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**What is theory and how does it affect our understanding of things or actions in life? Do you think learning theory has a potential benefit for faculty or for you as a student? If so, what is that possible benefit and how have you experienced or observed that benefit?**

### Introduction

Educational theory is a basic framework or a structure for a coursework and is consist of ideas, assumptions, plans and possibilities. A good theory utilizes resources such as time, technology and workforce efficiently. Theory is a good guidance or a roadmap to develop and conduct a successful course. Learning theory definitely has a benefit for faculty or for a student.

“Theory has been both celebrated and condemned in educational practice and research” (Anderson, 2008, p 45) .A good theory provides a solid background as well as a systematic approach to handle a task and maintains the requirements and principles. Wilson’s study (as cited in Anderson, 2008) illustrates the three functions of a good theory as envision of new options, development of efficiency and building honesty. A solid theory is critical foundation to build a successful course. Course developers and instructors should take learner’ needs into consideration and develop a theory based on the observations, assessments and motivations.

A good theory offers benefits to both learners and instructors. There are different models and frameworks for designing a coursework based on student learning, learning environments, different types of interactions, technologies used, community of inquiry, and outcome assessments. Ally (2008), describes the four schools of leaning based on different learning

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approaches as, behaviorist, cognitivist, constructivist and connectivist. Each offer some good points such as interaction, use of metacognitive skills, active learning etc and a blended approach can be beneficial. Bransford, Brown and Cocking (as cited in Anderson, 2008) propose four types of learning theories viz. learner- centered, community- centered, knowledge- centered and assessment -centered. Learner-centered teaching focuses on learners' needs and expectations and makes a good use of students' cognitive skills. Students receive proper learning resources in knowledge -based learning. In assessment -centered teaching, instructors assess and give feedback to the students and modify/ develop the course based on the results. Online learners need to develop a sense of community. This can be crucial for both the instructors and the learners as there are time and place constraints. Establishing an online community through social networking sites such as Facebook, or Twitter is a good option to support and develop a presence of a community. Students can interact more with each other and with the instructor if they are connected. Theories, as defined in Anderson (2008), are based on interactions are as follows: student- student, student-teacher, student- content, teacher-teacher, teacher-content and content-content .A balanced interaction and communication within these specified factors is necessary. In online learning, mode of delivery is critical. Technologies offer a wide variety of options to deliver contents back and forth. Depending upon the course requirements and learners' needs, proper use of synchronous and asynchronous techniques is desirable. A theory based on learning environments helps promote critical and complex thinking process, which triggers holistic thinking, which in turn, assists in deep learning process (Morrison, 2007).

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All these theories have some good characteristics as well as some drawbacks. A theory is a guideline to develop a successful course. Learning one theory gives a clear idea of organization, a good judgment of a course. Theory helps instructors to lay out a blue print of a particular course, around which they can further modify course contents. A theory also helps set up some ground rules and navigates the instructors as well as the students from start to finish. An educational theory helps set up course objectives and goals.

However, implementation of any one theory may not be a good option. Online learning, although moving close to face-to-face learning, is still facing many challenges. Educators already see many benefits of using theory in online education. A blend of several theories is a better option.

### Conclusion

A strong theoretical framework is critical to build a successful course in any scenario, whether face-to-face or online learning. While the basic components of a theory remain the same, some parameters may change depending on course contents, assessments, outcomes, feedback, technologies used, and learners' needs and backgrounds. A continuous research and development eventually leads to a successful course.

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