

Enquiry based Learning - Question-based Learning

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There are many types of learning, but let us consider the concept and the practice of enquiry, or question based learning'. This approach may open up situations for exploration in non-linear ways. Often, in life, situations are not clear-cut, however through question based learning, problems may be identified and resolved, and new questions may be formed in the process.

Unlike solution-led, problem-based learning that seeks finite answers and certainty, question based learning accepts uncertainty and indeterminacy, thereby empowering the inquirer. Also, problem-based learning has a fundamental flaw – it assumes that the world is a problematic that needs to be solved. It is only concerned with identified problems – fix them and the problem has gone. The narrow focus required for this approach deals with problems in isolation, as a 'closed system' – with neither context nor relationships

However, question based learning starts with 'whole systems' seeing and thinking to promote wider, deeper learning, rather than solutions. This is potentially an ecological approach to learning, generated by context, relationships and complexity. It includes analytical methods of understanding the world, as well as means of synthesizing knowledge. The process is creative and iterative, requiring the inquirer to first act (ask a question), then reflect on the effect of the action (the answer), and then make a further response (another question).

The process of question based learning, is also epistemic, in that it integrates its own means of critical evaluation, questioning its own method of generating knowledge. Above all, question based learning promotes questions that act as creative feedback loops of expansive knowledge. Knowledge, then becomes an 'open system' that is created from the relationship of many parts, and the parts may be shared by multiple disciplines; thus knowledge itself can be considered plastic and dynamic, or ecological.

This is the transcript for 'Introduction to ESD: Enquiry Based Learning', written by Dr. David Haley and produced by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2014. This film is part of a series of short resources introducing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). They are designed to give academic and teaching staff an introduction to some of the key issues and ideas around ESD and what this means for teaching and the curriculum.