

Robert M Gagné

Robert Mills Gagné, perhaps the most prominent theorist in the field of instructional design as it came into its own in the last half of the twentieth century, died on April 28th in Signal Mountain, Tennessee (USA). He was 85 years old. Gagné was born in 1916 and received his bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1937. He received his doctoral degree from Brown University in experimental psychology in 1940. His career, spanning some 50 years, included academic positions at Connecticut College for Women (1940); Princeton University (1958 to 1962); University of California at Berkeley (1966 to 1969); and Florida State University (1969 to 1985). He served as director of research for the American Institutes for Research (1962 to 1966). Gagné also spent a number of years researching military training issues. During World War II he worked as an aviation psychologist. From 1950 to 1958, he conducted numerous studies of human learning and performance as technical director for Lackland and Lowry Air Force Laboratories. In addition, toward the end of his career (1990–91), he was a National Research Council Senior Fellow at the Air Force's Armstrong Laboratories.

Through his writings and teaching, Gagné influenced thousands of instructional designers and educational psychologists, many personally as well as professionally. While Gagné's earlier efforts were firmly grounded in the behaviorist tradition, his later work was influenced by the information processing view of learning and memory. Although Gagné's theoretical approach addressed all types of learning outcomes to various degrees, the focal point of his theory was on intellectual skills (discriminations, concepts, rules, and problem-solving). Gagné's most original work was included in the several editions of *The Conditions of Learning and Theory of Instruction*. In these he introduced or elaborated on key instructional design constructs including his nine events of instruction (based on the internal and external conditions of learning), theory of the learning hierarchy of intellectual skills, and taxonomy of learning outcomes. He also authored or coauthored numerous other research articles, theoretical papers, and books such as the multiple editions of the influential *Principles of Instructional Design* (with L J Briggs and W W Wager); and *Essentials of Learning for Instruction* (with M P Driscoll).

Gagné had been president of the American Educational Research Association and president of the American Psychological Association Divisions of Military Psychology and Educational Psychology. He served as consulting editor to

several professional journals including the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Instructional Science*, and *Human Learning*. Among the many honors he accepted in his lifetime, Gagné received the Distinguished Scientific Award from the American Psychological Association, the E L Thorndike Award for Educational Psychology, and the American Educational Research Associations Phi Delta Kappa Award for Distinguished Educational Research. He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Academy of Education. He is survived by his wife, Pat, a son, Sam, and daughter, Ellen, who is also an educational psychologist.

Two books which provide an overview of Gagné's work and its impact are *Studies of Learning: 50 Years of Research* produced by the Learning Systems Institute at Florida State University and, more recently, *The Legacy of Robert M Gagné*, edited by Rita Richey.

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