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EMPOWERING LEARNING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Summary: Clinton Golding: Assessing Thinking Hawker-Brownlow Education Conference, May 23rd, 2011

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Here is my summary of what I found thought-provoking, relevant and useful in the workshops presented by Clinton. Additional material and references provided by Intuyu Consulting (www.intuyuconsulting.com.au)

NOTES:

- Clinton's third session for the day (the second I attended) moved the conversation about thinking towards a discussion of how teachers can explicitly assess thinking. He explored the challenges assessing thinking and the cognitive process that we as educators must understand in order to develop and implement successful assessment and reporting practises with regard to thinking.
- Clinton's overarching question for the session was:
'How do we assess thinking, when it is invisible, internal and complex?'
- He then asserted that in order to be assessed, thinking must be observable and concrete; that is; we must develop tasks that require students to THINK!
- Teachers need to develop their discernment so that they can teach students to also be discerning about what it is that they are looking for.
- As David Eddy (*Executive Director, Centre for Educational Leadership at Auckland University*) states, **precision** is crucial when developing tasks that enable assessment of thinking. School leaders can improve precision by enabling their school to integrate the most up-to-date research in practical ways. Again, this can only happen through consistent, focused effort around teacher professional learning, resource development, time-release for teachers (something that the vast majority of teachers cite as being of high importance) and valuing real and regular collaboration around how we define thinking for ourselves, across disciplines.



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- Developing successful means of assessing thinking will require schools to *articulate the habits/behaviours of good thinkers and good learners and make these explicit and highly visible across the learning community.*¹
- Clinton moved on to clarify the different modes of assessment – OF, AS and FOR learning, identifying the continuing bias towards assessment of learning in many schools and tertiary institutions.
- He emphasised the importance of **assessment AS learning** in order to promote thinking. This links closely to the notion of ‘prototyping’; that is; students have opportunities to reflect on and monitor their own learning, through experimentation. They are given opportunities to use assessment as learning for crucial FEEDBACK, to enable them to refine their work.^{2 3}
- Clinton believes that ‘...both teachers and students need clear and concrete descriptions/indicators on what ‘good thinking’ is.’ Our role, then, is to help students to express and explain their thinking so that it is visible to us.
- He then asked the workshop participants to choose a thinking process in which we felt we have mastery and explain it from start to finish. Being a visual learner, I sketched out my creative process with regard to writing:

¹ Clinton points to the use of a framework for effective learning with many similarities to that which was implemented at McKinnon Secondary College (referred to in my previous workshop summary, ‘*From thinking skills to thinking Schools*’). I myself have seen this work powerfully and dynamically when supported by a determined, collaborative teaching staff and school leadership team.

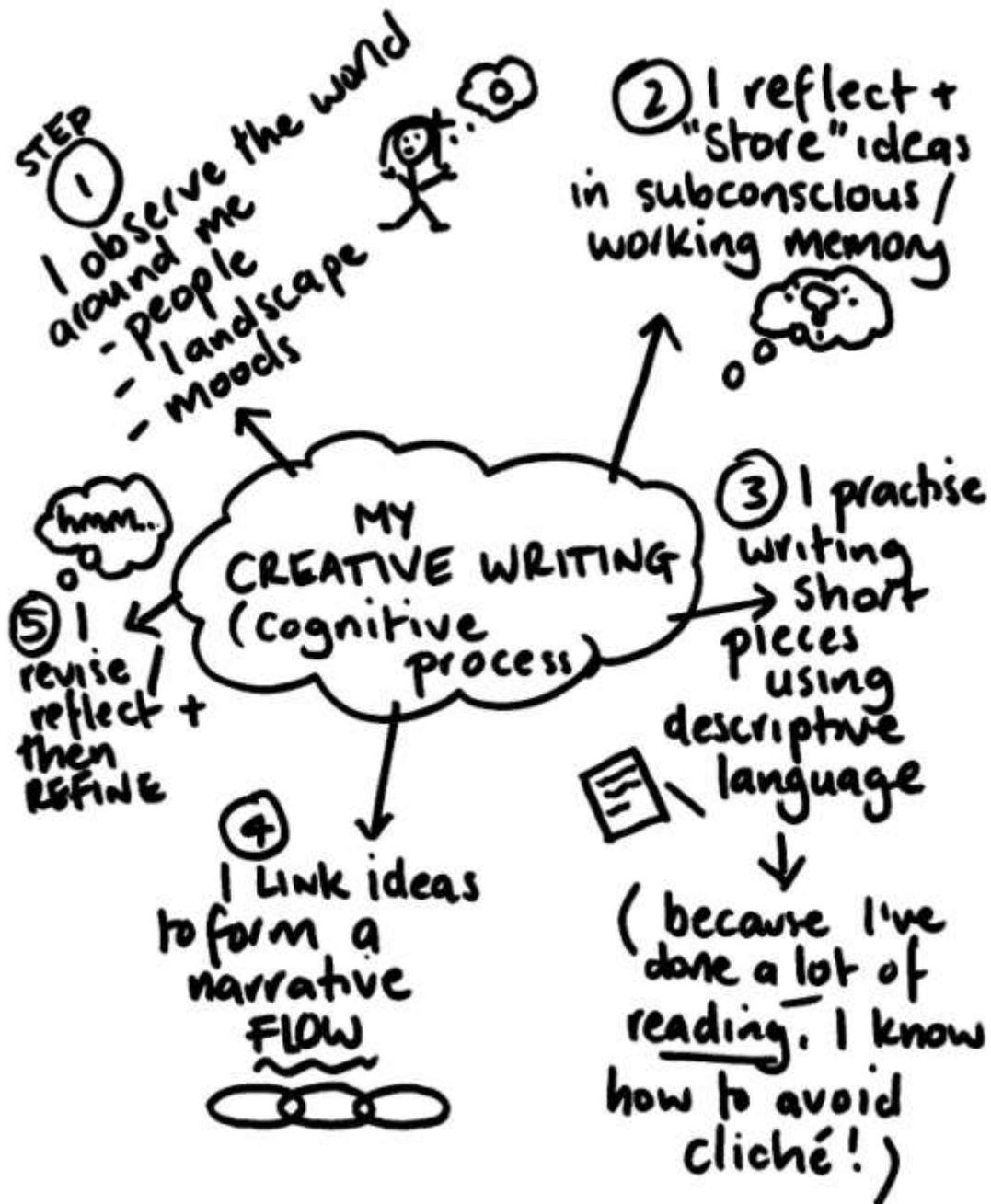
² For more information on Prototyping and Feedback watch ‘*The Marshmallow Challenge*’ video to hear Tom Wujec explain the process and the lessons to be learned from it:

<http://www.productivemindset.com/problem-solving/team-building-with-the-marshmallow-challenge/>

³ ...and for clear explanations of assessment of, as and for learning, please look at Intuyu Consulting’s *21st Century Learning Glossary* under ‘A’ (www.intuyuconsulting.com.au)



The Creative Process (writing)





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- I found this exercise both practical and powerful as it forced me to articulate my process (one that I've been applying to my creative writing for years) and share it with others. I FELT the thinking taking place and, in the classroom, would now be able to get much more explicit about the creative writing process, as the special skills required for it.
- Clinton also emphasised that a new learning and teaching tool or strategy needs to be used **MANY TIMES** before it begins to have an effect, which links back to the notion of *mastery*. We need to apply this to our own professional learning, as well as to the learning of our students.
- Finally, Clinton asked us to '*...let go of the content knowledge and instead support students in developing thinking skills.*'

Truly, this is our only way forward in the 21st century paradigm.