

# Rooty Hill High School aims to create effective learners for life



Western Sydney, NSW

"Our main focus is on increasing student agency. This is really important in these traumatic times. Students need a sure sense of themselves as learners – they are going into a world where we have no idea how many jobs there will be or what universities will look like. One sure thing we can give students is control and autonomy over their own creativity and capacity to know their own learning. This will stand them in good stead no matter where life takes them."

*Principal, Christine Cawsey AM*

## Achievements

**NSW Secretary's Award for Excellence in School Achievement (2019)**

**Yasodai Selvakumaran – Global Teacher Prize – Top 10 Finalist 2019**

**Innovative School of the Year Award 2016 & 2017 – Educator Magazine**

## Key characteristics, challenges and goals

Children attending Rooty Hill High School have a higher chance of having a parent experiencing unemployment or facing unemployment themselves when they leave school than students in inner metropolitan or northern Sydney. They start school with higher rates of social and learning vulnerability, and attended primary schools with average NAPLAN scores below the state average - in fact 80% of students start Year 7 below grade average for the state.

Rooty Hill High School has 1100 students from Year 7-12. 55% are from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, 5% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, 25% from the lowest quartile of socio-educational disadvantage.

The goal of Rooty Hill High School's participation in The Connection was to lift the expectations, capacity and achievement of students to become "Career capable, future-focused" and increase their options for study and work after school.

Rooty Hill HS is dedicated to changing the lives of its students for the better, long after they leave school. The school's work with SVA allowed it to design and deliver innovative ways to build the skills and capabilities to enable a culture that is adaptive, resilient and successful, while also improving student academic performance against more traditional measures.

The school is recognised as a leader by the NSW Education Department and runs professional development for teachers in other schools.

## Partnerships and collaborating across state boundaries

Principal Christine Cawsey sees sharing effective practice as the key to system-wide school improvement: "The value of The Connection is in the fact that it has been done across state boundaries, which is rare. Connecting across those boundaries is powerful systems leverage. We have much more in common with some interstate schools [in the Connection] than some of our local schools. There's power in working with schools with similar value sets, and similar ways of working."

The school has fostered partnerships with several South Australian schools, with a particularly strong collaboration with Wirreanda Secondary School.

One initiative that the school has shared with other schools, in The Connection, is their 'Creativity Wheel' developed with Professor Bill Lucas, University of Winchester UK. It's a tool that helps teachers to design programs that support students to develop their Creative and Critical Thinking by exploring the dispositions of imagination, inquisitiveness, persistence, collaboration, and discipline.

## Whole School innovation: Capability based curriculum and assessment

When Rooty Hill HS began the work with The Connection in 2014, there was no tried-and-tested model of a capability-driven curriculum for the school to implement as ACARA (the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) had only released the General Capabilities in 2013. Evidence indicated that teachers and students did not focus enough on subject based capabilities so the school prioritised capability-driven curriculum and assessment as a core strategic direction. The strategy changed pedagogy and enabled teachers to establish explicit learning tasks to use capabilities (ways of doing) to develop deep knowledge and applications.

## #MyLearningHub

The school sets up every student with their own online learning profile in #MyLearningHub (a school-designed digital student learning portfolio) where they can upload samples of their work and answer simple 'I can...' statements to share with teachers what capabilities they have mastered. (Eg: "In thinking critically, I can ask questions of complex issues and information"). The critical teaching practice that underpins this work is teaching students how to write high quality annotations.

The process of annotating and having work samples validated develops student's 'metacognition' in that it encourages students to reflect critically on their own work; they develop an understanding of their own learning process and journey, and are well-practiced in the valuable skills of annotating and critiquing their work and the work of their peers.

Engagement in #MyLearningHub provides students with capability-based evidence of their learning, and improves self, peer and teacher assessment of progress and achievement against the ACARA General Capabilities benchmarks. Students can demonstrate that they are "successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active citizens". When students transition from high school, they can use their portfolio to "demonstrate academic and social dispositions and readiness for life beyond school and for tertiary study".

## Creativity Wheel

The purpose of the Creativity Wheel is to help students understand their critical and creative dispositions, and that creativity is not just about drawing or dancing, even though those are creative forms. "It's about being imaginative, inquisitive, collaborative, persistent and disciplined in and across all learning," says Professor Bill Lucas. The Wheel emphasises certain dispositions for students and sets out questions for teachers to design higher-order learning and to enable students to self-reflect.

[Global Teacher Prize Top Ten finalist](#) (2019) Yasodai Selvakumaran is a leader in the school's professional work with teachers to embed critical and creative thinking pedagogy. The Creativity Wheel is used by all teachers to design programs, units of work and lessons which allow students to develop their creative and critical thinking.

"This school-wide approach has helped shape the way I think about and approach the teaching of Critical and Creative Thinking through its use of five domains: being inquisitive, being imaginative, being collaborative, being persistent and being disciplined. These domains are further divided into 15 subdomains as illustrated in the Creativity Wheel diagram," says Yasodai.

Yasodai describes a particularly successful application of the Creativity Wheel in her Year 11 class last year:

"My society and culture class engaged with their own version of ABC's Q&A. I wrote the learning intention specifically for the students to engage respectfully with ideas that are different to their own, especially as this is not always modelled in what we see in the media or in society. The students were able to unleash their creativity in re-creating the show – they led the way in allocating hosts, choosing theme music and arranging the classroom for the set-up of the panel.

We co-designed expectations, brainstormed and voted on topics, allocated fact checkers and set up a mock live Twitter stream via Google Classroom. Students successfully showed that they could empathise, be respectful in debate, justify their opinions and comment courteously.

What struck me was how much they enjoyed the lesson – they loved it so much that they asked to do it all again the next day and, as critical and creative thinkers, they were able to suggest and implement ways to improve the activity's design. When students took learning creatively into their own hands, the learning actually exceeded the intent or design of the lesson."



Students at Rooty Hill High School working with teachers using the Creativity Wheel to stimulate their Critical and Creative Thinking.

## Improved student outcomes

Throughout the school's time in The Connection, they recorded improved student engagement and learning. Student attendance rates increased, and the number of negative behaviour incidents fell significantly. HSC results for the 2018 cohort were the highest ever.

The school found through survey data that students' perception of their own creativity grew by over 40%. In particular, students recognised that they had developed the dispositions of persistence and inquisitiveness (being able to challenge assumptions, being able to wonder and question). This is important because some students previously had a tendency to give up, and through self-reflection students understood that they could manage difficulty and uncertainty.

"It's powerful for students to know that they can be all of these things when they leave school – these are essential skills to be a functioning adult," explains former teacher, Shae Dunbar.

Yasodai points out that by focusing on the key elements of Critical and Creative Thinking there was improvement in: student engagement (based on feedback from student and staff surveys); attendance and submission of assignments; higher order thinking evident in work samples; improved collaboration, and self-assessment - students were able to articulate how they were learning and thinking, a skill they can apply in the future.



Yasodai Selvakumaran - Humanities teacher at Rooty Hill High School and Top 10 finalist in the 2019 Global Teacher Prize.

Watch this [video of Yasodai giving a Masterclass](#) on how she uses the Creativity Wheel to teach History, at the Global Teacher Prize, Global Education Series in March 2019.

Yasodai Selvakumaran features in NSW Education Dept journal [Future Edge issue 1](#)

Read the Rooty Hill High School Case Study in the Appendix of the report [Unleashing the power of the collective in education](#)

[Read more here](#)

The Connection is a Collaborative Leadership Development Network, created and facilitated by Social Ventures Australia, that has achieved educational improvements in 50 Australian schools, across NSW, SA and Victoria. This network has connected 2900 educators and benefited approximately 50,000 students over five years from 2014-2019.

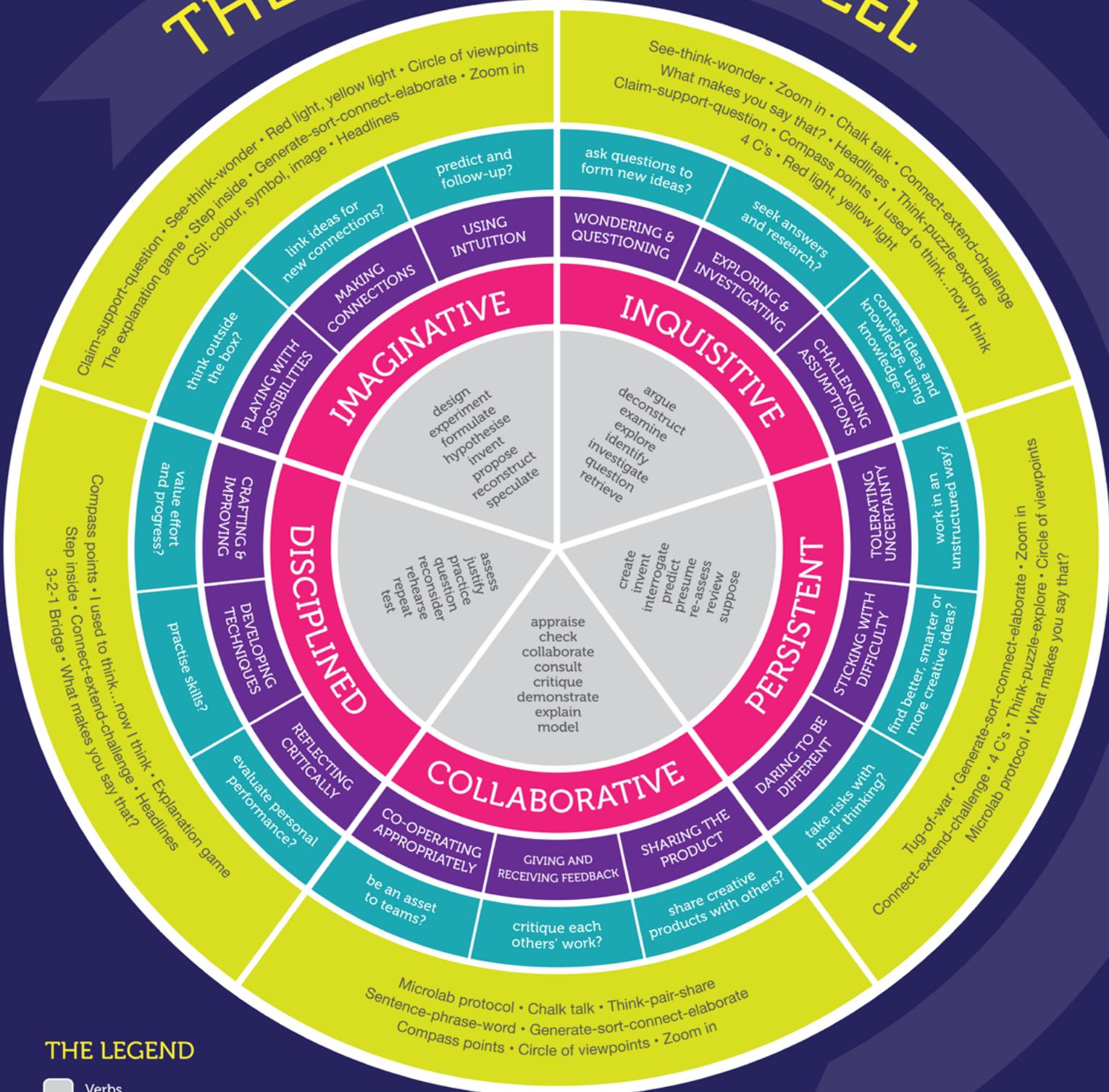
Participating schools in areas experiencing disadvantage are connected to other primary and secondary schools in the network and learn from each other. They are supported to implement new and innovative teaching practices and approaches to improve learning outcomes for their students.



# ROOTY HILL HIGH SCHOOL

A Community School Committed to Excellence in Learning, Leadership and Achievement

## THE CREATIVITY WHEEL



### THE LEGEND

- Verbs
- Creativity disposition
- Creativity sub-disposition
- In our programs and our practices do we provide opportunities for students to...
- Visible thinking routine