LEARNING PODCAST
An edited conversation with Phil Tyson

PT

This is podcast five. All of these podcasts are aimed at supporting users of the question-led learning resource. We do like to have your feedback to guide us. The author is here with me. G'day, Melvin

MF

G'day, Phil.

PT

Quality learning is our topic and that begins with frame 54, reminding us that learning's a continual dialogue with experience.

MF

Yes, Phil, it is. Dialogue is continuous and it obviously involves thinking, and thinking and dialogue are intimately connected. Dialogue implies conversation.

We talked in previous podcasts about negotiating the content of the examples of practice we discussed last time. Negotiation is usually talked of in terms of trying to come to an agreement between people. But in the current context, a lot of the talk is about collaboration. It is a tad different in the sense that it's trying to come to some sort of group understanding and group acceptance of the course of action or line of thinking.

As far as this resource is concerned, negotiation and collaboration are almost synonymous. They involve dialogue.

PT

Subtle shades of meaning. Now, what's the intention of this section of the resource?

MF

The intention, Phil, is to provide a language for talking about the quality, if you will, of the learning that's taking place in an inquiry, and so doing from different points of view. What's the potential in this or that inquiry? What can we look at? When it's finished, what has gone on, and what is next in terms of the depth or quality of learning?

Words like depth and quality are problematic. We might be talking about how well, and then how well is not right either. What follows in this section is a language for talking about what learners could do, are doing, and might do in the future.

PT

The six fields of learning provide us with a vehicle for talking about learning.

MF

They do, indeed.

Thinking and dialogue are interconnected

Collaboration and negotiation seen as synonymous

A language for talking about learning

Vehicles for talking about learning

PT
If we look at the first one, which is being cultural, the way that you've structured that is different from the other five.

MF
Yes, that's right, Phil. There are several reasons for it being different.

The substance of the charts for the other five, being literate, being numerate, being healthy, being expressive, and being knowledgeable, have been derived from investigation of different curriculums such as those in - California in the U.S., the United Kingdom, India, Thailand, and here in Australia. In the resource, the substance is articulated around strands.

Different curriculums investigated

When we came to deal with the cultural one, there's a problem. It's impertinent to tell different countries what their culture is. They have their culture. So, different elements have been identified like – difference, respect and appreciation; talents, expectations, aspirations; and histories, artifacts, literatures. In frame 57, they're labelled elements. They can be examined from a local perspective or a global perspective. In a cultural study, you might deal with all of them at once or select a few of them.

Impertinent to tell people what their culture is

Elements of cultural understanding are identified

Several indicative options are outlined in the resource. But beyond that, I think detailed descriptions are inappropriate, because it's up to individual countries and individual communities and families to articulate what the elements are like in their context. Yet the elements of cultural understanding are common, almost universal.

Universal cultural understandings

PT
I love lists, Melvin, and that's quite several lists of what you've called indicative experiences, running from frame 64 right through to frame 97.

I think perhaps a close examination of the first of those might be very worthwhile.

MF
Well, before we do that, Phil, could I go back to your previous question about what was common or different in the six fields of learning? There's one thing that's consistent across all of them. That is, they begin with a statement from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) which positions the charts in terms of beginning, developing and maturing.

Compatibility with ACARA

All the fields are articulated in terms of strands. That is, if you include the word elements in being cultural. They are also articulated at four levels - early learners, transitional learners, proficient learners and accomplished learners. People may want to associate them with year levels, or they may not. The intention is to give a sense of continuous growth, development and progression.

Articulated in strands

Four levels of increasing complexity

The word experience is crucial because lists like these are talking about what's going on in an inquiry and looking at what learners are doing. For example, are early learners using gestures and actions and body language to express their thoughts and feelings? Or are they using different interaction conventions, such as

Items talk about experiencing through inquiry

asking questions, offering different comments, constructing different points of view and so on? Move up one level to transitional learners. In the case of reading, are they justifying the predictions and interpretations and conclusions gleaned from reading material?

Are the experiences learners are having enabling them to do those things and/or encouraging them to do them? I have a big concern about these charts because the lists could be used, if you like, to tick, I'm doing this or tick, I'm doing that. Or X, I'm not doing this or that.

They are not intended to be used in this way. They are not checklists. Instead, I see the charts as learning barometers. It's a way of looking at what's going on with learners and observing things that are happening. And because they start with early learners, moving to transitional learners, to proficient learners, to accomplished learners, there's a sense of progression.

They provide a language for observing what learners are doing, but also what the experiences are enabling learners to do.

PT
I think there's another aspect too, and that is the lists aren't in priority order.

MF
God forbid, Phil, to be honest. How could you? Take three items from reading and viewing strand in transitional learners. Navigating text using the title, table, contents, headings. Reading and viewing longer narrative and information texts. And discussing possible meanings and predicting.

They are different things that might be experienced at different times and in different ways in different inquiries. Again, to make it very clear, the lists are not checklists, and they are not criteria for assessment. They articulate different aspects of learning.

PT
As you've explained, Melvin, each of the six fields for learning is represented here in this section. And I wonder if we could look at a couple in depth, please.

MF
Yes, Phil, I think it would be good to take maybe a couple of examples we had from the last podcast and apply the charts. If you take the one on keeping fit and look at the well-being of children and healthy habits.

Let's pick three items from the well-being and identity strand for being healthy in the chart for transitional learners. Were the learners understanding how each person's self-concept can change and grow with experience and time? Or were they taking responsibility for looking after their own health and their fitness and how that related to well-being? Or were they recognizing how different ideas, feelings and attitudes are reflected in the actions and behaviours of self and others? Did they have opportunities to develop their understanding and their mental strength in relation to those things?

Take something else out of keeping fit inquiry. Were learners carrying out fitness tests? A set of experiences that is slanted towards movement and physical activity. Are the learners describing what fitness is in terms of the effects on the body, why it's important, and the requirements for keeping fit and healthy? Is that the focus of their conversations? And how they are interpreting those activities? Or are they practicing movement changes and patterns orientating towards refining and sequencing speed and direction and balance and coordination?

What's happening? Is it what I wanted to have happen as teacher? And when we're finished, how well did those things happen? You can use the charts to look critically and professionally at what experiences learners have had, are having and could have or need to have in the future. In this sense, the charts are learning barometers.

You suggested, Phil, that we should go to a second example from the previous podcast and see how that relates to these charts. Let's take the global challenge one, which starts with something like David Attenborough's video about truth and climate. Many listeners will have viewed that video.

For me, a fundamental question would be, is the orientation of the inquiry predominantly scientific or societal or is it environmental or a combination of all three? Depending upon the answer, you would select the relevant charts to look at how the experiences were enabling learners to develop understandings outlined in them.

I should say as well, Phil, that the global challenge inquiry would probably be best pitched at proficient learners or accomplished learners, given the nature of the inquiry.

PT
What value would you hope users would draw from reading this quality learning section, Melvin?

MF
In one sentence, Phil, a language for talking about purpose, for talking about intention, for talking about performance in question-led learning inquiries

What is happening, could happen or should happen

Learning barometers shed light on what's happening

Selection of relevant charts

The challenge determines its level of difficulty