Grealy, Deborah S. and Sylvia D. Hall-Ellis. *From Research to Practice: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in LIS Education*. **Westport, CT: ABC-CLIO-Libraries Unlimited, 2009, xiv, 163 p. ISBN: 9781591586319. $45.00 pb.**

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A book that focuses on learning about learning in library and information science graduate education would certainly be exciting to practicing professionals in academic libraries—librarians, teaching faculty, and students. To have tools to gauge how students learn best, how they learn most efficiently, as well as to gain perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of one's own library and information science education, would certainly enrich a librarian's experiences. Initially, *From Research to Practice* evoked this kind of invigorating potential. The authors seemed to recognize that many students entering library programs are adult learners who desire to have a second career. James Davis' Foreword is also brimming with promise: here he explains that learning involves not just one, but many elements, and that being a subject matter expert is not enough in itself to make one a great teacher (v). Davis draws in readers by explaining how he has come to understand learning theories and how he created a typology of these theories; he also describes how he challenges his students to apply what they know about learning in general to their specific fields (v-vi). Never mind the somewhat off-putting description that the learning theories (here curiously used interchangeably with "learning strategies") were applied as much in training as in the classroom, and that the textbook for his course is *Effective Training Strategies: A Comprehensive Guide to Maximizing Learning in*

Organizations (co-written with his wife Adelaide B. Davis, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers).[1]

Looking through Grealy and Hall-Ellis's text, I notice several charts and tables that illustrate classifying desired outcomes of courses and programs, as well as what the authors call learning strategies. Their seven defined learning strategies are (no surprise here) the ones presented to them by Davis: behavioral, cognitive, inquiry, mental models, group dynamics, virtual reality, and holistic. For those with backgrounds in educational theory, the taxonomy used here seems daunting—some names stand for theories while others stand for approaches. The book seems nevertheless useful since the authors describe the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy, and the charts can be used to identify the learning strategies that entered the foreground of certain library and information science programs. Additionally, the tables give heuristics for using each strategy with students in the classroom (as opposed to a list of "don'ts").

Unfortunately, none of these strengths detract from the most striking weaknesses of the book. The practice of labeling anything "holistic" after listing its individual practices made this reviewer wonder, why not start there first; in other words, why not mix and match the best of all practices? To put it another way, the strategies listed by the authors are just representations of theories presented previously by Davis (in what the book description calls a matrix). And most unfortunately, the authors suggest a matrix. Rather than providing or inspiring fluid applications of the strategies they define, the authors match exercises, knowledge, and desired skills to what seem like arbitrarily chosen learning strategies. Imagine how library staff would feel knowing that shelving books, locating materials for resource sharing requests, checking sources in and out, and performing some technical processing has been umbrella termed by Grealy and Hall-Ellis as being *repetitive* (and one cannot help but read *mindless*); ergo, the authors suggest the

learning strategy best suited is the behavioral strategy (37). In another example, mental modeling is posited as the applicable theory (or strategy) for a course on cataloging (83). As a reader, I would have found this book far more valuable had the authors started out with the programs, courses, knowledge and skills to be taught, and general desired outcomes of library and information science education, and then explored the many possible learning strategies that *would be effective*. As is, the text offers heuristic lists that are clear (and remind readers how to work within each strategy specifically), and the theoretical background provides an initial grounding to those who work in library and information science—yet the pedagogical issues still remain: concepts and skills of library and information sciences are not all-enthralling in the classroom. In other words, it is obvious that the mental models strategy *could* be used for enabling students to grasp cataloging; however many will still find this strategy ineffective at best, useless at worst. The authors failed to note that a cognitive strategy or virtual reality strategy may keep interest better than the mental models one.[2] They seemed unaware that the hierarchical presentation of cataloging, to build brick (previous knowledge) by brick (knowledge needing to be acquired) would likely work better for learners, or that the virtual reality strategy (which the authors matched with reference activities) would be just as applicable to teaching students or librarians how to build a database.

When they aren't arbitrarily applying a learning strategy (or theory) to a skill or course of study, the authors are busy stating the painfully obvious. The group dynamics strategy is matched with teaching a library management course or collection management (not at all surprising to readers who have taken graduate coursework in library and information science). In the final chapter, "The Holistic Strategy" is argued to enable readers to comprehend that learners have individual needs, and that all previous chapters create an entire picture, and under the

subheading "Best Use" of this learning strategy, the authors write that "volunteering, service learning, and practica can help students practice the techniques and communication strategies that will enable them to be effective practitioners and managers in today's information settings" (122). Readers would likely know this fact before even opening the book. To their credit, the authors correctly emphasize that a weakness of using this strategy is that the instructor would have less control of the learning environment; thus s/he would have to build trust and rapport with colleagues and students in order to create a positive learning experience (125).

Though the authors' descriptions of strengths and weaknesses will likely heighten awareness of using any individual strategy for teaching, readers will notice that some of their observations make more sense than others. According to the authors (or perhaps to Davis), the cognitive strategy "lacks emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving" (53). Anyone familiar with educational theory and psychotherapy know that this observation could not be any further from the truth. Another criticism they offer on this learning strategy is that "the instructor assumes that students are passive learners with their brains ready for the imparting of information" (49). Here, the authors fail to realize that lecture style teaching may assume this attitude in general, but teachers who embrace the cognitive learning strategy often question their students—and the answers are not always programmatic.

It appears that this book is not really rewarding to supervisors, instruction librarians, and SLIS faculty at all; however, it may well be for those who wish to evaluate their own library and information science graduate education. These readers may wonder which of these learning strategies may have been emphasized in their programs. By understanding that they, for example, may realize that they learned management just from the group dynamics perspective, and further realize that this inspired them to study that management exclusively in this way, ignorant of

another perspective. Had it been more thoughtful, Grealy and Hall-Ellis's book could have been used to find ways to broach gaps in learning, since revisiting aspects of the discipline, combined with understanding learning strategies, encourages lifelong learning. But to be blunt, putting the cart before the horse is never a good idea, and here the authors' insistence on prescriptive analysis—in other words applying theories and then finding elements that justify that application—is short-sighted. A text which describes course content and then organically deduces which learning theories and/or strategies best fit that content and its required skill sets would be a welcome read. Unfortunately, this is not that text.

NOTES

[1] The potential usefulness of this book is further hailed in various reviews previously published in *ARBA Online* and *Reference and Research Book News*. Both focus on the practicality it has for teachers (of library and information science educators) and professionals.

[2] The cognitive strategy, according to Grealy and Hall-Ellis, would allow for the teacher to find engaging ways to interest learners through focusing on mental processes, checking to see if learners understand the material, and following up with feedback (51-52).