



Visible Learning

Background

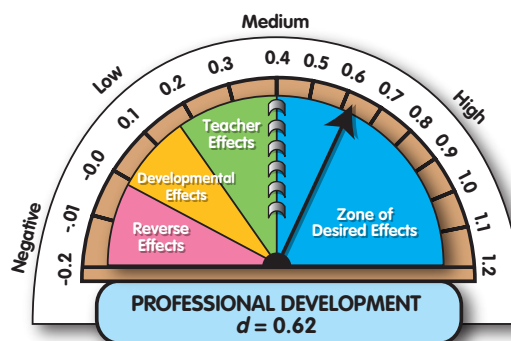
Visible Learning was written by John Hattie, Professor of Education, University of Auckland, New Zealand, and published in 2009. In this book Hattie synthesizes more than 800 meta-analyses related to the influences on student achievement. His work has been described as a “meta-meta analysis” by many in the education field. Over 50,000 studies and an estimated 236 million students were involved in this research synthesis.

Hattie’s summary of the research includes an overview of the contributions each of the following makes to student learning: (1) child; (2) home; (3) school; (4) curriculum; (5) teacher; and (6) approaches to teaching. Hattie’s goal was to identify those influences that have the greatest impact on student achievement. However, one of the chief problems in the field of education, according to Hattie, is that the vast majority of effect sizes achieved by school improvement interventions are positive. *“Everything seems to work in the improvement of student achievement”* (page 6). Even though most initiatives produce positive results, they do not all impact student achievement in a significant fashion.

Hattie contends that educators should not settle for trivial increases. We should not be satisfied with interventions that produce results that equal the gains that can be attained by students on their own or by results that can be achieved by average teachers. Rather, Hattie asserts that we should strive to implement interventions that result in positive changes in learning that are noticeable to the naked eye. Our efforts to increase student achievement should be visible, hence the name of the book. Hattie notes, *“Instead of asking ‘What works?’ we should be*

asking ‘What works best?’ as the answers to these two questions are quite different” (page 18).

To that end, Hattie created a measure that would enable educators to address “...whether the various teaching methods, school reforms, and so on are worthwhile relative to possible alternatives” (page 19). He calls this gauge a Barometer of Influence, and on it he has identified four zones (see a sample below). Hattie encourages educators to pursue alternatives that fall above the hinge point of $d = .40$, a region he has slated as the “Zone of Desired Effects.” Studies on cooperative learning fall within this zone. The purpose of this document is to show how Kagan connects to Hattie’s findings. If you have questions about anything contained herein, please feel free to get in touch with us. Contact information is listed at the end of this overview.



Connections

1 Kagan Structures address the needs of all learners.

“What matters are conceptions of teaching, learning, assessment, and teachers having expectations that all students can progress, that achievement for all is changeable (and not fixed), and that progress for all is understood and articulated.” (Hattie, page 35).

Traditional classroom teachers have supported teaching methods which only meet the needs of some students; **as a result, an achievement gap exists between various subgroups of learners.** Examples of subgroups that often perform below norms include the following: low socio-economic, special education, Title I, and minority groups. Because this achievement gap has endured for so long in the status quo, many in the education field have actually come to expect and, unfortunately, even accept such differences in student performance.

Teachers in cooperative classrooms refuse to accept achievement gaps. In fact, one of the fundamental goals of a cooperative classroom is to close—even eliminate—the gap. High levels of learning are expected for ALL students in cooperative classrooms. **Kagan Structures are one of the few instructional strategies that ensure all students are hard at work in the classroom.** By making ALL students fully engaged in learning, ALL students can attain high levels of academic success.

2

Kagan Structures make all students active in the classroom

“...as the meta-analysis throughout this book will demonstrate, the aim is to make students active in the learning process...” (Hattie, page 37).

Instructional strategies used in traditional classrooms do not make all students active in the learning process. In fact, research indicates that **the most active person in a traditional classroom is typically the teacher.** Consider, for example, a question and answer period in both a traditional classroom (Teacher A) and in a classroom characterized by group work (Teacher B). Teacher A asks a question, waits for students to raise their hands, and then calls on one student to respond. Since Teacher A will most likely call on two or three students to respond, she only engages a FEW students. Teacher B asks a question and then,

without structuring the interaction, directs groups of students to discuss the answer. Because students can dominate the discussion or hide and remain inactive during the conversation, Teacher B only engages SOME students.

In cooperative classrooms, the role of “actor” shifts from the teacher to students. Students in a cooperative classroom (Teacher C) are not allowed to remain passive or hide in the classroom. For example, consider how Teacher C handles a question and answer period in a lesson. Teacher C asks a question, gives think time, and then assigns some type of student-to-student interaction. She structures how the students interact with one another so that ALL students are engaged. In cooperative classrooms, **ALL students are active participants in an overt manner.**

- ★ Teacher A engages a FEW students.
- ★ Teacher B engages SOME students.
- ★ Teacher C engages ALL students.

3

Kagan Structures engage students with the content and with each other.

“An aim of schooling should be to maximize the number of active learners, but this requires teachers who can see learning through the eyes of their students and thence know how to engage them in learning that leads to these attributes.” (Hattie, page 37).

Teachers in traditional classrooms make efforts to engage students with the content. It is not uncommon for them to rely on their own personal energy and charisma to excite children about learning. However, efforts to engage all students with content often fail. As noted above, traditional classroom teachers engage either a few or some students, and sometimes none at all. Furthermore, opportunities for students to interact with one another are infrequent in tra-

ditional settings. Much learning is done in isolation from other students, creating a support system that is flawed. Traditional practices have led to great confusion among teachers because definitions of “student engagement” are extremely varied. Unfortunately, in many schools the definition of “student engagement” still makes allowances for low levels of activity from many students.

In cooperative classrooms, structures ensure that engagement happens on two levels. First, **students are engaged with the content**. Each structure requires all students to be active with the knowledge or skills being learned. Second, **students are engaged with each other**. All students have the opportunity to discuss their learning with a partner, teammate, or another classmate. Additionally, teachers in cooperative classrooms have a common definition of engagement. **PIES**—the acronym which represents the four basic principles of Kagan Structures—becomes the standard by which teachers can determine whether or not all students are engaged. Having a common definition results in less confusion for teachers, administrators, and students in terms of what the expectations are for the classroom.

4

Kagan Structures eliminate disengagement.

“We see the increasing number of disengaged students as the problems of students or their families, or of society, not of teachers or schools.” (Hattie, page 254).

Disengagement is often a consequence of traditional teaching methods. Because only a few or some students are active in learning, it is not uncommon for a traditional classroom teacher to complain about **student apathy** and **lack of motivation**. In addition, students in such settings often grumble about **boredom**. The problem in these classrooms is rooted in instructional strategies; however, traditional teachers typically do not recognize this issue because

they define teaching in terms of disseminating information or covering content. This type of mindset lends itself to whole group instruction characterized by lecture, and this will inevitably lead to disengaged students.

Teachers who embrace cooperative learning recognize that the key to eliminating disengagement lies in instructional pedagogy. These teachers still believe it is important to cover content; however, they define their job not as one who teaches a particular subject matter but as one who teaches children. They recognize that engaged children learn much more than passive children. As such, they use structures to ensure that all students are engaged, thereby **eliminating disengagement, boredom, and low levels of student motivation**.

5

Kagan Structures limit the need for multiple initiatives

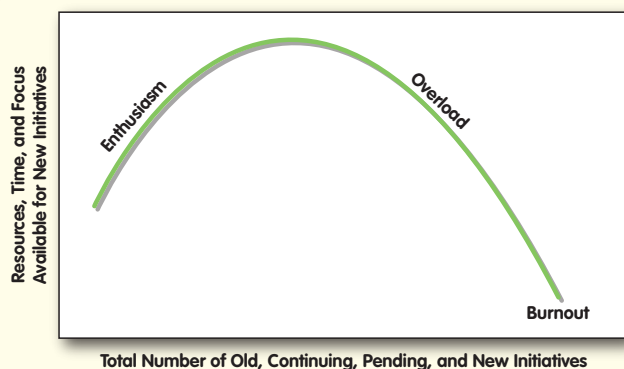
“According to noted change theory expert, Michael Fullan, one of the most critical problems our schools face is ‘not resistance to innovation but the fragmentation, overload, and incoherence resulting from the uncritical and uncoordinated acceptance of too many different innovations.’” (Hattie, page 2).

A focal point in Hattie’s work was to identify interventions that would have a significant impact on student achievement. As noted in Fullan’s comment above, we have historically been guilty in traditional settings of overloading teachers with initiatives. Instead of focusing our efforts on a few, robust, research-based instructional strategies, we jump from one ship to the next.

The result, according to Doug Reeves, founder of The Leadership and Learning Center, is that teachers experience the Law of Initiative Fatigue. The diagram below illustrates this concept. Reeves explains it this way: *“When the number of initiatives increases while time, resources, and emotional energy are constant,*

then each new initiative, no matter how well conceived or well-intentioned, will receive fewer minutes, dollars, and ounces of emotional energy than its predecessor.”

It is no wonder that many traditional teachers adopt the motto, “*This too shall pass.*”



There is no need to adopt such an approach to school improvement. ***Cooperative learning is robust—it is a multi-faceted strategy.*** Kagan Structures enable a classroom teacher to tackle multiple areas simultaneously. By using structures, teachers can increase student achievement in a content area, enhance students’ thinking skills, reduce classroom disruptions, improve student’s communications skills, address different intelligences, and improve students’ social skills—all at once! ***Kagan Structures enable classroom teachers to address many dimensions of student learning with a single instructional practice.*** As such, it is not necessary to have separate programs and strategies for varied issues. By limiting the need for multiple interventions, districts save resources, and teachers are not overwhelmed by school improvement efforts.

Final Thoughts

There are certainly other connections that can be made between Hattie’s findings and Kagan. However, the five connections noted herein demonstrate that Kagan Structures will enable educators to more effectively implement instructional strategies supported by educational research. If, as a nation of educators, we hope to close the achievement gap and ensure high levels of learning for ALL students, we must embrace changes in our instructional practices. Kagan has a long and proud history of helping schools across the country boost academic gains and close the achievement gap. It is our hope that we can establish a long-term relationship with your organization as you strive to improve the achievement of ALL children. If you would like to visit more about the information contained in this document, please feel free to contact either of the educators listed below.

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