

“Shifting to Learning Conversations”

Formative Feedback to Julie Stockton on Two Videos Related to the Above

1. General Remarks

As an engineering professor, my classroom is different from Julie's in several ways and similar in some ways. A well-articulated set of learning objectives, activities and outcomes is essential in my practise. The comments below reflect this bias.

The videos pertain to a “difficult” conversation between James and Julie and analysing this in the framework of “Ladder of Inference.” The two videos, unfortunately, do not contain the actual conversation that I could listen. My remarks below are based on the two videos *per se*.

Specific feedback based on the criteria sent to me by Julie follows next.

2. Learning Criteria

2.1. Learning requires high levels of student engagement/active participation and reflection

I can see that the deliberate structure and style of this workshop promotes conversation among the participants as well as between the facilitator and the participants. The participants seem to be generally engaged with the subject matter and are actively involved in the conversation.

There were brief opportunities for reflections and critical thinking. One conspicuous feature in these videos is the lack of questions *from* the students to the facilitators. May be this requires more deeper cognitive engagement on behalf of the learners than the visual conversation that is apparent?

2.2. Learners learn in different ways, they have diverse backgrounds, they are at different stages and they progress at different rates

I noticed that the style of the workshop is conversational. It is hard to comment on the diversity of the learners. Assuming that the workshop material is made available in advance, an idea worth trying in future is to ask the audience to reflect on the “difficult conversation video” and note down a few points in light of their own reading (before attending the workshop) of the material. Then, each group can summarise what they think are important turning points in the conversation. After this, perhaps, the facilitators can present slides, talk about the models, and then open up the conversation as they have done. I think knowing where the learners are before the presentation could have lead to a different level of conversation with the participants.

2.3. Learning is an individual, social and contextual process

The learning in videos is motivated by a context (a difficult conversation between James and Julie) and social learning is promoted within the workshop through discussions. As to the individual learning styles, only indications are given towards the end of the workshop about VISTA resources on “Assessing my individual style” such as MBTI?

2.4. Learning requires critical feedback

The facilitators provided timely interventions/feedback during the conversations. A challenge to this setting of workshops is to assess learning of each participant. Towards the end, the facilitator asked about the “takeaways” from this workshop which elicited a spectrum of responses varying from “being careful about making assumptions” to “choosing the learning path as opposed to the judging path.” This indicates that the participants are picking up a few ideas. In the present format there is no direct assessment of learning. One idea is to introduce a new “difficult” conversation and ask the participants to make notes about how they would approach this. Then they can exchange the notes and provide peer-feedback/assessment?

2.5. Learning requires taking responsibility for own learning and investing in the well being of the whole

Participants were pointed to further resources and online tools.

3. Concluding Remarks

My overall impression is that the videos are an excellent example of “Team based teaching and learning” in adult education. I thought the four facilitators have done an excellent job in directing the classroom conversation.

Some points for future consideration are to clearly identify the learning objectives, activities, and outcomes. In the present form one sees activities but not the other two. Peer-assessment can be considered. Think-pair/group-share can be considered too, instead of Group-share model followed in the discussions among the participants.

Overall, I enjoyed watching this video as I got a glimpse into how learning is facilitated in soft sciences. My teaching practise in engineering is worlds apart! Nevertheless, the opportunity to see this classroom video and thereby know different learning environments is, to me, the best feature of SoTL!