Switching young people onto STEAM: Tales from a teacher in a southwest Sydney primary school

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STEAM is an acronym that refers to the subject disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts (including the Humanities) and Mathematics. It’s a necessity that it’s taught well in primary schools and in education right now it encapsulates a movement that is much more than the sum of its parts. Through STEAM it is possible to develop primary school age students exploration of real world problems, their knowledge of the component disciplines and the digital competencies and dispositions that will enable students to become active citizens in a rapidly evolving world. In 2017 research to build teacher capacity and confidence in STEM using the technology enhanced learning framework of High Possibility Classrooms was conducted in three southwest Sydney primary schools. The lead author was one teacher in a STEAM teaching team in a total of 21 teachers in the study. As a mid-career teacher engagement in the action research project led to a redefinition of professional identity and what was understood about how primary school-aged students learn. By including the Arts/Humanities it informed a planning process using inquiry-based learning reliant on big ideas, hands on learning and experimentation. Sharing what students do in the classroom with parents via the Seesaw app also opened up a whole new level of desirable interactivity and inclusion in classroom learning. Such actions support a redefinition of the impact of teaching in primary schools. This snapshot presents how one teacher engaged in this school-university partnership collaborated with an academic partner (second author) and used the notion of ‘pressure and support’ to address challenges in their own practice to respond to the complex task of multi-subject integration. During the 7-minute presentation examples using the Seesaw app and its role as a tool to measure the positive impacts of classroom learning in STEAM will be discussed as well suggestions for how to recognise positive impact when it happens in education settings.