Chapter 1

The Purpose of K–12 Education From a Theoretical Perspective

ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning theories have developed from the work of the psychology, sociology, and education academies. No single theory can account for learning development in humans. An obvious statement, of course, but a declaration that educators need to remember occasionally. Theories do provide a universal language for the purposes of enquiry, investigation, and implementation. This chapter seeks to make connections between theory development in advancing education priorities and the need for learning networks to associate with earning networks. Theoretical perspectives create an effective teaching and learning framework. This chapter will offer several definitions of theory, a review of the different types of theory – including description and range of education theorists from the 19th and 21st centuries. Subject matter, including the usefulness and suitability of using theory in developing constructs on learning; the accountability of learning and teaching; and learning as shared work, are discussed. The focus of the chapter includes a case study.

INTRODUCTION

Though often rooted in scientific findings or religious dogma, the day-to-day enactment of teaching and learning by educators and students involves continual re-imagining and pragmatic re-configuring to address the challenges of teaching and learning (Hutt, 2019). Understanding the purpose of K-12 public education in the United States within the 21st century model involves the discovery and compilation of several different education interpretations and viewpoints.

The process of teaching and learning involves understanding the history of K-12 public education and how the educational system has developed in the last 300 years. in the United States, how past events have shaped the present education systems, theories, and related phenomena. To understand where the direction of the American education system will go, it is necessary to understand the direction from where it has come.

This chapter is an effort to understand the purpose of K-12 public schooling within the United States, that we may then recognize how we will proceed in the digital expansion of this education system, going forward into the 21st century. Within the realm of public education, discourse will address the philosophy, history, curriculum, organization, and responsibility of educators, from the late 1700's to the present.

Psychologist Carl Rogers, in *Freedom to Learn* (1969) states, 'Changingness, a reliance on *process* rather than on static knowledge, is the only thing that makes sense as a goal for education in the modern world' (p 104). David Tyack, an education historian, notes the social and economic needs of a society as integral to the purpose of school (in Stemler, 2019).). Conflict historians suggest that the social elite imposed public schooling on the working class (Kaestle, 1976). Although there was strong and widespread support for educating poor children in the United States, it was usually justified in terms of protecting society rather than of helping individuals get ahead (Vinovskis, 1992, p, 317).

Sociology, education policy, business management philosophies, are a few of the disciplines whose academics note the relationship between educational credentials and job assignment, stating that schools exist primarily to serve a practical credentialing function in society (Labaree, 1997; Bills, 2003;). Expanding on Dewey's pragmatic purpose of school, deMarrais and LeCompte (1995, in Stemler, 2019)) outlined four major purposes of schooling that include:

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