

## RES7700: Bracketing Assignment

**Research Sub-Question:** How do teachers at Pleasantville elementary school understand the purpose of education?

As I begin my research on the purpose of education as understood by teachers, I realize that my own experiences will impact my research. Specifically, my experiences as a student and teacher have shaped my view of education and my belief about its purpose.

My first experience with education began over 35 years ago when I was in kindergarten. Kindergarten was a half-day filled with play, the Letter People, singing, and even naps. We followed a predictable routine, and I believed the purpose of education was to enjoy learning. This belief changed as I moved from kindergarten to “real” grades, grades where we earned letter grades, we had homework, and we were expected to follow what the teacher said without questions as to why. My belief about the purpose of education evolved into a competition to earn the best grade and be acknowledged for obeying my teacher. It was reinforced when my high school English teacher questioned my interpretation of a poem. She believed there was only one “right” way to look at literature, even if the literature was designed to invoke feelings and thoughts. I was even told that my opinion was incorrect. This did not make sense to me; however, it did uphold my grim outlook on the purpose of education. This belief perpetuated throughout my high school educational career. Education was something I was going to survive until I could start employment in the real world. My college student years changed my perspective of the purpose of education, thankfully. I was inspired by a writing teacher who encouraged me to write what I felt, who taught me that sometimes not using punctuation is more powerful than using punctuation, and who believed in allowing each student to nurture and develop who they are as an individual. This became my mantra for education.

My college experience prompted my next lens through which I looked at the purpose of education. This lens is that of a teacher. Early in my teaching career, my belief in education being an

avenue to inspire students to become productive individuals continued. There have been a few potholes along the way that sometimes caused me to question the purpose of education. The largest and most recurring pothole is that of standardized testing and its impacts on my teaching. I continually grapple with how to balance standardized testing instruction and love of learning in order to create individual thinkers. I know that I have to teach the “rules” of the test or else my students will not be successful in the eyes of the public, but I also know that only teaching to a test will not teach students to think for themselves and question the world around them. When I find myself bogged down and overwhelmed by testing, how I will be judged because of this testing, and how my teacher evaluation is affected by this same testing, I stop what I am doing. I listen to and observe my students. I hear their chatter about the books they are reading. I watch as they independently find solutions to make our classroom run more smoothly and, they coach each other to make better decisions and be leaders. These moments remind me that I am working toward fulfilling my purpose for education.

In the end, I am brought back to our first assignment where we reflected upon various images. I concluded my reflection by focusing on the picture where students were standing for “The Pledge of Allegiance.” I chose this image as a summary for my belief in education because it reminded me of my belief about the purpose of education, to create individuals who are productive in society. I am proud to live in a country where we have the freedom to dream and the ability to chase after our dreams. We have the right to an education and even a demand to be educated. We truly educate every child, not just the best of the best.

Recognizing my experiences and my own beliefs about the purpose of education is important to acknowledge bias (i.e., a lens) in my research. Merriam (2009) warns that interviewers must remain neutral, “regardless of how antithetical to the interviewer’s beliefs or values the respondent’s position might be” (p. 106), in order to maximize the data provided by the interviewee. To capture the best data from the teacher interviews, I must put my experiences aside and prompt the teachers to share their own experiences so that I can paint a picture that truly represents their beliefs about the purpose for education.

References

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.