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2017 HSC Results: How to Pass their Successes on to their Successors

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Learning in Practice

Volume 2 Number 1 December 2018

About the Author

Amanda Eastman is an English and History teacher, but she is passionate about a range of KLAS. This interest has led her to various cross-curricula roles. From 2012 – 2014 she was the Assistant to the Director of Studies, overseeing the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. In 2016 she worked in the Learning Support Department, teaching Fundamentals of English and supporting students with specific learning needs. In 2017, she began working as the Assistant to the Director of the Barker Institute. She has also enjoyed participating in the co-curricular life of the School, having coached Softball and Touch football and been acting CCC of Hockey, Assistant CCC of Snowsports and a Boarding Duty Officer.

About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

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Learning in Practice
2019 Vol. 2 (1)
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Abstract

Each year, we farewell the graduating cohort with pride and nostalgia, confident that they have been equipped to thrive within and contribute to the world beyond the Mint Gates. They also leave with a wealth of knowledge about how to succeed within the walls of Barker College. Rather than allowing them to leave still holding the keys for success, the Barker Institute has undertaken a study with the aim of preserving this knowledge for posterity. The 2018 study aimed to identify successful learners from the 2017 cohort, ascertain the reasons for their accomplishments and determine how to engender the same traits in their successors.

Aim

The aim of this study was to identify the key factors contributing to HSC success and determine how to develop these characteristics in subsequent year groups.

Method

Two groups of focus students were selected from the 2017 HSC cohort by examining their portfolio of HSC marks across all subjects. Group 1 was composed of students who were recognised as high achievers and all-rounders (meaning they achieved Band 6 in 10 units or more). Group 2 consisted of students who were on the cusp of being all-rounders. Dividing the sample into two groups allowed the researchers to examine similarities and differences between the groups, thus ascertaining whether certain adjustments could help the second group to cross that threshold into Band 6. This would make a significant difference to their individual ATARs and our School rankings.

The analysis took 3 main forms: data analysis, surveys and interviews. A comprehensive analysis of the methodology, data and results was provided to the Executive for review. This report provides a brief summary of some of the key findings and recommendations.

Findings

Overall, the results helped to construct a profile of successful learners at Barker College. This provides something for students to aspire to and can also be used by staff and parents who wish to help their students / children develop these characteristics.

High achievers at Barker:

- Are passionate about their learning and choose subjects they enjoy (rather than the subjects they think will get them the best marks)
- Are motivated and determined to meet their goals
- Work out what study techniques suit them and tailor these to each subject
- Plan their study in a way that works for them and adjust their schedule depending on their busyness, understanding and results
- Self-report a strong level of organisation, feeling positive about their ability to manage the workload
- Ask many questions and seek advice
- Regularly seek out and apply feedback
- Practice examination skills, rather than just memorising content
- Engage in and are grateful for the School community and appreciate all the School has to offer
- Are interested in learning life lessons, not just academic content
- Sometimes regret letting themselves get too stressed about results

Recommendations

Assessment:

- The data analysis showed a general trend of improvement from the Half Yearly Examinations to the Trial Examinations. When large sections of the cohort underperformed in one section, this was evidently addressed and many students exhibited significant improvement in the corresponding section of subsequent examinations. However, there were cases where generally high-achieving individuals repeatedly scored lowest in the same section and perceivably could have benefited from more targeted intervention. This may include attending extra help sessions for individual feedback, examining exemplar responses and rewriting their own work to demonstrate improvement.
- It could also be pertinent to explore ways to support high achieving students more closely in their pursuit of SATs.

Feedback:

- The results of this survey reinforced what the research says – high achievers value, seek out and grow from useful feedback. The following points outline which types of feedback were perceived as the most useful.
- In-depth verbal feedback where the teacher is able to gauge comprehension, not just written comments on work.
- Opportunities to rewrite work based on feedback and show that they have understood and can apply it. This can help them to develop their own personal exemplars.

- Encouraging and assisting students to develop shared resource repositories, including notes, feedback and exemplars. Not only do these improve academic success, the students who were more involved in these processes also reported a better sense of connectedness and wellbeing.

Study:

The overwhelming theme when it came to successful study techniques was that students needed to work out what worked for them. The strategies varied widely, but the high-achieving students were able to rationalise what worked for them personally and why. Through trial and error, self-reflection and advice they had developed a deliberate and specific way of organising their study time and methodology. Accordingly, the recommendations are as follows:

- Introduce students to a greater range of study techniques early on so that they have a chance to trial different techniques and work out what suits them best by Year 12. There are currently some study advice sessions such as the Elevate program. Perhaps these could be supplemented by other methods, with more follow up and support to track students' application of these suggestions. PCSE could be a useful platform to have students report back on the skills they trial and further hone their techniques.
- Some successful students also reported being counselled by a particular teacher in study methods (rather than just course content). This approach could be adopted more widely as it would give students a broader bank of ideas to try and also help them understand how to adapt their study to suit different subjects.
- Given that executive functioning skills and high levels of organisation were almost ubiquitous amongst the successful learners, these skills should be more explicitly taught and honed throughout the learning journey.

Wellbeing:

Overall, the students reported a fairly low sense of wellbeing and positivity throughout year 12. This is an area that could benefit from serious attention, perhaps in the following ways:

- Some expressed an interest in speaking to or mentoring Year 12s about what they learnt in regards to life balance, and there certainly could be a place for carefully selected students to advise the students in this way.
- One student suggested, "I think a PCSE session talking about how to deal with stress and anxiety when actually in an exam room could be awesome". This is an idea worth pursuing.
- Involvement in sharing resources had a positive correlation to wellbeing, so it would be helpful to explore ways to enhance this culture.
- Another factor that seemed to positively impact the students was feeling supported by staff and family. The School should continue to explore opportunities to educate and engage with parents about supporting their children such as sessions run by the Barker Institute.

- Finally, the students were asked 'On reflection, what would you change about your final year if you had the chance to do it again?' The responses almost unanimously illuminated a desire to diminish stress and improve balance. The Barker Institute will work with the Director of Wellbeing to review these survey results and implement more targeted support for Year 12 students. It could also be beneficial to focus on the training and support for those with pastoral responsibility for Year 12s (such as Tutors, PSCE associates and parents).

Overall, the study highlighted the impressive range of knowledge, skills and attributes amongst Barker College's high achieving graduates. It provided staff, parents and students with ideas for maximising success and wellbeing at the School. The most pertinent summary of the findings appears to be that students need to focus on how they learn, rather than just what they are learning. They need to be proactive in their development of study techniques, their application of feedback, their contributions to collaborative learning and their pursuit of balance. The researchers wish the study participants and their successors every success in the future.



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