Learning to Learn

‘Mu’ Dictionary

Why a ‘Mu’ Dictionary’?

What is a ‘Mu’ dictionary? Why a ‘Mu’ dictionary?

Have you ever looked up a dictionary definition of a term and been none the wiser for your trouble? One of the shortcomings of a traditional dictionary is that the verbal, propositional definition of a term does not always convey meaning. Take the definition of ‘positivism’ for example:

1 a: a theory that theology and metaphysics are earlier imperfect modes of knowledge and that positive knowledge is based on natural phenomena and their properties and relations as verified by the empirical sciences.

Whether the term ‘positivism’ now has meaning for you will depend on how much meaning the words used to define it have for you. The actual meaning each of us takes away from the propositional definition will depend on the meaning we initially ascribe to each of the words used to describe the term. ‘Shared meaning’ and ‘felt meaning’ are not guaranteed.

‘Mu’ is a Japanese term, which is connected to the Greek concept of ‘Arete’, which implies a respect for wholeness or oneness. ‘Mu’ thinking rejects ‘either-or’ thinking in favour of ‘both-and’ thinking.

A ‘Mu’ dictionary attempts to express meaning in four different ‘ways of knowing’: propositional, factual, personal/experiential, conceptual. It attempts to develop greater ‘felt’ meaning through the use of personal story and greater ‘shared’ meaning through image and analogy. It also aims to develop precision and ‘definition’ in its true sense; i.e. the action or the power of describing, explaining, or making definite and clear.

The assumption behind the approach of a ‘Mu’ Dictionary is that deepest understanding emerges from the integration of these four ‘ways of knowing’.

Activity 1

The ‘Mu’ Dictionary for ‘tiger’ shown below is incomplete.

- **A: Defines, proposes, clarifies, classifies**...
- **B: Names, gives examples, describes how**...
- **C: Felt meaning, value, expresses as personal story**...
- **D: Abstracts essence, concept, expresses as image, analogy**...
To complete the entry for ‘tiger’ have a go, individually or as a group, on

1. adding **specific examples** of tigers to quadrant B -

2. connecting with any **experiences** you may have had of ‘tiger’ – what **emotions** did you experience? In what **context(s)** have you experienced one or more ‘tigers’? Share your **stories**. Choose a story that you all relate to and capture a synopsis of the story in quadrant C.

3. what is the **essence** or nature of a ‘tiger’? Can you think of an analogy for ‘tiger’. Imagine you are trying to communicate the ‘essence’ of a ‘tiger’ to someone who had never heard of nor seen images of a tiger but was familiar with a range of other animals – what **analogy** could you draw with other animals? What key words capture the ‘essence’ of tiger? Can you think of examples in which the term ‘tiger’ is used to imply the essence of tiger to humans or human phenomena? Include analogies, terms, ‘essence’ in quadrant D.

4. having completed 1-3, is there any modification you would like to make to the ‘definition’ in quadrant A to improve it as a propositional definition? If so, add it.
Activity 2  Developing a ‘Mu’ Dictionary definition of ‘learning’.

Part 1
What do we mean by ‘learning’?

A template for capturing a ‘Mu’ Dictionary definition for learning is provided on the next page. Use it to capture your entries for each of the following.

A: propositional definition

Complete the sentence:  

Learning is . . .

B: specific examples

Examples of learning are . . .

C: felt meaning, personal story

Share some stories of your own learning, perhaps learning in different ways.

D: analogies, metaphors

What is learning like? What is an image or an analogy for learning?

Part 2
Take a look at the ‘Mu’ definition of ‘learning’ on p5. It’s a first attempt. Can you improve on it?

Part 3
Reflection on the process
Positives?

Negatives?

Interesting?
A: Defines, proposes, clarifies...  

B: Names, gives example, shows how...  

C: Felt meaning, value, expresses as personal story...  

D: Abstracts essence, concept, expresses as image analogy...
# Definition

Learning involves processes which lead to change in the individual's capacity to perceive differently, adapt, perform, create/re-create, express.

Learning may involve gaining/developing factual knowledge, understanding, insight, skills, attributes, values, attitudes.

# Analogy, Essence

Learning is like:

- Journey
- Growth
- Construction-reconstruction; creation-recreation
- Transformation
- Enlightenment
- Empowerment
- Enrichment

Learning is to personal growth as nourishment is to physical growth.

# Example, Practical Implications

- Conditioned learning – stimulus - reward
- Associative learning – connecting distinct ideas
- ‘Surface’ learning - knows facts or information without meaning or understanding
- ‘Deep’ learning – learning with understanding and meaning
- Distance learning – learning at a distance from where learning experiences are designed
- Experiential learning – learning through experience
- Action learning – learning thorough doing

Learning & teaching strategies need to be adapted to suit the desired learning outcomes.

# Value, Personal Meaning

In my experience...

Learning is stimulated by range of motivating forces – fear, wonder, curiosity, desire, concerns.

Can involve many different emotions – frustration, desperation, excitement, enjoyment, sense of achievement.

Learning experiences that have a high emotional quality to them have a strong impact on your inner world.
Activity: Think about how you might use this activity with your students?

1. Develop your own Mu definition of a key concept you are developing with your students.
2. Have your students develop their own Mu definition of the concept.

A template for developing a Mu definition is provided on p 7.

TERM: ______________________

A: propositional definition

*Complete the sentence:* Learning is . . .

B: specific examples

*Examples of learning are . . .*

C: felt meaning, personal story

*Share some stories of your own learning, perhaps learning in different ways.*

D: analogies, metaphors

*What is learning like? What is an image or an analogy for learning?*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>ANALOGY, ESSENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Defines, proposes, clarifies . . .</td>
<td>D: Abstracts essence, concept, expresses as image analogy</td>
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<td>EXAMPLES, FACTS, PROCEDURES</td>
<td>VALUE, PERSONAL MEANING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Names, gives example, shows how . . .</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exploring Constructivism & Engagement

Develop a Mu definition of **constructivism**. Use the template provided to capture your reflections.

**A: propositional definition**

*Complete the sentence: Constructivism is . . .*

**B: specific examples**

*Examples of constructivist strategies are . . .*

**C: felt meaning, personal story**

*Share some stories of your own learning experiences when you considered that you constructed your own meaning.*

**D: analogies, metaphors**

*What is the essence of ‘constructivism’? How is a ‘constructivist’ approach the same as or different from an ‘instructivist’ approach?*

Do a web search on ‘Constructivism’ and compare your Mu definition with what you find.

Refine your Mu definition as a result of your research.
**DEFINITION**

Constructivism is.....

**ANALOGY, ESSENCE**

What is the essence of ‘constructivism’?

**TERM**

CONSTRUCTIVISM

A: Defines, proposes, clarifies.

D: Abstracts essence, concept, expresses as image analogy

**EXAMPLE, PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

What are some examples of constructivist teaching strategies?

B: Names, gives example, shows how.

**VALUE, PERSONAL MEANING**

What are some of your stories about constructivist learning?

C: Felt meaning, value, expresses as personal story.
**DEFINITION**

- Learning theory based on perception that all new knowledge is constructed by the individual and how that knowledge is constructed is dependent on past experiences or schema.
- Making personal sense of new experiences.
- Building on prior learning.
- How is knowledge/meaning constructed and what informs it?
- A learning theory.
- A belief about teaching practices.
- A belief about how people learn.
- Constructing meaning from your experiences and building on it. (Learning Memory)

**Sample processes to use with your group for discussion starters:**

1. Individually circle those descriptors you agree with/are common in your classroom/you are unclear about/would like to share examples of ……
2. Give examples of what it looks like/sounds like/feels like in your experience/in your classroom/in your observation of others/in life …..
3. Make a ‘Mu’ definition for other theories of learning – eg Behaviourism and contrast the elements with this chart – how do they differ/align?

**TERM**

**CONSTRUCTIVISM**

Julia Atkin & Learning to Learn, DECS 2005

**ANALOGY, ESSENCE**

- Multiple ways of doing and knowing.
- Building on past experiences.
- The journey is the end point.
- Reflective – spiral.
- Construction site metaphor eg. How different people conceptualise.
- Multimodal.
- Different ways of knowing.
- Construction – Reconstruction; scaffolding and building upon.
- Creating meaning and understanding of their learning.
- Free form building.

**VALUE, PERSONAL MEANING**

- Teachers’ view of the world is connected to teacher’s values and therefore the way they behave.
- Passion for learning.
- Disposition.
- Making personal the new stuff.
- Reflective on past experiences.
- What do I think now?
- Regenerating / Rejuvenating.
- Classroom is a social construct / relationships between learners if important.
- Knowledge is constructed.
- Acknowledging others’ values.
- Willingness of teacher to take risks and face challenges (of students, curriculum…..).
- Developing and connecting learning patterns.
- Diversity – non threatening.
- Surprise.
- Empathy.
- Relating to teachers’ own experiences and feelings.

**EXAMPLE, PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

- The link between what is known now and what is new – how it’s joined to existing meaning.
- What does it look like across the whole classroom.
- Implications for/in school environments.
- Use a range of learning/pedagogy activities in their teaching.
- Teachers are continually constructing their own knowledge (reconstructing and deconstructing) their practices.
- Correlation with 21st Century technology.
- Prior knowledge and brainstorming – practices which give you an insight into their lives.
- Student initiated curriculum.
- Collaborative work – student – teacher / student – student.
- Questioning.
- Skill focus – not just content.

**A: Defines, proposes, clarifies**

**B: Names, gives example, shows how . . .**

**C: Felt meaning, value, expresses as personal story. .**
Develop a Mu definition of engagement for learning. Use the template provided to capture your reflections.

**A: propositional definition**

*Complete the sentence:* Engagement for learning involves . . .

**B: specific examples**

*Examples of engagements are . . .*

*Strategies for engagement are . . .*

**C: felt meaning, personal story**

*Share some stories of your own learning experiences when you considered that you were highly engaged. What did engagement look like, feel like?*

**D: analogies, metaphors**

*What is the essence of ‘engagement’ for learning?*

Read the completed template provided that came from another group exploring engagement.

Read the paper on Definitions of engagement provided in the Readings for this section. Refine your own Mu definition as you see fit.
**DEFINITION**

Engagement for learning ....

**ANALOGY, ESSENCE**

Engagement for learning is like......

**VALUE, PERSONAL MEANING**

Reflect on some times when you were highly engaged in/for learning. What did it feel like – physically, emotionally, mentally?

Reflect on some times when your students were highly engaged in learning. What were the signs for you that they were highly engaged?

**EXAMPLE, PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

What are some examples of engagement for learning?

**TERM**

ENGAGEMENT

A: Defines, proposes, clarifies. . .

B: Names, gives example, shows how . . .

C: Felt meaning, value, expresses as personal story. . .

D: Abstracts essence, concept, expresses as image analogy
**DEFINITION**

- Making personal meaning – relevance, some form of involvement and understanding of where it might go
- Connection to
- Consumed (??) by
- Immersed in
- Actively involved with
- Participant may not necessarily have an understanding of where it might lead
- Indicator of engagement – “loss of time” (can I continue this at recess time?)
- Different levels of
  - Focus on activity
  - Reconnection - Connection
  - Interaction - Choices
  - Interaction with an experience
- Interest
- An emotional connection to a task or activity – is an active process

**ANALOGY, ESSENCE**

- Fun
- Level of engagement
- Multi sensory experience
- Learner connected to learning, drive, excitement, fear etc.
- Seeking meaning, seeking connection.
- Engagement happens when there is something to connect to – a link, cerebral interactions.
- Can engage in anything if it has personal meaning to you!
- Powerful engagement – satisfaction, aim to succeed, seek novelty, newness, seek possibilities, construction of new knowledge, choice.
- Connection / Hooked in
- Engagement is to learning as a “ring” is to marriage.

**EXAMPLE, PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

- Does engagement have to be - conscious
  - passionate?
- What is the valued learning? Not necessarily what the teacher is teaching
- You can be engaged but if there isn’t something to lead you on it may not lead to change
- Levels of engagement – you slip in and out; It is not consistent- peaks/troughs
- You don’t hear “What do I do now? I’ve finished?” time is used differently
- Learner engagement with a task/process or learner engagement with community (relationships)
- Interaction - choices
- Co-Construction
- Does structure lead to engagement?
- Deviation from process does not necessarily mean disengagement
- Feedback → Input: OUTPUT
- Busy / engaged
- Student initiated
- Motivating factor
- Agreement re focus
- Need understanding of how you learn
- Effort, persistence

**TERM**

**ENGAGEMENT**

**VALUE, PERSONAL MEANING**

- Learner powerfully involved - emotional connection
- Bringing out what’s within – personal involvement
- Being present, but not necessarily having a presence
- Can you have learner engagement without teacher engagement?
- Level of engagement depends on the state that you’re in
- Engagement – ownership
- Non-engagement – are we looking for compliance? Or considering why?
- Choices
- Interpretations vary with observer, participants
- Whose understanding of engagement is it?
- Interpreting the signals
- Must be meaningful/relevant or engagement doesn’t work
- Values – drive what we do - hidden values?
- Personal needs
- Embracing – internal/exciting/scary
- An engaged learner is an interested learner
- Supported challenge → ‘safe’ level of risk
- NOT BORING! – FUN (sometimes) at least makes the time fly

**C: Felt meaning, value, expresses as personal story. . .**
KNOWING ABOUT – PROPOSITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

How can I define this?
How can I describe it?
How can I explain this to someone?
Is there a Rule?
Formulae?

UNDERSTANDING – CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

How can I express this as an image?
What’s an analogy for it?
Make a model
Illustration

Examples
Labels
Facts
Methods
Instructions
Skills

KNOWING EXAMPLES, KNOWING HOW – FACTUAL, PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE

Stories
Poems
Attitudes, feelings
Can I express this musically
What am I going to do with what I know and can do?

SO WHAT? WHAT’S THIS GOT TO DO WITH ME & MY LIFE?
PERSONAL STORY KNOWLEDGE

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KNOWING ABOUT – PROPOSITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

UNDERSTANDING – CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

KNOWING EXAMPLES, KNOWING HOW – FACTUAL, PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE

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