What works in raising attainment and closing the gap: research evidence from the UK and abroad

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Overview

1. ‘Umbrella’ review of recent reviews
2. School level and teacher or class levels
3. Closing the gap
4. The challenges from research
5. The importance of effective evaluation
Review aims

Evidence from research about what we know and don’t know, so as to:

1. Support the EEF in identifying promising and innovative approaches when commissioning projects
2. Provide a starting point to develop a useful resource for schools to improve the learning and life chances of disadvantaged pupils
Systematic ‘umbrella’ review

- Reviews of research evidence (a narrative, best-evidence, systematic review or synthesis, or a meta-analysis)
- Improving attainment, closing the gap, overcoming disadvantage
- Published in or since 2000
- Identified 42 reviews
  - School level
  - Class and teacher level
  - Specific focus (reading, maths, parental engagement, SEN etc)
1. Umbrella review

Type of review (n=42)

- Meta-analysis: 57%
- Systematic review: 19%
- Best evidence: 17%
- Narrative: 7%

Focus of review (n=42)

- General: 55%
- Maths: 12%
- Literacy: 33%
School level analysis
School level actions

- Effective leadership
- A clear focus on improving learning
- Agreed structures and processes in school
- The importance of staff skills and professional development
- Making learning challenging
- Ensuring effective relationships for teaching and learning
- Building partnerships around the school
Challenges

- Sustaining a trajectory of improvement
- How much difference do these different approaches make?
  - E.g. Leadership vs partnerships?
- Difficult to translate general messages into specific practice
Teacher and class level analysis

2b. Class level
Class and teacher level actions

- Using teaching strategies and developing pedagogy
- Building effective learning relationships
- Improving professional expertise, undertaking effective development and training
Characteristics of effective teaching

- Monitoring and feedback (target setting, AfL, use of data and classroom evidence)
- Teaching for learners’ use of strategies
- Peer interaction and mutual support
- High quality relationships to enable learning
Interventions and approaches

- Explicit, direct teaching providing feedback to learners
- Collaborative and co-operative approaches
- Peer-tutoring
- Meta-cognitive approaches (planning, monitoring and reviewing one’s own learning)
- One-to-one and small group tutoring (ideally by teachers, if not, then well-trained volunteers)
Effective programmes

- Range of evidence, mainly US
  - Reading Recovery
  - Building Blocks Mathematics
  - Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies
  - Student Teams-Achievement Divisions
- Formalise aspects of effective teaching, provide professional development, monitor performance
Issues and challenges

- Provides more evidence about how well different approaches work
- Based on averages…
  - Wide range of effects
  - Some inconsistencies
- Translation of evidence to practice
Closing the gap

- Most approaches ‘work’ for the majority of learners
- Most approaches therefore increase the gap
  - The “Matthew Effect” - ‘advantage begets further advantage’ or “to them that hath shall more be given”
- Reducing the gap is a significant challenge
Promising classroom strategies to ‘close the gap’

- Focus on improving teaching and learning processes and methods
  - Collaborative and co-operative learning
  - Peer involvement in learning (*peer tutoring, team approaches*)
  - Meta-cognitive strategies, making learning explicit
  - Specific subject strategies (*e.g. phonics instruction in reading, computer assisted instruction in maths*)
- Effective scaffolding practices by teachers
‘What works’ or ‘what’s worked’?

- Good bets based on research and evidence
- Importance of understanding context and variation
- Not so much what you do but how well you do it
Research issues

- Tentative conclusions – analysis based on averages
- Most reviews call for ‘more research’
- Better understanding of the challenge
- General principles, but no ‘recipe’ for success
Reflections

- Complex and challenging problem
- Evidence offers advice on good and bad ‘bets’
- Remedies or capacity building?
- EEF is an unparalleled opportunity to collect evaluation data, over 10-15 years, to improve the way we educate disadvantaged young people .... and improve the odds of success
For every complex problem there is a solution that is simple, neat…

and WRONG!

H.L. Mencken 1880-1956
Included reviews


