

WSD Independent Study Contract

“Cognition Theories”

Winter 2000

Student: E.C. Mare

Evaluator: Guy Burneko, Ph.D.

Credits: 3

Learning Intentions

This course is intended to provide the student with the opportunity to explore some of the brilliant theories of cognition that have developed during this century – theories of how we come to know, and in particular, those theories that lend themselves to an organic, systems oriented worldview. There is a whole lot more to Mind than is normally brought to awareness. Through this course, the student will come to deeply understand the nature of Mind as illuminated by these theories, so that he/she may expand her/his awareness and thus her/his capacity for knowing, thinking, and being.

Learning Goals

Besides an expansion of awareness of Mind and a greater understanding of the nature of Reality, the student will explore the implications of the learning to a proposed educational setting. While studying these cognition theories, the student will begin to analyze his/her experience with current educational systems that attempt to transmit knowledge, and will begin making proposals for the design of a learning institution whose curriculum and purpose is in accord with the organic, relational, systems oriented ways of knowing espoused by these theories.

Learning Activities

The student will read:

- 1) *The Tree of Knowledge* by Maturana & Varela
- 2) *The Embodied Mind* by Varela, et al.
- 3) *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* by Bateson
- 4) *Process and Reality* by Whitehead
- 5) *Process Metaphysics and Hua-yen Buddhism* by Odin

The student will take detailed notes while reading these selections in order to retain key elements, language, and ideas. The student will initiate a regular meditation practice to integrate learning, and to consciously observe the nature and activities of Mind. The student also will communicate regularly with the evaluator to maintain perspective.

Demonstration of Learning

The course is designed to provide an open, free-thinking inquiry into the subject of how we know what we know, so there will be some flexibility in required documentation. The reading material has the potential to loosen rigid, outworn thinking patterns and to spontaneously replace them with new patterns of perception. The student will document this transition/emergence through the keeping of a journal, whose contents may be very personal and varied. The student also will write a paper collating any accumulated meanderings around the theme of "cognition and learning," with preliminary ideas for incorporating the understanding gained from these cognition theories into a proposed "Gaia University" for the 21st century. The actual contents may vary somewhat, depending on the course of internal dialogue that will be stimulated as a result of this study. For example, speculations about the evolution of consciousness in a new millennium may arise and are perfectly appropriate.

Evaluation of Learning

- The student will produce a journal documenting the quarter's thought processes
- The student will produce a 30-page paper applying cognition theories to the design of pedagogy in a proposed Gaia University