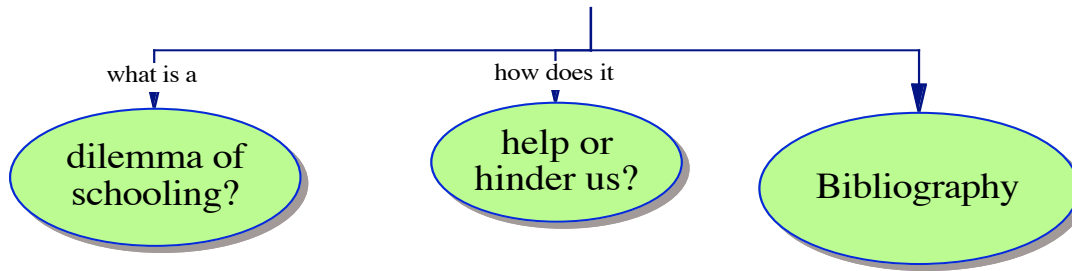


Dilemmas of schooling



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Dilemmas of schooling

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Edited from: Berlak, A. and Berlak, H. (1981) *Dilemmas of Schooling*. London: Methuen, 125-37, 237.

This article is discussing the importance of what I'd call 'cognitive dissonance' where a person is confronted with something that challenges their thinking or their practise about how something should be. These 'dilemmas' are in constant flux and are always changing. I guess the most important thing that strikes me is that it is fundamentally important to deal with these 'dilemmas' in ways the continue growth in learning. The authors also mention that their 'dilemmas framework' can be used as a means to structure critical inquiry into the learning and schooling process.

So what are dilemmas of schooling?

According to Berlak and Berlak (1981) a dilemma of schooling is a contradiction that "resides in the situation, in the individual, and in the larger society - as they are played out in one form of institutional life, schooling." These dilemmas are set within the social setting of the school and are extremely complex- because they deal with many of the aspects of teaching that one can't see, but can feel or sense.

They go further to discuss the example given of how a teacher 'allows' two students to continue to stay focussed on something that is not directly related to the maths task at hand; explaining that they were not able to glean what was going through the teacher's head at the moment in time when he choose (consciously or unconsciously) to ignore the lack of focus from these students.

This ties in with the little that I know about systems thinking, in that Berlak and Berlak are trying to make connections between how complex the processes around the making of this decision are- a system is both complex and has many factors, plus it is also something that we are 'within' and therefore have the power to influence or change.

Do dilemmas of schooling help or hinder us?

The authors mention that school can act as both a transmission mechanism of societal mores as well as a force to transform it. I find this extremely interesting because on one hand school is just an instrument of control and coercion (see Glasser, W. *Choice Theory*. 1998, 235), yet on another hand (and there may be more than two!) it can transform how we believe a 'modern' society can operate.

They finish the article by suggesting that the dilemma language is a way to structure critical inquiry into teaching, education and how we are as humans. I'm unsure of the use of the wording 'dilemma language' because I believe that all good learning involves choice, challenge and change at some point. Therefore it is perhaps not a broad enough term- what about 'learning opportunities'?

Bibliography

Edited from: Berlak, A. and Berlak, H. (1981) *Dilemmas of Schooling*. London: Methuen, 125-37, 237.

Glasser, W. (1998). *Choice Theory- A New Psychology of Personal Freedom*. New York: HarperCollins, 235.