

Transcript Ross Fox's Keynote Address

Part 2 – Why the Science of Learning?



Science of Learning Leadership Accelerator

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A joint venture between



Crowther Centre
AN ENGINE THAT POWERS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

**Primary
focus**

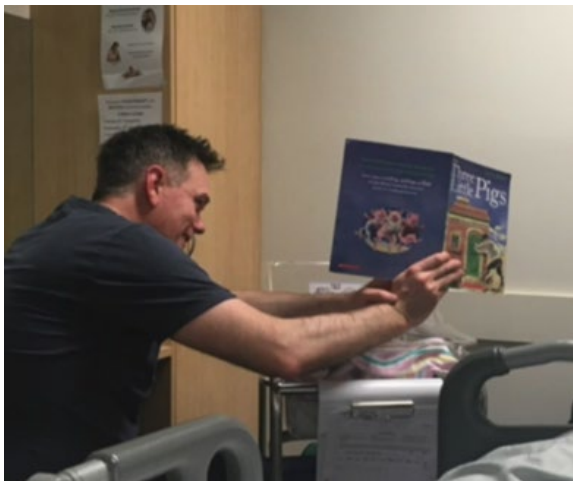


So what prompted my conversion? It was this little guy.



This is Jedidiah Jeffrey Fox. He was my first son. He's coming up four and a half.

He was born the 23rd of September in 2017. And I thought, "oh gee, I'm an education, I'm an educational leader, and I don't quite understand how my son's going to learn to read." I went to the people in the office and started asking questions. That was certainly a strong motivator.



This is about 3 hours after Jed was born. We're reading the Three Little Pigs.

I describe myself as an enthusiastic, well-intentioned parent in this. Maybe I was doing the right thing. I was certainly hopeful I exposed, was starting to expose him, into vocabulary. I don't think I was doing any harm, but perhaps if you went through a very precise criteria about what I was doing at this stage I'm maybe a balanced literacy approach and maybe a



whole language approach. We didn't get on to the phonics instruction till later. We didn't get onto letter recognition until much later. But we started with this idea. Let's read every day for a rich vocabulary.

And shortly after that, I understood about Emily Hanford's great work in the US about the 'three-cueing' theory, how I actually got one of my staff to go and get Goodman's book and tried to understand how you could make sense of it. I really couldn't. I'm not a trained teacher, but I can think through things, read research and understand it.

And then, I had this experience at a book fair where there was an education section. I go there and here's the approach to literacy in our Archdiocese, and I pull it out. And on page three is the three-cueing theory. The approach had expired but had been proclaimed for about six years, so the three-cueing theory was well ingrained in our supposed understanding of how we approached the teaching of reading. We had a normative position that we have to acknowledge was counter to the evidence and not well informed. With that, regardless of whether teachers in classrooms believed it, regardless of whether they were acting on it, we had a whole organisation committing to this three-cueing theory, that objectively was not sound, so starting with some trouble there.

Now, just one of the aspects about change - because today is about how you achieve great change, how we get the science of learning, how we get the focus on learning - my reflection, I might have got it wrong, was that we had to move very, very slowly because you can do something wrong faster than you can do it right. It's much harder to wind it back. We went very, very slowly. And certain colleagues of mine will tell you there was just this constant barrage of "when are you going to announce what you're doing?" "What are you going to do?" And I said, "No, no, no. We're going to keep thinking about, we're going to reflect on it." We did a lot of reading, a lot of listening to podcasts, a lot of talking with the likes of Lorraine and others, understanding what the Science of Reading said, the Science of Learning said, and what its implications were for how we approach the core. What I describe as the core pillars of our teaching task; which is what we're going to teach - the curriculum, how we're going to teach it - the pedagogy, and how we're going to know the students have learnt - the assessment.

I'm boiling it down to a simplistic model, but I find that quite helpful.

Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. What is our position on those? What are our expectations?



I think one of the profound things that we did early on was say, we're going to start with an assumption this is not about students, which sounds a bit odd. It's not about students - it's actually about the teacher. And what we know is we can trust the teacher to deliver great learning in every classroom as long as we're confident that they know the right thing. That they've got an opportunity to be supported in their practice and they've got all the materials they need to realise that.

We haven't delivered fully on that yet. That's a challenge. But it's all about providing great teaching and learning through a great teacher in every one of the thousand classrooms, and that has been a very deliberate focus, a very strategic focus for us. I have had multiple conversations with Patrick, saying "I don't understand how this is going to affect or help a teacher in a classroom". "Is it that important?".

With respect to our colleagues, as I said, there are so many distractions. You can talk about theories of leadership, theories of change, all of these things. And my real reservation is that none of these things necessarily entail a commitment to the science of learning or science of reading. And you're doing all this work, all this great theorising that has marginal, if not no impact on the actual learning. I think what we're setting out to change in Canberra Goulburn is the relationship between the teacher and the learner in a thousand classrooms, so that we've got fidelity to the Science of Reading in the Science of Learning.