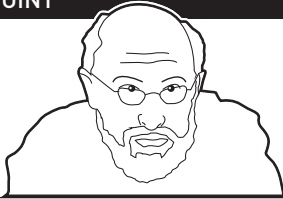


Evidence-Based Teaching: the Ifs and Buts

HOW2

PINPOINT



I applaud the emphasis within some accounts of evidence-based practice on the need for professional reflection and judgement about the validity and value of various kinds of evidence in making decisions.

Martyn Hammersley

Assertion

Here at Train Visual, we actively champion the development of evidence-based practice. But at the same time, we are very well aware that there are no easy or one-dimensional solutions.

So, this PinPoint looks at the weaknesses behind the evidence movement, and the dangers of its wholesale adoption for classroom practice.

The fallibility of evidence

The very term *evidence-based* has been criticised for implying that all else is irrational.

Of course, research is more likely to be valid than other types of knowledge. However research is not infallible and not all opinion or personal experience of no value.

The false precision of research

For the most part, research findings in education take the form of generalisations. And yet their effect sizes are presented with great accuracy. Hattie's list of top strategies, for example, is specified down to two decimal places.

This level of precision is at odds with the lack of identification of the methods themselves.

Take Assessment for Learning. This approach is a *catch-all* for very many specific techniques. But we do not know which ones were the subject of the research or how they were executed.

Nor, do we know how many different methods are grouped together under the one concept. Such vagueness does not help teachers learn new techniques.



It can't be acceptable for a teacher to ignore proven best practice, or, at worst, to continue with methods that are shown not to work.

Estelle Morris, former Minister for Education, England

The confusion of lists

Which list of top-ranking methods should one refer to? Hattie's, the Sutton Trust's or Marzano's? They are not identical, each having markedly different methods in contrasting order of impact.

Which of these competing ranking-lists is the most valid? A taxing question, made more so when these lists also compete against each other in the commercial market.

More confusing still are the different names given to the few teaching techniques that appear in all three lists.

The tyranny of evidence

There is great danger in the wholesale adoption of such lists to enforce evidence-based compliance. A worthy aspiration than can go terribly wrong.

Take a state in the USA, where Marzano's list is used for performance management. In formal lesson observations, teachers are expected to use all nine of Marzano's top methods. All nine in one single lesson!

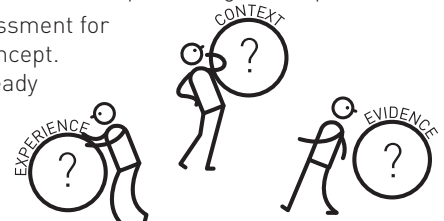
Such managerial incompetence threatens, rather than promotes, quality teaching and stifles innovation with its culture of unthinking compliance and fear.

Conclusion

One simple solution to the problems outlined above is to use the evidence as a source of reference when making decisions about what to do in your classroom. But to not make it the sole source. Alongside it, incorporate your experience and your knowledge of your specific context. Your best decision will come in mixing these three points of view.

And it's here that the HOW2s really come into their own. Informed by evidence, the HOW2s give teachers a comprehensive source of specific and practical guides to the top teaching techniques.

Take the concept of Assessment for Learning — yes only a concept. But with 25 classroom-ready AFL HOW2s, the concept becomes concrete, practical and precise. A recipe for success.



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