Evaluate sociological explanations of the role of education in transmitting ideas and values. 30 marks.

Sociologists have varying views and opinions when it comes to the role of education and the way it transmits ideas and values. Some believe that the lessons schools teach have a positive effect whereas others believe the lessons are negative.

Marxists would argue that the role of education is to teach children to obey and conform to the rules of capitalism. They believe this is done through ‘the hidden curriculum’ – a set of unwritten lessons that the teachers push onto students implicitly. Bowles and Gintis agree that the hidden curriculum is one of the major problems with the education system as it pushes norms and values onto children without letting them grow and learn for themselves. They came up with the correspondence theory which explained that the norms and values children are taught at school correspond to the norms and values in a work place. Althusser argues that schools are an ‘ideological state apparatus’ this means that its role is to push values onto children to make them become what is ‘ideal’ in society. He says that schools create a false consciousness to control students into believing that capitalism is inevitable, and they therefore become passive and subservient worker.

On the other hand, Functionalists would argue that schools push norms and values onto children for them to know how to be hardworking when it comes to getting a job. Durkheim proposed the idea of social solidarity whereas he idea that schools are teaching students to feel part of society and work together towards their goals. He believes that the way this is done is by teaching the same curriculum throughout the country and much like Marxists believe that norms and values are portrayed through the hidden curriculum. Parsons argues that the norms and values they portray work as a bridge between home life and school life as at home parents may push individual views which may not be accepted in society whereas school provides a very universal set of views which therefore makes everyone equal. Functionalists believe that society is meritocratic and tells children that you need to work hard to succeed which they believe to be a good thing; Marxists would say that this is a clear example of the ways education prepares children for the exploitation of capitalism.

The New Right argue that the role of education is to ensure that everyone has shared values which will help to benefit the economy. This is done using the national curriculum which was introduced along with ‘the education reform act’ in 1988. They feel very strongly about the importance of schools preparing children for work, this is another reason for the introduction of the Reform Act 1988. Many of the New Rights’ opinions compliment what the functionalists believe; they both have very positive views on the role of education. The values schools push benefits the economy as many people who go to school aspire to go into higher education or get a job, however it is often frowned upon if someone wants to do a vocational subject. Although they believe that the role of school is to push these values onto children, some functionalists such as Chubb and Moe believe that it is failing at doing so.