

Evidence for practice

Professional learning through partnerships

Organised by: *The International Learning and Research Centre with the Coalition for Evidence-Based Education*

On: 5th July 2012

At: Hilton City Hotel, Bath

Highlights

Highlights of CEBE events are intended to provide a succinct record of points. The intention is to build up an accumulating record of insights into evidence-based approaches in education.

Background

The focus of presentations and round-table discussions was:

- The use of research evidence by schools and local authorities
- Collaboration in the use of evidence:
 - between universities and schools
 - internationally between schools
 - with partners in health and social care

Speakers were:

- Spencer Cartwright and Maggie Pawlowski, Advisers,
- Gary Lobbett, Principal and Lisa Thomas, Callington Community College, Cornwall
- Trevor Davies (ILRC) and Kerry Saunders, St John's schools, Marlborough
- Charles Desforges, professor emeritus, University of Exeter

Personalisation and Innovative pedagogies

Bath and NE Somerset local authority

Spencer Cartwright and Maggie Pawlowski outlined a two year project under the Comenius programme, between schools in Denmark and the UK. It developed strategies for creating learning communities which investigated, developed and shared best practice in foreign language teaching and learning and, alongside the theme, the integration of new technologies and ICT both for teachers and students.

The project demonstrated the benefits of international collaboration between both students and teachers in developing materials, planning lesson and evaluating impacts. Shared IT platforms were used successfully for planning, document development and direct video communication.

Emotional Health in Schools

Callington Community College, Cornwall

Gary Lobbett offered a snapshot of the emotional health agenda implemented at Callington Community College and its impact on school improvement. He showed how policy and practice have

been shaped through partnerships with other schools, working with multi-agencies and in collaboration with other employers.

Starting with the quote “In God we trust, all others must have data”, head-teacher Gary Lobbett explained how:

1. Evidence about the adolescent brain, anger arousal, emotional literacy and other areas helped initially frame the initiative
2. This was integrated with everyday practice through the three pillars of the school: *Teaching & Learning – Curriculum – Emotional Health*
3. Training for support staff, and later teachers and external partners, was designed in the light of this evidence. This was later extended to feeder primary schools.
4. Later, professional development activity was organised and a rolling programme introduced for new recruits

The impact has been huge, leading to a new Centre being built on school premises in partnership with the NHS and local authority. Leadership is now more collaborative, academic results have improved dramatically and changes have been embedded in the social and personal education curriculum.

Multilingual pedagogy for the vocational sector

Trevor Davies and Kerry Saunders described development work that brought together partners from vocational institutions, language schools and universities from five countries to collaborate on, develop and trial innovative teaching materials and a training programme for vocational education professionals.

The method involved trials by each of the partners which were self-evaluated and then externally evaluated by an HEI team. Evidence was also generated through a pre- and post-questionnaire for students. From the study a toolkit was developed for training programmes for vocation language teachers. Impact was noted in greater independence of learning and better use of resources. Use in an International Baccalaureat programme in Wiltshire led to more in-depth learning and greater flexibility in teaching methods.

Charles Desforges

Some highlights of Charles Desforges’ talk about the role of evidence in practice:

1. “A perspective can also be a way of not looking”
2. Issues for practitioners include:
 - a. Getting hold of evidence that is both sound and useful
 - b. Deploying theory – a good one, not necessarily a right one, in order to test it
 - c. Requiring multiple expertises because the problems are so difficult
3. We lack accumulation of expertise and knowledge; we fail to “stand on the shoulders of giants”
4. We may have some evidence about the skills aspect of achievement, but there is no evidence-base about the attitudes and values aspects. For example to “narrow the gap” we expect struggling learners to catch up 15 months in 12 but lack evidence about how to do it.

5. The best effect size available in the ideal conditions of 1:1 teaching is 2.0. A typical effect size from “national strategies” intervention is 0.1
6. There are good effect sizes for Thinking Skills and Assessment for Learning – around 0.7. For parents listening to children reading it is about 0.51
7. On CPD there is little evidence about effectiveness, but a review by Helen Timperley in New Zealand suggests it work best when it is deep, involving continuous enquiry
8. Collaboration is important for using research to improve practice. A useful tool to support this is Trevor Folley’s 9-box framework available at <http://trevorfolley.com/5-years-action-research/the-9-box-framework>

Discussion groups

Discussion groups addressed four questions:

- What experiences do you have of research evidence being used in your context/ learning environment?
- From your experience, what have been the barriers and enablers to the use of research evidence in practice?
- What has been the impact of using research evidence? What has changed as a result?
- How might partnerships help you to develop the use of research evidence further?

Key points raised included:

1. *Experience of using evidence*
 - a. Younger teachers are more open to use of research
 - b. It’s difficult to track the move from hearing about evidence to using it
 - c. Many modalities
 - i. supporting Masters’ study
 - ii. collaborating with an HEI
 - iii. using an HEI to provide CPD
 - iv. carrying out joint research between a set of schools and an HEI
 - d. Findings of action research may not stand up to robust Quality Assurance
2. *Barriers/enablers:*
 - a. *Resources*
 - i. Shortage of time and funding
 - ii. Access to evidence can be difficult and costly
 - iii. Advanced skills teachers can help promote evidence use
 - iv. Colleagues taking part in ITT or Masters’ and doctoral programmes are a help
 - b. *Culture*
 - i. Need to develop a culture of professional learning
 - ii. Evidence use can become part of your own CPD
 - iii. Teachers need to develop research skills
 - c. *School-level actions*

- i. Schools can pay for teachers to be members of professional associations
 - ii. Someone in a school can have a formal role in coordinating evidence use
 - iii. Need to think through the management of change implied in using evidence
 - d. *General*
 - i. Tricky issue is integrating evidence into your actual context
 - ii. Guidance to *good* research is needed – critical engagement
 - iii. Can try to make reading more accessible by using quotes
 - iv. Teachers need to see themselves as knowledge producers
- 3. *Impact:*
 - a. Very few examples – the EPPSE project is one of them
 - b. Need to monitor changes on the school and teachers
 - c. For impact, teachers need to know WHY before introducing change (e.g. AfL)
 - d. Identifying a common theme helps findings to be transferred
- 4. *Partnerships*
 - a. An extremely valuable and necessary component. But who takes the lead?
 - b. Partners can provide access to resources
 - c. Involve HEIs – can link to teacher training
 - d. HEIs provide rigour (essential)
 - e. But need to choose the right partner carefully – HEIs have differing cultures
 - f. Involve local authorities
 - g. Work between schools as well – to compare practices

Panel discussion

In the final panel discussion with presenters it was suggested that:

1. We need to distinguish the use of evidence by the many, from engagement in new research by those who wish to
2. There is not likely to be a new source of national funding for teachers to engage with evidence; yet some schools and colleges do it. Much depends on how local budget holders decide on their priorities.
3. Head-teachers and other practice leaders need to settle on some of the *big* questions and levers of change to avoid research focusing on the little ones. E.g.
 - How do we get the bottom group of learners moving ahead?
 - Is homework worth it?
4. But what is the role for the “little” research that practitioners often engage with? Surely there is a need for both.
5. We need to improve the status of research as a normal activity in the workplace
 - Every school with a research partnership?
 - Should teachers’ own research be valued more?
 - Should more be expected of teachers, in order to develop the profession?