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Creating the Outstanding School

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jake_madden/28/
From Australia's leading teaching and teacher education researchers comes a book about creating the outstanding school.

Lynch, Madden and Doe provide an easy to read text that is all about ensuring every student gets a quality education.

Each chapter explains a set of ideas and research-based strategies that schools and their teachers can employ to reform their school. The book explains key research-based elements that lie at the heart of creating the outstanding school and features the Collaborative Teacher Learning Model and the elements of 'teaching,' 'leadership,' 'coaching,' 'mentoring,' 'feedback,' 'data driven decision-making,' 'high impact instruction' and the idea of 'teachers as researchers' as the embodiment of a school-based strategy for creating the outstanding school.

This book is compulsive reading for teachers and school leaders and those who care about our children's education future.
Creating the Outstanding School

David Lynch

Jake Madden

Tina Doe

with

Richard Smith, Steve Provost and Helen Spiers
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David Lynch is Professor of Education in the School of Education at Southern Cross University. He is the author of numerous articles and texts on teacher education and related matters and one of Australia’s foremost teacher education innovators. His research and development interests form the basis of a radical rethink on teaching and teacher education and these are reflected in his seminal published works over the past fifteen years. He has had a distinguished academic career at several universities in Australia, having held a number of senior academic leadership positions, and consults in education jurisdictions across the globe.

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Jake Madden has served as a principal of five schools and is currently the principal of Dar Al Marefa Private School, Dubai, UAE. He is passionate about leadership and the positive difference that it can make to teacher and student learning outcomes. Over many years, Jake has led and facilitated the professional learning of principals and staff at school and national and international level in the area of leadership, school improvement and curriculum development. His educational interests lie in building teacher capacity. He is widely published in this area of teachers as researchers, authoring two books and a number of journal articles showcasing his experiences and research into leading educational change. He is currently an Adjunct with Southern Cross University and is on the editorial board for the International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change.

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1. Creating the Outstanding School

David Lynch, Jake Madden and Tina Doe

In this book we provide an insight into what it means to create the outstanding school. Our aim in writing this book is to stimulate thought and to provide some guidance into what, for many, is now a many decades long school reform aspiration. The book does not purport to be conclusive in its scope towards such an aspiration, but it does seek to signal and then explain key elements which, from our own research work in schools and in teacher education over the past twenty or so years, and that of other noted researchers, lie at the heart of creating the outstanding school. In effect we bring to bear what we have discovered after conducting pioneering research focused on ‘teaching’, ‘teacher learning’, ‘the leadership of teaching’ and the organization of schools.

In working towards such an agenda we feature the Collaborative Teacher Learning Model (See Chapters 2 and 5) and its key elements of ‘teaching’, ‘leadership’, ‘team teaching’, ‘coaching’, ‘mentoring’, ‘feedback’, ‘data driven decision making’ ‘high impact instruction’ and the idea of ‘teachers as researchers’ as the embodiment of a school-based strategy for creating the outstanding school. Each chapter explores associated concepts in greater detail and the book, when read in its entirety, comes to represent an insight into what ‘creating the outstanding school’ means and thus requires.

But as the book will reveal, this ‘outstanding school’ agenda is complex and enmeshed in socio-economic change, not to mention various political agendas, that is redefining what it means to work and live in the 2000’s. With this point in mind, we commence this introductory chapter with an elaboration of such an environment to highlight key points for later reference.

Education, Change and Government Policy

Education is now front and centre in the minds of governments across the globe. National and international student performance benchmarks, such as PISA\(^1\) and ISA\(^2\) are commonplace and being used to judge the performance of schooling systems. These testing regimes have created a global competition in education, such that Governments strive to enact policies in an attempt to ensure that their education systems exceed the performance of their trading partners and of course that these systems contribute to the standard of living of their citizens. The important point is the key role that education now plays in positioning economies for high-value trade and high standards of living\(^3\) (Australian Government, 2009; OECD, 2011; 1996).

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\(^1\) See [http://www.oecd.org/pisa/](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/)
\(^3\) See [http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/australia/](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/australia/)
This era can be explained by the emergence of the Knowledge Economy (OECD, 1996). The Knowledge Economy can be defined as an economy built on the wealth created from ‘know-how’. That is, the selling of technology based products for cash, exchanging them for something else of value or leveraging them to create added value. In comparison, the former ‘industrial economy’ relies predominantly on the sale of raw resources, commodities and primary processing to generate income and wealth: a stratified and well-organised chain of ‘human labour’ is a key requirement (Smith and Lynch, 2010; Powell and Snellman, 2004).

In contrast to this industrial economy, the key commodity in the Knowledge Economy is knowledge and its use in new and interconnected ways to create what appears a voracious and endless cycle of new products and services coming to market and which are available to a worldwide set of consumers. This new circumstance requires a confluence of ‘human brain power’ networks, each working simultaneously towards a product or service. The workforce required is thus highly educated within all sections and across all levels of the economy (Powell and Snellman, 2004; Doyle, Kurth & Kerre, 2000; Donkin, 1998). This circumstance implicates education systems and their schools for an appropriate and sustainable response (Lynch, 2012). Chapters in this book provide an insight into what such a response might involve. At the heart of each chapter is a goal to seed the creation of the outstanding school.

Having made these introductory statements our task now is to explore what is meant by the term ‘outstanding school’ and then provide a preliminary insight into what is required for it to be achieved. We conclude the chapter by outlining each subsequent chapter.

Towards the Outstanding School

A ‘Google’ search for ‘what is an outstanding school?’ reveals a plethora of websites, articles, reports, publications and the like, each arguing a perspective on education. At the heart of each however is an implicit understanding that it is desirable and importantly that it embodies a set of ‘things’ (articulated as learning goals) which are achieved in every student at specifically defined ‘schooling’ junctures. The emphasis upon ‘every’ student is important here because the Knowledge Economy --- putting aside the social justice issue in not achieving this --- has few places for the low or unskilled: to such an extent that the jobs that do become available for such people are often menial, short term and low paid and of course not fully contributing to the premise of the Knowledge Economy. On a social outcomes front, mortality and imprisonment rates rise markedly as educational attainment decreases (OECD, 2011).

Further, social cohesion is informed by education. Education also enables networks to form that have “shared norms, values and understanding that facilitate co-operation within or among groups” and which creates the environment for innovations and advancements which in turn add to the quality of life of a country (OECD 2001 cited in Dijkstra and de la Motte, 2014, p.8).

While we could delve deeper into this circumstance given the diversity of nation states and how the Knowledge Economy is playing out in each, our task in writing this book is best served by stating categorically that schooling and teaching are now fundamentals in this new society circumstance. But we emphasize that inherent schooling and teaching tasks are complex,
enmeshed in numerous ‘modern day’ socio-cultural considerations (i.e. changing faces of ‘the family’; children in long day care, less adherence to traditional mainstays such as ‘The Church’, people more informed and more likely to question supposed ‘truths’, to name but a few) and subject to constant changes (Lynch, 2012).

To highlight this ‘complexity’, schools, in addition to ‘delivering’ the State curriculum, are increasingly being called upon to remedy emerging social ills, in a belief by governments that schools are best placed to deal with such matters (meaning convenient and already mobilized into each local community). Issues such as; drug and alcohol awareness, personal safety, as well as diverse agendas ranging from ‘surf safety’ to ‘career counseling’ to ‘moral upbringing’ and civics, further complicate what has now become an over-crowded curriculum for schools. This is perhaps a case of modern society failing to keep pace with an unprecedented rate of new and emergent issues (Griffin, et al, 2012). In any case the ‘outstanding school’ has to deal with such a circumstance and likewise achieve in it (Lynch, 2012).

While it can be argued that schools have always played such a key role, the difference today is that the stakes in education failure has just got higher and the consequences more dire for the individual student.

In simple terms modern society requires each of its citizens to have a sound education. Failure at school is not an option and so it is incumbent on the School to ‘design’ so each student achieves prescribed learning outcomes at key learning junctures. This is a tall order, but it does get to the heart of what the outstanding school comes to mean. We can thus have a go at defining the outstanding school as one which has the sustained capacity to achieve defined sets of learning outcomes, in every student, at key schooling junctures.

So What Contributes to the Outstanding School?

As previous sections indicated the work context for schools and their teachers is complex, fast changing with various entanglements: at face value reforming a school so every student achieves appears a daunting task. But understanding where ‘impact’ is best rendered is a key first step. We are assisted in this understanding by John Hattie (2009, 2011, 2012) who conducted a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to student achievement. He identified five variables which have the capacity to impact student achievement. These are:

- The Student
- The Student’s Home Life
- The School
- The Curriculum
- Approaches to Teaching

Hattie’s (2009) central finding however is that ‘what teachers do matters’.

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4 See for example http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/jointventure/govt/ddemo/choosing/formal.html#informal
In terms of ‘the student’, Hattie (2009) argues it’s what the child brings to school that influences their achievement (from preschool, home, and genetics) as well as a set of personal dispositions that can have marked effect on the outcomes of their schooling. ‘The home’ can either nurture and support achievement of students, or it can be harmful and destructive. In terms of the ‘other’ Hattie (2009) variables: ‘the school’, ‘its curriculum’ and the ‘approach to teaching’, Hattie has thus identified for teachers and schools three strategic remediation or ‘strategic focus’ areas that directly contribute to creating the outstanding school. While ‘the student’ and ‘the home’ are not in the realm of the school to remedy pragmatically, ‘the school’, ‘the curriculum’ and the ‘approaches to teaching’ are well within scope. In fact these three areas come to represent what a school needs to attend to if it is to path itself to becoming the ‘outstanding school’. We focus on these three elements by outlining key processes and strategies in chapters, which follow.

Returning to the theme of ‘Creating the Outstanding School’, we must also appreciate that the research literature indicates that “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Barber and Mourshed 2007, p.13). Putting this finding with those of Hattie (2009, 2011, 2012) and the message becomes one focused on a need to improve the teaching capacities of all the school’s teachers. To sharpen this statement further we’ve identified a series of key findings from the education research literature. Each, while not comprehensively representing what is in the literature on such a topic, does come to represent key insights into what constitutes ‘strategy’ when creating the outstanding school. They also formulate for the reader a set of further readings to better understand the premise of this book. They also front end discussions in sequent chapters. These key findings are:

1. **A Focus on Teacher Professional Learning**
   - To improve student learning, professional learning needs to be conceived both as a means for improving teacher effectiveness and as a means for improving the effectiveness of schools. (Cole, 2012, p.6)
   - Effective professional learning focuses on developing the core attributes of an effective teacher. (Cole, 2012, p.6)
   - Improvement is a discipline, a practice that requires focus, knowledge, persistence and consistency over time. (Elmore, 2008, p.13)
   - Targeted professional learning should ‘become part of the expectations for teachers’ roles and form an integral part of the culture of a school’. (Lieberman 1995, p. 593)

2. **Teachers working together on improving their teaching**
   - …collaborative cultures build social capital and therefore also professional capital in a school’s community. They accumulate and circulate knowledge and ideas, as well as assistance and support that help teachers become more effective, increase their confidence, and encourage them to be more open to and actively engaged in change. (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p.114)

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5 We are assisted in this process by references to http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/teachingprofession.pdf
- Schools that function as professional communities are four times more likely to be improving academically. (Lewis, 2002, p.488)
- Teachers learn from each other and share good teaching practices through a range of opportunities at school and system levels. Observing and giving feedback on each other’s practice is the norm. (From New Directions to Action 2013, p. 13)
- “The focus must shift from helping individuals become more effective in their isolated classrooms and schools, to creating a new collaborative culture based on interdependence, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability”. (Dufour and Marzano 2011, p.67)

3. A Focus on Instruction
- …you cannot change learning and performance at scale without creating a strong, visible, transparent culture of instructional practice. (City, Elmore et al. 2009, p.32)
- [Educators] must be hungry for evidence of student learning and use that evidence to drive continuous improvement…(Dufour and Marzano 2011, p.24)
- Effective systems have developed an integrated set of measures that show what teachers do and what happens as a result. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011, p.10)
- The only way we can accomplish the changes we need is through intense focus in improving classroom practice. We can do it by declaring that this is the focus: reduce bad variation by increasing consistency. Teachers and teacher leaders will have to take a risk here. It is the one area that is within the control of teachers – break down the autonomy of the classroom so that greater consistency of practice can be achieved. (Fullan, 2006, p.58)
- If we want students to learn more, teachers must become students of their own teaching. (Kane, 2013)

4. Feedback on Teaching Performance
- The majority of Australian teachers reported that evaluation of their work is largely done simply to fulfil administrative requirements and that their work has little impact on the way they teach in the classroom. (OECD, 2009)
- Performers can only adjust their performance successfully if the information fed back to them is stable, accurate, and trustworthy. (Wiggins, 2012, p.13)
- Meaningful appraisal is geared to teacher development and improvements in learning. It helps teachers improve their teaching skills by identifying and developing specific aspects of their teaching. It improves the way they relate to students and colleagues and their job satisfaction, and has a large impact on student outcomes. (Jensen, 2011, p.7)

The implication of these four elements is that school leaders must first know how well each teacher is performing and then devise an improvement strategy to positively impact the teaching
performance of each teacher. To this end, subsequent chapters focus on an aspect of these four elements as a cohesive teaching improvement strategy. To this end, subsequent chapters focus on an aspect of these findings as a cohesive teaching improvement strategy.

Let’s now recap where we are at in terms of our discussions thus far.

We’ve established that the outstanding school is one that enables each and every student to sustainably achieve all the predefined learning outcomes at key schooling junctures. In many ways this is about ensuring ‘no kid gets left behind’! These outcomes come to represent the ambitions of society and are reflective of prevailing education policies globally. As Hattie (2009) indicates it is the work of the teacher that matters in such equations and thus any moves towards creating the outstanding school must have a focus on the ‘teacher and their teaching capacities’. While the teacher’s teaching is central in focus, strategies that positively influence ‘the child’ and ‘their home’ and which mobilise ‘the curriculum’ and ‘the school’ for teaching effect are further ‘foundation’ considerations in this quest.

Having made these introductory comments we now prefigure chapters in this book.

Prefiguring this Book

Each chapter in this book informs an aspect of ‘Creating the Outstanding School’. To organise the book and to do justice to the chapters included, we briefly introduce each one.

Chapter 2 case studies a school which undertook a five year ‘create the outstanding school’ journey. In general terms, the school consolidated current knowledge about effective teaching and learning into a cohesive, whole of school approach for teaching improvement. This school in effect tested propositions that lie at the heart of this book. This strategy is termed the Collaborative Teacher Learning Model (CTLM) and is based on an approach to school leadership, where a coaching, mentoring and feedback regime for classroom teachers is coupled to ‘research and data’ to improve student outcomes. The chapter concludes with a presentation of research data associated with this strategy. In presenting this chapter early in the book we seek to illustrate the fundamentals of the ‘creating the outstanding school journey’ and to prefigure key elements, which are then expanded on in subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 in effect stands to illustrate what is possible when key knowledge in this book is brought to bear on a school for student learning gain.

Central to the Collaborative Teacher Learning Model in Chapter 2 is the notion of ‘using data’ to inform teaching decision-making. Chapter 3 provides an outline of how school leaders can use teaching and learning data to improve their overall school teaching performance.

Chapter 4 introduces the concepts of coaching, mentoring and feedback by providing a comprehensive review of the literature as it relates to each in an education context. This foundations Chapter 5, where the ‘how to implement’ a coaching, mentoring and feedback regime is explained. The central premise of the chapter is an understanding that it requires for effect an orchestration of ‘leadership’ and ‘data driven decision making’, which are then consolidated into
a ‘coaching, mentoring and feedback’ regime at the classroom teacher level. To explain the ‘how to’ we revisit the Collaborative Teacher Learning Model and use it to scaffold an insight into the key elements required for implementation.

In Chapter 6 the Teacher Professional Learning Initiative (TPLI) is presented as an approach to teacher professional learning. The TPLI has been conceptualised as a ‘purpose-fit’ teaching enhancement model and is specifically designed to maximize the benefits of a teacher professional development program.

To this point in the book outlined chapters have focused on teaching improvement models and a set of related understandings that create the environment and mechanisms through which the outstanding school is created. Book chapters now transition their focus to the embodiments of the outstanding school.

In Chapter 7 we examine the premise of the ‘required’ learning environment. The central tenant of the chapter is that there is growing research evidence that a well designed and orchestrated learning environment contributes to the improvement of teaching practices and to student learning.

Chapter 8 examines the premise of planning the outstanding lesson. In discussing such fundamentals we make the point that the outstanding school is commensurate to outstanding lessons. To this end we take the reader back, as it were, to initial teacher education and focus on a process that scaffolds the design of the ‘outstanding lesson’. On another plane, this chapter also creates a set of underlying considerations, which in turn inform ‘the what’ that one coaches, mentors and provides feedback to teachers on.

Chapter 9 examines what is meant and thus required for the creation of a teaching performance culture in a school. Key to the chapter is the notion of ‘teaching feedback’. The chapter examines the concept of feedback in greater detail and concludes by providing a model for its implementation.

Chapter 10 examines the concept of teachers as researchers. The ‘teacher as researcher’ concept comes to represent a strategy for enabling teachers to better understand their profession, to make informed teaching decisions and to contribute to the growth of their profession by making valid contributions to it. Not to mention a new way for teachers to approach and engage with teacher professional learning. Taken together, the teacher as research concept can perhaps be described as a Knowledge Economy strategy for teacher professional learning, where teachers collect and interpret data for teaching and learning effect.

Chapter 11 concludes the book by providing an insight into the Collaborative Teacher Learning Model and how it is being implemented in a school with many inherent challenges. In effect the chapter case studies how one school is building on findings, as outlined in this book, for direct school-wide improvement.
Having now made these introductory comments about the book and each chapter we now invite you to begin the journey into understanding the creation of the outstanding school.

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