

# An afternoon of insight and sharing of teaching and learning strategies

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**G**uy Claxton in his book *What's the point of school?* talks about powerful learners that are curious and who are drawn to learning. These learners, Claxton (08:123) argues, "like to engage with things that are new and puzzling and they like to wonder about things: how they came to be; how they work. They are open minded, looking for new interest and perspectives. They like to get below the surface of things, to go deeper in their understanding".

It was in this spirit that recently the College engaged in afternoons of sharing of strategies that were effective for senior teachers in the classroom. In the spirit of the work of John Hattie and the Harvard Ground Zero project we wanted to make a difference to our students using the expertise within our College community: our teachers.

And so the booklet *An afternoon of insight and sharing of teaching and learning strategies* was born. The extracts below are designed to give you a feel for the tenor and ambition of the 57-page booklet, which is a resource for teachers (if you would like a copy of the booklet please email the address at the end of the article).

## The overview

"The activities in this booklet have been designed to promote and foster effective teaching through the power of collegial and collaborative conversation with the student as the central focus. Importantly these afternoons were an opportunity to reclaim the time to think in an often time poor environment.

There were three sessions each beginning at 2.30 pm (period 6) and concluding around 4.00 pm with finger food and refreshments provided. The 31 senior teachers who participated in the workshop brought with them a variety of teaching experiences from a variety of disciplines. The framework of *An afternoon of insight and sharing teaching and learning strategies* was based on the work of Hattie and the Harvard Ground Zero project."

## The aim

"Using the work of Hattie our aim was to explore the fundamental tenets about teaching that lead



to a positive impact on student learning. Hattie proposed three principles:

- i The need to make relative statements about what impacts on student work;
- ii Estimates of magnitude as well as statistical significance. It is not good enough to say that this works because lots of people use it but that this works because of the magnitude of impact; and
- iii The need to be building a model based on these relative magnitudes of effects.

Therefore, teacher effect sizes have framed the responses from teachers used in the various activities".

## The hope

"It is hoped that this booklet will continue to inspire and develop teachers in improving their practice by teachers:

- i Reflecting on and using the suggestions of colleagues in this booklet marked by the light bulb image either at Whole School, in Learning Teams, Faculty or at on an individual level;
- ii Facilitating ongoing professional learning in all aspects of their work;
- iii Critically reflecting on their practice and achievements; and
- iv Contributing to the professional learning of their colleagues".

## The focus: who are we here for?

"The fundamental thing in highly successful schools at all levels is they have a central focus on every student as a learner and as a person".

Steve Dinham: *Outstanding teachers fight for recognition* SMH June 21, 2010

## The power of conversation

"Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has. One of the things we need to learn is that very great change starts from very small conversations, held among people who care. What are the things you really have deep, abiding concern for? What is it you really have some passion for? If you go into that question for yourself, you will find the energy to go forward."

Margaret Wheatley:

*Turning to one another*

## The research

"A key message from Hattie is: *"the more the student becomes the teacher and the more the teacher becomes the learner"* the more successful the achievement outcomes. In regards to the school, his research suggests that the *most powerful effects relate to features within the school, such as the climate of the classroom, peer influences and the lack of disruptive students in the classroom*. Hattie argues that the most critical aspect contributed by the teacher is the quality of their teaching as perceived by the students.

Overall, Hattie argues that *teachers need to seek feedback on their practice from both students and colleagues. They also need to help students become their own teachers*. Through more visible teaching and learning, there is a greater likelihood of students reaching higher levels of achievement".

The following activities were based on the Harvard Project Zero conducted over three workshops. The responses of teachers have not been modified to maintain the integrity of the process. The activities such as Brainstorming A-Z; Complete the statement; Compass activity; See think and wonder; and Headline routine topic, can be used as teaching and learning strategies in themselves.

(Extract taken from *Visible learning: what's good for the goose?* The Research Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Further information about the Research Branch is available at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/default.htm>).

## How to use the booklet

(extracts taken from pp 15–16)

### a What do we mean by Feedback?

*“A powerful moderator that enhances achievement is feedback. Hattie sees feedback as not only as something teachers provided to students but that feedback was most powerful when it is from the student to the teacher. When teachers seek, or at least are open to, feedback from students as to what students know, what they understand, where they make errors, when they have misconceptions, when they are*

*not engaged – then teaching and learning can be synchronised and powerful. Feedback to teachers helps make learning visible”.*

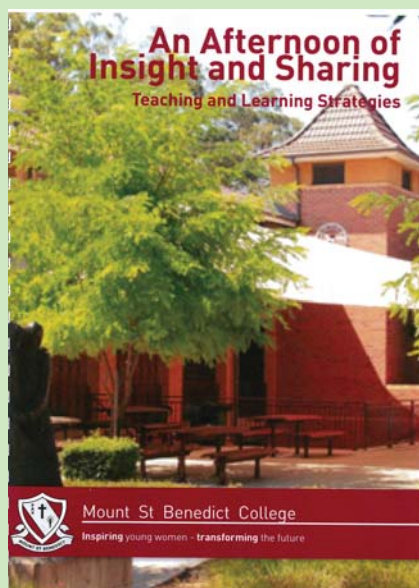
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### b Teacher responses through the workshop activities

**Activity:** Complete the statements –

*The most important thing to do when giving feedback to students is...*

- 1 *Be specific. Address the particular error/ weakness with a positive/supportive suggestion.*
  - 2 *Ask the girls to read out the sample answers we can all learn from, through sharing.*
  - 3 *Give positives and points for development.*
  - 4 *Always give an exemplar so students know what to work towards.*
  - 5 *Incorporate peer evaluation.*  
*When writing school reports one thing which must be included is...*
- 1 *A “positive”, “way to make progress is”, sort of comment.*



## THE PROGRAM

### 1 Introduction and welcome

### 2 Background and context: 5 minutes

### 3 Icebreaker 1

Characteristics of Gen Y – Group Activity: 10 minutes

- Three minutes to brainstorm a characteristic of Gen Y
- Competition to list these on alphabet scaffold A to Z list a characteristic for each letter of alphabet. Prize for group who can complete all e.g. A = assertive B = bombastic to Z = zealous (This is then starting with the student).
- Pass on activity along twice and now identify three Gen Y characteristics that describe the students in your class.
- Now pass along again twice and now discuss why the previous group chose those particular characteristics?
- Discussion question: “How can knowing this help you in your learning space?”
- Does this activity have: room for mistakes; collaboration; competition; build complexity; give expert advice; and is structured yet open ended?

### 4 Icebreaker 2

*Complete the statements –*

Whole group: 10 minutes

- Each person picks a card and answers e.g. Students learn best in my class when...
- People are then invited to read the question out and their responses. (All responses collected).

### 5 Choice activity

1–4 – Individual: 15 minutes

*Activity choice 1 Compass points activity*

“You have an HSC Year 12 group with a very wide ability spread”

- E = What excites you about this group?
- W = What is worrisome about this group?
- N = What do you need to know to support them fully?
- S = What stance do you have to move forward with the group?

*Activity choice 2 See; think; wonder; draw*

“Think about a senior class of students you have or have had or may be likely to have”

- What do you see?
- What do you think about that?
- What does it make you wonder?
- *I wonder how to...*
- Draw an image that represents catering for this group.

*Activity choice 3 Headline routine topic*

“Catering for the learning needs of the most able in your class”

- If you were to write headline for the topic that captures the most important issues what would the headline be?
- If the students were to create a headline on “what does the best teacher do to make me love learning and do my best”
- What would the headline be?

*Activity choice 4 Question starts*

Brainstorm a list of as many questions as you can about the topic quality teaching and learning for the 21st century.

Use these as a starting place

- Why?
  - What are the reasons?
  - What if?
  - What is the purpose of?
  - How would it be different if?
  - Suppose that
  - What if we knew...?
  - What would change if
- (All responses collected)

### 6 Philosophy of teaching activity opposite point of view – Pairs: 10 minutes

- This is a competition to come up with as many valid points that refute the statement that the pair randomly selects.
- Some are read out, time allowing (All responses collected).

### 7 Icing activity – Bloom’s taxonomy or building house analogy: 15 minutes

- Three groups – Each group does a different section.
- Time allowing groups share at end.
- Using the following verbs as a guide list as many strategies a teacher can use to facilitate deep learning in your mixed ability learning space (All responses collected).

### 8 Good Samaritan Teaching and Learning Framework and the lived practices of teachers: 45 minutes

- Three groups – Each group does one of the five frameworks for 15 minutes.
- Then rotate for five minutes on the other four frameworks adding to the previous groups on butcher paper framework.
- The heading on the butcher paper would be – “In my learning space this would like...” (All responses collected).

### 9 Where to from here? – Whole group: 5 minutes

Include invitation for teachers to email any resource that has worked well for them.

- 2 Feedback and examples on how students can improve.
- 3 By being quite specific, it gives the student something they can focus on.

A good way to educate parents in their daughter's learning is...

- 1 Email parents on specific things happening in the learning space.
- 2 Asking parents for feedback on assessment tasks.
- 3 Involving parents in activities at home that give them an insight into their daughter's learning e.g. survey.
- 4 Encourage them to be a resource and be positive about any level of achievement.

**Activity:** To give a counter argument to the following statement –

*Giving feedback to students is spoon feeding and only makes them complacent...*

- 1 Clarification when reviewing exams is crucial to student understanding.
- 2 All perspectives are valuable and these should be shared e.g. sample essays.
- 3 Summary tables are crucial within a differentiated learning space.

**c From reflection to action**

- 1 Read the suggestions made by colleagues above.

- 2 Find ONE suggestion you could implement in your teaching in the next few weeks.
- 3 Once you have completed the activity obtain feedback from students and share your findings with colleagues.

*The suggestion that I will implement in my teaching is...*

**Example Peer evaluation**

In my next informal assessment task for Year 9 I will develop a rubric template which will serve as feedback for each student.

## Final reflections

There was much strength in this process. It had a multiplier effect on teaching and learning in the College. As mentioned earlier the suggested teaching and learning strategies came from teachers for teachers, grounded in solid research.

The activities themselves which were modelled by the facilitators (Mrs Elizabeth Dirckze, Coordinator of Teaching and Learning and John Muskovits) on the afternoons, as well as the teacher suggestions, served as a springboard for better learning in the classroom. Creating communities that speak a common language of learning was another product of this rich and relevant

process. Perhaps it is incidental or perhaps it is strategic but last year in the HSC the College received arguably its best ever results (in terms of numbers): 69th best performing school in NSW; 9th best performing Catholic College in the State; and estimated 35% achieved an ATAR of 90 or over.

However you measure success both Guy Claxton and John Hattie are right when they say that we want teachers (and by extension students) to be powerful learners who are curious and are drawn to learning. In this way perhaps teachers will stop talking (or at least talk less) so that deep learning can take place in their classrooms. **ET**

*Copies of An afternoon of insight and sharing of teaching and learning strategies are available from John Miskovits email: [jmuskovits@msben.nsw.edu.au](mailto:jmuskovits@msben.nsw.edu.au)*



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## "I love teaching but... I'd love it more if I could..."

- **focus** more on teaching students
- **control** how and who I teach
- **feel** like I belong
- **be** part of something successful

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