Evidence-based programmes: Tackling barriers to effective implementation

Organised by: The Social Research Unit and Institute of Effective Education
On: 26th March 2012
At: London's Living Room, City Hall,London London SE1 2AA

Highlights

Highlights of CEBE events are intended to provide a succinct record of selected 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 latest policy and scientific developments related to evidence-based programme
- Examples of effective implementation of evidence-based programmes
- Exploration of **organisational challenges** to implementation (e.g. faithful implementation, scaling
- Exploration of **professional objections** to their implementation (e.g. threats to professional autonomy, stifling innovation)

Speakers were**:**
- Chris Robinson – CEO, Mayor's Fund for London
- Michael Little – Co-director, Social Research Unit, Dartington
- Bette Chambers – Director, Institute for Effective Education, University of York
- Paul Prest – Director, *Success for All* programme
- Lee Elliot-Major – Director of Research and Policy, The Sutton Trust and Trustee of the Education Endowment Foundation

Chris Robinson – *introduction*
1. There is strong evidence in some areas (e.g. early Years, Parenting) but not others
2. We need to find and scale up E-B programmes
3. Funders should evaluate and provide evidence from their interventions

Michael Little – *reflections on experience*
1. Probably less than 1% of expenditure is on E-B activity
2. E-B approaches suit some things but not others

3. Human judgement is crucial, science informs it
4. Practitioners choose programmes, decide when they are needed and assess outcomes
5. Key success factors from evaluation of E-B programmes:
    a. Consistent high quality implementation
    b. Getting the practitioner to do the right thing
    c. Getting the right intervention to the right child
6. There are limits to our knowledge; we need innovation and testing
7. Even successful programmes may only improve outcomes for 50%
8. Interventions lead to more than just outcomes for clients – also effects on workforce, childcare etc.
9. Typically, proven programmes are not scaled and scaled programmes are not proven
10. Programme packaging is chunky, also need E-B systems, practices and processes
11. Prevention may be best solution - e.g. a trained psychologist talking periodically to children (cf dental hygienist for teeth)

Discussion
1. With localism, how can organisations like SRU engage with thousands of schools?
2. Qualitative research is essential to explain *why* things work
3. We need funders to spend on evaluation (Scottish Funders Forum suggests 10%)
4. We need different forms of evaluation focussing on impact

Bette Chamber and Paul Prest – *implementing an actual programme*

A number of implementation challenges and practical responses were presented:
    a. Why change? To do things differently
    b. Not aware of evidence? Look outwards; focus on translated research
    c. Risk averse? Collaborate , face your fears
    d. Getting buy-in? Put your students first
    e. Teacher knows best? Use data for a hard look at yourselves
    f. Too many initiatives? Stop thing that are having no impact
    g. We're unique! Visit some other schools/providers
    h. Problem of fidelity to the programme? Get consensus - whole school.

Discussion –*professional challenges and solutions*
1. Need to communicate information about disinvesting in ineffective programmes
2. Use savings from the outcomes of an intervention pay for the intervention
3. Practitioners are always overstretched, so bottom-up and top-down approaches need to be better integrated
4. Implementation should be monitored continuously to raise confidence amongst participants that it is working
5. Get practitioners to promote what is already working to avoid stifling creativity
6. Examples of:

    a. a county-wide parenting programme where creativity was developed through the EB programme

    b. a partnership in which the "manualised" approach released creativity

7. Train practitioners about evidence and EB programmes

8. Need more transparency about different understandings of what evidence is

Lee Elliot Major – *reflections on experience of a funder*

1. Need to spend as much time on dissemination as on research

2. We are moving from "uninformed practice" in the 1970s to "informed professionalism" in the 2010s

3. In a Sutton Trust survey of practitioners

    a. 1/3 said they considered research evidence in deciding on approaches

    b. Most takers of the Pupil Premium are not using EB approaches

4. It's not just what approach you take, but how you do it

5. You need qualitative and quantitative but evaluations with a randomised element are largely missing from the UK system

Discussion – *organisational challenges and solutions*

1. With multi-agency services we need more dialogue locally between the providers and with the LAs about EB approaches

2. With localism, who are the intermediaries now that many government linked bodies have gone and schools/providers are detaching from the LA?

3. Organisations are legitimately afraid of negative evaluation findings – they can reflect badly on the provider

4. Translation of research should be done by writers, not academics

5. Need to know the costs as well as benefits of an EB programme

6. Benefits need to accrue to implementing organisations (e.g. cost of literacy in colleges and schools lead to benefits in crime reduction and health provision)

7. INSET activities need to be EB

8. Lots of effective practice is not recognised in the evidence base.

Michael Little – *concluding remarks*

1. The SRU is producing a number of tools and publications on standards of evidence, programmes that meet these standards and ways of scaling up.

2. It may be best to work at town or county level before tackling a whole country

3. You need pull as well as push – you need to create demand

4. We need to develop a European approach, because public services differ from US

Andrew Morris, CEBE 3rd April 2012