

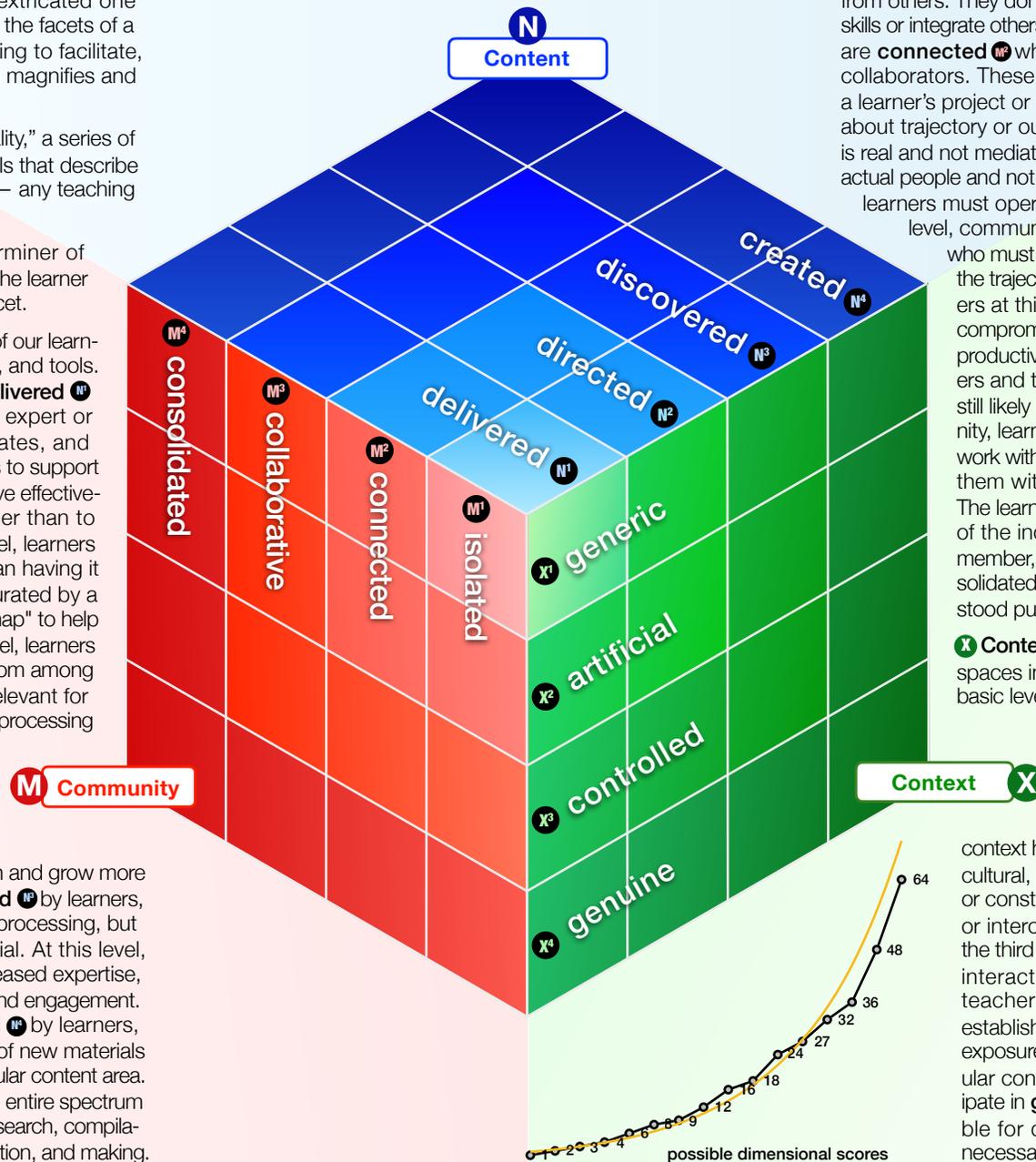
Dimensions of “Cubic” Learning

In every learning experience, we encounter three elements: **content** **N**, **community** **M**, and **context** **X**. However, these should not be seen as separate elements, nor can they be easily extricated one from another. Rather, they comprise the facets of a multidimensional prism, each working to facilitate, enhance, and extend learning. Each magnifies and multiplies the impact of the others.

Each facet has its own “dimensionality,” a series of increasingly rich and productive levels that describe — and that can be used to assess — any teaching practice or learning experience.

In each facet, the important determinant of “dimensionality” is the relationship of the learner to the elements that make up that facet.

N Content consists of the material of our learning, including information, practices, and tools. At its most basic level, content is **delivered** **N¹** by someone else (for example, an expert or teacher who compiles, sorts, curates, and packages it) and provided to learners to support the learning experience. Learners have effectively no responsibility at this level other than to process the material. At the next level, learners are **directed** **N²** to content rather than having it delivered to them. Content is still curated by a teacher or expert, who provides a “map” to help learners locate it. However, at this level, learners must exercise discretion, choosing from among the materials to find what is most relevant for their projects or intents. This need for processing means learners have a more direct and engaged connection with the material, even if they lack the ability to locate it all on their own. At the third level, the learners’ engagement with the content continues to deepen and grow more complex. Here, content is **discovered** **N³** by learners, who must exercise skills not only in processing, but also in locating and curating material. At this level, learners demonstrate not only increased expertise, but also a higher level of investment and engagement. At the final level, content is **created** **N⁴** by learners, who now participate in the creation of new materials that extend or contribute to the particular content area. At this level, learners demonstrate the entire spectrum of abilities associated with content: research, compilation, curation, discernment, internalization, and making.



M Community consists of the the people surrounding learners in the learning process. At the lowest level, learners are **isolated** **M¹** with no expectation of meaningful interaction or collaboration from others. They don’t need to demonstrate any interpersonal skills or integrate others in their work. At the second level, learners are **connected** **M²** who function more as resources than as collaborators. These others may have little understanding of a learner’s project or goals and often play no role in decisions about trajectory or outcomes. Nonetheless, community here is real and not mediated: learners have to deal relationally with actual people and not just with media artifacts. At the third level, learners must operate as **collaborative** **M³** partners. At this level, community plays a more central role for learners,

who must share decisions and responsibilities about the trajectory or outcomes with collaborators. Learners at this level must demonstrate self-discipline, compromise, and strategic thinking in order to work productively. However, the “seams” between learners and the others with whom they’re working will still likely be discernible. At the final level of community, learners are so tightly **consolidated** **M⁴** in their work with others that it’s no longer possible to divide them without diminishing or damaging the work. The learner’s team functions with full understanding of the individual talents and capabilities of each member, but those differences have been fully consolidated to serve a closely shared, mutually understood purpose.

X Context consists of the physical and conceptual, spaces in which learning takes place. At the most basic level, the context is **generic** **X¹** with no meaningful cues that connect the learner to a particular place, time, or background. It is simply a “space.” At the next level, learners have an **artificial** **X²** relationship to the context. In this case, the

context has some meaningful environmental, social, cultural, or disciplinary cues, but these are artificial or constructed, often without the full development or interconnections we see in the real world. At the third level, learners experience a **controlled** **X³** interaction with context where someone — a teacher or some other custodial figure — has established safeguards that protect learners from exposure to the full risks or complexities of a particular context. At the deepest level, learners participate in **genuine** **X⁴** contexts and are fully responsible for demonstrating the agency and insight necessary to navigate the context’s complex web.