

Theoretical Foundations of Professor Llanes Course Development and Teaching

In Spanish we have a saying “Cada maestro con su librito” (To every teacher his own book). We mean that every person has his or her own way of doing things, of perceiving the world and acting accordingly.

I am no exception, I also have my “librito” and since I teach in colleges to adults and graduate student mostly, my “librito” is meant to address the needs of that type of student. When I first began to teach in college I was helped by a very wise retired professor, Dr. Agustina Padilla, who observed me in my first semester and gave me books on learning that have been very helpful in my development. She also taught me what was then known as “blackboard techniques” which, while not improving my handwriting on the board, made it possible for me to convey my meaning more effectively.

She handed me a copy of what was at that time a newly translated book by L.S. Vygotsky, called “Thought and Language” ([Vygotsky, 1962](#)). This book offered a perspective of learning as social interaction which has survived the test of time. I later read another book by Vygotsky called “Mind in Society” ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)) which extended my understanding of his theories to the functioning of societies, another area of interest for me. Today you can read about his theories in a brief essay on the net. See <http://tip.psychology.org/vygotsky.html>

My courses are centered around you, the student, and not the subject matter and while they provide the information I think you will need within the topic of the course; it does so through the exercise of competencies, which are vital your future professional goal as well as helpful to your life-long learning.

I rely upon Jerome Bruner’s Constructivist Theory to design my courses. You can read about it in numerous books but I suggest two: “Toward a Theory of Instruction” ([Bruner, 1966](#)) and “Acts of Meaning” ([Bruner, 1990](#)). Bruner’s theory dovetails with Vygotsky’s in expressing that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. The learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure to do so. Cognitive structure (i.e., schema, mental models) provides meaning and organization to experiences and allows the individual to “go beyond the information given”.

Bruner suggests (and my experience bears this out) that the instructor should try and encourage students to discover principles by themselves. The instructor and student should engage in an active dialog (i.e., Socratic learning). The task of the instructor is to translate information to be learned into a format appropriate to the learner’s current state of understanding. Bruner suggests that curriculum should be organized in a spiral manner so that the student continually builds upon what they have already learned. Since you are all adults and most of you are professional in education, I enable for you a high level of control over the learning-path through the use of diverging path-links which enable you to choose where to go next while at the same time looping back to the path when through. See an essay on his theories on the web at: <http://tip.psychology.org/bruner.html>

This looping Bruner describes is further explained by [Argyris, \(1982\)](#) in his book “Reasoning, Learning and Action. Individual and Organizational”. I also use Argyris as a provider of content in my classes on systems thinking and leadership. See an essay on his theories on the web at: <http://tip.psychology.org/argyris.html>

Since 1995 I have been teaching using the web and this has led me in search of theories to maximize the value of the “content” I want you to understand. This content is often delivered through textual web pages. The characteristics of the construction of the text pages has made me refer to them as “Learning Text.”

My Learning Text concept is rooted in two theories of learning. The first is Merrill’s Component Display Theory ([Merrill, 1980](#)) and [Merrill \(1983\)](#). You can also read about it on the web and see a clip of the author explaining it <http://www.gwu.edu/~tip/merrill.html>. This theory provides the general organizational scheme.

My Learning Text concept in practice is also informed by Gagne’s Conditions of Learning Theory which helps us understand how to enable the auto-didactics for you, by allowing you to manipulate the knowledge available in the Web-based course and links, to successfully meet the course requirements. You can read about it in “The Conditions of Learning” ([Gagne, 1985](#)) and get brief essay on the topic and see a clip of Dr. Gagne explaining his theory (unfortunately for us who do not know French his clip is in French) at the following web address. See <http://www.gwu.edu/~tip/gagne.html>

So that’s my “librito” in a nutshell. I hope this course meets you expectations, allows you to learn naturally, is structured properly and looped wisely and manages not to bore you too much.

Good luck.

José R. Llanes

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