



Making informed decisions

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What's the idea?

As Drucker (2001, p. 195) states: 'One alternative is always the alternative of doing nothing.'

What does it mean?

You have done your research and think you've found an intervention or change which has a sound base. However, just because the evidence base appears to be sound, that in itself is not a good enough reason to adopt the intervention or change.

In fact, there are a range of factors that need to be taken into account before deciding whether or not to proceed. Willingham (2012) identifies the following factors worthy of consideration:

- » Implementing a change incurs a cost in time, energy and resources. You must weigh the expected benefits against the anticipated costs
- » Any change you adopt will bring

opportunity costs (i.e. the loss of other alternatives when one alternative is chosen)

- » A change may work as described, but may have negative side effects. (For more about side effects, see Zhao, 2018.)

What are the implications for teachers?

Willingham (2012, p. 217), drawing upon the work of Atul Gawande – a world-renowned surgeon and author – has developed a 10-point checklist for you to reference before adopting a change:

- 1 The thing I'm hoping to change is ...
- 2 The way I can see that things change is... (In other words, what will you measure?)
- 3 I've measured it before I start the change, and the level is...
- 4 I'm also going to measure... (What other factors could potentially be relevant/affected by the intervention)

5 The change could have some negative effects. I'm most suspicious that it might influence... To be confident about whether or not it does, I'm going to measure...

6 Here's how often I plan to collect the measurements, and the circumstances under which I'll do so...

7 My plan to keep these data organised is...

8 The date by which I expect to see some benefit of the change is...

9 The size of the benefit I expect to see on that date is...

10 If I don't observe the expected benefit on that date, my plan is to...

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Drucker PF (2001) *The Essential Drucker*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- » Gawande A (2010) *The Checklist Manifesto*. London: Penguin.
- » Willingham D (2012) *When Can You Trust the Experts: How to Tell Good Science from Bad in Education*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- » Zhao Y (2018) *What Works May Hurt: Side Effects in Education*. New York: Teachers' College Press.