



[Podcast Review]: The 3QTL Podcast by Derritt Mason

ABSTRACT

Review of the 3QTL Podcast, by executive producer Dr. Derritt Mason

KEYWORDS

review, podcast, higher education

The Three Questions about Teaching and Learning (3QTL) podcast is led by executive producer and Host Dr. Derritt Mason, the acting director of the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary, and associate professor of English. The podcast aims to inspire creativity and innovation in higher education by conducting semi-structured discussions with a different guest each episode. While the podcast focuses primarily on higher education, the discussion format invites educators, staff, students, and administrators within and beyond higher education, and across disciplines, to connect with the conversations that unfold.

The high quality of production adds to the inviting nature of the podcast, with short episodes that are interspersed with engaging sound effects and musical breaks to cue topic changes. Each episode begins with a well-prepared scripted introduction giving context about the speaker and episode theme, and then the host and guests move into a conversational tone, allowing the listener to feel as if they are sitting with trusted colleagues having an easy conversation over coffee. Overall, the audio quality is clear and consistent for the host, offering an easy and enjoyable listen. At times, guest audio quality varied, likely due to interviews/conversations happening virtually. While the audio quality did not detract from these episodes, future seasons may wish to consider production support for guests so that audio levels and quality are consistent between host and guests throughout all episodes.

Each season centers around three specific questions that guide episode discussions with guests. In season one, which includes ten episodes, the questions surround the impacts of COVID-19 on teaching and learning:

1. How did COVID prompt shifts in our fundamental values?
2. What most supported and challenged our teaching and learning practice during COVID?
3. How might we describe our most successful pandemic-era classroom innovations?

Dr. Derritt Mason's background in SoTL and interest in teaching and learning means that he is an informed and thoughtful host who is well poised to engage in critical reflection with guests on their teaching and learning experiences. Season one of 3QTL invited guests that ranged from disciplinary experts from Dr. Derritt Mason's institutional context of the University of Calgary to well-known pedagogical scholars and authors beyond a Canadian context. There is a wonderful diversity of views represented across the episodes in this first season, but it would be great to see representation from scholars outside the North American setting in the future.

Each episode offered a new perspective from a guest around the season's three questions. The three-question format is a unique design choice that has benefits and drawbacks. The episodes are sequential and create a season arc, allowing listeners to skip around to different episodes within the season and always know how the discussion will be framed. The format also allows for comparisons to be made across episodes with ease, and for overarching season themes to emerge. For example, many guests responded to the question about how COVID prompted shifts in their fundamental values by discussing how their values were deepened or emphasized rather than changed or shifted.

Asking the same three questions each episode might be expected to result in repetition from episode to episode, but that did not seem to happen during the season. This is likely due to the diverse choice of guests who bring unique ideas and experiences to the podcast, even while perhaps contributing to overall themes or similarities across the season. Naturally, even though each podcast is framed around the same three questions, discussion does wander from time to time away from these questions, which is another reason that the topics of each episode end up being quite different from episode to episode. It would be interesting to hear more about the process they took to formulate the questions that guided the season. Perhaps an episode about this process each season would be informative. This could include a brief literature review, or some other demonstration of the existing knowledge gap that drove the selection of questions. In future seasons, the audience could even be involved in the process of formulating the questions.

While not a traditional artifact of SoTL inquiry, the podcast as a whole offers discussions grounded in evidence and references a range of relevant and notable scholarship. However, given the nature of these discussions, their reference to other scholarly work is not the explicit focus, and does not need to be; rather the scholarly value comes from the discussions themselves, acting as the method or mode of SoTL.

The podcast offers additional materials for the listeners. The accompanying website is easy to navigate, and the use of images and colourful design draws attention to key supplementary information such as the season's theme and questions. The in-depth episode descriptions, transcripts, and notes including scholarly references relevant to each episode, as well as a biography and information about the guest for that episode adds scholarly depth to the podcast and allows the listener to further explore topics of interest.

To emphasize the podcast's contribution to the SoTL community, the creators could incorporate a written summary or a season finale episode that summarizes the season's themes. For example, many of season one's guests responded to the question about how COVID prompted shifts in their fundamental values towards teaching. The creators could have then provided a focused look into how one can use a critical lens on their teaching values, or the importance of self-reflection as an educator. Looking at the season as a whole might serve to solidify the SoTL-ness of the podcast, adding in another opportunity to connect more explicitly with existing SoTL work when it does not fit as seamlessly into the dynamic discussions that make up a normal podcast episode.

Overall, this is an inspiring and well produced podcast and a great contribution to the teaching and learning landscape. We can't wait to see what questions will prompt guests in season two, and we would love a season specifically exploring the topic of SoTL!

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Kate Thompson is an educational developer supporting the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) at The Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) at Dalhousie University. She received her PhD in experimental cognitive psychology in 2015 and has been at the CLT since 2020.

Dr. Jill McSweeney is an assistant director at the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, and an assistant professor of wellness in the Jo Watts Williams School of Education at Elon University.

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