from the main culture but with many aspects in common. An anti-school counter-school subculture is a group organized around a set of values, attitudes, behaviour in opposition to the main aims of school.

Sexism refers to prejudice or discrimination against people, especially women, because of their sex.