

# What's the research telling us?

Big Picture Education Australia, 2016  
Conference, Fremantle

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With a little help from my friends  
John Hogan, Kathryn Choules, Donna Carr and Helen Stone

# BIG PICTURE EDUCATION AUSTRALIA

Experiences of students,  
parents/carers and teachers

DEB HAYES, BARRY DOWN, DEB TALBOT & KATHRYN CHOULES

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY.  
NOVEMBER 2013

A Report for the Western Australian Department of Education



## The Secondary Engagement Evaluation Project in Low SES Schools

Professor Barry Down  
City of Rockingham Chair in Education  
*with*  
Dr Kathryn Choules



Centre for Learning Change and Development (CLCD)



**MAP4U** Murdoch University

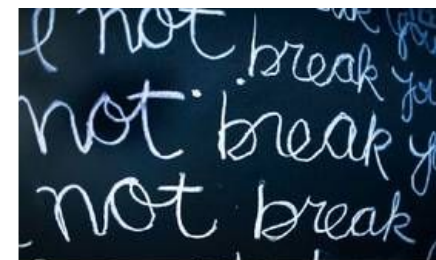
The **BIG PICTURE ACADEMY** Research Project  
Promising Practices: What students and parents say about  
learning in a Big Picture context.

# Four key questions for today

- Why are students disengaging from mainstream schooling?
- What are students learning in Big Picture Advisory?
- What practices support student engagement *for* learning?
- What can I do next?

\*Boredom \*Bullying \*Irrelevance \*Not mattering \*Not fitting in \*Class sizes \*Rigidity \*Measurement \*Competition \*Punitive rules \*Didactic teaching \*Streaming \*Poor relationships \*Stressed \*Tired \*Anxious

## **WHY ARE STUDENTS DISENGAGING FROM MAINSTREAM SCHOOLING?**



## Wounded by School

*Recapturing the Joy in Learning and  
Standing Up to Old School Culture*

Kirsten Olson

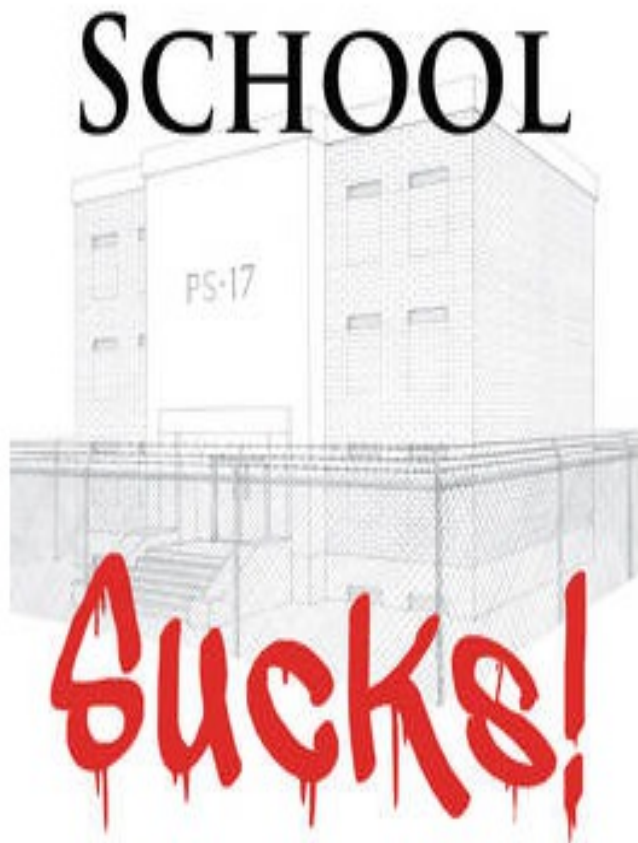
Forewords by

SARA LAWRENCE-LIGHTFOOT  
and PARKER J. PALMER



Students Talk Back to a Segregated Nation  
on the Failures of Urban Education

Gaston Alonzo, Noel S. Anderson, Celina So, and Jeanne Theoharis



Arguments for Alternative Education

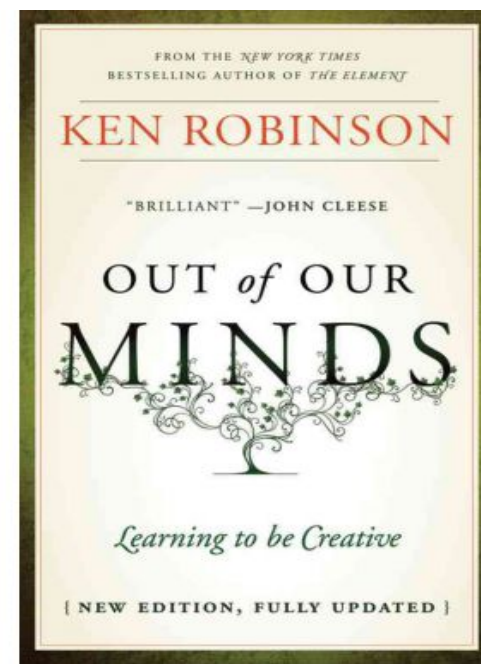
EDITED BY  
ROCHELLE BROCK & GREG S. GOODMAN

## 'Dropping Out,' Drifting Off, Being Excluded

*Becoming Somebody Without School*

JOHN SMYTH and ROBERT HATTAM

WITH JENNY CANNON, JAN EDWARDS,  
NOEL WILSON, and SHIRLEY WURST



FROM THE *NEW YORK TIMES*  
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE ELEMENT*

KEN ROBINSON

"BRILLIANT" —JOHN CLEESE

OUT of OUR  
MINDS

*Learning to be Creative*



[ NEW EDITION, FULLY UPDATED ]

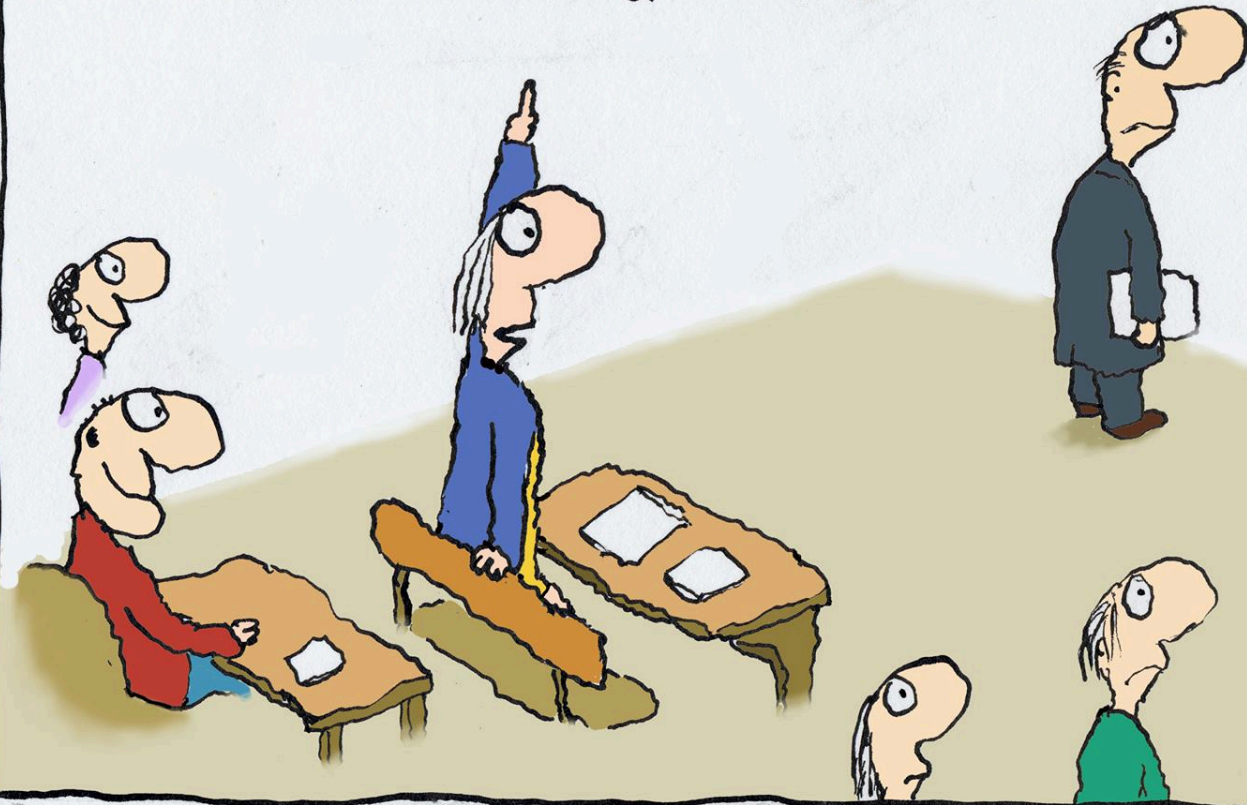
# Disengagement, not learning

*I didn't really go to class. It wasn't interesting. ...it just got boring for me so I guess I just stopped doing things that were boring for me. (Student)*

*Year 8 and 9 and half of year 10 I didn't want to be at school. One of the main reasons was because I didn't want to be in my classes because all the kids in my classes would make fun of me and pick on me all the time so I didn't want to be in there so I stopped going at one point and it kind of came like a habit so I stopped going to school. (Student)*

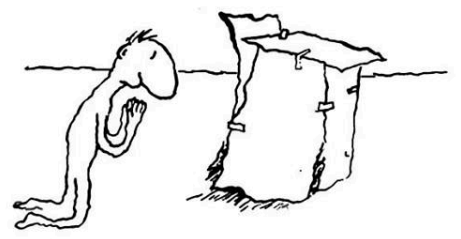
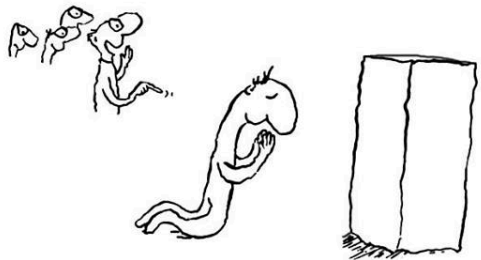
Sir... SIR!  
... it was the Prime  
Minister who wrote it sir...  
John Howard did it.

THE TEACHER  
IS A  
LOSER   
AND  
THE SCHOOL  
IS CRAP. 



Leunig

SO... you believe  
in this do you..?  
...well just watch...



Leunig

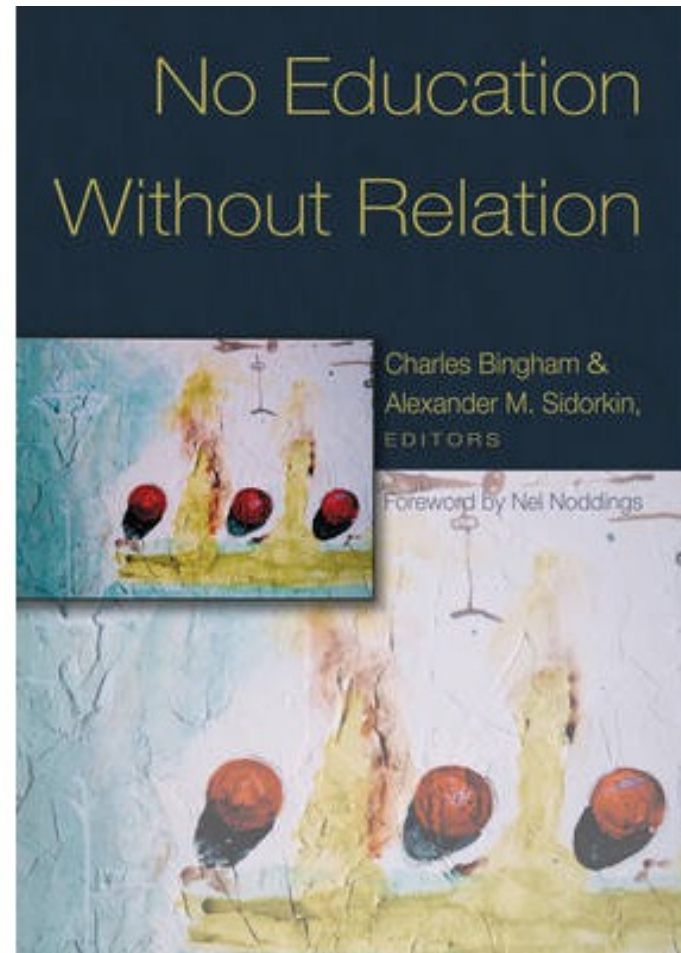


\*Relationships \*Affect \*Engagement \*Deep Learning \*Transformation  
\*Learning about Learning

# **WHAT ARE STUDENTS LEARNING IN BIG PICTURE ADVISORY?**

# Relationships – respect, trust and care

Students value the closer relationship with their Advisory Teacher because they feel connected and supported. This relationship is an important cornerstone of their learning. For many students the acceptance and interest shown by the Advisory Teacher is unusual, facilitating a sense of belonging and trust.

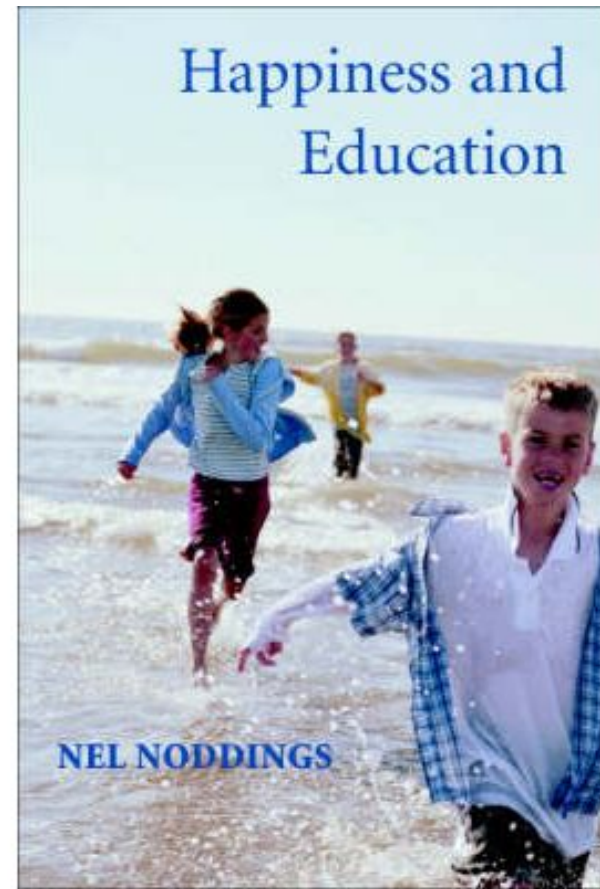


# Student

*Like she knows my strengths and weaknesses through my time in Big Picture, so I can sort of trust that she knows when to step in and help out, unlike other teachers that will just watch me struggle in other classes.*

# Affective – well-being, self-worth and self-efficacy

The affective dimension refers to the connection between a young person's sense of self-worth, self-efficacy and general happiness and their capacity to be a contributing member of a school community.



# Student

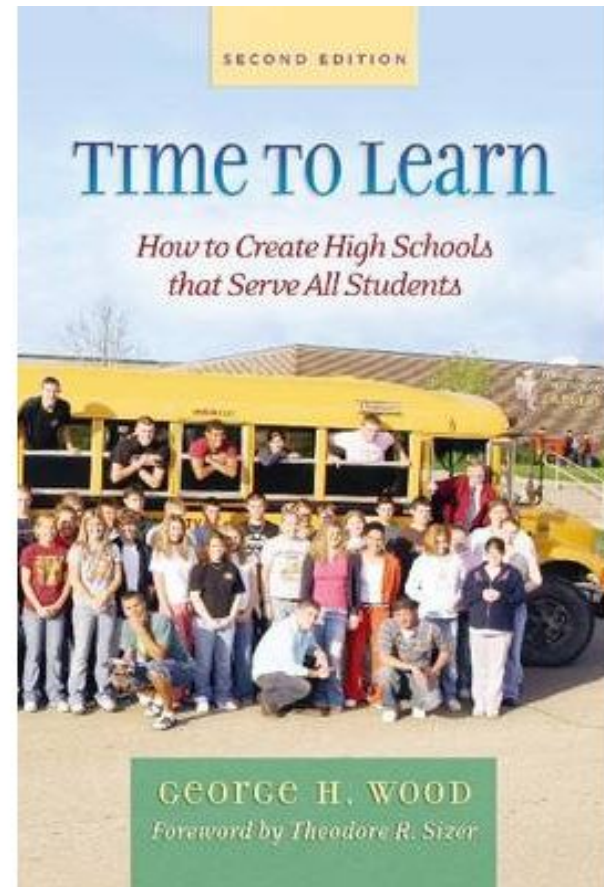
*I feel like I'm a lot closer with the (family)...(they ask) how was school today and that kind of stuff ...I am probably telling them more about what I did because it's interesting for me and its just like I write this and this and this and I'm doing this next week and can you come along to that because I kind of need you to. I feel like it's closer – like me with them with school.*

# Parent

*My relationship with William (pseudonym) is changing. When he was in mainstream he'd arrive home angry, drop his bag down and I'd ask how his day was. He'd just say 'bad'. Now he wants to talk to me because he's interested in being at school and loves it when I listen to what he's doing.*

# Engagement – taking ownership of learning

Engagement is a broad theme and includes how students feel about their learning, their interest, and their general endeavour and output. A desire to participate is a starting point from which a deeper commitment to learning is possible. This theme recognises the importance of relevance, rigour and relationships to student engagement – both within and outside the school.



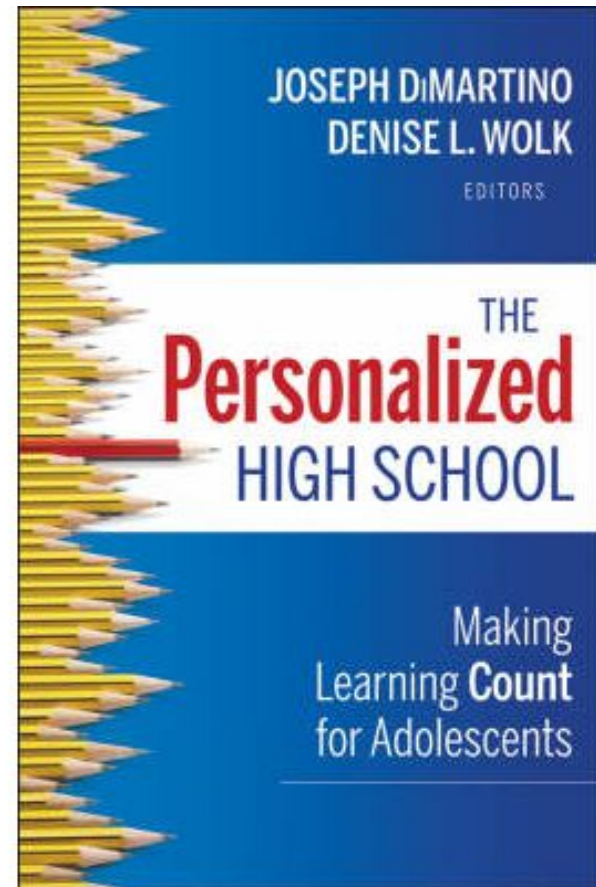
# Advisory Teacher

*We've had students working on fantastic topics... we had one student last year who was learning all about the issues in Palestine and Israel and it was all off the cuff comments from the news... she found it fascinating and she had no idea and she just ran with it really. She was not the student you would have expected to go there and I remember her mum coming in for one of the Exhibitions and she said "I've never seen her talking about the news and tuning into it." But she is quite a high level and performing student. The whole research thing... she was very good at putting that together... and it wasn't planned it was just how it went.*



# Deep learning – facilitated by a personalised approach

A core purpose of the Big Picture approach is to facilitate deep learning. Essential to this task is helping students to find and follow their interests. Depth of learning is evidenced by the extent to which students learn about the content (the interdisciplinary knowledge) of their interest. They learn the language, the key concepts, to use the tools, and the 'ways of working' of their interest. Achievement then is measured by the quality of the work and how the work changes the student. Across all their learning students are asked to demonstrate their development in each of five learning goals: Empirical Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, Social Reasoning, Communication and Personal Qualities. Depth of learning then must also be seen in the context of each student or one student at a time.

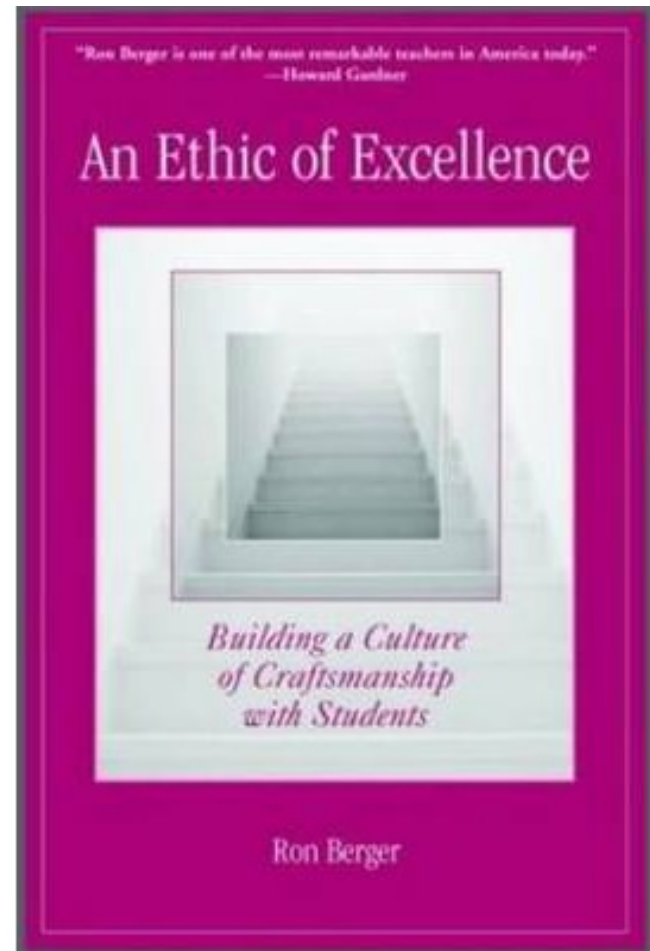


# Starting from where students “are at”

*At the beginning [of the year] I wanted to be a tattooist. Learning the history of that was fun and how they do it... Now I'm studying psychology because it has always interested me. In particular, I'm studying post-traumatic stress disorder. For my Exhibition, I did a timeline of psychology from 1500 BC to 2000 A.D. Psychology isn't just about mental illness. I made a PTSD fact sheet and people asked me if I'd just cut and pasted it but I had written it all down and then put it into a document. It was my own work, including the compare and contrast of two different PTSD cases. The preparation is more stressful than the actual Exhibition. (Student)*

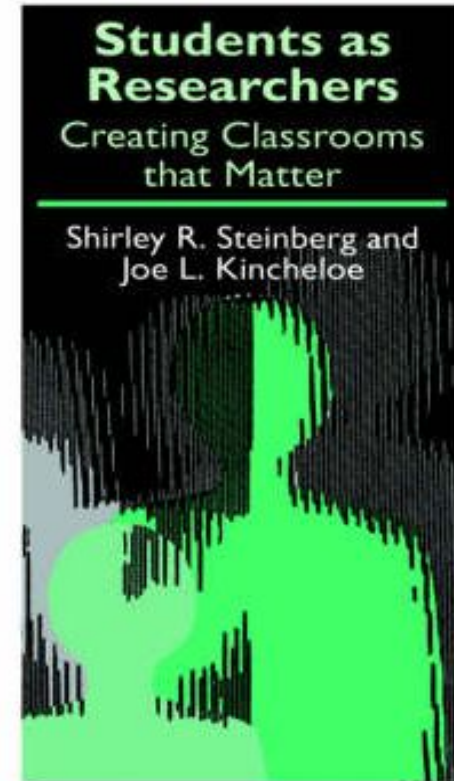
# “Real World” standards

Kiah’s interest centred on astrophysics and the question of evolution. With support from her Advisory Teacher Kiah enrolled in an online course at Go8 University led by an astronomer. She participated in classes twice a week where she interacted with an expert mentor and students from specialist STEM schools around the country. These students were a year older than Kiah. She completed all her assessment tasks and participated in collaborative group work to tackle “real world” problems and questions. She described learning about light, wavelength, matter, and the universe. She found it challenging and in her words, ‘too much depth’. Kiah is now thinking about a career in science. (Exhibition Observation)



# Authentic research methods

Loretta's project focused on history, not the kind of decontextualized history covered in the race through the syllabus but a desire to understand 'life to text' rather than 'text to life'. Her research/inquiry question examined the reasons why European families migrated to Australia in the post war period. Loretta wanted to explore her own family history as a means of understanding why historical events happen. Her family came from Macedonia so she decided to undertake an oral history through the use of interviews and by accessing primary documents in the state library as well as family photos. These are real research techniques employed by experts that help students move beyond low-level Wikipedia information gathering i.e., cutting and pasting information into an assignment of dubious value. Loretta is doing much more than *completing assignments for the sake of it*. (Exhibition Observation)



THE PALMER PRESS TEACHERS' LIBRARY

# Personal interest to academic knowledge

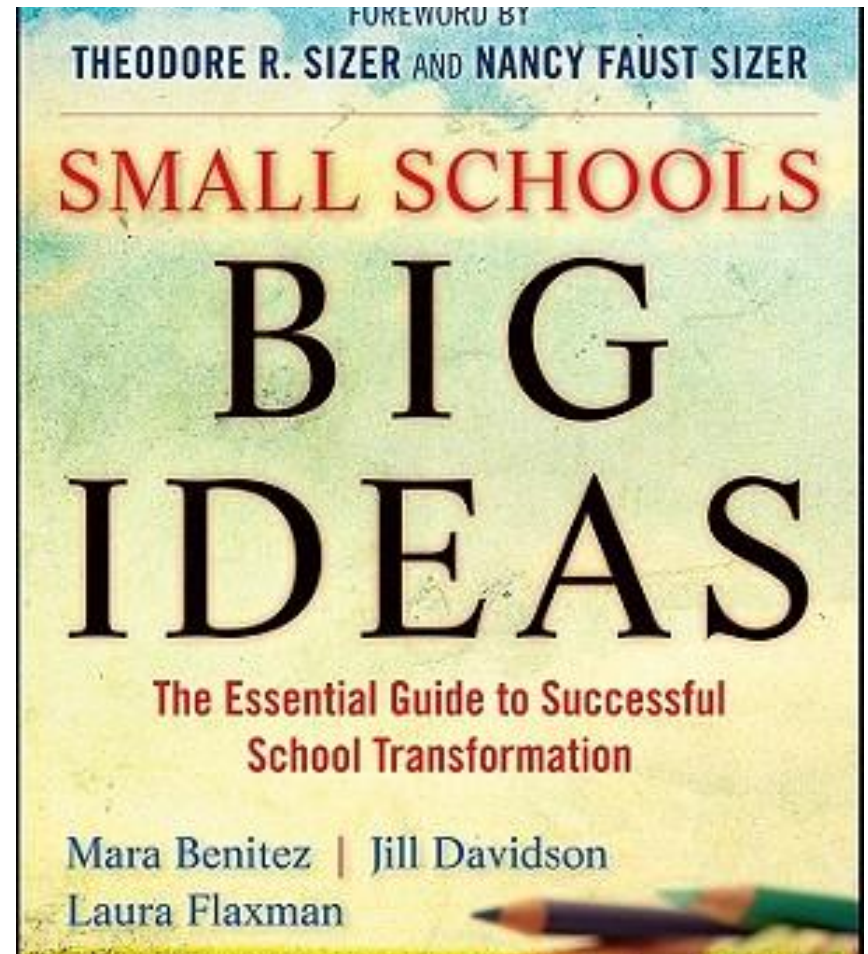
Rick is a Year 12 student with a passion for basketball. He worked on a project that required him to analyse the shooting techniques of famous players. He represented his findings using parabolas. Throughout the project Rick also investigated the scientific principle of force in relation to the vertical leaps of some of the best known players that can slam dunk a basketball. Rick combined his project work with an internship at an NBL club working closely with his mentor to explore the world of professional sport. Rick is currently completing his Certificate III in Gym Instruction and Fitness (Exhibition Observation)

# Learning in a community of learners

*In Big Picture it is great that you don't have to do everything on your own. If there's a problem or something on my mind I can talk to the Advisory teacher or the other students. The advisory teacher knows me as person and I know him well enough to talk to him about anything. It's amazing. There is a lot interaction between students and no problems we get on really well. We help each other and work together on any decisions. Any conflict is over by the next day. (Student)*

# Transformation – developing independence

Transformation refers to the idea of a fundamental change in the way students perceive themselves and their experiences with the world. Transformative learning occurs when students become aware of having a limiting or distorted view about themselves or others. It involves interrupting the way things are and instead, imagining alternative identities and futures.



# Student

*I did an Exhibition in front of a big group of visitors to the school. I was really nervous because I am scared of public speaking but it benefited me in the long run. Getting the feedback from so many adults was good. I was stressed but afterwards I was glad that I had had the opportunity.*



# Learning about learning – self and others

This theme describes students' growing capacity to step back and reflect on the learning process itself. This involves the students' learning about their own learning and their learning about the learning of others (teachers, other students, mentors and parents). Students are developing an awareness of the challenges and possibilities of learning in an innovative and personalised environment.



# Advisory Teacher

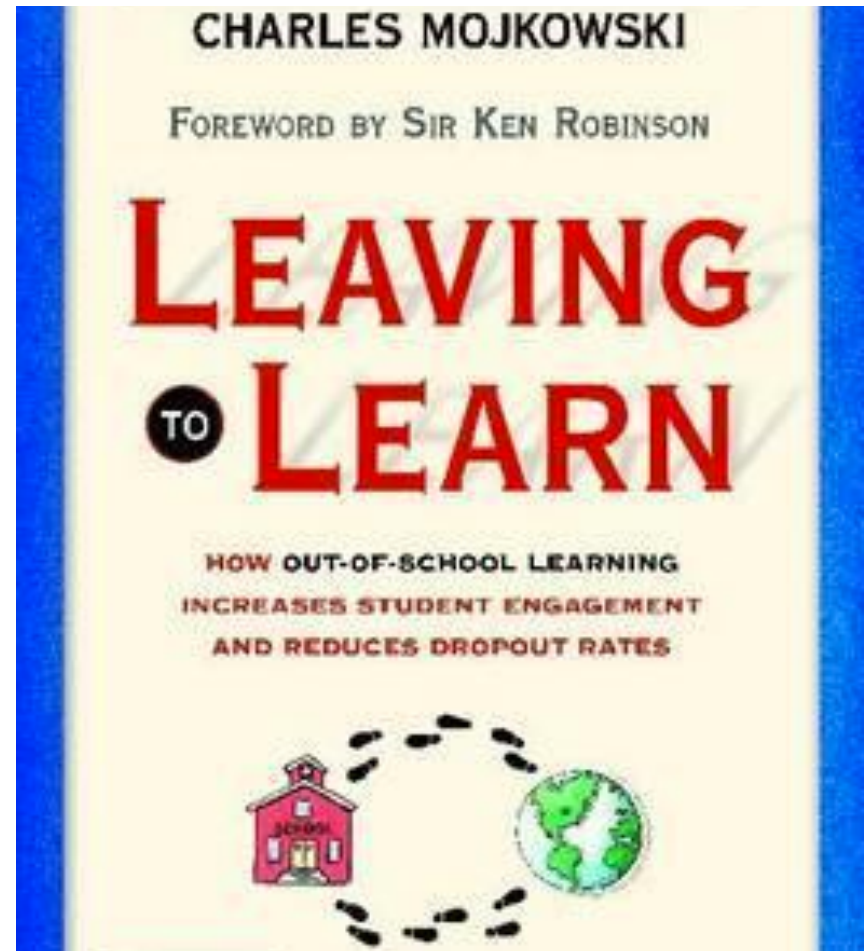
*The other day they were studying for their upcoming assessments and the way that they did it was sophisticated. They were challenging each other. They knew each other's strengths and weaknesses so they knew when to lean on someone or when to let someone lean on them during that process.*

\*Advisory \*Advisory Teacher \*Real World Learning \*Post School Plans  
\*Exhibitions \*Families

## **WHAT PRACTICES SUPPORT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT *FOR* LEARNING?**

# What practices support student engagement *for* learning?

- Advisory – like an extended family, the engine room
- Advisory teacher – the coach, facilitator, authority
- Real world learning – connecting to people in the community
- Post-school plans – looking to the future
- Exhibitions – a site of learning and connection
- Families – families are enrolled too

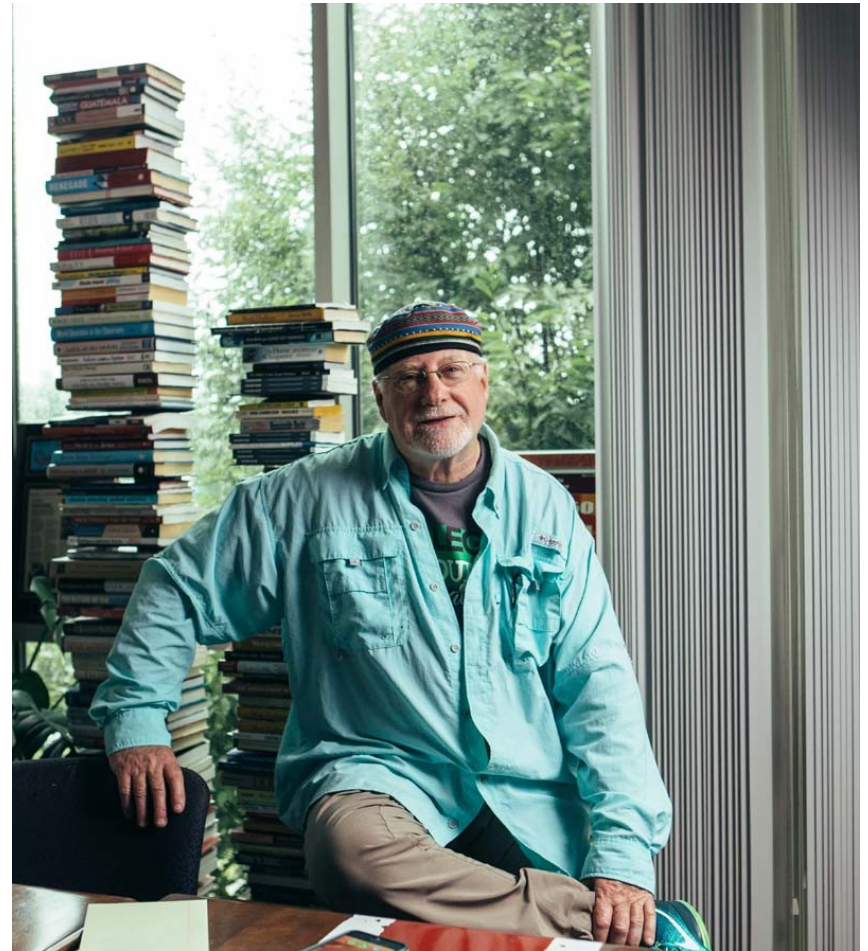


# A final word

How have I gotten here?

- Fight for what you think is right.
- Don't give up.
- Anything is possible in Rhode Island [and ... ].
- Think differently.
- Innovate. Innovate. Innovate.
- Keep showing up.
- It has been a great 21 years, with still more to come.

(Littky, D. When hard work is worth it. *Providence Business News*, 29 August, 2016.  
[http://www.pbn.com/detail.html?sub\\_id=5ce1fe410c](http://www.pbn.com/detail.html?sub_id=5ce1fe410c))



# Some questions

- What surprises, interests you most from these research findings?
- What key messages/ideas/strategies might be useful in your school/classroom in light of this evidence?
- What can I do to improve my practice?
- How will you go about it? With whom? What do you need?
- What would you like to know more about?