

Dissolving the myth, untapping the potential: an approach to engagement and literacy at Clarkson CHS

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Introduction

Travel 35 km down the freeway, north of Perth and you will find Clarkson Community High School, a school that would appear at face value, just like any other public school – only it's not. That's because it has a 'vibe' and that ambiance is *intentionally inviting*. The school's collective and driving vision of *Invitational Education* has been pivotal in harnessing engagement leading to achievement and progress in literacy. In practice, *Invitational Education* (Purkey, Novak, 1992) at Clarkson CHS takes the form of a 'starfish' model consisting of five arms; *People, Places, Programs, Policies and Practices*. Each arm serves its purpose equally, to drive what is the thriving learning community of Clarkson CHS.

People: widening horizons and dissolving the myth

Clarkson Community High School is a north metropolitan school in Perth with an Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA) of 962 (ACARA, 2016), indicating a low socio-economic status. Despite this, the school continues to defy probabilities that

this has an effect on student achievement in literacy. NAPLAN results for 2016 indicate that the Year 9 students have performed above expectations in a number of key areas (see Table 1) and this 'dissolves the myth' that disadvantaged students' achievement is encumbering and indicative of a low-socio economic status.

Since recently reading the text *Visible Learning for Literacy* by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey and John Hattie, a few points re-sounded in terms of my moral purpose as an educator and what a group of dynamic, data-driven invitational leaders are focused on at Clarkson Community High School in 2017, from a literacy point of view:

- 1 *Literacy is among the major antidotes for poverty.*
 - 2 *Literate people have more choices in their work and personal lives, leading to greater freedom.*
 - 3 *Literacy soon becomes the currency for other learning.*
- (Fisher, Frey, Hattie 2016)

Fisher, Frey and Hattie's points resonate with the school's vision that success and attainment, in the area of literacy, is

	Reading	Persuasive Writing	Spelling	Grammar and Punctuation
2011	532	490	537	522
2012	534	494	537	525
2013	536	514	555	523
2014	541	525	546	525
2015	555 (-0.5%)	511 (-3.7%)	563 (-0.03%)	542 (+0.17%)
2016	569 (+2.54%)	545 (+3.98%)	584 (+7.35%)	562 (+3.54%)

Table 1: 2016 Year 9 NAPLAN literacy results over time for Clarkson Community High School

Another priority at a classroom level is the focus on making learning visible for students. We do this by proposing **clear learning intentions** and success criteria so when the students enter the classroom, three questions will be proposed and students will be able to engage with the answers to these questions

crucial for our students' futures to 'widen their horizons', and that there are effective and researched ways, such as those of *Invitational Education Theory* (Purkey and Novak 1992) and *Visible Learning for Literacy* (Fisher, Frey, Hattie 2016) to ensure students are not disadvantaged when it comes to literacy, despite a low socio-economic status.

Practices: measurement of teacher impact and student improvement

As an educator and leader it has become evident that using curriculum documentation and data diagnostically assists with curriculum planning and assessment as well as allowing educators to implement and improve programs to cater for individual students' needs.

"...Formative assessment is a chief way for teachers to make instructional decisions about what will occur next" (Fisher, Frey, Hattie, 2016).

At Clarkson CHS, the students generally transition from primary school with low literacy skills, which was evident in the Year 7 2013 NAPLAN data. With that in mind, it was important to seek out strategies we knew would work based on research and to put these in place to support student progress. *Visible Learning for Literacy* (Fisher, Frey, Hattie 2016) aligns perfectly with this vision as it outlines what is effective, based on overall effect sizes, against what we know doesn't work.

In 2017 we will continue to implement and encourage ourselves to do many of these effective practices in our own classrooms at a grassroots level. One strategy we have implemented is to introduce data reviews and analysis every five weeks to ensure an internally sufficient cohort rank is evident and that it is comparable with statewide standards. This involves teachers inputting their class data into Reporting to Parents (WA government school system for recording results) and senior leaders analysing this data in the fifth week for comparability. In the lead up to this, teaching staff participate in moderation with other faculty members and cross-mark samples of work. They then provide work samples in portfolios at grade cutoffs to ensure these are consistent across the cohort and that the rank is internally accurate.

Following this, the data are input into graphs and we can see the teacher's impact over a five week period, and the student progress is graphed. This is useful for the teacher's own Self-Reflection (AISTL Standards 2017) which is linked to the school's performance management policy ultimately echoing Professor John Hattie's mindset of 'Know Thy Impact' and his notion that "Passion for evaluating impact is the single most critical lever for instructional excellence", (Hattie 2012).

Classrooms: a place for untapping potential through programs

At a grassroots level is the classroom setting at Clarkson CHS; a place that is a positive, safe and supportive environment which is conducive to effective learning. The *Instructional Core* is a priority

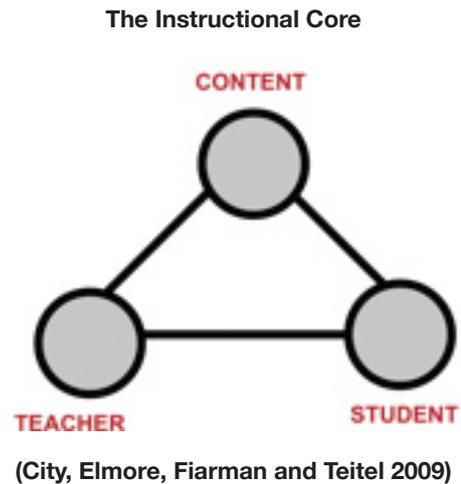


Figure 1: The Instructional Core

and by instructional core we refer to the overlapping diagram of student, teacher and content in context (see Figure 1).

The section in the middle is 'the relationship between the teacher, the student, and the content – not the qualities of any one of them by themselves – that determines the nature of instructional practice, and each corner of the instructional core has its own particular role and resources to bring to the instructional process' (Elmore, Fiarman, Teitel 2009). *Invitational Education* aligns perfectly with this as our classrooms are focused on being *intentionally inviting* leading to student engagement and that means the teacher-student relationship is the focus.

In the classroom being 'intentionally inviting' is about developing the student's self-concept which aligns closely with what Fisher, Frey and Hattie (2016) called 'self-efficacy.' Self-concept is about encouraging students to believe they are able, valuable and responsible individuals that are part of a democratic classroom and for the teacher this is about *intentionally* using language that promotes positivity and mutual respect. Purkey and Novak (1992) called the model 'ICORT' and our fundamental approach at Clarkson is to implement this in all classrooms: Intentionality, Care, Optimism, Respect and Trust.

As reflective practitioners, it involves focusing on the following when dealing with students:

Intentionality – the main focus of Invitational Education that involves deliberate decisions made about language, purpose and direction towards potential.

Care – refers to empathy and a positive regard for the students.

Optimism – is about believing that all students have untapped potential.

Respect – focuses on the positive idea of self-concept and that all students are able and valuable, and should treat others and themselves accordingly.

Trust – is about focusing on developing positive relationships with students.

Another priority at a classroom level is the focus on making learning visible for students. We do this by proposing clear learning intentions and success criteria so when the students enter the classroom, three questions will be proposed and students will be able to engage with the answers to these questions. Fisher, Frey and Hattie call this 'learning intentions with success criteria.'

- 1 What am I learning today?
- 2 Why am I learning this?

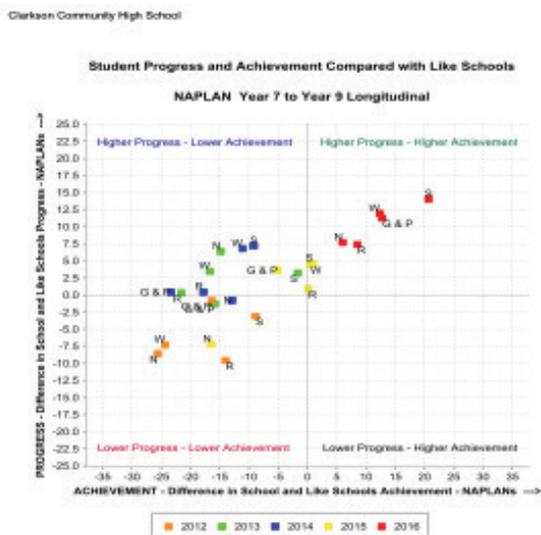


Figure 2: Student progress and achievement compared with Like Schools

3 How will I know that I learned it?

(Fisher, Frey, Hattie, 2016)

For example:

- 1 *What am I learning today?* Visual Literacy: camera angles
- 2 *Why am I learning this?* To understand and evaluate how images work in distinctive ways to present ideas and information in the text.
- 3 *How will I know that I learned it?* You will be able to explain the camera angles in a visual text and the purpose of these to influence viewers.

Policies: performance management and behaviour management

As part of the school's performance management policy, following self-reflection, teaching staff bring evidence to a planning meeting and part of that evidence is peer-to-peer classroom observations. This builds up teacher efficacy which Jerald (2007) describes as "a belief in their ability to positively impact student learning." They then plan goals with a growth coaching mindset to achieve what they want to achieve in their own classroom and professionally. 'Teachers have a responsibility to repair harm to relationships' (Fisher, Frey, Hattie, 2016).

Fisher, Frey and Hattie (2016) refer to repairing harm to relationships as *Restorative Conferencing* and this is closely related to *teacher credibility*. At Clarkson CHS a restorative approach underpins the behaviour management policy. It has been evident that restorative conferencing plays a key role. This conferencing has been effective in reducing student suspension rates because when situations do escalate they are dealt with in a restorative way.

What happened?

What were you thinking at the time?

What have you thought about since?

Who do you think has been affected by your actions?

How have they been affected?

Conclusion

What is clear from the data and theories underpinning the vision at Clarkson Community High School, is that the students



can accomplish success and achieve literacy attainment through *teacher efficacy* that ultimately leads to positive students' *self-efficacy* in the face of disadvantage, and this is dissolving the myth and untapping true potential, ultimately widening the students' horizons. After all, the "biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers" (Hattie, 2012) and if we see results from this and the "data speaks" then we "know thy impact" and that "what teachers do matters" (Hattie, 2012).

References

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About the author

Sarah A Glanvill began teaching in 2005 as part of an internship, a joint initiative run by the Education Department of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University. In 2008, she was appointed as Head of Department, which saw her role as a teacher encompass a senior leadership role. Sarah is currently Head of Learning Area – English, Humanities and Social Sciences at Clarkson Community High School, located in the north-western suburb of Clarkson in Perth, Western Australia. She believes to effectively lead a learning community, leadership needs to facilitate action and motivation among staff, which involves identifying where change can occur and presenting evidence and data to assist with that change. Sarah also believes leaders need to ensure they monitor and evaluate the provision of quality teaching and learning that puts the needs of students at the forefront of decision-making and provides students with the opportunity to exercise choice and develop skills in areas of interest.