

Are you the GPS?

Leonie Anstey

We can often observe students exclaiming “we have never seen this before”. This is often followed by a teacher’s internal (and sometimes external) voice thinking “what did they do last year in maths?” The reality is that often students have been involved in *activities* related to this concept over a number of years.

This made me consider “what’s that about”? Observation of classrooms reveals that teachers are working incredibly hard, and that students do what they are enabled to do. We also know that teachers and students are doing the very best that they can.

This made me consider a personal situation that I have recently found myself in. I am currently working on a project involving visiting schools throughout the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales. As a Victorian, I had very limited knowledge of the area. For the first two months, I had a colleague take me to each school, often pointing out landmarks and connections. These all made complete sense to me, and I thought to myself, “Yep, I know where these places are.” Fast forward another month and I am “travelling solo” in my car with a GPS. I plugged in the school address, and checked the general directions and thought YEP, got it. I started the journey, turned the corner and all was quiet! I glanced at the screen and blank! Followed by the message, manufactures error, contact the supplier. So, I did the only thing that I could do; I pulled over. My brain was racing, I didn’t know the address of the school or the contact details. I thought to myself “good one, oh man, I have no idea what to do”. I paused and reset the phone and waited. In the back of my mind, my only over option was to call my colleague who was travelling with me. Without my scaffolds, my colleague (teacher) or the GPS (instructor) I did not have any other skills to solve this problem for myself. Luckily for me, the GPS reset and I was on my way.

Fast forward another 10 weeks, I was staying in Canberra and was travelling to Queanbeyan (15 kms away). I thought to myself “I think I can get there without the GPS”. So I gave it a go, when I arrived at the school (without a U-turn) I celebrated with a fist-pump and walked just a bit taller into the school.

As I was visiting classrooms and teachers that day I was thinking about who are we the GPS for and do they need it? How do we build a culture to enable students to be the navigator of their own learning?

It’s important to remember that we need supports/scaffold in the early stages of the learning process. There was no way that I could have navigated my way to schools the first time around or even the second. What we need to consider is when do we enable students to navigate their own direction and have enable their “eureka” moments? I definitely would not have felt the same success if I always used the GPS.