

## Psychology of Learning

15:295:580

Department Of Educational Psychology  
Graduate School of Education  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

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**Instructor:** Dr. Anandi Nagarajan

**This is an Asynchronous Online Class: 1st day to log-in: January 28<sup>th</sup>, Monday.**

Topics switch every Monday night. Weekly Participation is as per your schedule but deadlines for all assignments and discussions must be met. Please check details below.

**Virtual Office Hours:** I log in at least 5 times a day and will respond to your queries promptly. If have an immediate concern, email me directly instead of just posting on the discussion board.

**E-mail:** [annagara@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:annagara@rci.rutgers.edu) This is the best way to reach me.

### Course Objectives

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The objective of this course is to introduce you to psychological theories of human learning, in particular cognitive and sociocultural theories. We will examine how people learn and how psychological principles of learning are applied to instruction. We will also consider applications of these theories and principles to a variety of settings that include both classroom and out of school situations.

### Learning Goals

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The course is designed to help you acquire specific knowledge and skills related to learning and instruction:

1. You will learn and be able to demonstrate an understanding of theories of learning
2. You will discuss and consider effective instructional practices that relate with different learning theories.
3. You will critically examine and analyze learning and instructional case studies and problems and propose recommendations based on best practices and research rationale.
4. You will collaborate with your peers on discussing course topics and also collaboratively solve problems and case studies related to learning and instruction.
5. You will demonstrate proficiency of course concepts and demonstrate an advanced critical understanding of course concepts as they apply to different educational settings.
6. You will reflect on how your understanding as evolved as a result of course discussion and activities.

### Course Text/Readings

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1. Alexander, P.A. (2006). *Psychology in Learning and Instruction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. The book is available on Amazon or any other online bookstore. A used copy is fine as well.

2. STELLAR Website: This site contains a learning sciences hypertext and online videocases at <http://stellar.wcer.wisc.edu/step/>. The username is demo2; the password is testing2.

3. Additional articles will be made available through electronic sources at the library or posted at the DocSharing tool on the course site. You can expect at least one article each week in addition to the chapter readings from the textbook.

## Participation Schedule

Since learning in the course is predominantly via discussion, it is ESSENTIAL that all readings for the week are completed prior to the start of the discussion. So basically if we are scheduled to discuss Topic 1 on Understanding and Assessment starting on 2/11, then all readings on the topic are to be completed BEFORE 2/11.. You are also expected to concurrently continue to read the assigned readings scheduled for the following week.

Schematically, the weekly schedule looks like this:

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
	Discussions for current week begin on Monday night.  Begin reading the next week's readings.	Continue contributing to current week discussion.  Continue the next week's readings.	Continue contributing to current week discussion.  Continue the next week's readings.	Continue contributing to current week discussion.  Continue the next week's readings.	Continue contributing to current week discussion.  Continue the next week's readings.	
Continue contributing to current week discussion.  Complete the next week's readings.	Topic change: Start contributing to the next topic discussion  Begin reading the next week's readings  Weekly assignment for current week's readings is due by midnight.	The cycle repeats each week.				

## Course Structure & Expectations

This is a reading and writing intensive course. You are responsible to keep up with the weekly readings and be prepared to participate in the online discussions during the week and submit weekly writing assignments as per the deadlines. Online discussions will be whole-class, small-group, and in dyad settings. **You can expect to put in six – nine hours each week in preparation, participation and homework assignments for this class.** Owing to the online nature of the course, you can determine your own timings, and plan as per your schedule in order to meet the weekly deadlines.

My instructional goal is to make your experience in this course productive, practical, and personally meaningful. To accomplish this, it is important that you understand how the course will be structured and what my expectations are.

- We will have asynchronous discussions online on a weekly basis on the topic/module under consideration. Throughout the semester, you will discuss the readings from Alexander and other documents that I will

upload which might include research articles, classroom scenarios, videos of learning and teaching, actual artifacts/products created by school children, and relevant case studies. These readings and activities will help in relating psychological theories to educational practices. You are encouraged to share articles, current news-stories, videos, simulations, and/or other related materials that can help to explain, clarify, or elaborate on ongoing class topics.

- All components of this course require your active and consistent involvement and participation in class. There will also be a number of papers and short proficiency quizzes in this course. **You will need to turn in at least one written assignment every week.** If you have any questions or concerns regarding online participation or writing, please address this with me as soon as possible. Considering the strength of the class and the number of written assignments, **I will not accept any delayed submissions.** You can expect my feedback on weekly papers before the next paper is due.

### Communication

Most of our communication in this online course is via asynchronous discussion and exchange of ideas via the reflection papers. Assigned readings and lecture slides are typically reviewed individually and then we get to discuss our ideas on the discussion board. This can seem to be quite an isolating experience for many who prefer face to face communication and understandably so.

In an effort to enhance our communication and also make things more personable, I will be uploading mini-video segments discussing certain aspects of the week's discussion. "Seeing" the instructor may help in setting certain things in context. In addition, I will also host small group virtual meetings via Skype or GoToMeeting or Google Hangout whereby we could "meet" one on one and/or in small group settings every week or every other week to review any queries you may have. I am always available on email and can also talk to you over the phone or skype if we set up a predetermined time.

### Course Assignments & Grading

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| • Online Discussion and Facilitation             | 20% |
| • Weekly Assignments and proficiency tests       | 30% |
| • 6 Weekly Reflection Papers out of a possible 8 | 30% |
| • Collaborative Case Analysis                    | 10% |
| • Final Paper                                    | 10% |

### Grading Scale

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*90 and above = A; 87-89 = B+; 80-86 = B; 77-79 = C+; 70- 76 = C; 60-69 = D; Below 60 = F*

### Details of Course Assignments are further discussed below

#### Online Discussion and Facilitation (20%)

Since this course is online, all of our review, understanding and discussion of weekly readings will be conducted via the e-college discussion board. All students **must** complete the weekly readings, review any additional information that I may have posted including slides and handouts for the week's topic. You are also required to engage in the online discussion by responding to the questions of the week or summarizing your understanding of the given readings. You have 2 roles to play, either that of a facilitator and/or that of a participant.

Each week, 2 students will be assigned as facilitators of the discussion for the following week. I will be the facilitator for the first two weeks and get the discussion started on 2/4 and continue facilitating until 2/11. Two

students will be assigned to facilitate the online discussion starting on 2/11 and ending on 2/18 and so on for the remaining weeks. Every student will get an opportunity to facilitate at least 2 discussions. All student facilitators **MUST** email their discussion questions to me the Friday prior to their topic discussion for approval before posting on the discussion board. So for example, if you are facilitating Topic 1 and the discussion is to start on 2/11, you must email your questions to me by 2/8 and wait for my response before posting on ecollege.

The role of the facilitator is to get the discussion started by either summarizing or asking a **BIG IDEA** question from the readings. The facilitator should also help keep the discussion going for the week by asking students to justify their thinking and explain their ideas and how they fit with others in the class or group. If some students are not participating or haven't posted a single idea or comment, the facilitators can and should encourage and politely nudge these students to express their opinions. If a comment seems ambiguous, you can ask for elaborated explanations or clarifications.

All remaining students (non-facilitators) are expected to either respond to these questions, identify questions that they have about the readings, and/or share critical ideas that stem from the readings. Posting 2-3 lines of general ideas is **NOT** considered as effective participation and **WILL** reflect on your participation grade. On a similar note, please **DO NOT** post a 4page long summary on the discussion board. Make sure that you are addressing the question and not summarizing the entire reading.

In order to demonstrate your opinion, understanding, and critical analysis of the reading, you must contribute a significant number of ideas and also respond to other students' questions. I expect that you will each contribute at least 3 initiating comments and/or elaborated questions on different topics within the readings **AND** respond to at least 3 posts by other students each week. Remember, these postings need not be perfect or represent your final understanding on the topic. These are your thoughts, ideas, and reactions to the reading. Your understanding and final stances on the topics will evolve after sharing, discussing and reflecting on these ideas. **You will learn more if you focus on the content and depth of discussion rather than the number of posts required.** After the week's discussion concludes, you will be ready to write your reflection paper (discussed in the next segment).

*Deadline: You must post your comments on the weekly readings by 8PM, Sunday. The discussion is asynchronous and I expect a lot of back and forth exchange of ideas taking place during the week. For the discussion started on 2/4, you must post your comments by 8 PM on 2/10. Please don't wait till the last minute as you need to respond to each other as well. The new discussion topic will start on 2/11, Monday.*

### **Weekly Assignments and proficiency tests (3\* 10=30%)**

The discussions and reflection papers are opportunities for you to interpret the readings and apply them to your learning/teaching context and offer some flexibility. The proficiency tests, on the other hand, will allow you to test your basic conceptual knowledge on the topic and allow me to assess whether you have read the important aspects of the chapter and understand the basic concepts. So while we may discuss different motivational strategies in a particular classroom and debate whether one way works better than another, the proficiency test will address whether you know the main ideas of a particular motivational theory.

Other weekly assignments could include mini-case analyses, and or any relevant assignment that will supplement your understanding on the week's topic.

### **Weekly Reflection Papers (6\*5=30%)**

An effective learning strategy that facilitates understanding and remembering is reflection and review. At the end of every week, you will complete a reflection paper that synthesizes your main understanding from the readings. These reflection papers will provide opportunities for you to reflect on the readings, the course, and your role in discussion. You may consider how what is being discussed would apply in your classroom, counseling practice, or other real world situation. This is where you can demonstrate evidence of your

understanding the course material and how it connects with various educational and practice settings. These should not be longer than 1 single spaced/ or 2 double spaced pages (but they should be about that length). If you try to write about everything in the readings, this will be a challenging task. It works a lot better if you select 2-3 topics that you connect with and/or you have a strong opinion or reaction to and then elaborate on your reflection on those topics. However, in addition to stating your opinion or reaction, substantiate it with examples, evidence, arguments, and or theories that lend support to your main idea. You can think deeper through an idea via these reflections. These are a useful medium to have a one-on-one conversation with me on topics that interest, perplex, and or intrigue you.

While these are not formal papers, they are also not meant to be bulleted outlines of the readings. Please do NOT summarize the book chapters or the online discussion. Your papers need to reflect your critical thinking and therefore should be given due thought. Feel free to share your experiences that are relevant to the readings, and also why you agree or disagree with the readings. Please do not complete these papers hastily just before they are due. I am not looking for chapter summaries but for the ideas you have developed as a result of reading, discussing, and reflecting. Mere completion does not ensure full credit. I will post samples to exemplify the quality of critical thinking that I expect from you. This is an excellent opportunity to connect the course information to your own teaching and/or other professional experiences.

In all, there are 8 weeks/topics when these papers are due so you get to take 2 weeks off. Basically, you are to submit a reflection paper for 6 of the 8 possible weeks. Check the schedule towards the end.

*Deadline: You must submit your weekly reflection papers by 8 PM Monday night before starting discussion on the next topic. For example, discussion for Topic 1: Understanding and Assessment begins on 2/11, comments must be posted by 8 PM on 2/17, Sunday, and reflection papers must be uploaded by 8 PM on 2/18, Monday. The topic switches after 8 PM Monday to Topic 2. Please plan time for reading and completing reflection papers as per your work/school schedule. It is better to try and complete the reflection papers over the weekend so you're not struggling to write it last minute on Monday which might be a working day for you.*

### **Collaborative Case Analysis (2\*5 = 10%)**

In an effort to apply the psychological concepts and principles we encounter in the readings to practical real-world situations, we will analyze 2 case studies in small groups. The first case study will be a manuscript that provides information on a learning situation and focuses on the learner. The second case study will be a video case that addresses a teaching situation and focuses on teacher techniques and strategies. I will provide a framework for you to discuss the case studies in small groups and then present your conclusions to all students in a whole-class discussion. You will complete a reflection paper after completing the case analysis as a group on the discussion board. However, your level of participation on the discussion board will impact your grade as well. Please check schedule for deadlines.

### **Final Paper (10%)**

You will write a critical observation report on *a teaching/learning episode* in a context of your choice. This could be a teaching situation you have observed or been a part of, as a teacher or a student. The main goal of this assignment is for you to connect your classroom observation with the theories and principles discussed in class. When describing the learning method, I expect you will do so in relation to the learning theories we have discussed. At this point in the course, you should be able to provide a professional description, using terms and concepts appropriately to describe the classroom context and learning events. This will count as your final exam. Detailed guidelines and rubrics will be uploaded on ecollege.

## TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

Week	Class	Discussion Topic	Readings for next week's discussion	Participation and Assignments Due
1	1/28 - 2/4	Online introductions, Intro to the course and syllabus, surveys How can psychology inform pedagogy?	Read syllabus Alexander- chapter 1 Hmelo-Silver & Barrows'06	Read syllabus, complete surveys by 2/1. Complete all readings by 2/3 to start discussion on Monday 2/4 <b>Weekly assignment # 1 Due on 2/4</b>
2	2/4-2/11	What makes a good discussion question?	Alexander – Ch. 4 Assessment (refer Ch 13, 14 as appropriate)	Contribute to the weekly discussion board. Respond to the main questions and to each other by 2/10. <b>Weekly assignment # 2 Due on 2/11</b>
3	2/11 - 2/18	<b>Topic 1:</b> Understanding and Assessment	Case study uploaded in Doc-Sharing Additional reading/research	Online Discussion <b>Weekly Reflections #1 Due on 2/18</b>
4	2/18 - 2/25	<b>Collaborative Case Analysis</b>	Alexander – Ch. 5 Additional reading/research	Online Discussion <b>Case Analysis Paper Due on 2/25</b> <b>Weekly assignment # 3 Due on 2/25</b>
5	2/25 - 3/4	<b>Topic 2:</b> Domain Learning	Alexander- Ch. 6 Additional reading/research	Online Discussion <b>Weekly Reflections #2 Due on 3/4</b> <b>Weekly assignment # 4 Due on 3/4</b>
6	3/4 - 3/11	<b>Topic 3:</b> Transfer	Alexander – Ch. 8 Additional reading/research	Online Discussion <b>Weekly Reflections #3 Due on 3/11</b> <b>Weekly assignment # 5 Due on 3/11</b>
7	3/11 - 3/25	<b>Topic 4:</b> Problem-solving	Case study links and info will be posted Additional reading/research	Online Discussion <b>Weekly Reflections #4 Due on 3/25</b> <b>Weekly assignment # 6 Due on 3/25</b>
8	3/18 - 3/25	SPRING BREAK		
	3/25 - 4/1	<b>Collaborative Video Case Analysis</b>	Alexander – Ch.7 Additional reading/research	Small-group discussion <b>Case Analysis Paper Due on 4/1</b>
9	4/1 - 4/8	<b>Topic 5:</b> Strategic Learning & Strategic Teaching	Alexander – Ch. 9, 10 Additional reading/research	Online Discussion <b>Weekly Reflections #5 Due on 4/8</b> <b>Weekly assignment # 7 Due on 4/8</b>
10	4/8 - 4/15	<b>Topic 6:</b> Motivation and Affect	Alexander – Ch. 11 Additional reading/research	Online Discussion <b>Weekly Reflections #6 Due on 4/15</b> <b>Weekly assignment # 8 Due on 4/15</b>
11	4/15-4/22	<b>Topic 7:</b> Collaborative Learning	Alexander – Ch. 12 Additional reading/research	Online Discussion <b>Weekly Reflections #7 Due on 4/22</b> <b>Weekly assignment # 9 Due on 4/22</b>
12	4/22- 4/29	<b>Topic 8:</b> Technology	Additional readings will be posted	Online Discussion <b>Weekly Reflections #8 Due on 4/29</b> <b>Weekly assignment # 10 Due on 4/29</b>
13	4/29- 5/6	Catch-up and Review		
14	5/6 - 5/13	<b>Work on Final Paper</b>		<b>Final Paper due on 5/13</b>