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# Teacher Clarity: A Potent Yet Misunderstood Teaching Strategy



June 16, 2017 By [Shaun Killian \(MEd, MLead\)](#)

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If you have what we call *teacher clarity*, you can have a much larger impact on how well your students do in your class.



Clarity is critical. Eminent educators, Dylan Wiliam and John Hattie agree that you must be very clear about what you want your students to learn. **You need to know**



## How to Use Teacher Clarity

# Research on the Impact of Teacher Clarity

In Hattie's 2009 book, *Visible Learning*, he reports that teacher clarity has an effect size of  $d = 0.75$ . This claim was based on a [meta-analysis by Frank Fendick](#). If you read the actual meta-analysis, you will see that this effect varied by sector. In:

- ➔ Primary school  $d = 0.54$
- ➔ Secondary school  $d = 0.63$
- ➔ University  $d = 0.93$

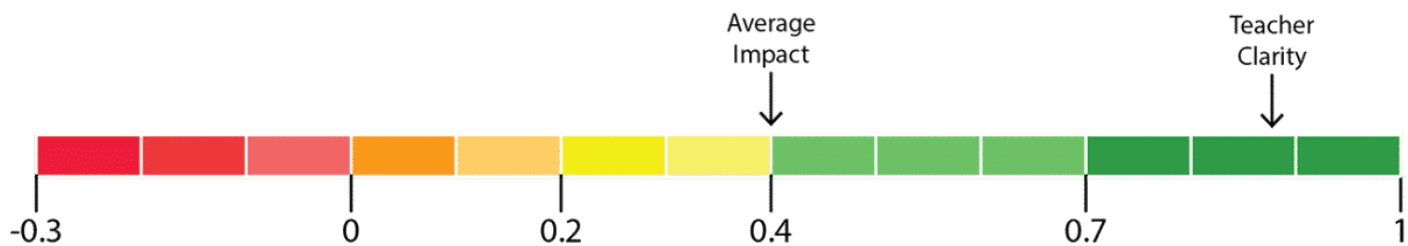
This may mean that teacher clarity has more impact on older students. However, Fendick also found something else that may explain this difference. The impact was higher when students rated the clarity of their teacher rather than when observers watched and rated teachers. Studies of older students made far more use of student ratings. So, it is feasible that the differences between sectors stem from how teacher clarity was measured rather than from the age of the students.

Since then, Scott Titsworth and his colleagues have conducted [2 meta-analyses](#) (2015) on the impact of teacher clarity. They did not report separate effects for different sectors.

In their second meta-analysis, they found that teacher clarity had an effect size of:

- ➔  $d = 1.03$  for academic learning
- ➔  $d = 1.25$  on students' motivation and attitudes

Given that they included Fendick's work in their own analysis – the average impact of teacher clarity is  $d = 0.88$   $[(0.72 + 1.03) \div 2]$ .



The Average Impact of Teacher Clarity on Academic Learning

Yet, the real impact of teacher clarity may be slightly smaller in schools as:

- ➔ Fendick's work showed lower results for primary and secondary schools
- ➔ Titsworth did not show separate results for each sector

In either case, the impact is substantial.

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## What Is Teacher Clarity?



- [Examples & Guided Practice](#)
- [Assessment of Student Learning](#)

## Learning Intentions & Success Criteria

I am not against using learning intentions and success criteria. They may indeed be useful ways to clarify what you want your students to learn in some context. And, such clarity is a core part of *organisation* (above). But:

- They are only one way to achieve such clarity, and the research did not use those terms. There are other ways to do so that may be better suited to your context. What matters is that you are clear about what your students must learn.
- Being clear about what your students must learn is critical, but it is only one part of teacher clarity. And, the research is clear that combining the various aspects of teacher clarity has a much larger impact on your students learning.

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## How to Use Teacher Clarity to Enhance Student Learning

First, you need to understand the various aspects of teacher clarity and how they fit together. I have tried to organise these aspects so that they make sense to teachers who

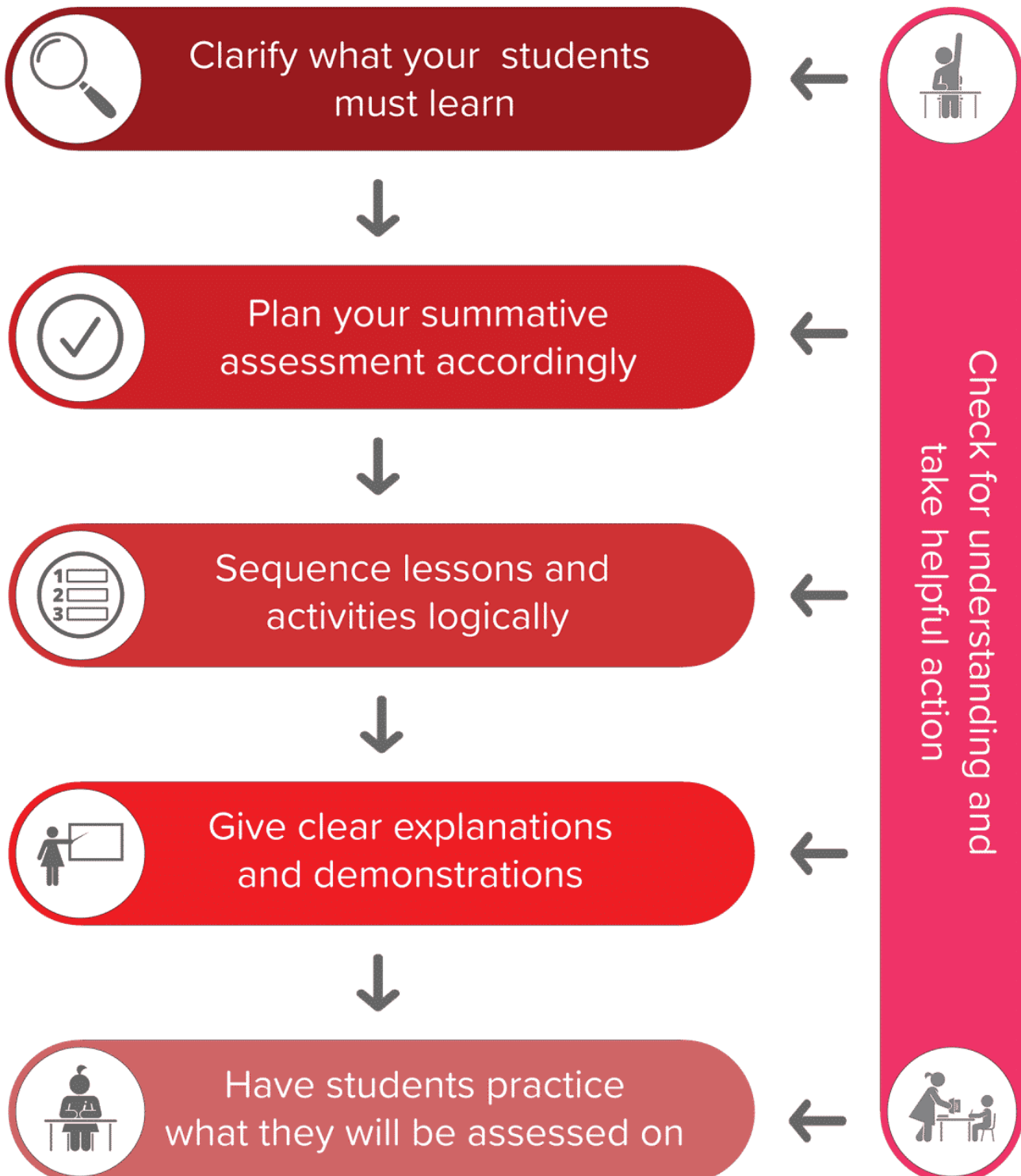
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## Step 1: Clarify What Your Students Must Learn

### Essential

Always begin with the end in mind. You need to be clear about what your students need to *know* and be able to *do* – *either by the end of the lesson, unit or program.*

“ If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up some place else  
**Yogi Berra**

### Flexible

This may take the form of a list of a unit aim, unit objectives, learning intentions, a lesson goal(s), success criteria or any other form of your choice. But you must spell out what it is that you students should learn.

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prior knowledge and competence in the above. The way you do this should be influenced by the nature of your objectives. Possible methods include *a pre-test, a running record, a phonics check, an unassisted draft piece of writing, a concept map* or any other form of assessment.

The helpful action (+) you take is using the results during step 3 when you plan how to get your students from where they are now, to where you want them to be.



### Step 2: Plan Your Summative Assessment

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#### Essential

At the unit level, you plan a summative assessment task(s) in line with what it is you want your students to learn (e.g. your unit objectives). The best assessment task(s) will depend upon what you want your students to learn.

Within a single lesson, you plan less formal ways to check your students understand what you have taught them and can do what you have shown them.



formative assessment(s) similar to your summative assessment.



## Step 3: Sequence Your Lessons or Activities Logically

### Essential

You must plan a sequence of lessons or a series of activities within a lesson. These lessons or activities must explicitly help students to achieve the intended learning.

Put another way, it must provide a logical pathway from where the students are at to where you want them to be.

And, you must build in time for reviewing past work.

### Flexible

Except for the above, you can sequence learning however you want. There are some things that offer you some guidance, but they are not part of the teacher clarity concept. These include:





At this stage, it is useful to identify common misconceptions your students may hold. This could be about the unit topic or in relation to the specific lesson you are about to teach.



## Step 4: Give Clear Explanations & Demonstrations

### Essential

You need to clearly explain the things that you want your students to understand. And, you must show your students how to do the things you want them to be able to do.

Moreover, you should

- ➔ Explain things as simply as possible
- ➔ Break things down in a step-by-step manner
- ➔ Stress difficult points
- ➔ Stay with a topic until your students understand it



visuals to support verbal explanations, and the power of faded worked examples.



## Checking for Understanding+ in Step 4

It is crucial that your students have understood what you have taught them before moving onto the next part of a lesson or to future lessons. You can do this through asking questions, listening to responses and listening to discussions.



## Step 5: Have Your Students Practice Assessment Like Tasks

### Essential

You must give your students the opportunity to practice things that are like those that they will need to do when formally assessed.

Yet, don't just throw your students in the deep end. There should be a gradual release of responsibility, with steps in between you showing them what to do and them doing it independently.



## Checking for Understanding+ in Step 5

Checking for understanding at this stage involves marking their practice attempts. The + component includes offering feedback and going over areas they are having difficulty with. Depending on the nature of the practice tasks, you can mark students work either within or after class.



## Step 6: Have Your Students' Do Their Summative Assessment

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### Essential

Your students must complete a summative assessment task(s) that genuinely reflects the intended learning.

### Flexible

You can choose any type of assessment task provided it aligns with the intended learning.

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clarity, so let's break it down.

1. Teacher clarity includes but goes *beyond* the notion of being clear about what you want your students to know and be able to do.
2. Teacher clarity involves using the above clarity to focus subsequent teaching and assessment. These activities include initial explanations and demonstrations. They also include practice and review sessions. But teacher clarity does not rule out other types of activities provided they help to achieve the intended learning.
3. When your students have not understood what you have taught them, teacher clarity also involves explaining things a different way, giving students constructive feedback or taking other actions to help them master it.

## Teacher Clarity FAQs

### What is Teacher Clarity?

Teacher clarity starts with you being clear about what you want your students to learn. But it also involves much more than that. You must also focus and align your assessment, teaching and curriculum in line with this intended learning.



## How to Improve Teacher Clarity?

There are 7 steps involved in improving teacher clarity, you:

1. Need to be crystal clear about what you want your students to know and be able to do.
2. Must select or create a summative assessment task(s) that genuinely assesses the above.
3. Have to organise and sequence your lessons (or activities within a lesson) in line with your intended learning. This should include time for review.
4. Clearly explain what your students need to know and show them what they need to do within each lesson.
5. Give your students time to practice the sorts of things they must do in their upcoming summative assessment.
6. Progressively check for understanding and competence, offering help and feedback along the way.
7. Have your students complete their summative assessment task(s) and see how clearly they understood what you taught them.



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Shaun Killian is an experienced teacher and principal with a passion for helping students to excel. He believes that assisting teachers to adopt



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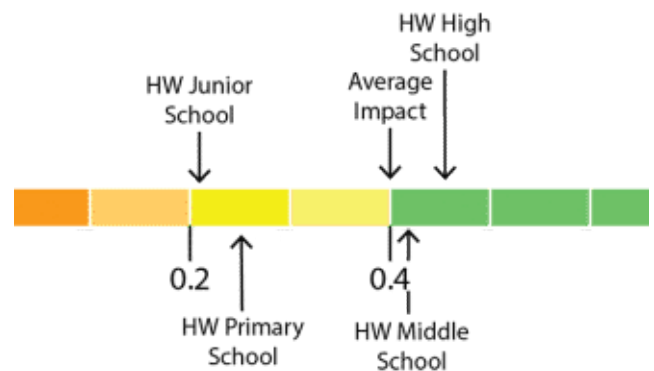
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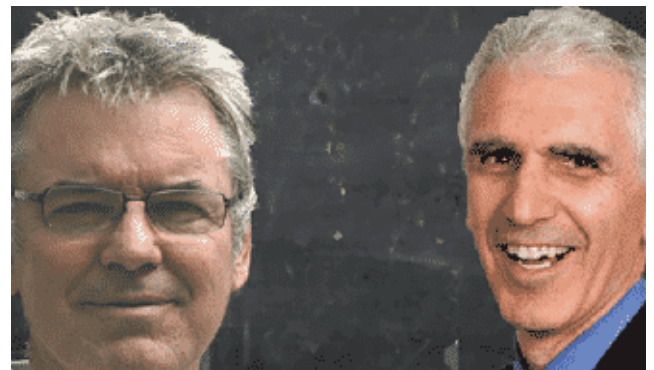


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