

AI Practitioner

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Lifelong Learning “On the Road to Find Out”: How Theory Informs Practice and How Practice Informs Theory

Steven N. Pyser and Marjorie Schiller

steve@thedialogue.net and MargeSchiller@Yahoo.com

As children, you may have been asked “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” The question resurfaces at family dinner when you ask the same question of your children or grandchildren. Feigning wisdom, you wait on the response of the younger members of the family. The spirited conversation is a wonderful academic exercise. Despite our lifelong learning and maturity we may not know the answer. It makes for an interesting critical thinking exercise in circular logic; however, we are no closer to a solution. And that is ok.

The November 2006 issue of the *AI Practitioner* is titled “Lifelong Learning and Education: On the Road to Find Out”. The issue highlights possibilities for individual and educational transformative positive change through lifelong learning and lifelong education.

Lifelong learning includes learning for personal, civic and social as well as for employment-related purposes. It takes place in and outside the formal education and training systems. Lifelong learning implies raising investment in people and knowledge; promoting the acquisition of basic skills, including digital literacy; and broadening opportunities for innovative, more flexible forms of learning.⁽¹⁾

Lifelong learning is the never-ending dance among theories, practices and behaviors. As evolving and curious people, we live on the road to finding out. So our question is, “Which came first, the life or the learner?” This issue of *AI Practitioner* focuses on learning as a continuous and iterative process. The stories you will read and the research and cases that explore the topic of lifelong learning are divided into two categories: Theory and Practice. Since these twin spotlights on our own landscape of

learning are so foundational, we start with a working definition on Practice and Theory.

How Theory Informs Practice and How Practice Informs Theory

Miriam McNown Johnson in *Human Behavior and the Larger Social Environment: A New Synthesis*⁽²⁾, voices a definition for theory and practice that helped guide our Call for Papers and Cases, selection and editing of manuscripts:

A **theory** is narrower than a perspective. It is a proposition that explains or predicts something. In other words, it is an educated guess, based on both previous knowledge and observations.

Models provide guidance on how to **practice** in a range of situations. They focus on what to do by describing patterns of activities and highlighting certain principles that give practice consistency. (our emphasis)

As you read each article that follows, we invite you to step out of *your* comfort zone. Several of our articles offer an orientation toward the academic. Others offer an equally compelling practitioner view. If you are an academic – consider taking a practitioner perspective. If you are a practitioner consider taking an academic regard. Or, better still, take a “pracademic” approach – a hybrid approach of professional practice and the theoretical. There is a constant dynamic tension among theories and practice. Read both sections of this issue with an open mind. Stay away from an “either or approach” – go for “also/and”.

On a personal note – both of us have thoroughly enjoyed working with our colleague-authors and we have loved working together. The editing project has involved a practitioner network of shared trust, norms and values. A unique form of social capital emerged as we interacted with the authors and with each other. As coeditors, this collaborative and cooperative experience has been part of our own lifelong learning. The two of us have worked together virtually and by telephone over several years; yet have not met “face-to-face” (this will soon change). Thanks to *AI Practitioner* we close our e-mails to each other with “Your Pal, Steve” or “Your Pal, Marge.” A virtual collaboration has grown into a friendship. Yusuf Islam’s⁽³⁾ (formerly known as Cat Stevens) song lyrics “On the Road to Find Out” helped inspire this issue of *AI Practitioner* – there is so much left to know, and we’re all on the road to find out.

Steven N. Pyser and Marjorie Schiller
Guest editors, November 2006

References

1 EurActiv. (2005). *Lifelong Learning*. Retrieved September 30, 2006, from Euractiv.com Web site:

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/education/lifelong-learning/article-117516>

2 Johnson, M. (2005). *Human Behavior and the Larger Social Environment: A New Synthesis*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

3 There is more information about Yusuf Islam at <http://www.catstevens.com>