

# Transcript Ross Fox's Keynote Address

## Part 7 – Conclusion



# Science of Learning Leadership Accelerator

19 May 2022

A joint venture between



**Crowther Centre**  
AN ENGINE THAT POWERS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

**Primary  
focus**



## High level synthesis

## Catalyst

1. Ideology to science
2. I know better, I do better
3. Definition of teacher as Professional
4. Precise curriculum, pedagogy and assessment
5. Always and everywhere through learning
6. Beware lethal mutations - the problem of fidelity



I'm just going to wrap up with just a high level synthesis about what we're trying to do. We are trying to shift our education community from ideology to science. We're obviously got the inclination to homeostasis - the people don't want to change or they find it hard to change. We're doing it through huge investment in exposure to high quality resources that guide people into reflection on what the science says about how students learn to read or generally learn, and then what implications does that have for our practice? That's by far from a trivial thing, but as we know, there's all sorts of people with ideologies about how they think students should learn or what might be important in student learning. As we heard with Pam's examples, totally unrelated to, in fact, how students do learn.

I think this has been a common refrain in the US, particularly I think in Mississippi, where whole districts adopting a mantra of "I know better, I'd do better", because professionally it's pretty embarrassing for me to say we were committed to all these things, which when you dig into them, bear no relationship to what the science says. I do think we have to admit as a profession, "when I know better, I do better".

We're always going to learn; it's not a destination, it's a journey.

I've reflected on the definition of the teachers as a professional. It is that it is a deep worry to me that will continue to define teaching as an unsustainable proposition, if you compare it with how medicine works in terms of the value chain of health service and delivery compared to what we might often be expecting teachers to do. My belief is we need to head towards precise curriculum pedagogy in assessment expectations. That means really well supported, and I'm not saying program to the minute for the whole school day, but I am saying if there's a way to teach explicitly phonics really effectively, that we've got the best programme or the



best two or three programs at the disposal of the teacher to deliver that really, really effectively. I do think that is, and hardly anyone I talk to, talks about precise curriculum pedagogy in assessment, but I'm convinced that is something we need to consider and reflect on.

I think I might have said it earlier, but one of the challenges I think in terms of distractions is we're in a society where schools feel like they're the only enduring community institution left. That feels like a reality because hardly anyone's at church, hardly anyone's volunteering because we're all so busy. Everyone's working, we've got families, whatever it is. What my point there is that the expectations on schools to do things like mental health, other things, as we know, were just getting higher and higher. Now I'm all for schools meeting the needs of their communities, but we've got to be very vigilant of what a teacher is trained to effectively do, and what are we going to make the most difference set and focus on the collaboration and coordination of support, not taking responsibility for all of it. Why does that matter? I see a lot of instances where wellbeing is more important than learning. Of course, the well-being of students is important. But the problem is, what is the role of the school? What is the role of the teacher? And how are we going to prioritise learning? Some of that needs unpacking, needs discussion. My provocation would be it's hard to go wrong as the system if we say always in every way through learning. I was talking to Michael Roberts recently and he did say I was sharing some of these views. He said the motto of the school he started is, "Success is the fun we offer". Have I got that right? "Success is the fun we offer". Because what I know is no better thing for the well-being of students than to experience success, to grow their confidence. I would always be asking, can we address these through learning first? I think that's really important because we in theory, if the science is right, if we're good at delivering it, then we know that our actions will deliver a result in terms of learning.

Then the final one is the lethal mutations. It's a sign of my scepticism and reservation about frameworks, that if you put up a list of things that you ask people to do and they're really imprecise in general, then there'll be a statement that I see myself in that, I'm very comfortable, I don't need to change anything. If that's starting from a deficit of knowledge, that is quite problematic. I think that's Dylan Wiliam's term, but we do need to beware the lethal mutations taking the Science of Reading and turning it into balanced literacy plus a sprinkling of phonics that may not work, and balance should not be a priority. Moderation in all things is not a tenant of education. We should be committed to the science. We've got to beware the lethal mutations and hold to that fidelity as professionals testing our practise against the evidence.

I'll wrap up and just say there's online resources that we've developed through Catalyst, and many of the people today. There are all sorts of good material. Patrick is here if you want to contact him after. If anyone wants a tree change, Canberra's not a bad place to live. I've got my details there, so you're very welcome even if you just want to visit and see one of our schools. Canberra is a 20-minute city so it's a really good lifestyle, if you're looking for different opportunities. I just want to say congratulations to everyone in being part of today.



Thanks to Knowledge Society for bringing, it together. Thanks to the contributors today, I can say I was really taken by some of Pam's comments and I think there's so much to learn and collaborate on together.

So thank you.