2019 Principal Sabbatical Report

A practical guide to implementing Visible Learning to maximise impact on learning

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Overview:
Gain relevant information from a variety of schools by;
undertaking observations of Visible Learning in action,
conducting 1 on 1 interviews with teachers and principals,
getting an insight into what are considered as the MAJOR FACTORS WHICH HAVE RESULTED IN THE GREATEST IMPACT ON IMPLEMENTING VISIBLE LEARNING in their school.

Gain an international perspective by attending the International Visible Learning Conference and combined with John Hattie's research publications.

Intentions:
1   Highlight the core researched benefits of implementing a Visible Learning philosophy schoolwide;
2   Explain the positive effect that the implementation of Visible Learning has on students, teachers and the learning culture within a school;
3   Identify successful approaches for evaluating the impact Visible Learning has on teachers and students;
4   Explain some of the issues and challenges faced by schools as they work through their own unique way of implementing Visible Learning.

Success Criteria

School leaders reading this report will be persuaded to inquire further into the researched philosophy driving Visible Learning.
Information from the 15 schools visited shows Visible Learning is a critical and highly effective learning philosophy, which if implemented as the core learning and teaching philosophy within a school, the impact for all students, is indisputably beneficial.

Reflective Statement
The key message in this report is that teachers and leaders need to be continually aware of the impact they are having on their students, and from the evidence of this impact, they need to make relevant decisions to scaffold progress. By considering the information and guidance in this report, I believe school leaders and teachers will have a supportive reference to influence the implementation in their schools and possibly their Kahui Ako, to enhance student outcomes and the quality of teaching.

The core aspects of Visible Learning

Visible Learning is the result of 15 years of research and synthesis undertaken by John Hattie, and over 800 meta-analyses (over 50,000 studies) relating to the influences on achievement in school-aged students. It presents the largest ever collection of evidence-based research into what actually works in schools to improve learning (and what doesn't).

Benefits for students and teachers

The big idea driving Visible Learning is 'know thy impact.' Hattie argues that expert teachers are not wedded to specific ideas but instead focus regularly on evaluating the effects they have on their students and adjust teaching methods accordingly.

Visible learning involves teachers "seeing" learning through the eyes of students, and students seeing teaching as the key to their ongoing learning. When learning is visible the student knows what to do and how to do it. This process also ensures the teacher knows if learning is occurring or not, in order to make the required adjustments.

Benefit for a school's learning culture

The benefit for school leaders, teachers and students is the fostering of collective teacher efficacy across the school. Achieving a collective teacher efficacy means consolidating common beliefs of your teacher group about their collective ability to promote student success in their school. This is achieved by staff being involved in a collaborative approach to implementing Visible Learning, enhancing their collective ability to positively affect students. Research indicates such a collective teacher efficacy has an effect size of 1.39.

These judgements are based on Hattie's research the analysis of information gained from the mixture of primary, full primary and intermediate schools in both the North and South Island.

The Process

David Ausubel who claimed if he had to reduce all of the educational psychology to just one principle, he would say, "The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach that learner accordingly." Being a strong believer of this, my intention was to ascertain where schools saw themselves and what were the related drivers that motivated their Visible Learning journey, and how they scaffolded their development throughout the progress.

To achieve this I designed a questionnaire with 4 key questions where those participating were asked to complete prior to my visit. These would be the catalyst for conversation during my school visit.

Key Questions

The WHY;
- Being the beliefs related to Visible Learning that have been the motivational drivers influencing the implementation of the school's Visible Learning philosophy?

The HOW;
- How were high impact approaches successfully actioned to influence the implementation of Visible Learning to become consistent practices for teachers and learners?

The WHAT;
- What are the effective processes that are in place within their school which acknowledge and celebrate the impact of Visible Learning for students and teachers?

- The CHALLENGES and ISSUES;
- being what they would consider schools intending to implement Visible Learning should be aware of and what could be possible strategic solutions?

The WHY?

'What were the major motivational drivers influencing the Implementing of Visible Learning philosophy, successfully?

Research
The Visible Learning research emphasises the need to move away from "Teaching as tell and practice", in-order to influence greater achievement. Hattie's research proved teacher talk takes up to 89% of engagements in classrooms. His research proves that this form of teaching approach has limited effect on the actual high impact, cognitive engagement that all teachers should be striving for, and is the challenge that students need to maximise the impact from these learning encounters.

Hattie's extensive research worked on establishing the 'effect size' of teaching strategies, it proved how ineffective the passive participation in the learning encounter by learners is (Effect size .22). This was compared to other cognitively challenging approaches that had a marked effect size such as:
Self-reported grades. Effect Size 1.33 (e.g. Rubrics)
Cognitive Task Analysis. ES 1.29 (Collaborative Problem Solving)
Responsive intervention. ES 1.09 (Just in time teaching)
Awareness of Learning Intention. ES .75 (Clarity of purpose for the learning)
Awareness of Success Criteria. ES .88 (Knowing the progressive stages to self monitor progress)
Constructive and informative feedback and feed forward. ES .74

The above reference to 'Effect Size' rating, is universally acknowledged as a valid way to measure learning and teaching impact. Effect Size is the measure impact Hattie found relating to the specific influence and impact on the learner that approaches have. The base impact needing to be .40 or above to ensure every student should experience at least one year's growth over the course of one school year. Anything below .40 means the chance of a student maximising his learning potential is severely handicapped. However it is not my intention to explain 'Effect Size', but hopefully motivate you, the reader, to undertake your own research before, hopefully engaging your school in a Visible Learning implementation journey.
                "Seek First to Understand, then be Understood." Steven Covey

Feedback from discussions in schools related to the WHY:

STUDENTS

Seeing learning through the eyes of students in order to provide appropriate scaffolding.

Empowering student agency to build learner efficacy; students seeing themselves as their own teachers.

Assessment Capable Learners so learners are reflecting throughout the learning process and adapting where required for the next, progressive learning stage.

Articulation of learning. Developing a common language for students as learning should be a social/collaborative activity and a common language influences a greater consistency of mutual understanding.

Active cognitive engagement because learning is influenced by thinking and thinking in turn influences learning retention.

Self regulate their learning to allow for a personalised approach to learning and progress to enhance not only progress but to build self efficacy as a learner.

Clarity of learning purpose. The stronger the WHY, the strong the learning commitment.

Understanding meaningful progressions to foster greater celebration as progress is made through them.

Student voice. We all know the problem of 'Assuming'. Student voice throughout all aspects of education allows us to better understand the world of, and the impact on the learner.

TEACHERS

Effect size of their teaching allowed them to reflect on actual impact of practices and provided clarity of measurable progress.

Provides greater awareness of what constitutes effective, informative feedback and feedforward.

Inquiry Centred Learning fostered meaningful engagement and increased opportunity for teachers to be that guide on the side.

Upskilling of staff on not only what were highly effective teaching and learning approaches, but supporting there implementation.

Ensuring consistent practice based on effect size led to enhancing capacity across all teachers.

All schools believed that greater teacher efficacy had developed in their teachers and this is making a positive impact on student learning and engagement

GENERAL

Common language of learning across a school enhanced the informal and formal learning talk across the school.

Clarity of process knowledge resulted in teaching talking more about strategies and fostering cognitive engagement around the learning process, rather than what knowledge they were trying to promote through activities.

Clarity of learning and progressions resulted in more focussed and engaged learners.

Data driven decision making ensured new learning was being scaffolded from what the learner already knew.

High expectations for all students created greater learner efficacy.

Shared ownership of learning was seen as a very empowering exercise from students, but sometimes a struggle for teachers to 'let go'.

Consistency of high impact teaching and learning because teachers and students were aware of the related success criteria and all had a role in achieving them.

Valid and reliable feedback began taking an increased range of form, many of which were generated by students.

Strategic Hint:

Be informed by all data… including observational and informal. There is a story behind this data that numbers can't tell.

The HOW?

- The HOW, being the high impact approaches successfully actioned to influence the implementation of Visible Learning to become consistent practices for teachers and learners.

Half the schools that I engaged with used an outside facilitator, however those that didn't, found there is an abundance of research information and schools willing to share advice and guidance to support them. Most of these schools also undertook a collaborative 'Inquiry Approach', which ensured a collective buy in by all stakeholders, right from the start.

It is not my intention to provide a progressive pathway to be followed, as each school, and those that lead and those that hopefully will be influenced to follow, are all different. However I will share key aspects for implementation for your consideration.

All schools began with some from of "Foundation Day" to ensure the development intention and related success criteria for teachers and students were clear. This opportunity also provided the first platform to begin the process of embedding a common language around the Visible Learning philosophy.

All schools regularly engaged in reflective discussions from the start and throughout the journey, co-constructing expectations and agreeing on required actions.

Most schools used the model of a Visible Learning process. That being co-constructing 'Development Intentions and related Success Criteria'. Importantly agreement was related to WHEN, HOW and by WHOM would provide progressive feedback/ feedforward to celebrate achievement and progress. All schools believed this aspect was crucial to gauge their professional learning and to begin to appreciate their impact on learners and themselves.

All schools developed a strategic plan which guided their direction. However they also emphasised that they had to make sure the plan guided their direction but didn't dictate their progress pace. Most schools had fallen into this trap early, and had learnt from reviewing their processes, that changing a mindset and actual practice takes sensitivity and time.

A major challenge faced in varying degrees by all schools was getting teachers comfortable to be influenced through using student voice as evidence as they considered progress, and the way forward. This should be a key aspect of discussions throughout the process, ensuring collaboration means engaging not only teachers, but also students, and in time parents.

Schools approached had been engaged with Visible Learning for various lengths of time. However, a common response was that this process shouldn't be rushed as you needed time to embed the WHY, the resources to achieve the HOW, and the opportunities to CELEBRATE the WHAT are the progressive successes, being experienced by teachers and students.

Strategic Hints

Align what you already do with Visible Learning to avoid initiative overload.

Involve teachers in the process of determining 'look for' that corresponds to the actual classroom environment. Collaboration + ownership = collective teacher efficacy. (Effect size 1.29)

Foster student ownership throughout the process.

The WHAT?

- The WHAT being what are the effective processes that are in place within their school which acknowledge and celebrate the impact of Visible Learning for students and teachers?

In no particular order these were identified as effective strategies, milestones and success criteria, to acknowledge and celebrate measurable impact. I suggest these are considered as possibilities to select from, rather than a list to comply with. Your school is unique, just like each of the 15 schools who shared their stories with me.

#. Hearing and acknowledging the consistent learning language throughout the school (Learning intentions and success criteria) was a sure sign that teachers were buying into not only the philosophy, but the crucial aspects of Visible Learning.
E.G "We are learning to' &' I know I will be successful when……" Is the language we are using throughout the school and students are now beginning to speak it and use it consistently.

#. Post student surveys and teacher surveys began forming Teacher Inquiries around the needs within their classrooms and their teaching.

#. Learning dispositions, the establishment of which are part of the Visible Learning Philosophy, were being taught to all students through songs, music and chants made up by every class. Students understood their learning dispositions a lot better and could speak about them more confidently.

Self and peer assessment: Students were beginning to follow the process of giving effective buddy feedback and using the co-constructed conversation to help get them started.

Some schools had all staff working in collaborative inquiry groups led by impact coaches. This form of collaboration were found to be very beneficial in supporting 'Beginning and Overseas Teachers', however they weren't only used successfully in these situations.

Enhancing teacher knowledge and understanding by purchasing and then including the wider reading Visible Learning books in staff and team meetings proved effective. However, a warning was given as to the extent of coverage in such a reading, and ensuring appropriate, structured discussion time.

A range of Capability Surveys were used to gauge where staff were, at the beginning and throughout the process. Ensuring these had a clear purpose and the outcomes provided clarity for feedback as to progress and relevant feedforward for progress was emphasised.

Some schools used the Visible Learning Observation Tool which you will need to research if interested, however most schools generated their own to gain real and relevant information.

Collection of student voice that is relevant to considering teacher impact MUST be a critical aspect of measuring the impact on the learner.

Self review of practice by teachers and students MUST also become an embedded part of the learning process. Both teachers and students need to be supported being comfortable with their own vulnerability as a learner and teacher. Simply, we learn more from our mistakes and we all are learners.

#. It became increasingly clear that many schools were introducing their Teacher Inquiry around Visible Learning, within particular curriculum areas, which included observations of peers, self assessments, and self reflections of practice.

In a few schools the collection of 'Impact Reports' for each class focussing on effect size, analysis of which became the formative review of programme/teacher effectiveness.

Some schools also undertook the 'comparing and contrasting of student progress', structured as an enhancement process. Mid Year and End of Year reviews were carried out.

In all schools the discussion revealed the need to have a competent person analysing 'effect size' which is crucial for reliable feedback/ feed forward.

Also embedding a school belief and community understanding that assessment must be an active discussion focus, and not a recording exercise, was a critical area of promotion.

To build capacity, schools knew to undertake professional development to influence teacher growth, but these had to be followed up with regular 'Impact Discussions' to gauge progress and required progressive support.

Moderated assessment and essential follow up discussion focussing on improving outcomes were also carried out in all the larger schools where there were multiple cohorts of the same age group.

Some schools referred to using pre & post surveys at regular times, followed by in-depth analysis, and discussion of outcomes. In most of these situations the discussion seemed to be between the teacher and student, however it was exciting to see in a few situations this learning process was very student controlled and comparative and feedforward discussions were being undertaken only by students who had accountability for the process.

Gathering feedback and data to inform what we do was gained in some schools by preplanned walkthroughs, along with student surveys, teacher voice, followed by analysing the information, and sharing of findings. This approach, though considered as being effective and transparent, was often seen by the teachers I spoke to as being more a 'checking up' rather than checking in. Clarity of intent is crucial!

Interesting in one school they had reached a stage of professional openness that there was a sharing of their teaching intentions and related learner success criteria, at certain times of the day, and other teachers on their staff were invited to come in, observe and give feedback.
This I felt should be a goal for all of us.

Because of the 'Effect Size' of effective feedback. i.e. levels of feedback and types of feedback - teacher to student, student to student, student to self, student to teacher; Levels: Task, Process,Self regulation, all schools, no matter at what stage of their implementation of Visible Learning, had this area as a major focus.

A key understanding was being embedded in all schools, though the process was considered a challenge because it required a mind shift for many teachers. That area was ensuring they were developing Assessment Capability Students. Students who could freely discuss their learning and use their own data to inform their next steps. Knowing what makes them a good learner was crucial in enhancing their self efficacy.

Celebrating meeting goals, in class recognition and reflection were all mentioned as being crucial to keeping teachers positive, motivated and energised. Many principals found that for some teachers the shift of the locus of control of learning was a major paradigm shift.

A common theme of celebrating publically was evident in most schools.
Examples being the introduction of Dispositions Awards each week for newsletter/FB page.

Students use the learning dispositions (and rubrics) to help them when striving to achieve a goal or understand new learning, this was clearly evident in many schools.

Students selected by the teacher to see the Principal on a Friday to talk about the success they have had with their learning using the learning dispositions was a strategy I'll definitely be putting in place after this sabbatical.

Strong partnerships developed with the teacher, students and parents to enhance learning opportunities was a common theme during discussions. However all schools accepted the fostering of parental awareness and acceptance required a strategic approach rather than optimistic and random sharing of ideas.

Students use the learning intentions and success criteria as tools to self regulate, self assess and peer assess were processes that all schools felt should be monitored and celebrated.

Some larger schools used a strategy of Instructional Leadership. These leaders designed questions and received reflections from team minutes to gauge progress and required support.

A number of schools used the opportunity of implementing Visible Learning to rebrand their school with a Graduate Profile, Values, Learning Dispositions etc – all carefully linked to a localized curriculum.

Many schools found that the Visible Learning philosophy led them into changing their End of Year report format to include the Learning Dispositions and Values.

It was increasingly evident during discussions that teachers and students were acknowledging the importance of growing assessment capable learners. Students who could review their learning

regularly so they can identify what they are successful at, what their next goals need to be and how they can get there. It is then expected that these students drive their own learning and act on their goals. When students feel they have met their goals they then arrange to review their new learning.

Schools' dispositions were clearly developed to identify behaviours that will support students to become successful learners. Being capable of assessing their strengths and engage in the identification of next steps, so they are aware of and can self-regulate their development in the different dispositions.

Here lies the challenge for students. All schools were working hard to shift students thinking to a place where mistakes are actively encouraged and seen as exciting learning opportunities. Risk taking is promoted and students are supported.

Student led conferences were operating in many schools, and these provided opportunities for students to celebrate, share and talk about their learning. Discussions revolve around what they enjoy and why, where they are at, where they have come from, how they as students help their learning, what the teacher does that is helpful/unhelpful to their learning.

The smart use of 'Student Management Systems' were only evident in some schools where various tabs provide students' with all their LIs and SCs, which they can see in their Dashboard and in their School calendar online. Teacher comments provide feedback and feedforward which are also read every morning by students at the start of each day.
Having their information online seemed handy and easy to refer to as opposed to having these plastered on walls as experience tells me that most students we want to, do not go up and read these very often if they are a wall display.

There were a few examples of Professional Partnerships arranged in schools, giving staff the opportunity to reflect on their teaching and learning practices by using higher order questioning. This was done in conjunction with appraisal and meeting the needs of our learners.

Visible Learning Class Observations are conducted in many schools to seek specific evidence related to aspects of Visible Learning. An example could be a specific focus on how feedback is used and understood by teachers, students, and if possible, parents.

Often it seemed teachers use and display Learning Intentions and Success Criteria in their classroom on the whiteboard, though a number were restricting the use to their modelling books, or in a digital format. No matter which approach was used teachers and students seemed more focused on their respective teaching and learning roles. Clarity of purpose and process was definitely an effective 'hook' for the students I spoke to.

For school leaders promoting an open door policy at anytime is crucial. In the case of Visible Learning; encourage it to the point where visitors, students, staff and parents have the ability to ask questions to gain a better understanding of the increasing evidence of Visible Learning in each class.

For those more creative, having students create songs linked to their learning dispositions, school values was an effective and entertaining process to engage all.

For accountability to one's governing body the sharing of teacher Visible Learning and student progress with Board of Trustees was seen as essential by all Principals and staff spoken to.

Strategic Hint:
Don't rely on face-to-face professional development alone! Valuable learning, sharing, and reflecting can occur digitally. Take the time and opportunities to reflect and celebrate along the way

The Challenges and Possible Solutions

- The CHALLENGES, being what interviewed colleagues would consider schools intending to implement Visible Learning be aware of and what might be possible strategic solutions?

My intention here is to forewarn as a support and definitely not to deter you. As stated previously, mistakes are opportunities for learning and CHALLENGES are opportunities for creativity.

New teachers - Visible learning leaders must be open to working around these teachers and ensuring they are set up for success, by spending that time with them to get them up to speed with the rest of the school. Visible learning leaders need to realise each teacher will have their own timeline and be prepared to work with that.

New parents- As above, consideration must be given to new parents to get on board by understanding of structure and related language; significance of purpose for this schoolwide approach, understanding of formative feedback/ feed forward and related language, accessibility to actual learning process and their ability to evidence their child's learning progress, but more importantly being able to acknowledge their child as a learner.

Time commitment, this is a two to three-year implementation initiative. However larger schools stated a 3 to 5 year process. Ensure teachers are allowed the space to fully commit time, energy and thinking to Visible Learning. It mustn't be seen as an extra and don't be attracted to undertaking side offers.

Staff turn over, the need to revisit various aspects and to establish clear expectation documents to codified "how things are done here,"

To have the journey well planned out with the assistance of those who are already trained in Visible Learning. Networking with other schools both in New Zealand and overseas will ensure a successful and collaborative process.

Small school size doesn't make implementing easier, in some aspects, the implementation can take longer so ensure you start with a strong WHY.

Whoever is leading the implementation, needs to be well informed and passionate about Visible Learning and the philosophy behind Visible Learning for it to be a successful journey. Provide opportunities for this person, or persons to visit other schools, attend conferences and undertake their own inquiry. 'Seek first to understand then be understood'.

Move teacher's thinking from seeing Impact Reports, relating to student progress, with a deficient mindset, and as a support for professional enhancement and improved effectiveness.

In larger schools having a strength of belief within the Leadership Team is needed to ensure solidarity. Silence signifies consent but often does signify belief.

Some teachers might not be able to cope with the required changes and expectations and choose to move. Others who choose to stay and not engage in this schoolwide approach may require a difficult conversation to challenge their thinking.

Ability to locate schools of a similar decile and cliental to visit that are also implementing Visible Learning. However this should ease as more schools move into implementing Visible Learning both here and in Australia.

Simply there will always be a challenge getting everyone on the same page - Solution: consistently checking, addressing and supporting.
Rome wasn't built in a day !!!

Balancing the need to keep moving on and the need to embed.
Solution: Give permission to embed, focus on specific aspects but be clear about the time frames. With every change there are those who fail to change or are very slow to change. Perhaps consider focussing time and resource on those who were prepared to take a risk to start making a change. Those high flyers who won't need too much time or resources to change, providing you with a stronger support network to assist others.

Cycles of review change also seem threatening, so ensure clarity and purpose, identifying who does what and how to enable people to be able to complete the reviews.
Solution: develop a plan that recognises the who, when and costs involved.

Leading Visible Learning is better worked through a collaborative team. Have the team drive the learning and the actions, especially in the beginning to get traction, then in a supportive, networking role.

Embed the expectation that student voice will be collected regularly and that the Team Leaders will have a coaching role alongside their team members.

Ensure there is alignment with the Visible Learning elements and highlight in the School Charter and Teaching and Learning Plan (Curriculum Plan). This will cover MOE and Board requirements.

\# In cases of a change in leadership within the school, it is important to document the journey particularly the strategies that haven't worked along with the strategies that have worked. Succession planning is crucial for one's well being

\# Acknowledge that teachers are unique learners too. They need to be given 1-1 support to help them understand and own the process every step of the way.

Strategic Hint
Don't make Visible Learning just another initiative...start with how it is already evident in your current learning and teaching process, even if it's just minimal.

Conclusion

It has not been my intention to provide an in-depth researched document of the effectiveness of Visible Learning through an analysis of 'Effect Size'. There is extensive information available online, on YouTube and in the numerous books now available (some are referenced below). It has been my intention to provide some real and relevant practical information that encourages you to pursue your own, or your school's inquiry into the benefits of Visible Learning. Hopefully this will lead to the implementation of this proven learning and teaching philosophy across your school, benefiting learning outcomes for both students and teachers.

Visible Learning isn't the 'Holy Grail', as suggested by some, but it certainly provides us with a strong foundation of evidence-based education research to generate further inquiry by those involved, not only in schools, but in any form of learning process.

Engagement with John Hattie's New Zealand and Australian research, with research which is now widely accepted and influencing teaching and learning worldwide, challenges our perceptions of what effective learning and high impact teaching needs to look like. It challenges all of us in the education profession, to never stop learning and improving the outcomes for students.

Summary statement.
The implementation process can support the establishment of an effective collaborative approach that has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all, by embedding a strong learning philosophy, based on the intent of making learning visible. With this in mind we at Rotorua Intermediate are only too willing to assist the development of a Visible Learning philosophy in your school. So take up the challenge of inquiring into the proven benefits of Visible Learning, and don't hesitate to contact me for some friendly advice and guidance.

Strategic Hint:
No one's story or implementation will be the same. Relax and enjoy the journey.

Thank you for reading this report.

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A reflection:
I've been a principal for over 25 years and this is the first Principal's Sabbatical I have applied for. If you are a principal DON"T wait this long to apply for and undertake the time provided by a sabbatical to 'Reflect and Rejuvenate'.

References
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What Works Best to Optimize Student Learning
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Feedback to Feed Forward
31 Strategies to Lead Learning
Amy Tepper and Patrick Flynn