Education theory (an introduction)

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Education theory seeks to know, understand and prescribe educational practices. Education theory includes many topics, such as pedagogy, andragogy, curriculum, learning, and education policy, organization and leadership. Educational thought is informed by many disciplines, such as history, philosophy, sociology, and psychology.

For example, a cultural theory of education considers how education occurs through the totality of culture, including prisons, households, and religious institutions as well as schools.[1][2]

Other examples are the behaviorist theory of education that comes from educational psychology and the functionalist theory of education that comes from sociology of education.[3]

The earliest known attempts to understand education were by classical Greek philosophers and sophists.[*citation needed*]

Contents

Educational thought

See also: Philosophy of education and History of Education

Educational thought is not necessarily concerned with the construction of theories as much as it is the "reflective examination of educational issues and problems from the perspective of diverse disciplines."[4]

Normative theories of education

Normative theories of education provide the norms, goals, and standards of education.[5]

[1] [Normative] Educational philosophies

Main article: Philosophy of education

"Normative philosophies or theories of education may make use of the results of [philosophical thought] and of factual inquiries about human beings and the psychology of learning, but in any case they propound views about what education should be, what dispositions it should cultivate, why it ought to cultivate them, how and in whom it should do so, and what forms it should take. In a full-fledged philosophical normative theory of education, besides analysis of the sorts described, **there will normally be propositions of the following kinds:**

1. Basic normative premises about what is good or right;

2. Basic factual premises about humanity and the world;

3. Conclusions, based on these two kinds of premises, about the dispositions education should foster;

4. Further factual premises about such things as the psychology of learning and methods of teaching; and

5. Further conclusions about such things as the methods that education should use."[6]

Examples of the purpose of schools include:[7] develop reasoning about perennial questions, master the methods of scientific inquiry, cultivate the intellect, create change agents, develop spirituality, and model a democratic society :[8]

Common educational philosophies include: educational perennialism, educational progressivism, educational essentialism, critical pedagogy, Montessori education, Waldorf education, and democratic education.

[2] [Normative] Curriculum theory

Main article: Curriculum theory

Normative theories of curriculum aim to "describe, or set norms, for conditions surrounding many of the concepts and constructs" that define curriculum.[9]

These normative propositions are different than the ones above in that normative curriculum theory is not necessarily untestable.[9]

A central question asked by normative curriculum theory is: given a particular educational philosophy, what is worth knowing and why?

Some examples are: a deep understanding of the Great Books, direct experiences driven by student interest, a superficial understanding of a wide range knowledge (e.g., Core knowledge), social and community problems and issues, knowledge and understanding specific to cultures and their achievements (e.g., African-Centered Education)

Descriptive theories of education

Descriptive theories of education provide descriptions or explanations of the processes of education.

[Descriptive] Curriculum theory

Main article: Curriculum theory

Descriptive theories of curriculum explain how curricula "benefit or harm all publics it touches".[10][11]

The term hidden curriculum describes that which is learned simply by being in a learning environment. For example, a student in a teacher-led classroom is learning submission. The hidden curriculum is not necessarily intentional.[12]

[Descriptive] Instructional **theory**

Main article: Pedagogy

See also: Educational technology

Instructional theories focus on the methods of instruction for teaching curricula.
Theories include the methods of: learning, coyote, inquiry-based instruction, lecture, maturationism, socratic method, outcome-based education, taking children seriously, transformative learning

[Descriptive] The nature of the learner and of learning

Main articles: Philosophical anthropology, Philosophy of education, and Educational psychology

[Descriptive] Philosophical Anthropology

Philosophical anthropology is the philosophical study of human nature.

In terms of learning, examples of descriptive theories of the learner are:

1. a mind, soul, and spirit capable of emulating the Absolute Mind (Idealism);
2. an orderly, sensing, and rational being capable of understanding the world of things (Realism),
3. a rational being with a soul modeled after God and who comes to know God through reason and revelation (Neo-Thomism),
4. an evolving and active being capable of interacting with the environment (Pragmatism),
5. a fundamentally free and individual being who is capable of being authentic through the making of and taking responsibility for choices (Existentialism).[13]

Philosophical concepts for the process of education include *Bildung* and *paideia*.

[Descriptive] Educational Psychology

Educational psychology is an [empirical science](#) that provides descriptive theories of **how people** learn.

Examples of theories of education in psychology are: [constructivism](#), [behaviorism](#), [cognitivism](#), and [motivational theory](#)

[Descriptive] Sociology of education [[edit](#)]

Main article: [Sociology of education](#)

The [sociology of education](#) is the study of how public [institutions](#) and individual experiences affect [education](#) and its outcomes. It is most concerned with the public schooling systems of modern industrial societies, including the expansion of [higher](#), [further](#), [adult](#), and[continuing](#) education.[14]

Examples of theories of education from sociology include: [functionalism](#), [conflict theory](#), [social efficiency](#), and [social mobility](#).

[Descriptive] Educational anthropology

Main article: [Educational anthropology](#)

[Educational anthropology](#) is a sub-field of [anthropology](#) and is widely associated with the pioneering work of [George Spindler](#). As the name would suggest, the focus of educational anthropology is obviously on education, although an anthropological approach to **education tends to focus on the cultural aspects of education, including informal as well as formal education.**

As education involves understandings of who we are, it is not surprising that the single most recognized dictum of educational anthropology is that the field is centrally concerned with cultural transmission.[15]

[Cultural transmission](#) involves the transfer of a sense of identity between generations, sometimes known as [enculturation](#)[16] and also transfer of identity between cultures, sometimes known as [acculturation](#).[17]

Accordingly thus it is also not surprising that educational anthropology has become increasingly focussed on ethnic identity and ethnic change.[18][19]

[Descriptive] Organizational and leadership theory

Main article: [Organizational theory](#), and [Leadership studies](#)

See also: [Politics in education](#)

- [Tracking](#)

Educational theorists [[edit](#)]

[Michael Apple](#)	[John Holt](#)
[Bill Ayers](#)	[Bell Hooks](#)
[William Chandler Bagley](#)	[Robert Hutchins](#)
[Charles Beard](#)	[Ivan Illich](#)
[Allan Bloom](#)	[David A. Kolb](#)

Theodore Brameld

Harry Broudy

Nicholas Burbules

George Counts

John Dewey

Kieran Egan

Paulo Freire

Howard Gardner

Henry Giroux

Daniel Greenberg

Jonathan Kozol

Peter McLaren

Richard Mitchell

Maria Montessori

A.S. Neill

Michael Adrian Peters

Harold Rugg

Rudolf Steiner

Max Stirner