

Unleashing the Positive Power of Differences

*Polarity Thinking
in Our Schools*

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A Joint Publication



Contents

Acknowledgments	v
List of Professional Development Activities	vi
About the Author.....	vii
PART I. UNDERSTANDING POLARITY THINKING.....	1
Chapter 1. Introduction: Let's Put Our Differences to Work for Us.....	3
Chapter 2. Getting Unstuck in Education.....	9
PART II. THE BIG PICTURE OF POLARITY THINKING IN EDUCATION REFORM.....	33
Chapter 3. Leveraging Education Goals: Academic Success AND Whole Child Success.....	35
Chapter 4. Ensuring Effective Teachers: Evaluation as a Measure of Effectiveness AND a Guide for Professional Growth	55
Chapter 5. Maximising Mathematics Instruction: Mastery of Knowledge AND Mastery of Problem Solving	77
Chapter 6. Making Certification Meaningful: Standardisation AND Customisation	105
PART III. PUTTING THE SMALL POLARITY THINKING TOOLS TO WORK	127
Chapter 7. Introducing Polarity Thinking to Your Team.....	129
Chapter 8. Guiding Your Team Through Polarity Thinking	141
Chapter 9. Using Polarity Tools to Explore Initiatives and Opposing Experts.....	159

Chapter 10. Working With Common Polarities in Education.....	175
Chapter 11. Students and Polarities: A Tool for Critical Thinking	193
PART IV. A CLOSER LOOK AT WHY WE BELIEVE WHAT WE BELIEVE	215
Chapter 12. Carl Jung, Neuroscience and the Truth That We're Wired to Develop Different Viewpoints.....	217
Conclusion: Moving Beyond Polarisation in Education	247
Appendix A. A PACT Process Case Study.....	251
Appendix B. Chapter 9 Reading: How Do We Help Students Succeed?.....	257
References.....	261
Suggestions for Further Reading.....	269



Hawker Brownlow Education

measure progress, by providing adults with the support and training they need, and by working to ensure that the system conditions and incentives support both teaching and learning. This is reflected in the Australian Professional Standard for Principals issued by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), which emphasises such practices as “leading teaching and learning,” “developing self and others” and “leading improvement, innovation and change” in order to promote “high-quality teaching, learning and schooling” (AITSL, 2011).

5. Accountability, measurement of academic progress and school choice result in academic success for all.

Under NCLB, accountability, flexibility and choice are seen as key strategies for closing the learning gap. In Australia, reliance on standardised tests, calls for more stringent teacher accountability initiatives and support for selective and charter schools are three common themes that tie into these strategies.

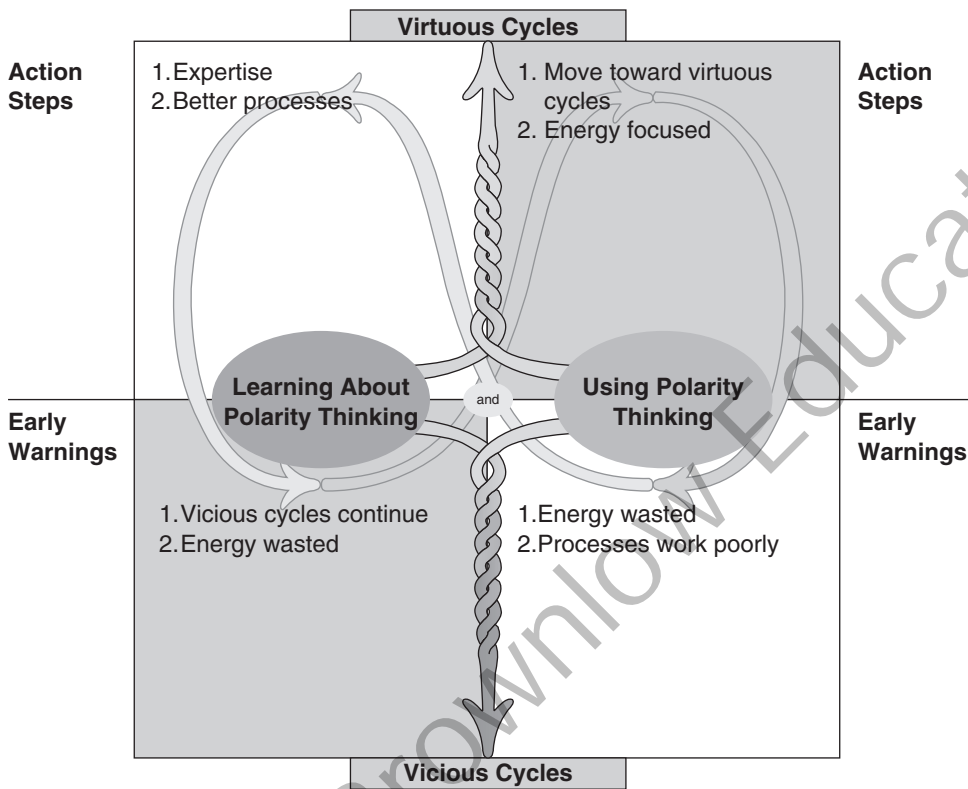
NEGATIVE RESULTS OF OVERFOCUSING ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT TO THE NEGLECT OF WHOLE CHILD ACHIEVEMENT

If academic achievement accurately captures part of a polarity, then too much focus on its values will eventually lead to its downside. Below are possible outcomes from failing to consider the values of educating the whole child.

1. Rating schools and providing school choice means that some students have access to a better education than others.

Opponents of school choice claim that if we’re ranking schools, we’re failing to strive for excellence in all schools. They point out that while choice would seem to empower everyone, it often disadvantages those with the fewest resources. Many parents prefer having their children in neighbourhood schools, especially low-income families who rely on public transport and might struggle to access schools further away from home. Meanwhile, parents with more resources, in terms of time, money and knowledge of the system and how to research other opportunities, are more likely to select schools based on ranking and reputation rather than proximity. This concentrates students with the biggest academic and other struggles in certain schools.

Figure 7.1 *Learning AND Doing Polarity*



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ACTIVITY 7.1: A 45-MINUTE INTRODUCTION TO LEVERAGING DIFFERENCES

The first item in your toolkit is a presentation, complete with activities, to introduce your learning community to working with polarities. The following slides with facilitation instructions are available at go.hbe.com.au.

Note: This is written as a script. Many presenters, though, will feel more comfortable using their own words to convey the ideas.

Objectives:

- to introduce a team to the three main steps of the Polarity Approach to Continuity and Transformation (PACT)
- to provide a concrete experience by mapping a common polarity

8

Guiding Your Team Through Polarity Thinking

One of my favourite differentiation strategies for mathematics is finding tasks that are rich enough to require collaboration *and* that can be approached in multiple ways. If carefully chosen, these tasks allow students with different levels of knowledge to engage at their own level of understanding. Frequently, students are successful with such problems when they first work with others of similar ability and then participate in a discussion about approaches that other groups used (Fosnot & Dolk, 2002).

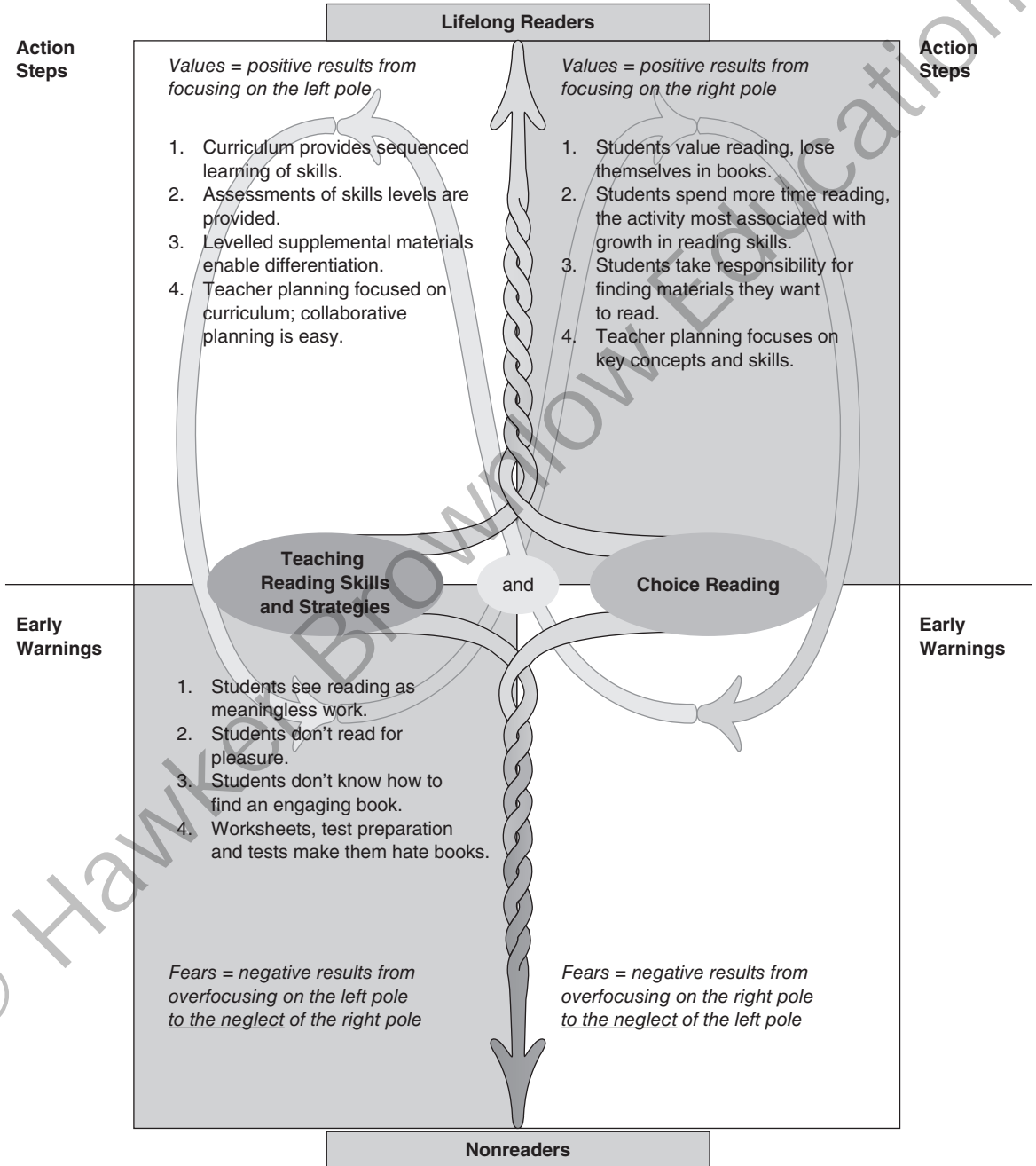
During the break at a workshop where I'd introduced this strategy, two teachers approached me and said, "We've been told that we must *always* use heterogeneous groups so that our struggling students can benefit from high-level thinking. Are you saying that grouping by ability is a good practice? It was so much easier to teach when we did that."

I asked whether in the past their "low" groups had been given different tasks. "Of course – they couldn't do the harder ones on their own. Now we are supposed to 'scaffold,' but that means all our attention goes to guiding some students through work that's over their heads."

I then used the age-old pizza/fractions problem to explain multiple points of entry.

Figure 9.5 Polarity Map for *The Book Whisperer* That Includes Current Values

Polarity Thinking Map for Reading Instruction – *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller



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REFLECTION

1. Use Chart 10.1 at the end of this chapter to consider which common polarities may be causing ongoing difficulties in your learning communities. On what issues are there policy swings? Ongoing tension, debate or infighting? Resistance? Where might polarity mapping make the biggest difference in putting those differences of opinion to use towards a greater purpose?
2. Consider using Activity 10.1 below or 10.2 (page 185) with your team, focusing on one or more of the key polarities you've identified.
 - Activity 10.1: Demonstrating Respect both builds an understanding of how respect is being leveraged and demonstrates an effective learning strategy, where individuals brainstorm on large strips of paper that are then incorporated into a "moving outline" with which the group can work to capture the members' collective wisdom. *Note: This activity benefits from learning by doing; have your staff work through the entire activity as a team before using it with students.*
 - Activity 10.2: Point of View Debate provides an engaging debate activity that also demonstrates the benefits of tapping opposite points of view.

ACTIVITY 10.1: DEMONSTRATING RESPECT

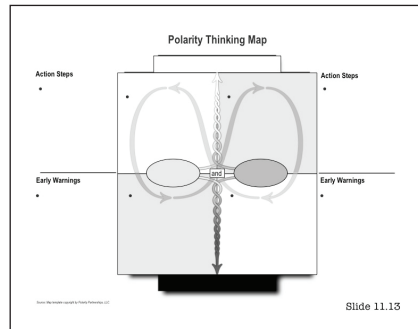
Objectives:

- to help students and/or staff understand the *Conditional AND Unconditional Respect* polarity and leverage it in the classroom

Materials:

- long strips of paper (either strips of adding machine tape or poster paper cut lengthwise into six strips per page), one for each participant
- masking tape
- textas, at least one for every two people
- a large area of table, wall or window space for sorting the strips
- two large signs, one labelled "Conditional Respect" and one labelled "Unconditional Respect"

- Point out how polarity mapping provides the framework for considering what those at each pole in a debate value and what they fear about the other pole. The structure makes it easy to develop a cohesive argument about how to move forward on an issue.
- If you completed Activity 9.1 or 9.2, show students the original article and then how the pieces fit onto a polarity map as a demonstration of its use.
- Use your preferred technology method to capture the top five most significant results for each quadrant so that all students have access to them and can see them for the next step. A blank map is included in the slide deck [Slide 11.13], with a sample map for *Touching Spirit Bear* included as the last slide [Slide 11.15]. Or have groups copy their top five to a separate piece of paper, printing in large letters, and tape the charts on the wall, arranged to form the polarity map quadrants. You could then draw the infinity loop on the papers.
- Have students work in groups of four to organise the maps so that there are three results in each quadrant. Can they see pairs of items, where a negative result of one pole is “solved” by a positive result of the other? Or where a positive result, overdone, will produce a negative result as well? Point out how this helps them organise a cohesive argument. The sample map is organised this way.
- Move to action steps. Define action steps again. Have each group brainstorm at least one for each pole and share it with the class.



FROM MAPPING TO WRITING

While students could certainly write essays on the all-class map, the quality of rigorous essays usually improves when students are vested in the arguments they are making. And for teachers, reading a classroom’s worth of essays on the same topic can have a few negative results from overfocus on one subject. Here’s one solution.

- Introduce the universal polarities listed on page 203 [and Slide 11.14], as well as others, such as *Activity AND Rest*, that might appeal to your students. Give at least one example of each. Have students work in small groups to think of at least three issues they’ve seen that might illustrate one of the polarities, writing the polarity *and* topic on sheets of copy paper. *Note: You may wish to col-*

- rethinking where our own positions come from and how the needs of others might differ from our own
- considering which teachers might favour/struggle with implementing a new strategy or practice
- evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, learning and intervention strategies for students with different learning preferences

Let's look at how type preferences influence educator beliefs about the four main issues discussed in Part II of this book.

TYPE AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND WHOLE CHILD SUCCESS

From a personality type perspective, the Achievement pole is seen to reflect an ESTJ preference, whereas the Whole Child pole reflects the very different values of INFP preference. One of my colleagues, the late Gordon Lawrence, surveyed over 1200 people to develop common values statements for each type. He then asked one hundred people of each type to critique the statements that applied to them to ensure that they reflected values, not behaviours. Chart 12.6 lists a few for these two types.

While it is *not* true that everyone who prefers ESTJ tends towards the Academic Success pole or that every INFP tends towards the Whole Child Success pole, it is safe to say that an emphasis on academic achievement is more consistent with the values in the left column than those in the right

Chart 12.6 Comparison of ESTJ and INFP Values

ESTJ	INFP
• Common-sense practicality	• Creativity, curiosity and exploring
• Consistency and standard procedures	• Helping people find their potential
• Concrete, present-day usefulness	• Seeing the big picture possibilities
• Having things settled and closed	• Adaptability and openness
• Rules, objective standards and fairness according to the rules	• Compassion and caring; attention to feelings
• Systematic structure and efficiency	• An inner compass; being unique
• Scheduling and monitoring	• Perfecting what is important

Source: Lawrence (1998).