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Theory of Action and Information Literacy: Critical Assessment towards Effective Practice

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Research Background



RUTGERS

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Competing Conceptions

- ▶ Behavioral Conception
[Doyle, 1992]
- ▶ Constructivist/Knowledge Construction View
[Gordon, 2000; Todd, 1999]
- ▶ Process Approach
[Kuhlthau, 2004; Cheuk, 2000; Lloyd, 2007]
- ▶ Relational Conception
[Bruce, 1997; Catts, 2005; Maybee, 2006, 2007]

Multiple Definitions

- ▶ The ability to access, evaluate and use information towards a specific purpose. [American Library Association, 1989]
- ▶ Enabling student learning via theory based strategies and interventions which enable students to construct new knowledge [Todd, 2001]
- ▶ A process of constructing meaning [Kuhlthau, 2004]
- ▶ A way of thinking and reasoning about aspects of subject matter [Bruce, 2000]

Information Literacy as Complex

*Critical reflection on institutional values may
address challenges and dilemmas in
professional practice*

*Public **reflection** on practice is done in the
interest of **learning** towards bringing
theories-in-use in line with espoused theories
for **greater effectiveness in practice***

Argyris and Schön, 1974



Conceptual Framework

Theory of Action (Argyris and Schön, 1974)

A detailed framework for explaining relationships between what can be observed in people's actions and their beliefs about these actions.

- ▶ employed to examine organizations and communities of practice

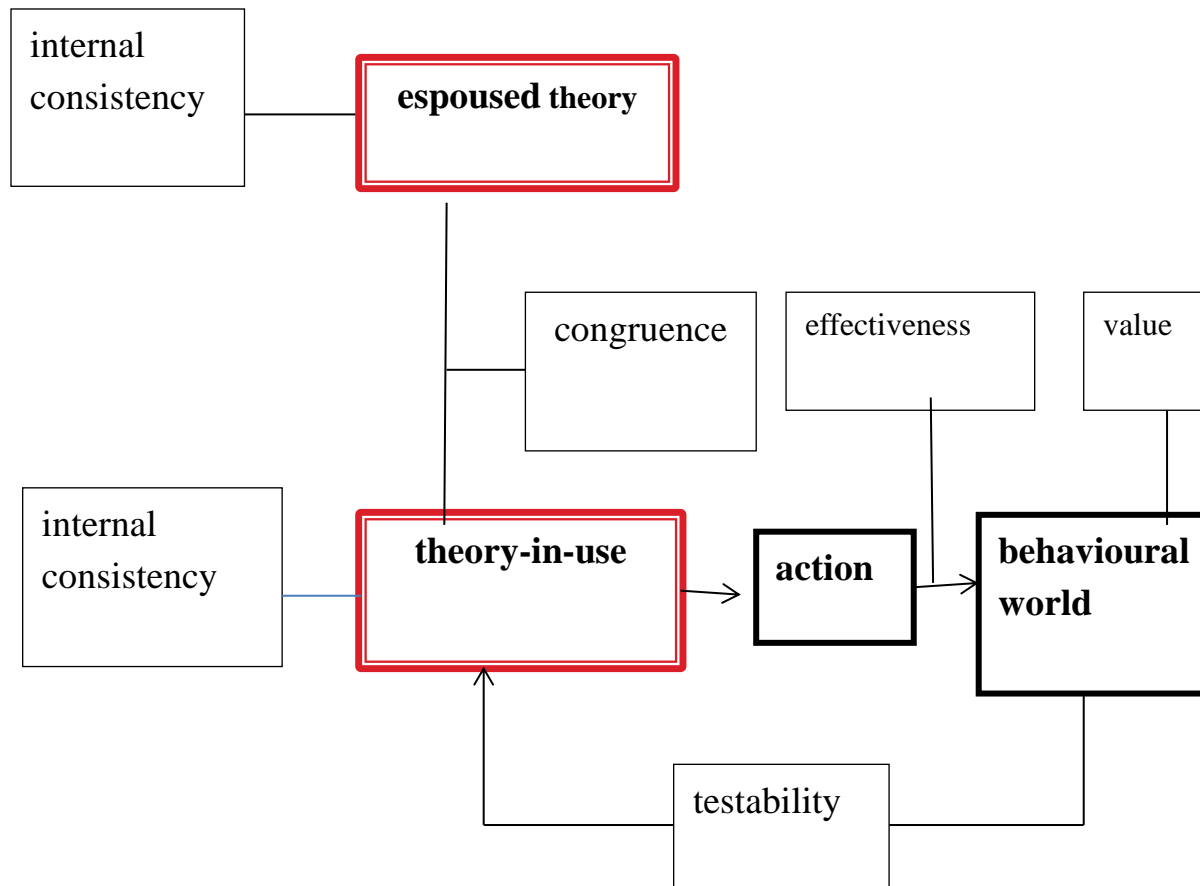
Theories of action are beliefs, rules, concepts, practices that underlie actions

Contrasting theories of action:


- ***Espoused theory***
 - *Beliefs, assumptions, rules*
- ***Theory-in-use***
 - *Theory of action implied by behavior*

Effective practice: congruence between espoused theories and theories-in-use

Evaluating Theories of Action




Theory of Action: Research on Professional Practice

- ▶ Investigation of espoused theories of learning in policy statements and theory that actually informs assessment used by academics. Willis, 1993.
 - ▶ Meta analysis of studies exploring teaching **beliefs** and **practices** of university academics. Kane, Sandretto and Heath, 2002.
 - ▶ Rhetoric and reality of teachers' feedback to students. Orrell, 2006
 - ▶ Educational leadership. Houchens and Keedy, 2009.
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Theory of Action and Information Literacy Research

**Conceptions and Practice of Information Literacy in
Academic Libraries: Espoused Theories and
Theories-in-use. Kerr, 2010.**

Assessing a community of practice via an in-depth investigation of relationships between conceptions and practice in light of varying and competing understandings of information literacy.



Research Design and Procedures

▶ **Multi-case sample**

- 11 US academic libraries recognized in two best practice databases for exemplary instruction resources

▶ **Multiple data sources**

- 60 Policy documents (mission statements, instruction policies, goals, definitions of IL)
- 150 Online tutorials
- 12 Semi structured in-depth interviews

▶ **Multi-method approach**

- **Questioning, thematic, comparative analysis at 2 levels**
 - 1. Case-by case, institutional : Statements of claims**
 - 2. Meta claims of espoused theories and theories-in-use**

Meta Claims from Policy Docs	Meta Claims from Tutorials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Libraries as environments of learning become agents for fulfilling missions of universities. ▪The espoused discourse of academic libraries indicates intellectual support for universities by advancing knowledge, critical thinking and learning. ▪Information literacy is conceptualized primarily as intentional engagement with information for specific purposes ▪Libraries espouse a “culture of collaboration and integration” as essential to achieving information literacy ▪Information literacy agendas address multiple learning outcomes to enable holistic development of students, including academic success, social responsibility and lifelong learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Online tutorials address multiple information literacy competencies with a focus on developing strategies for accessing and using information sources. ▪A few tutorials give attention to critical thinking and other knowledge outcomes. ▪Critical thinking is addressed primarily via the evaluation of information sources. ▪Information literacy is practiced primarily as locating, using and evaluating information sources ▪Ethical dimensions in missions of universities and libraries are addressed via tutorials. ▪Some tutorials are designed to be used by faculty for integration of student learning outcomes

Espoused Theories: Conceptions of IL

- ▶ **Information literacy is understood as**
 - **Knowledge outcomes and processes** including critical thinking, knowledge creation, scholarship and intellectual habits.
 - **Intentional use of information** for specific purposes
 - Enabling **academic success, social responsibility** and **lifelong learning**.
 - Knowledge and skills in **accessing and using information sources**
 - Enabling **ethical and human values**
 - Effective in collaborative endeavors

Theories-in-Use :

Practice of IL via Online Tutorials

- ▶ Multiple goals and outcomes
- ▶ Varied roles
- ▶ Source approach: focus on strategies for accessing information sources: “Find it” theme
- ▶ Emphasis on plagiarism and ethical use of information
- ▶ Nuanced approaches to evaluation of information sources
- ▶ Interactivity
- ▶ Point-of-need learning tools

Espoused Theories and Theories-in-Use

► Congruence

- Knowledge focused missions and definitions
- Encouraging of ethical values
- Disciplinary approaches in subject tutorials
- Critical thinking addressed via evaluation of sources
- Strategies for accessing and using sources
- Strategies for creating knowledge

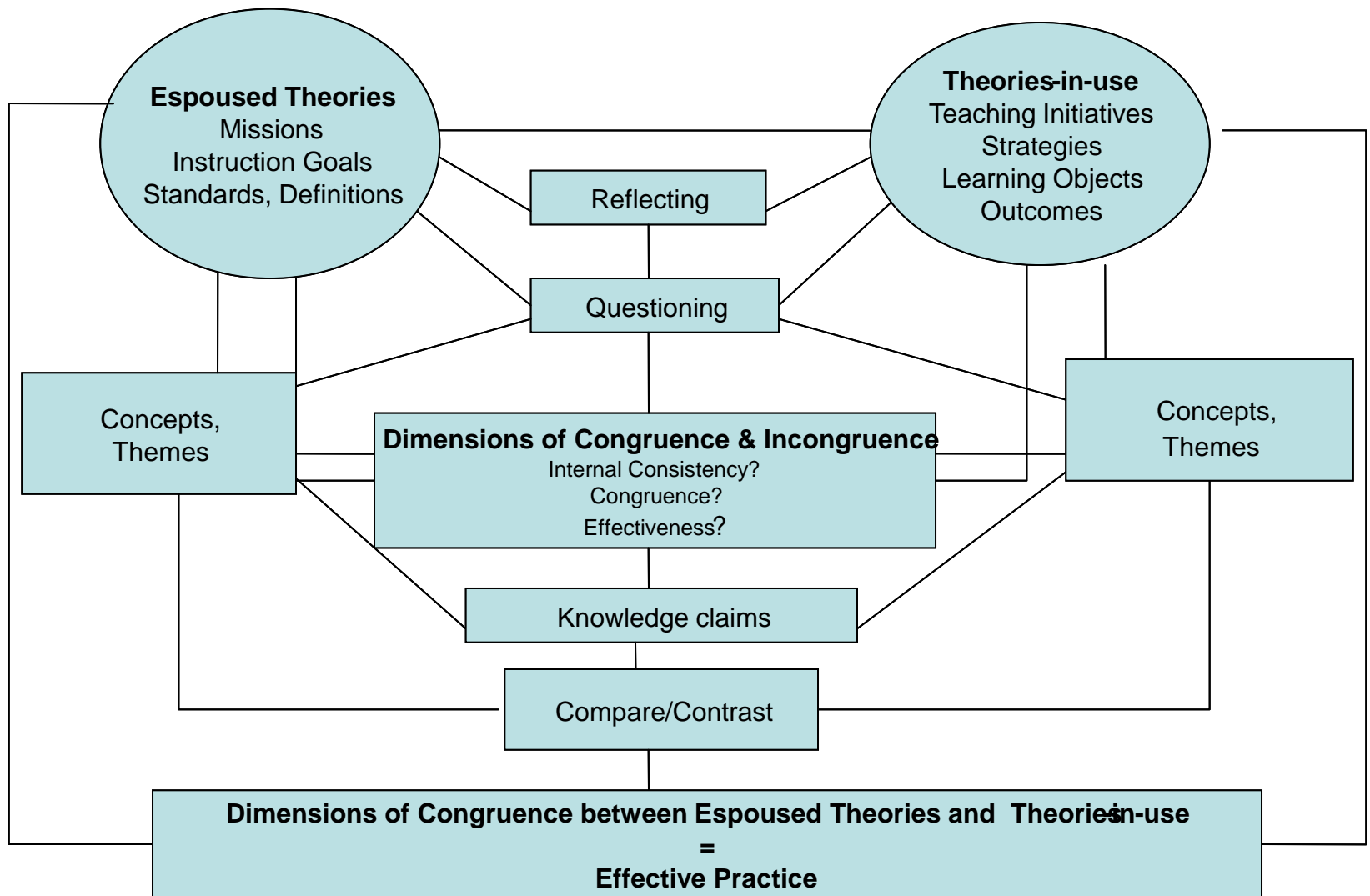
Espoused Theories and Theories-in-Use

► Incongruence

- Source approach rather than a knowledge approach in tutorials
- Greater emphasis on procedural techniques than on conceptual understandings
- Focus on a few aspects of the continuum from access to use of information
- Information use operationalized as ethical use
- Little attention to communicating, constructing meaning, solving problems
- Tutorials focus on strategies for consuming information without parallel process of creating information
- Minimal attention to developing lifelong learning competencies

Model of Effective Information Literacy Programme

- ▶ Best practice elements from sample of libraries
 - Explicit and implicit attempts at aligning practice with mission
 - Assessment models beyond self assessment and quizzing: outcomes-based
 - Culture of collaboration
 - Enabling values and social responsibility via tutorials
 - Curriculum integration modules; curriculum mapping; embedding outcomes
 - Team approach to developing instruction tools.



Information Literacy: Evaluation and Reflection Tool

(Kerr, 2010)

Thank You!
Questions?

