# What does Hattie say?

Michael Victory, Teacher Learning Network

John Hattie's work is a favourite at the TLN, and references to his ground-breaking meta-analyses, **Visible Learning** appear in many recent editions of the TLN journal. In the TLN office we have adapted a saying from the Gruen Transfer (ABC TV) and now regularly ask, "*What does Hattie say?*'

Hattie is clear that his research relates to student achievement and is not about all of the nuances of classroom life. However, it is not difficult to identify data that helps to understand student engagement and classroom management.
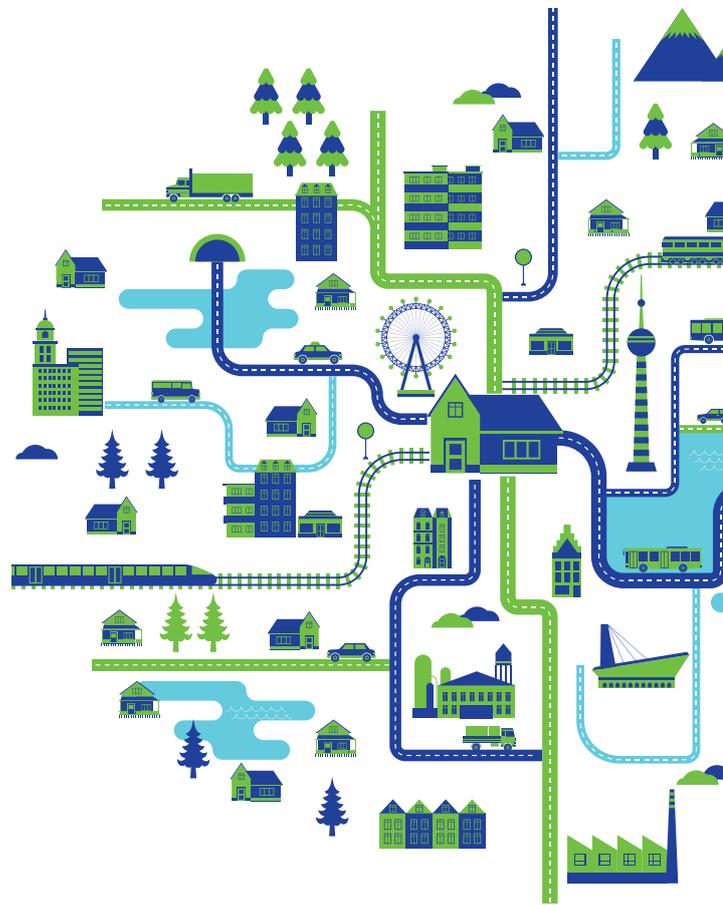
at a glance

- Hattie has the research and data
- Teacher practice influences behaviour
- The teacher-student relationship is core

Classroom environment

When exploring the impact of climate of the school on student achievement, Hattie investigates the work of Robert Marzano, whose work is familiar to many Australian teachers.

According to Marzano's work, the teacher attribute that most led to the creation of a well-managed classroom and minimised disruption was – "with-it-ness" – a mental set that enabled the teacher to identify and quickly act on potential behavioural problems while retaining an emotional objectivity. Langer described this quality as "situational awareness" or "mindfulness".

Conducive classroom environments are also created by teachers who provide clarity of purpose and strong guidance across classroom interactions and show concern for the needs and opinions of others and a desire to function as a member of a team. In these classrooms rules and procedures are well articulated and negotiated with students. Other studies that explored group cohesion in the classroom (i.e. teachers and students working towards positive learning gains) identified positive effects on student achievement arising from:

- Goal directedness
- Positive interpersonal relations
- Social support

(with the opposite being friction, cliquishness, apathy and disorganisation).

Strategies and techniques for minimising disruption

The next most effective method of creating a classroom climate conducive to enhanced student achievement was the application of appropriate disciplinary interventions. This included verbal and physical behaviours of teachers that indicated to students that their behaviour was appropriate or inappropriate. It is not the intent of Hattie's initial work to go to the detail of classroom practice. However, the TLN suggests that there are many classroom practitioners providing good advice to teachers on these strategies, and most of them Australian. For classroom strategies see Glen Pearsall's *And Gladly Teach* and *Classroom Dynamics* or attend courses with Jo Lange (see www.tln.org.au) or investigate the work of Barrie Bennett. For whole school practice see the work of Ramon Lewis, Bill Rogers or Jenny Mackay (p. 16 of this journal) or the Restorative Practice Philosophy (see article on p. 9)

Teacher-student relationship

The quality of the teacher-student relationship is one of the most significant influences for improving student achievement that is in control of the teacher. (Hattie ranks it 11th in his list of influences). It is a constant theme among the classroom practitioners writing for

this journal, so it is not a surprise and it is not new. However, what does it mean and what is the impact?

Hattie cites the study of Cornelius-White. In the study eight teacher-student relationship variables are identified and the effect size measured. The variables and their effect size are:

1.	Non-directivity	0.74
2.	Empathy	0.68
3.	Warmth	0.67
4.	Encouragement of higher order thinking	0.60
5.	Encouraging learning	0.48
6.	Adapting to differences	0.40
7.	Genuineness	0.28
8.	Learner-centred beliefs	0.10

To put the achievement score in context, in Hattie's list of 138 variables from the meta-analyses, only two have an effect size greater than 1.0 and the greater the effect size the more desirable it is

Cornelius-White says that teachers need to demonstrate that they care for the learning of each student as a person so that students can "*self-assess, feel safe and learn to understand others and the content with the same interest and concern*" (in Hattie p.119)

Hattie, himself describes the relationship building as being about "*agency, efficacy, respect by the teacher for what the child brings to the class (from home, culture, peers), and allowing the experiences of the child to be recognised in the classroom. Further developing relationships requires skill by the teacher – such as the skills of listening, empathy, caring, and having positive regard for others*" (p.118)

The research states the obvious that teacher's have the responsibility to build a quality relationship with students. We should recognise that for a myriad of reasons related to the student, the teacher, the school, the community, that this can be extraordinarily difficult, but this is what we commit to as teachers and this is what the research tells us makes a difference to student achievement.

Clarity of Purpose

Hattie obviously covers more than classroom management. I want to summarise from the conclusion to *Visible Learning* what Hattie saw as signposts toward excellence in education that can be influenced by teachers. He calls on teachers to recognise their influence and to be engaged in the passion of teaching and learning. He calls on teachers to know what their students think and know and how they construct meaning and knowledge. He writes about the three key questions:

- Where are you going?
- How are you going?
- Where to next?

It is clarity of purpose, feedback and clear direction that enables a teacher to improve student achievement.

Beliefs about students

To finalise this paper I want to extend briefly beyond Hattie's meta-analyses. What are our core and fundamental beliefs about students as persons? This is critical to the forming of teacher-student relationships. What do we believe is happening when we are required to "manage a student's behaviour"? William Glasser writes that people's behaviour is determined by their search to satisfy one of four needs:

- The need for power or control
- The need for freedom or choice
- The need for fun or humour
- The need for love and belonging

Here we have the reasons for students behaving in ways that we find unacceptable. How we create environments to help our students meet those needs and how we respond to their search for those needs will be at the heart of how we construct our learning environments.

In summary

To enhance student achievement a teacher must bring:

1. A positive outlook on student behaviour – a genuine belief that students are seeking to meet their needs and are not intrinsically "bad"
2. A clear sense of what is appropriate in the learning environment and a process to reach cohesion on what is acceptable
3. A 'with-it-ness' that enables them to respond to the inevitable classroom situations when a group of young children, adolescents or young adults are gathered in a confined learning space (a classroom)
4. The strategies and techniques (all of which can be learned) to respond to disruptive behaviour in a way that minimises the disruption and maintains a safe and orderly learning environment
5. A commitment to building a quality teacher-student relationship with every student
6. Clarity of purpose about what is to be achieved (learning goals), how it is to be achieved (learning strategies) and how students will know about their progress toward those goals (feedback)
7. A willingness to see student behaviour as a form of feedback

The challenge for school leaders, both those in formal leadership roles and teacher leaders, is to support all teachers in the workplace to develop those attributes that will enable them to manage an environment and will maximise student achievement.

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Bennett, B., Smilanich, P. 1991 *Classroom Management: A Thinking and Caring Approach.* (now available from State School Teachers Union of Western Australia)

Hattie, J. 2009 *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement.* London, Routledge Publishers

Hattie, J. 2012 *Visible Learning for Teachers.* London, Routledge Publishers

Lewis, R. 2008 *The developmental management approach to classroom behaviour: Responding to individual needs.* Melbourne: ACER Press

In the interests of space other references have not been listed. Authors mentioned in the article were either quoted from Hattie (2009) or are available from www.tln.org.au or can be easily located with a simple internet search.