

Chapter 1.5

Learning Activities Model

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INTRODUCTION

The design of learning is probably more accurately described as the design of learning activities as it is the activities that are designable compared to learning which is the desired outcome of the activities. While the term “instruction” may be out of favor with some commentators, as it implies a teacher-directed approach, “instructional design” has been used for some years to describe the design of the things learners and teachers or trainers do to facilitate learning.

Instruction is a set of events that affect learners in such a way that learning is facilitated. Normally we think of events as external to the learner – events embodied in the display of printed pages or the talk of a teacher. However, we also must

recognize that the events that make up instruction may be partly internal when they constitute the learner activity called self-instruction. (Gagné, Briggs, & Wager, 1992, p. 3)

Courses of study, subjects, or training programs are generally too large to be matched to a particular technology or technological element of a learning management system. Distance education courses are generally characterized by a “package” of several technologies (Bates, 1995) or a “combination of media” (Rowntree, 1994), indicating clearly that more than one technology is generally used. In online learning or e-learning where a learning management system (LMS) is used for a course, subject, or program, the question remains of how to undertake the matching of each technological element of the LMS to subsections of the course, subject, or program.

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The learning activities model (LAM) is based on an investigation of approaches to the categorization and classification of learning activities and reconceptualizes them in such a way as to facilitate the matching of them to learning technologies.

With a small number of notable exceptions (Gagné et al., 1992; Laurillard, 2002) there is little reference in the literature to explicit methods of classification and categorization of learning activities for the purpose of matching them to learning technologies. However, several commentators provide tacit classification as a by-product of discussions for other purposes.

BACKGROUND

The approaches to the theorization of learning activities can be grouped into four categories:

- Some commentators classify learning activities for purposes other than the selection of learning technologies.
- Others do not overtly categorize or classify, yet provide tacit conceptualizations while achieving other ends.
- Yet others simply list methods or examples of learning activities in the absence of a more detailed conceptual framework.
- A fourth approach is to provide categories of learning activities that may ultimately assist in the selection of learning technologies in a way that is appropriate for the learners, the material, the context, and the budget.

By investigating other aspects of distance education, Bates (1995), Taylor (2002), and Rowntree (1994) imply a classification of learning activities. Bates' descriptions of learning technologies as one-way or two-way implies that there are one-way and two-way learning activities and it follows

that learning activities that utilize technologies in these ways can be classified as:

- Interactions with the material using the one-way technologies, and
- Interactions between people using the two-way technologies.

Taylor (2001) provides corroboration of this tacit conceptualization in the description of the generations of distance education, where technologies are categorized as providing "highly refined materials" and/or having "advanced interactive delivery." Further, Rowntree (1994) implies a similar tacit categorization of learning activities by categorizing "media" as those for human interaction and those for interaction with materials. It is not surprising that learning activities can be categorized as interactions with materials and interactions between people as this is reflected in many learning experiences.

THE LEARNING ACTIVITIES MODEL

The learning activities model is a theoretical framework that can be used as an analytical tool and to assist designers of learning events. It is premised on the argument 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.

Provision of Material

Traditionally, the predominant approach to undergraduate university teaching consisted of a presentational style. Most lectures were primarily concerned with the provision of material, as learning seemed to be equated with the acquisition of knowledge as opposed to the development or construction of it by students. A similar approach occurred in human resource development and

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