EEF Blog: Latest updates to the Teaching and Learning Toolkit

When we launched the Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit in 2011, we designed it specifically with busy headteachers in mind. “Best bets” for improving children’s attainment are presented in the language teachers will immediately understand: the extra months of learning that approaches might lead to during an academic year.

The top-level overview of each Toolkit strand helps to set a range of research in context. We use meta-analyses and existing research reviews to compare effects across these different areas and make an estimate of the cost and impact of different approaches as accurately as we can.

The evidence on which educational approaches are effective (or not) in increasing students’ attainment is constantly growing. We want schools and teachers to be confident when consulting the Teaching and Learning Toolkits that they are always working with the most up-to-date, high-quality evidence.

So together with a team of academics at Durham University, we regularly update the Toolkit (and its Early Years companion) to ensure that it reflects the latest findings from EEF trials and other rigorous research.

Today we’ve published the latest update, incorporating new evidence on nine educational topics. Three of these have resulted in changes to the Toolkit’s headline findings. So what’s new, what’s changed and what does this mean for schools?

Mentoring

We’ve added two new meta-analyses to this strand which means the evidence base is now more secure. The padlock rating has increased from ‘3’ to ‘4’ (out of 5) to reflect this. It also means we have better information on the impact of mentoring programmes and, with the inclusion of the latest evidence, the average months’ progress for this approach is now 0 instead of +1.

However, according to evidence from the Toolkit, different types of mentoring programmes have different effects. For example “programmes which have a clear structure and expectation, provide training and support for mentors, and use mentors from a professional background”, have been associated with more positive outcomes.

Metacognition and self-regulation

There’s a lot of research out there on metacognition and today we’ve added several new meta-analyses and single studies to this particular strand. While the increasing evidence base gives us a better idea of what effective metacognitive strategies look like, the addition of new research means the average additional months’ progress for this approach has fallen slightly, from +8 months to +7.

We know how interested schools and teachers are in metacognition and self-regulation: since the Toolkit launched in 2011, it’s regularly taken the prize of most popular strand and has been accessed over 130,000 times. However it can be difficult to pin down what effective metacognitive strategies look like in the classroom. Later this month, we’ll be publishing our latest guidance report, with clear and actionable recommendations, to support schools and teachers to develop their pupils’ metacognitive skills.

Reading comprehension strategies

We’ve added one new meta-analysis to this strand which takes the average additional impact on attainment for this approach from +5 months’ progress to +6. The evidence is clear that both phonics and reading comprehension are effective strategies for teaching literacy.
Our guidance reports on teaching literacy in Key Stages 1 and 2 suggests that reading strategies are most effective as part of a broad and balanced approach to developing effective literacy.

The next Toolkit update will take place later in Spring. We will also be publishing the first edition of our Toolkit Process Manual, replacing our current technical appendix, which will provide more detail on the update process and how the Toolkit impact estimates are created.