Panning for gold: Which emotion theories are most relevant to language learning – and for what purposes?

As the primary human motive (MacIntyre, 2002), emotion operates as an amplifier, providing energetic intensity to language learning and all other human behavior. This presentation helps audience members to "pan for gold," that is, to use critical thinking while encountering potentially valuable elements of emotion theory. This presentation outlines and contrasts emotion theories from several fields: positive psychology, social psychology, social constructivism, social constructionism, existential psychotherapy, and affective self-regulation. Some of these are major emotion theories that are known in other areas of learning but that have not been considered in the language learning field. Dr. Oxford explains the orientations and purposes of selected theories and offers implications for (a) understanding emotions, particularly in a social context (e.g., as transitory social roles); (b) recognizing positive as well as negative aspects of anxiety; (c) understanding how emotions can fit together in a systematic way; (d) regulating emotions and developing resilience; and (e) managing emotional expression in varied cultural contexts.

To increase interactions between the presenter and the audience, all audience members will have the opportunity to participate actively by rating existing emotion theories on a survey according to clarity, general meaningfulness, and practical utility for explaining emotions in a range of learning purposes. This presentation enables audience members to go "for the gold" while using their keen judgment.

Keywords: learning, emotion, theory.