

Opening Activity

1. Think about a moment from your childhood in which you learned something valuable.
2. When you were growing up, what career paths did your teachers guide you toward? Do you think they would have guided you toward different career paths if you were of a different gender, race, ethnicity, or social class?

Opening Activity, continued

3. What, in your opinion, is the function of school?

Ivan Illich's view

1. Illich believes that formal, state-run schools with mandatory attendance policies should be abolished and people should be allowed to explore their world and learn from these experiences (as cited in Schultz). Networks can also be formed to connect those who want to learn about a certain topic and those who want to teach about this topic (as cited in Hart).
2. He writes, "Curriculum has always been used to assign social rank" (as cited in Schultz, 97).

Illich's view, continued

3. He believes that schools function to “provide custodial care, selection, indoctrination, and learning” (as cited in Schultz, 97).

Illich's Background

- Born in 1926 in Austria
- Ordained a priest in the Catholic Church at age 24
- Immersed himself in the culture of his Puerto Rican parishioners in New York City, and later in Puerto Rico and Latin America, because he felt that to impose American ideals and expect them to conform was dehumanizing and arrogant, denying the worth of other cultures

Illich's Background, Continued

- Founded the Center of Intercultural Documentation in Mexico to promote the exchange of intercultural dialogue
- Resigned from the priesthood due to his belief that the Church was too bureaucratic and did not give enough power to laypersons
- Published *Deschooling Society* (one of his many works concerning social issues) in 1970

Illich's Beliefs

- He did not want schools to be eliminated completely, but believed that they should not be publicly funded nor mandated for all to attend.
- He believed that since people would then attend school because they wanted to, not because they were mandated to, the quality of education would increase.

Illich's Beliefs, continued

- School contributes to the maintaining of status quo, as it teaches students what to value and what their role should be in society
- Teachers decide the futures of their students by guiding them in different directions and teaching students not to question authority

Illich's Beliefs, continued

- Childhood is a social construct
- “Rather than calling equal schooling temporarily unfeasible, we must recognize that it is, in principle, economically absurd, and that to attempt it is intellectually emasculating, socially polarizing, and destructive of the credibility of the political system which promotes it” (as cited in Schultz, 96).

Illich's Beliefs, continued

- “Pupils have never credited teachers for most of their learning. Bright and dull alike have always relied on rote, reading, and wit to pass their exams, motivated by the stick or by the carrot of a desired career” (as cited in Schultz, 100).

Illich's Beliefs, continued

- Teachers take advantage of their 'captive audiences'
- Possessing a diploma is not a guarantee that one has learned useful skills
- Educators have not done enough to increase the learning levels of the poor

Illich's Alternatives to Formal Schools

- Illich proposed four 'educational networks' to replace schools:
- 1. People to serve as a guide to resources (similar to the role of a librarian)
- 2. Exchanges of skills
- 3. Matching of peers interested in particular topics
- 4. Catalogue of experts on a topic

Does the Internet Provide These Networks?

1. Online resources are available for almost any topic.
2. People advertise the skills they are willing to teach or want to be taught on online bulletin boards.
3. Discussion groups exist online (chat rooms, listservs)
4. Lists of experts (or organizations that employ experts) in any given field are found online, often with contact information provided should readers have questions.

Limitations to Using the Internet as an Alternative to Schools

- Discrepancies are found regarding the quality/ accuracy of educational resources on the internet and advertising and commercial interests are found almost everywhere online.
- Also, chat rooms/discussion boards can be potentially dangerous, and Internet access is still not available to many people worldwide.

References

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