

Learning types and online tasks

The following two tables are a guide to the different types of tasks that can be included in an online course. We should ensure that we have a mix, either within modules or over the course as a whole. Table 1 shows the different ways of learning material (through reading, experimentation, discussion and so on). Table 2 shows different ways of achieving the different types of learning in an online course. We must not forget that we can blend the two columns of conventional and digital technology and ask participants to do real world activities and report them digitally.

Table 1: Definitions of learning types

Learning type	The learning experience
Acquisition	<p>Learning through acquisition is what learners are doing when they are listening to a lecture or podcast, reading from books or websites, and watching demos or videos. This is probably still the most common type of learning in formal education. The student is playing a relatively passive role while the teacher uses the transmission mode of teaching... We cannot avoid learning through acquisition. Students need to learn what others have discovered, to hear about expert ways of thinking and practising, and what is known already in their field. Enabling students to build on the work of others is fundamental to formal education and the progressive development of ideas.</p>
Collaboration	<p>Learning through collaboration embraces mainly discussion, practice, and production. Building on investigations and acquisition it is about taking part in the process of knowledge building itself. It is distinct from learning through practice because although it builds something this is necessarily done through participation and negotiation with peers. It is distinct from learning through production, because although it produces something this is through debate and sharing with others.</p>
Discussion	<p>Learning through discussion requires the learner to articulate their ideas and questions, and to challenge and respond to the ideas and questions from the teacher, and/or from their peers. The discussion may end with a consensual outcome, but the pedagogic value is the reciprocal critique of ideas, and how this leads to the development of a more elaborated conceptual understanding.</p>
Investigation	<p>Learning through investigation guides the learner to explore, compare and critique the texts, documents and resources that reflect the concepts and ideas being taught. Rather than having to 'follow the storyline', as in learning through acquisition, they are in control of the sequence of information, and can 'follow their own line of inquiry', making them more active, and giving them a greater sense of ownership of their learning, taking a critical and analytical approach, and thereby coming to a fuller understanding of the ideas.</p>
Practice	<p>Learning through practice enables the learner to adapt their actions to the task goal, and use the feedback to improve their next action. Feedback may come from self-reflection, from peers, from the teacher, or from the activity itself, if it shows them how to improve the result of their action in relation to the goal. This helps them to develop, understand and use the knowledge and skills of a discipline. It is sometimes referred to as 'learning by doing', or 'learning through experience', where the learner</p>

Production	Learning through <i>production</i> is the way the teacher motivates the learner to consolidate what they have learned by articulating their current conceptual understanding and how they used it in practice. Producing an output generates a representation of the learning enabled by the other types. In its simplest form it is the learner's articulation of their current thinking, which enables the teacher to see how well they have learned, and to respond with feedback, guidance and further explanation.
-------------------	---

Table 2: Definitions of 'learning types' in terms of typical technologies used

Learning types	Conventional technology	Digital technology
Acquisition	Reading books, papers; Listening to teacher presentations face-to-face, lectures; Watching demonstrations, master classes.	Reading multimedia, websites, digital documents and resources; Listening to podcasts, webcasts; Watching animations, videos.
Collaboration	Small group project, discussing others' outputs, building joint output.	Small group project, using online forums, wikis, chat rooms, etc. for discussing others' outputs, building a joint digital output.
Discussion	Tutorials, seminars, email discussions, discussion groups, online discussion forums, class discussions, blog comments.	Online tutorials, seminars, email discussions, discussion groups, discussion forums, web-conferencing tools, synchronous and asynchronous.
Investigation	Using text-based study guides Analysing the ideas and information in a range of materials and resources; Using conventional methods to collect and analyse data Comparing texts, searching and evaluating information and ideas.	Using online advice and guidance Analysing the ideas and information in a range of digital resources; Using digital tools to collect and analyse data Comparing digital texts, using digital tools for searching and evaluating information and ideas.
Practice	Practising exercises; doing practice-based projects, labs, field trips, face-to-face role-play activities.	Using models, simulations, microworlds, virtual labs and field trips, online role play activities.
Production	Producing articulations using statements, essays, reports, accounts, designs, performances, artefacts, animations, models, videos.	Producing and storing digital documents, representations of designs, performances, artefacts, animations, models, resources, slideshows, photos, videos, blogs, e-portfolios.

Reference

Definitions are taken from Chapters 6-11 in Laurillard, D. (2012). *Teaching as a Design Science: Building Pedagogical Patterns for Learning and Technology*. New York and London: Routledge.