



Introduction

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In 2020, [Educational Technology Research and Development](#) published a special issue titled “The Role of Theory in Learning Design and Technology Research and Practice” ([Volume 68, Issue 2](#)). The guest editors began the issue by writing:

The field of learning design and technology... aims to accomplish both research and practical goals. In short, our discipline exists equally in both the worlds of design and practice, and in research and scholarship. Undergirding and driving our work in both of these areas is good theory. Solid theoretical foundations about learning, teaching, design, and technology separate instructional designers from website developers, teachers from presenters, and academics from commentators (West et al., 2020, p. 593).

The importance of theory in Learning Design and Technology (LDT) research is to go beyond identifying variables and questions by providing context, explanation, and critique to those variables and questions (see Whetten, 1989). Furthermore, theory is then useful to the extent that it can lead to an impact on the world (West et al., 2020). Although essential for LDT research, developing and applying theories is not easy. Warr and colleagues (2020) argued that two LDT factors make theorizing especially difficult. First, the work of LDT is complex and uncertain. Second, theory and practice must be closely connected in LDT to make claims and provide practical direction for design.

With these constraints in mind, the [Research and Theory Division](#) hosted and organized the second annual *Theory Spotlight Competition* at the 2022 annual convention of the [Association for Educational Communications and Technology \(AECT\)](#). The focus of the competition was to answer the question:

What theories should LDT researchers consider to provide context, explanation, and critique to the field?

After a peer review of the initial proposals, five papers were selected. Authors were invited to virtually present a short video at the AECT convention. A panel of judges, Dr. Tutaleni Asino, Dr. Stephanie Moore, and Dr. Tom Reeves, reviewed and evaluated presentations on their quality (Judge Rankings). The AECT community was also invited to watch and vote for their favorite proposal (People’s Choice Award). The five final papers are as follows:

1. *Examining the Intersection Between Instructional Design Decision-Making and Problem-Solving of Ill-Structured Problems Through Bounded Rationality* by Jill Stefaniak
2. *Improving the Design of Learning Interaction: A Designerly Theoretical Approach* by Victoria Abramenka-Lachheb
3. *Designing for Productive Disciplinary Engagement and Responsive Assessment with Situated Cognition and Expansive Framing* by Daniel T. Hickey
4. *The Theory of Learning in Micro: Context & Explanation* by Irene A. Bal, Mohammad Shams Ud Duha, Okan Arslan, Jessica Collier, Paula Marcelle, Annette Dolowitz, Jamie Bernhardt, Megan Swanson, Monalisa Dash
5. *Understanding Empathy in Instructional Design* by Hengtao Tang

The papers in this volume spotlight various LDT theories and frameworks useful in both design practice and design research. Each chapter presents the authors' proposed theory and examples of how it can be applied in practice. Recorded presentations from the competition are also available for your consideration with each paper.

We invite all LDT practitioners and researchers to share theories they find particularly valuable in their work in the annual RTD Theory Spotlight Competition in the coming years!

References

- Warr, M., Mishra, P., & Scragg, B. (2020). Designing theory. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 68(2), 601-632.
- West, R. E., Ertmer, P., & McKenney, S. (2020). The crucial role of theoretical scholarship for learning design and technology. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 68(2), 593-600.
- Whetten, D. A. (1989). What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 14, 490–495.

Previous Citation(s)

Leary, H., Greenhalgh, S. P., Staudt Willet, K. B., & Cho, M. H. (2022). Introduction. In H. Leary, S. P. Greenhalgh, K. B. Staudt Willet, & M. H. Cho (Eds.), *Theories to Influence the Future of Learning Design and Technology*. EdTech Books. <https://edtechbooks.org/-uXCJ>



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