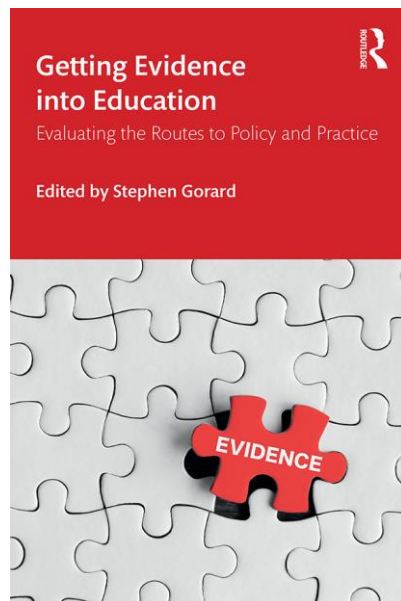


## TRI EDITORIAL

Dr. Nadia Siddiqui

This issue of Translational Research Insights invited review of our book edited by Stephen Gorard, *Getting Evidence into Education: Evaluating the Routes to Policy and Practice*. The book has been reviewed by an academic expert, a lead practitioner and a doctoral researcher who are working for the promotion of evidence in education. These three book reviews are important insights on the translation of evidence into practice.

### Getting Evidence into Education: Evaluating the Routes to Policy and Practice Book Reviews



Gorard, S. (Ed) (2020). *Getting evidence into education: Evaluating the routes to policy and practice*, London: Routledge, ISBN hardback 9780367258801, paperback 978036728832, ebook 9780429290343

Ewan MacRae, Doctoral Researcher, Centre for Evidence and Social Innovation (CESI), Queen's University Belfast



It is not often the premise of a book is positioned towards 'what more we desperately need to know' than 'what we know'. Yet from the outset, *Getting Evidence into Education* is at pains to offer little in the way of panaceas or silver bullets. Instead, it appeals for a quality of evidence and the quality of its subsequent usage in education. The directness of the authors, their openness and transparency regarding the current situation and their uncertainty for the future stems from a desire to see education make the best decisions possible for the best possible reasons.

Starting with a section introducing experimental research methods, it specifies randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and what evidence of effectiveness signifies for education. Part one serves as a direct positioning and justification for the text as a whole. However, subsequent chapters on the Pupil Premium in England, Widening Participation in Scotland's universities and performance indicators for primary schools in Brazil ensures the book is not restricted to one type of evidence or education phase. The emphasis it puts on quality evidence having the greatest impact is especially true in the chapter on contextualised admissions in Scotland which is a particularly powerful example, irrespective of readership.

A key feature of the book is the consistent use of a chronology of events to navigate to the main topic in each chapter (e.g., chapters each on the emergence and development of the Research Schools Network and the Teaching & Learning Toolkit). Given one of the stated aims of the book is to improve communication amongst the research community, practitioner bodies and policymakers and advisors, this is unsurprising. Beyond being widely accessible, it is also concrete in

terms of introducing and reflecting on many important examples of where quality evidence in education had impact, such as in Dylan Wiliam's formative assessment chapter. There is a gradual narrowing of scope in the latter stages of the book, with chapters on leadership in part four and quality of evidence use in part five requiring more systems thinking.

Getting Evidence into Education is likely to be successful in its aim of improving communication between stakeholders however sections of the research community will still find chapters on RCTs, experimental research methods and statistical analysis problematic. Although offering a variety of research methods and a theme committed to social mobility, such as the chapter on overcoming educational disadvantage, it may not be sufficient to appease entirely. Howard White's *fait accompli*, "The evidence revolution is here, and it is coming to education. Will you, the reader, be with us or against us", will be similarly unsettling. However, this text offers an emboldening record of what is known and what is not, and what it has taken to get to this early stage. Weak evidence in education is a real issue for society. It is in this field that quality evidence can lead to life-changing impact, and readers are navigated through this with convincing clarity.

**Cat Scutt, Director of Education and Research,  
Chartered College of Teaching**



There has been huge growth in interest in the use of evidence to inform policy and practice in education over the past few years. And yet, this interest has not yet always translated into effective action and translation of high-quality research into classroom

practice. As the editor Stephen Gorard points out, the growth in high-quality education research that is available needs to be accompanied by a growth in knowledge of how we can most effectively get this evidence into use – and that is where the focus of this book lies.

As Director of Education and Research at the Chartered College of Teaching, an organisation committed to supporting evidence-based practice in the teaching profession, it is a topic that naturally interests me. It also means that I'm aware that a number of books have been published on similar topics in recent months – as is often the case when a topic is of particular current interest! However, *Getting Evidence into Education* has a number of notable features that make it both unique and particularly helpful in the current context.

There is a clear focus throughout on a key concept that is sometimes overlooked – that of the importance making sure the evidence that gets into use is that which is most robust. With a plethora of education research published every year, there is inevitably huge variety in its quality – and making sure the research that informs policy and practice is of the highest quality should certainly be a priority, given its potential impact.

The various case studies provide a helpful overview and starting point for consideration of a range of different approaches to getting evidence use into practice, but it is the chapters addressing the big questions that perhaps contribute most to the evidence-informed education landscape. These include, but are not limited to, a chapter from Carole J Torgerson and David J Torgerson around the value of RCTs and why evidence based on these is not always used in practice; Beng Huat See's chapter on the challenges in getting evidence into use; and a chapter from Mark Rickinson, Jonathan Sharples and Oliver Lovell exploring the notion of quality of evidence *use*, rather than simply quality of evidence. It is these that make the book stand out for me as different to other books that cover similar topics.

Whilst - as might be expected given the nature of the publication - the majority of chapter authors are academics, the voices of teachers working in this field are also heard, with a varied and impressive contributor list. The inclusion of international examples, and examples from a range of phases, is also powerful; of course, these examples are not comprehensive, but they provide a sense of the breadth of approaches (and challenges).

Finally, whilst reference is often made to the evidence-based practice movement in medicine when considering the use of research in education, the connections and

comparisons with other sectors in this book go deeper than is often the case. The short examples from healthcare and agriculture in the Torgersons' chapter on RCTs, and Howard White's more detailed comparison of the evidence architecture in healthcare and education respectively, both add insight to how we think about evidence in education.

Overall, then, there is also no doubt that it is an important book, both practically and conceptually – the latter because there is a certain level of irony that the process of getting robust evidence into use is not always itself robustly researched.

## Jonathan Haslam, Director at the Institute for Effective Education



Edited by Stephen Gorard, *Getting Evidence Into Education: Evaluating the Routes to Policy* is a thought-provoking read on the challenges of making education more evidence-based. The book is divided into several parts, looking at the need for better evidence, different routes to evidence use, the role of leadership in evidence uptake, and suggestions for next steps. However, as usually happens when writing or reading about evidence use, the themes bleed across the various sections.

The early chapters are often critical of the current state of research evidence in education, and this does mean that the later chapters, describing routes to evidence use, are somewhat tentative. As Gorard puts it in the final chapter, "Considerable funding from all relevant agencies is being used to promote evidence-into-use, but with almost no funding spent on serious attempts to determine whether such promotion is beneficial, or how it could be most effective. This needs to change."

The most convincing narrative on putting evidence into practice comes from Dylan Wiliam, who relates the 25-year history of Embedding Formative Assessment. It's a good, and probably realistic, example of how long the successful development and implementation of an approach can take. It also highlights that successful approaches are likely to combine both a change in practice that improves outcomes for pupils and extensive professional development to embed that change in practice.

One of the stand-out chapters for me is by Rebecca Morris and colleagues, who interviewed middle and senior leaders to examine their use of evidence to inform decision-making and practice. I found this the most convincing portrait of life in schools at the moment, and the way that "evidence use" is being enacted. For many, this means a more superficial process of engagement with evidence, implementation, and evaluation. Whether this less-than-perfect approach makes any difference to student outcomes is anyone's guess.

For many school leaders and practitioners, research evidence is mediated into practice by teacher or ex-teacher consultants and gurus, whose skill is in converting research into actionable approaches for schools, presented in ways that teachers can understand. This usually features popular hits such as Rosenshine, cognitive science approaches (retrieval practice, cognitive load theory, etc), and a knowledge-based curriculum. A reflection on these routes of evidence into practice would have been interesting.

Similarly, while this book thankfully features diverse voices, the evidence-use movement is mostly led by white males with a secondary background. Megan Dixon and colleagues suggest that "the evidence can support school development to become a democratic process, open and inclusive, to all who wish to be involved". I think it would have been worth exploring some of the potential barriers to this – issues of status, ideology, race and gender, such as the inherent power imbalance between funders, researchers and practitioners.

The sum of all these parts is not so much a field guide on how to get evidence used in practice, but a series of reports back from explorers in the field. Or, perhaps, looking out on my COVID lockdown garden, like the Victorian plant hunters, sending back exotic specimens they have found, but not yet knowing which will grow and flourish at home.

## How to Contribute

Articles should be no more than 2000 words and should be accompanied by a brief introduction to the author(s) (100 words), an abstract (200 words) and up to 5 keywords. Articles should be submitted by email to [nadia.siddiqui@dur.ac.uk](mailto:nadia.siddiqui@dur.ac.uk) as MS Word attachment. Articles will be reviewed by the Editorial Board, and any changes requested. Editors are happy to discuss feasible articles.

## DECE News

### DECE members and affiliates collaborate on new evidence book

*Getting Evidence into Education* was released in April and has involved contributions from several members and affiliates of DECE including Stephen Gorard, Carole Torgerson, Beng Huat See, Nadia Siddiqui, Steve Higgins, Lindsey Wardle, Vikki Boliver, Chris Brown, Jane Flood, Becky Morris and Tom Perry. It is available to buy now in paperback and ebook.

### Evidence workshops online

Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, we had to cancel our intended Using and Understanding Evidence workshop in Durham. However, we made the move to deliver this online to deliver two evidence workshops, one from ourselves on 7<sup>th</sup> May and another in collaboration with the Islamic University of Maldives. Feedback from the workshops has been excellent.



### Other current work from DECE members

Dr Nadia Siddiqui recently secured a British Academy grant to support work with partners in the UK, Pakistan and India on early childhood development.

Prof Stephen Gorard, Dr Nadia Siddiqui and Dr Beng Huat See have been appointed as part of the Cabinet Office What Works Panel. Stephen Gorard was also recently appointed as External REF reviewer for Edge Hill University and External Assessor for Hong Kong University.

Various members of DECE will be guest editing publications in the near future, including *Research Intelligence* and *Education Sciences*.

Prof Chris Brown gave a talk at the AI in Education symposium in London in March. He has also been busy during lockdown giving guest lectures for Universität Duisberg-Essen in Germany and Model Institute of Education and Research, Jammu in India.

### New/Forthcoming Publications by DECE Members include:

Brown, C., Flood, J. and Handscomb, G. (Eds)(2020). *The Research-Informed Teaching Revolution: A handbook for the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher*. John Catt: Woodbridge

Gorard, S. (Ed)(2020). *Getting evidence into education: Evaluating the routes to policy and practice*. Routledge: London

Gorard, S., See, BH and Siddiqui, N. (2020). What is the evidence on the best way to get evidence into use in education? *Review of Education*

See, BH, Gorard, S., Morris, R. and el-Soufi, N. (2020). What works in attracting and retaining teachers in challenging schools and areas? *Oxford Review of Education*

Uwimpuhwe, G., Singh, A., Higgins, S., Coux, M. Xiao, M. Shkedy, Z. and Kasim, A. Latent Class Evaluation in Educational Trials: What percentage of children benefits from an intervention? *The Journal of Experimental Education*.

Wyse, D., Brown, C., Oliver, S. and Poblete, X. (2020) Education Research and Educational Practice: The Qualities of a Close Relationship, *British Educational Research Journal*, early online access.

