In Bruner’s (1996) *The Culture of Education*, he examines the interconnectedness of mind and culture as necessary contributors to past, present and emerging theories of education. While he believes that educational theory is created at the nexus of these two paradigms, as demonstrated simply below (on left), and that each is a key contributing factor in defining the teaching and learning process, Bruner focuses on the intersection of the two as the genesis of theory formation. I would argue, however, that the alternative model below (on right) better depicts the true and holistic interplay between nature and nurture as it defines theories in education. In terms of nature, Bruner’s “nature of mind” provides the cognitive slate that is brought to the teaching and learning equation. His “nature of culture,” however, better defines the nurture value in the equation. It is my opinion that both mind and culture must be viewed in their entireties as contributors to educational theory. As such, Bruner’s lens of intersection is perhaps too narrow; a peripheral view would allow for the seemingly infinite factors that are interrelated and at interplay with one another.

Beyond Bruner’s psycho-cultural or computationalism/culturalism approach, the intersubjectivity in defining theories of education is well rooted in other paradigms and research. Constructivism is one
tenet guiding educational theory that impresses upon me the concept of aiding young people in learning and to assist them in becoming better architects and builders of understanding and knowledge. In reflecting on the work of this course, I found a couple of other theories of education and of learning to be compelling. These include Santrock’s (2004) concept of life-course development whereby we acknowledge the never-ending cycle of change during a human’s lifetime, as well as Gauvain’s (2001) focus on social context and its influence in learners and learning at all points on the socioemotional, cognitive, and cultural social-cognitive transactional continuum. The influence of both nature and nurture on learning throughout the course of a human’s life is clearly a recurring theme throughout these readings and cannot be understated.

As a final note, I would like to echo a sentiment Bruner puts forth in *The Culture of Education*, “Education is a complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and of fitting its members and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture” (p. 43). I believe that this is a thoughtful, holistic approach to thinking about teaching, learning and theories of education.

In the quest for improved educational leadership, an understanding of learning theories is an essential professional ingredient toward greater school or organization understanding. Both leaders and institutions should endeavor to create and sustain model learning organizations. In this business, it is essential to practice what you preach. As such, educational leaders should strive to be active, practitioner researchers. Ideally, the production of knowledge for the common good should couple with the absorption of understanding and practice of theories of learning.

Along these lines, Heibert, Gilmore and Stigler (2002) propose that professional knowledge must be public and presented in a manner that enables it to be accumulated and shared with other educational professionals, particularly school leaders. Moreover, this professional knowledge must be continually
verified and improved upon if a learning organization is to remain true to the concept, with educational leadership that is both informed and a valued contributor of that professional knowledge. In Leading for Learning, Schlechty (2009) better defines what it means to be a learning organization. He notes that educational leaders wishing to pursue this model create an organization framework that is flexible, creative, problem-solving, self-directed, and attuned to 21st century skills. In addition, he emphasizes that these educational leaders and institutions work on and with knowledge.

Over the past several years I have learned a great deal about Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligence theory as a framework for how the human mind might operate and maneuver through understanding. Translating this psychological construct of the human brain into pedagogy and practice, as both an educational leader and as an institution, has been a labor of love. Gardner never proscribed a curriculum or educational theory to accompany his M.I. theory. Rather, he has left this task to educational leaders like me, attempting to create and define a teaching and learning paradigm that has an institutional place for the students we serve. Using differentiated instruction based upon M.I. theory, my school has successfully created a teaching and learning environment that leverages each student’s strengths based upon their natural learning inclinations and asymmetrical excellence. Our faculty, staff, students and families are all very well aware that we are a learning organization creating educational theory through practice and product. To be creators of educational knowledge, not just consumers, is a joyful enterprise that we take very seriously. As such, my school, Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall, and I continue to consider creating a global and virtual Center for Multiple Intelligences in the 21st Century that would establish and maintain an “m.i.Cloud” for international collaboration, a resource spanning the globe as we attempt to bring together educational leaders, schools, practitioners, parents, students and anyone else with interest to learn more about applying multiple intelligence theory to teaching and learning. This will be considered in the School’s next strategic plan.
References


