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**Book Review: Visible Learning For
Teachers, Maximizing Impact on
Learning by John Hattie**

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As the result of a lifetime dedicated to the study of the determinants of students' success, John Hattie presented in his influential 2009 book, a summary of the results of over 800 meta-analysis about the factors that influence achievement in school-aged students. Professor Hattie, a University of Melbourne researcher, coined the term "visible learning" to highlight the importance of professors evaluating their practices using good quality evidence. His work is currently active, and his last update was from last year identifying more than 250 influences coming from 1.500 meta-analysis. This influential work is the most ambitious systematic review of the research in factors influencing education and also, from a methodological point of view, it grounds the case for rigorous quantitative research in education.

The main purpose of the book is to answer a simple question: what actually works in schools to improve learning? The need for an evidence-based approach when answering such a question is clear as "everything seems to work" in education. So probably the most important contribution of the book is trying to answer is "what matters most". In doing so, Hattie reviewed hundreds of meta-analyses, mainly published in academic journals, and found that almost all report a positive effect. The average effect is $+0,4SD^1$, which makes Hattie suggest that interventions with higher effect than that, are those that really matter.

John Hattie is a researcher in education that focused his interest in performance indicators measurement of teaching and learning. He has been Director of the Melbourne Educational Research Institute at the University of Melbourne and was previously part of the University of Auckland. He holds a PhD from the University of Toronto.

The book groups the factors that influence student's performance in six categories highlighting the importance of teachers in the equation. The categories are: the child, (knowledge and expectations that student bring to the classroom), the home (parent expectations and aspirations for the child), the school (the climate of the classroom and the peer influences), the curriculum (its balance between deep and surface understanding), the teacher, and his/her teaching approach.

In relation to the teacher Hattie highlights the importance of the relationship established between learners and teachers and among teachers as a collective. The quality of the teachers as perceived by students has a great impact on their ability to engage students with the classroom. In addition, teachers' expectations and their beliefs about the competences of colleagues and students are also very determinant. Teachers that report lower beliefs about the efficacy of them as a collective are correlated with poorer student performance.

¹ Hattie uses Cohen's d to rank influences. Cohen's d relates the size of the effect with the standard deviation of the phenomena under study. The higher the ratio the most significant the effect size.

In relation to the teaching approaches, Hattie highlights the importance of a good balance between attainable and challenging tasks, the ability to look for and understand feedback that help improve teaching practices, and the time spent in planning and talking about teaching.

The author summarized the report of interventions in each of these six categories making a grand total of 138 influences that come from 52 thousand studies and more than 80 million students involved. The analysis shows that while positive significant contributions were reported in each factor, those that relate to teachers presented the highest impact, while those that relate to school, the lowest.

The main message of the book is that successful teaching and learning is visible during the class but require evidence-based evaluation of practices. Good teaching has teachers that monitor, seek and give feedback, show a great deal of passion in their teachings, and actively try alternative learning strategies when others do not work. In all, what teacher do matters a great deal and according to Hattie, teachers have to develop effective ways to stay aware of what each individual student is thinking and knowing. The best way to do so is to create environments that help teachers to be questioned. In Hattie's own words: "The essence of good teaching is that teacher's expectations and conceptions must be subjected to debate, refutation and investigation" (p.239). The author calls for teachers and principals to collect effect sizes within their schools, and then ask: "What is working best?", and "Why is it working best?".

This ground-breaking 10-year-old book, makes a notable contribution to widen the array of explanations and tools used to improve academic performance of students, making it a must-read to anyone involved in teaching at any level. Nevertheless, Hattie's work received critiques coming from educators and statisticians. Some educators see in Hattie's work an excessive focus on results that may not reflect the complexity of education, and that his all approach underestimates the impact of socio-economic situation in learning. On their side, statisticians warn about some miscalculations or misinterpretations of effect sizes. Both aspects are directly addressed and warned by Hattie in the book and in the followings of his research. The book should not be taken as the final word on these issues, but as an ambitious and useful systematization of the always expanding world of academic research in education. But most importantly it is an invitation for teachers in their last mile to embrace a more scientific approach in their quest to impact on their students' knowledge.

As said, John Hattie's Visible Learning is a must-read for anyone interested in education. In a world where most teachers effectively do positive contributions to the development of their students, the call for measurement and rank is probably one of the most important ones. Asking "What works best?" is a simple question that develops into a powerful tool to improve teaching and learning. It helps us to remain sceptic in front of powerful narratives, usually with little evidence, and let us effectively find and share those winning teaching strategies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gabriel Inchausti graduated in Economics from the University of the Republic (Uruguay). Gabriel has professional specialization in corporate finance and strategy and received his Masters Degree in Behavioural Sciences at the London School of Economics. He is a professor and lecturer in topics related to Behavioral Economics in Uruguay and Brazil, and is an active researcher in the field. His research focus is in the area of education and time preferences. Moreover, Gabriel served as the Executive Officer for a major South American beef group and the General Manager in an important media group in Uruguay. Currently, he is chairman of the board of a South American software company.

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