## Chapter VI

# The Learning Activities Model

## Introduction

The effects of open, distance, and flexible learning, and the changed role of technology in learning have been felt in almost all educational sectors and institutions. Technology in many subjects now plays a central role and learning management systems (LMSs) are part of the standard software of higher education institutions. However the influence of learning technology has not been limited to education. The literature on human resource management (HRM) recognizes that there are benefits to be gained through the application of some of the techniques and technologies of flexible learning to training and development (Smith, 1992; Wilson, 1999). For example, LMSs are also providing efficiencies to organizations in the development of their human resources. As mentioned earlier in this book, the term *flexible learning* is used here to refer collectively to the approaches of open, distance, online, and e-learning and to the literature that is concerned with them. More recently terms such as *blended learning* and *e-learning* have appeared to refer to learning experiences

that incorporate an electronic element. Typically flexible learning or e-learning would involve the use of the learning technologies discussed here.

In earlier chapters the literature of flexible learning has been shown to support the notion that the process of learning can be described as consisting of the provision of materials and interactions. Also, the literature was interpreted as providing tacit conceptualizations of the process of learning as the provision of materials and interactions. In this chapter, this description is defined, described in greater depth, and interaction is also subdivided into several categories. The categories of interaction and the provision of materials are then brought together to constitute the theoretical framework, the learning activities model (LAM).

This model is the first of two theoretical frameworks described in this book and provides the field with a new analytical tool and as well as informing the learning technology field. The model is intended to assist designers of learning events and is based on the thesis that categories of activities that are subdivisions of the learning process can be matched to techniques, technologies, and methods as part of the design process. While the literature, in many places (Bates, 1995, 2000; Taylor, 1995, 2001), implies that the process of learning can be described as interactions and delivered things, previous investigators have chosen not to use these categories of learning activities as overt tools for the analysis of the learning process. The research reported here conceptualizes learning activities and presents a theoretical framework within which the process of all learning events can be described and analyzed. This framework is the LAM. When the selection of learning technologies is addressed in Chapter VIII, the categories of activities form identifiable elements to which appropriate technologies can be matched. This chapter concludes with several examples, which analyze fictitious learning events and illustrate how the model can describe the learning process.

## Provision of Material

Traditionally, the predominant approach to undergraduate university teaching consisted of mainly a presentational approach. Most lectures were primarily concerned with the provision of material, as learning seemed to be equated with the transfer of knowledge as opposed to the development or construction of it by students. A similar approach occurred in human resource development and many programs have been conducted in venues using the model of a trainer presenting material to a group of trainees. In these cases material was provided by the words the lecturer or trainer spoke and the words written on the board, overhead projector, screen, or handout. The material provided in traditional presentations like this resulted in the notes and memories that learners took away from the training room or lecture theatre.