

Mindframes for teachers

Midlothian Council Educational Psychology Service



Visible learning for teachers

The work of John Hattie (2009; 2012; 2014) is the largest analysis of evidenced-based research into what happens in schools to improve learning. It has led to worldwide discussion about the nature of learning and teaching, challenging traditional assumptions and provoking reflection and debate amongst practitioners.

Visible learning is the term that Hattie coined to describe the most effective practice found in his meta-analyses. It refers to the importance of keeping the process of learning transparent to both students and teachers. And central to all aspects of visible learning is the quality of the teaching that

takes place in our classrooms. This places huge responsibility on teachers to be aware of their impact on their students' learning.

Changing how students learn can seem a daunting task. Yet, the literature indicates that the biggest impact on learning is made by how we, as educators *think* about learning; our beliefs about the nature of learning and our roles in learning affect what we do in our daily practice. Hattie has identified a number of core beliefs that underpin the actions and decisions of highly effective teachers. He has developed these into 8 "mindframes" which, when adopted by teachers, can lead to effective learning for all students.

Visible Learning Series

Spotlight 4

September 2014

"[Visible Learning] is a belief that we are evaluators, change agents, adaptive learning experts, seekers of feedback about our impact, engaged in dialogue and challenge... that we see opportunity in error and are keen to spread the message about power, fun, and impact that we have on learning"

Hattie (2012, p.159)

Key Questions for Effective Teachers

- How do I know this is working?
- How can I compare "this" with that?
- What is the merit and worth of this influence on learning?
- What is the magnitude of this effect?
- What evidence would convince me I was wrong in using these methods and resources?
- Do I share a common conception of progress with other teachers?
- Where is the evidence that shows that this is superior to other programmes?



Hattie (2012)

Mindframe 1: *I believe that my fundamental task is to evaluate the effect of my teaching on students' learning and achievement.*

There are a range of variables that can affect learning including the curriculum, the materials and resources used, the previous learning experiences of the students and the efforts students put in to their work. Teachers often attribute students' academic success or failure to these factors. However, while it is true that they have some impact, all are beyond the control of the teacher. The only thing a teacher can control is what he or she does every day in front of the class – and it is this which Hattie argues has the greatest impact on learning. If we focus on the impact we are having, the impact of the other factors increases as a result.

Knowing their impact requires a teacher to have high expectations of their learners, seeing ability as something that is changeable, not fixed (refer to Learning to Learn Series Spotlight 3). This in turn places responsibility on the teacher to be flexible and creative in order to meet the needs of all pupils and develop their ability. This requires considerable reflective thought and self-questioning on the part of the teacher.

So, how can we find out if we are having an impact on our students? Hattie has a simple answer: feedback (see Spotlight 3). Teachers need feedback on where they are

going, where they currently are and what their next step should be. This comes from listening carefully to students, the errors they make, the questions they ask and the successes they have and responding appropriately. We need to evaluate not only what we are doing and what our students are doing, but also the effect of what we do on what the students do AND the effect of what the students do on what we then do! Or, as Hattie puts it, we need to see learning through the eyes of our students.



Mindframe 2: *I believe that success and failure in student learning is about what I did or did not do ... I am a change agent*

The traditional view of the teacher is as a "guide on the side" who sets up the learning activities and allows the children to get on with the learning. While this works for some students in some learning contexts, for most learners in most tasks, it will never be enough; at some point, we all need clear direction. Hattie believes that teachers should therefore see themselves as a change agent, rather than a facilitator of learning.

clear, meaningful feedback about where the learner is in relation to the learning intentions and success criteria and the next steps they need to take. It requires knowledge of the prior experiences of the learners and what they are bringing to the learning task. Above all, it requires the teacher to believe that ability is changeable and learning is about challenge.

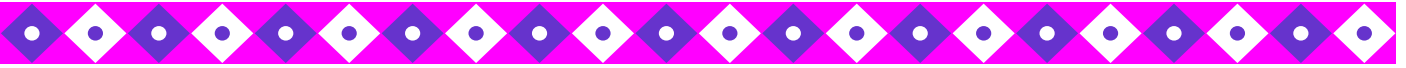
For teachers to promote effective change in their pupils' learning, they must provide direct instruction and

Think Positive!

A teacher's beliefs about learning have the biggest impact on their ability to be a change agent.

- All students can be challenged
- It's all about strategies, not styles
- Develop high expectations for all students relative to their starting point
- Encourage help-seeking behaviours
- Teach multiple learning strategies to all students
- Developing peer interactions is powerful for improving learning
- Critique, error and feedback are powerful opportunities for improving learning
- Developing student self-regulation and "students as teachers" are powerful mechanisms for improving learning
- Don't blame the kids!
- Differences of social class and home resources are surmountable
- There is no place for deficit thinking – that is, there is no labelling of students, nor are there low expectations of students

Hattie (2012)



Mindframe 3: *I talk more about the learning than the teaching*

Teachers are adept at talking about their professional skills, but focusing only on teaching can occlude discussions about learning. Having a particular honed teaching skill, such as setting up collaborative enquiry, will always be a benefit for many students. But, there will always be other students in the class who do not learn that way. To be effective, we need to vary teaching approaches to suit a range of learners.

With that in mind, Hattie suggests that we should focus not on the mechanics but on the impact of teaching. We should be asking ourselves "what theories of learning am I using?" and developing our ability to coach and model different ways of learning. This allows us to adapt accordingly when we recognise that a particular teaching method is not having the desired impact



Mindframe 4: *I see assessment as feedback about my impact*

Feedback has a high-impact influence on learning (Hattie, 2009) as teachers give students valuable information about how well they are performing in their learning journeys and what their next steps should be. However, it is important that this process is reciprocal and that teachers use information about their students' learning as feedback on the impact of their teaching.

Hattie notes that from the age of 8, children are good at predicting the scores they will get in tests. They then perform to their own expectations. So, for any assessment situation, whether formative or summative, we should be asking ourselves what the results can tell us about the impact of our teaching, and most importantly, what we are going to do next?

Using assessment as feedback

- Who did I teach well/not so well?
- What did I teach well/not so well?
- Where are the gaps and where are the strengths?
- What was achieved/what is still to be achieved?

Hattie (2012)

Mindframe 5: *I engage in dialogue not monologue*

Hattie's research indicates that teachers talk 70-80% of the time in class, and that in much of the remaining 20-30% of the time, students are often engaged in individual written work. Moreover, although teachers ask an average of 200 questions a day, students already know the answer to 97% of them! While such surface-level discussion is crucial for assessing understanding, it does not allow us to clarify misunderstandings.

Dialogue allows us to listen to students about what they did or didn't do and the reasons why. It allows us to follow the thread of their reasoning in order to identify next steps for the learner. In addition, engaging in true dialogue opens up space for deep level learning, giving students the opportunity to fully use their knowledge and relate it to other aspects of their learning.



Chinese symbol for the verb to listen

Hattie states that there is no magic formula for the optimal levels of teacher talk versus student talk that can enhance either surface or deep learning. It is not enough to reduce teacher talking time and increase that of the students—the quality and purpose of the interaction is the important aspect. It requires the teacher to actively listen to the learner, and adjust to the nature of the discussion, the learning task and context. Meaningful discussions about learning will engender development of the language and vocabulary of learning as well as of the subject being taught.

Mindframe 6: *I enjoy the challenge and never retreat to "doing my best"*

"Do your best" is something we often say to children (and ourselves) to motivate and encourage. However, this attitude is dangerously limiting—we should be striving to get children to do better than their best, to exceed their potential. Teachers need to adopt this attitude in their daily practice and strive to continually set and exceed their own performance goals.

Doing better than your best involves embracing challenge as a crucial part of every day life. The art of teaching lies in posing appropriate levels of challenge to different learners, and teaching students how to cope with challenge both in the classroom and beyond. To effectively cope with challenge, students need to see a clear purpose in it and have meaningful feedback about their performance in relation to success criteria and their next steps. When students don't learn effectively, teachers must embrace the challenge themselves and ask themselves what they need to do differently to have a greater impact on that student's learning.

Mindframe 7: *I believe that it is my role to develop positive relationships and classrooms/staffrooms*

If, as Hattie states, "learning thrives on error" (2012: 165), it is vital that the learning environment is warm, empathic and, above all, safe for the learners to make these errors and admit their lack of knowledge. The teacher's role is to discover what students don't know and help them learn it. To do this, he or she must develop positive relationships to build the learners' trust.

To some extent, students have been conditioned by the traditional classroom environment. Many have learned to put any answer to a question rather than leave it blank and admit that they don't know. While having trust in their teacher is the first step to braving uncertainty, they must also know that they will not face ridicule from their peers. Therefore, the teacher must ensure that positive relationships exist between peers.

As teachers are also learners of their own craft, it follows that this culture of the supportive, safe learning environment should also extend to the staffroom.

Mindframe 8: *I inform all about the language of learning*

To encourage true partnership with parents, it is vital that we share the language of learning with them and share our expectations of their children. It can be difficult for parents to understand the culture of schools as today's classrooms are likely to be very different from their own experiences as students. Sharing what we do and the language we use to do it will allow parents to have a dialogue about learning with their children as well as giving them a greater insight into what learning looks like and how it happens.



Hattie reminds us that students don't choose to come to school – it's an obligation that society places on them. However, we have a valuable opportunity to effect lasting change with them. To do that, we have to develop as "a collective capacity of teachers, to show success – not just in achievement but also in making learning a valued outcome, retaining student interest in learning and making students respect themselves and others" (Hattie, 2009).

References for further reading

Hattie, J., (2012) *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* Routledge: London
Hattie, J., (2013) *Know Thy Impact: Teaching, Learning and Leading In Conversation 4* (3)
Hattie, J., & Yates, G., (2014)