

REFLECTION TO SIMONSON'S EMERGING THEORY

To begin with, I start with the term *theory*. I learned that a theory is a set of general principles that offer guidance or help to explain things. According to Holmberg, Keegan and Moore, a theory is a foundation; it helps explain and predicts occurrences but is also used when decisions have to be made. In fact, Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek agree that a "[t]heory is important to the study of distance education because it directly impacts the practice of the field" (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012). The problem that lies with this *theory* as a whole and for distance education, is that there is no definite theory that explains distance education. Granted, there are several theories that have been presented, and *equivalence theory* is one, I believe that *equivalence theory* is not an appropriate theory for distance education.

First and foremost, distance education is a form of education that is distinct yet connected to a major stem. To better explain my point, distance education is like a pedal on a flower and not a separate flower itself. As such, the similar theories used for traditional education should also be reflected in distance education. That does not appear to be the case with all the theories presented but especially with equivalency theory.

Equivalence theory

Schlosser and Simonson (2009) *theorize* that distance education needs to be equivalent in order for it to be successful in the United States (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012). Both clarify that equivalency is not the same as identical and that each learner, no matter if they are local or distant, should have *equal learning experiences*. I could not help but think of a pie with different kinds of slices; just because they are all pies does not mean they are the same.

It is further stated that in regards to equivalence theory that, "[i]t is the responsibility of the distance educator to design, even overdesign, learning events that provide experiences with *equivalent value* for learners" (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p. 52).

However, even with this explanation of emerging theory, I cannot help but question whether *theory* should be used at all. I also question the use of *equal learning experiences* and feel the combination of these terms open the door to skepticism, as does the use of *equivalent value*. My concern lies primarily with the fact that even in traditional education, *equal learning experience* and *equivalent value* are not soundly defined and as a result, make it difficult to justify in distance education.

Equal learning experience

When this term was presented in *equivalence theory*, my first thought was *what is equal learning experiences* and *how do you measure it?* I believe it is difficult to measure *equal learning experience* in traditional base education and therefore, would be difficult to measure in distance education. A definition was shared that included observation, feelings, hearing or what is done to promote learning but again, how can one measure these experiences in a traditional base classroom and compare it to what distance learners are experiencing. As I understand, a different mix of learning experiences would need to be offered. The problem with this issue is that it would require a vast amount of time and energy from the instructor or distance educator who is designing the course. Some may find it easy to design a course that fits every students' learning style to be able to offer an *equal learning experience* but it would require years of preparation. In addition, even if time is not an issue, there is no guarantee that everyone would have equal learning experiences. As a result, I cannot help but question what Simonson means

by *equal*.

In addition, as many schools are starting to realize, students perform at different levels. To say that one day all students would be experiencing the same type of learning is to insinuate that all students will one day come from the same background and have the same type of primary and secondary education. Could it be possible that cloned sheep was on the mind of Simonson? To be clear, every person experiences things differently based on past experiences, it would be difficult to achieve an equal form of learning experiences because of different backgrounds.

Equivalent value

The same can be said about *equivalent value* for learners. In my years of experience in academics, I have heard countless reasons why students get an education. Some go to school to better themselves, others go to school because they need to fulfill a family legacy and some attend school to find their future spouse. The reasons that students get an education vary and will make it difficult for instructors/teachers/professors/designers of education to offer an *equivalent value* of an education. Although this argument may apply to traditional education but because distance education attracts an array of learners, defining *equivalent value* becomes difficult.

In my opinion, the theory of equivalence of learning experience is not appropriate and does not apply to distance education. In fact, I believe the theory does not apply to education at all. In regards to improvements made to this theory, I think it would be safe to say that equivalence of learning experience in distance education should be eliminated altogether since equivalence, as the definition implies, cannot be achieved with any form of education and therefore should not be considered a theory at all.