

Book review: Visible Learning for Teachers

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. London: Routledge.

286 pages.

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Visible Learning for Teachers. Maximizing impact on learning is the 2012 continuation of Hattie's own 2009 bestselling *Visible Learning: A synthesis of 800+ meta-analyses on achievement*, also published by Routledge and to date arguably one of the most impactful publications on teaching/learning of the 21st century.

Visible Learning for Teachers is divided into 9 chapters (excluding references

and 6 appendices), each consists of three parts: content, conclusion and exercises (the latter clearly meant to encourage teachers to try any variety of actions, from “mere” reflection to hands-on research or classroom implementation). The chapters progress along a checklist of 42 points overall, each highlighted in a grey textbox, ranging from **VISIBLE LEARNING – CHECKLIST FOR INSPIRED AND PASSIONATE TEACHING**

¹This ISBN refers to the paperback edition used for this review. In addition, *Visible Learning for Teacher* is available as hardcover and e-book versions.

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“All adults in this school recognize that:

- a. there is variation among teachers in their impact on student learning and achievement;
- b. all (school leaders, teachers, parents, students) place high value on having major positive effects on all students; and
- c. all are vigilant about building expertise to create positive effects on achievement for all students”
(Chapter 1, p. 26f.)

to **VISIBLE LEARNING – CHECKLIST FOR THE END OF THE LESSON**

“42. Teachers create opportunities for both formative and summative interpretations of student learning, and use these interpretations to inform future decisions about their teaching.” (Chapter 8, p. 163)

As may be expected, Hattie uses *Visible Learning for Teachers* to take issue with one of the largest misconceptions derived from *Visible Learning* (2009): “What I am *not* saying is that ‘teachers matter’: this

cliché is the most unsupported claim from the evidence in *Visible Learning*. (...) What *does* matter is teachers having a mind frame in which they see it as their role to evaluate their effect on learning” (p. 18). This statement not only provides some much-needed clarification, it also serves as a starting point from which Hattie sets out to illustrate how his previous work may be applied inside and outside the classroom.

Drawing its data from now little over 60.000 studies involving roughly 245 million students (p. 13), *Visible Learning for Teachers* is not meant to provide teachers with yet another prescriptive set of activities or didactic approaches, but rather to present and evaluate typical teacher *attitudes* towards their students as well as towards their fellow teachers, the institutions they work in, and the factors that influence these and every other aspect of their teaching lives. Hattie states: “It is important to note that there is nothing new in this book or in *Visible Learning*. The messages and evidence are



based on a study of prior literature, on what has worked successfully in so many classrooms... it is a recognition of the critical importance of how excellent teachers think! (...) It is about having multiple sources of evidence about impact on all students, and esteeming – and publicly and privately valuing – this evidence of impact.” (p. 177)

It is this “evidence of impact” that Hattie strives to improve in classrooms. While acknowledging that *any* input will achieve *some* learning, he recommends not accepting 0.00 but rather to set an improvement of minimum 0.4 as the benchmark for effect size (d), thus arriving at the formula $d > 0.40$ (Appendix E provides a formula on how to determine d). The importance of this effect size, in addition to an overview of some general areas teachers may want to look at in order to optimize their own impact on their students’ learning, are established in the introductory Chapter 1: “Visible learning inside”, as well as in “Part 1 The source of ideas and the role of teachers” with chapters

2 “The source of the idea” and 3 “Teachers: the major players in the education process” respectively.

“Part 2 The lessons” follows the process of developing, delivering and evaluating lessons, which is evident in the titles given to chapters 4-8: “Preparing the lesson” (Chapter 4), “Starting the lesson” (Chapter 5), “The flow of the lesson: learning” (Chapter 6), “The flow of the lesson: the place of feedback” (Chapter 7), and “The end of the lesson” (Chapter 8).

There are numerable quote- and discussion-worthy statements in these chapters, such as “...more often than not, when students do not learn, they do not need ‘more’, rather, they need ‘different’” (p. 93) or “Teachers do not mind change; they are not so happy about being changed” (p. 94), and some of these statements cannot be reiterated and emphasised enough: “Error is the difference between what we know and can do, and what we aim to know and do – and this applies to all (struggling and talented; students and



teachers)” (p. 130). Indeed, these are not new ideas. What is new, however, is that Hattie leaves the teacher’s point of view behind and instead persistently encourages his readers to see their lessons, as well as everything that happens inside and outside the classroom, through their students’ eyes in order to reflect on how each individual student may perceive what is going on and what is being said when and how.

In this respect, Chapter 7 “The flow of the lesson: the place of feedback” in particular is presented as a field where further research may yield valuable insight, and Ha Hie provides an example of an alternative way of giving feedback: “I never allow teachers or school leaders to visit classrooms or observe teachers; I allow them only to observe students – the reactions that students have to incidents, to teaching, to peers, to the activity” (p. 155). This way is certainly better suited to an assessment of the impact of a lesson than the usual critique of a teacher’s methods.

In “Part 3 Mind frames” and Chapter 9 “Mind frames of teachers, school leaders, and systems”, Hattie concludes his book with a list of 8 mind frames that he considers conducive towards having a major impact on students’ learning (pp. 182-191):

Teachers/leaders...

“1. ... believe that their fundamental task is to evaluate the effect of their teaching on students’ learning and achievement.

2. ... believe that success and failure in student learning is about what they, as teachers or leaders, did or did not do ... We are change agents!

3. ... want to talk more about the learning than the teaching

4. ... see assessment as feedback about their impact

5. ... engage in dialogue, not monologue

6. ... enjoy the challenge and never retreat to ‘doing their best’

7. ... believe that it is their role to develop positive relationships in classrooms/staffrooms

8. ... inform all about the language of learning

The main body of the book ends after Chapter 9 on page 194, the remaining 91 pages present a vast body of reference material (11 pages), followed by Appendix A, a “Checklist for ‘visible learning inside’” (5 pages) that school personnel may use to assess their own institution as well as themselves and their peers, Appendix B “The 900+ meta-analyses” (54 pages), an expansion of the previous list Hattie used in his 2009 study, Appendix D “Rankings and effect sizes of program influences from the end-of-chapter exercises” (2 pages), Appendix E “Calculating effect sizes” (3 pages), and Appendix F “The Irving Student Evaluation of Accomplished Teaching Scale” (2 pages), an example of how visible learning may be assessed by students. Both Appendix A and F may be photocopied with the expressed permission of the author. The book concludes with author index (4 pages) and subject index (7 pages). While 91 pages of appendices would

seem overblown in most other publications, this is not the case here: all appendices are either useful reference material that readers may use for their own research or resources which may be used to gain insights from their students, peers and/or leaders.

Overall, *Visible learning for teachers: maximising impact on learning* may primarily and expressly focus on school teachers, but its ideas and suggestions are most certainly relevant for teachers in all areas and stages of education, as the concluding trans-institutional “checklist” suggests:

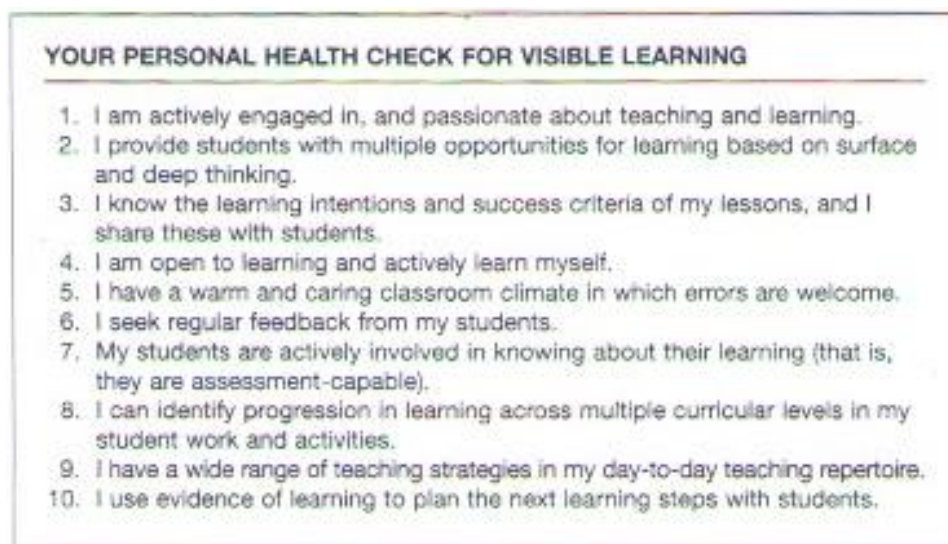


Figure 1: Your personal health check for Visible Learning (Hattie, 2012, p. 193)