

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 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 and to further the conversation and highlight the importance of theory in LDT research, a *Theory Spotlight Competition* was proposed as part of the 2021 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?

The [Research and Theory Division](#) hosted and organized the competition. After a peer review process of the initial proposals, six papers were selected and then virtually presented at the convention to be considered by three judges: a) Dr. Xun Ge, b) Dr. Enilda Romero-Hall, and c) Dr. George Veletsianos. The whole AECT community was also invited to watch and review the proposals. Each paper was presented as a short video (also attached here in this volume with each paper). The six finalists were:

1. *Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction as a Conceptual Framework for Interpreting the Diverse Facets of Learning Observable*, by Nantha Kumar Subramaniam
2. *Theory-Driven Research in Learning Design and Technology Discipline: Toward More Rigorous and Richer LDT Inquiry*, by Ahmed Lachheb and Victoria Abramenska [First Place]
3. *Personalized Learning Design Framework: A Theoretical Framework for Defining, Implementing, and Evaluating Personalized Learning*, by Cecil R. Short
4. *A Framework for Phronetic LDT Theory*, by Jason McDonald [Second Place]
5. *Toward a Theory of Learning Experience Design (LXD)*, by Isa Jahnke, Yvonne Earnshaw, Matthew Schmidt, and Andrew Tawfik [People's Choice Award]
6. *Maturation of Universal Design for Learning: From Design Framework to Theory*, by Susie L. Gronseth, Jill E. Stefaniak, and Elizabeth M. Dalton [Third Place]

These six papers spotlight the variety of theory in LDT research but are only a handful of theories and frameworks available. This book provides the authors writing and recorded presentation of their work for your consideration.

References

- Warr, M., Mishra, P., & Scragg, B. (2020). Designing theory. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 68(2), 601-632.
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- Whetten, D. A. (1989). What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 14, 490–495.



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