



Side-effects of your intervention

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What's the idea?

When deciding whether to implement a teaching strategy or intervention, you should take into account any potential adverse side effects – alongside the reported benefits (Zhao, 2017).

What does it mean?

In his work, Zhao uses the Cambridge Online Dictionary definition of a side effect as 'an unwanted or unexpected results or condition that comes along with the desired effects of something'.

It's important for practitioners who are using evidence to consider side effects for three reasons:

- » To make sure you don't adopt teaching strategies that do more harm than good.
- » So you can minimise any negative side effects that interventions may entail.
- » So you can make an informed choice about an intervention when deciding

whether to use is (based on Zhao, 2017).

What are the implications for teachers?

Be aware of overconfidence. As (Kahneman et al., 2011) point out, when making decisions, we are prone to overconfidence, planning fallacies and optimistic biases. Try to protect against this by identifying and planning for any potential side effects before you make a decision about implementing an intervention.

Watch out side effects that are not discussed or reported. When appraising research evidence, if there is little or no discussion about side effects this is a warning sign that the intervention may have unreported side-effects.

Be vigilant for any side effects or unanticipated consequences. Consider the implications for 'bystanders' or others involved in the intervention, as they may incur the costs. For example, you might switch

resources from one area to support the new intervention.

Avoid the avoidable. A 'pre-mortem' (Klein, 2007) can help you to identify any unintended consequences before you start implementing an intervention. This technique helps you imagine circumstances when your planned for intervention has failed and will allow you to develop some mitigation before you go ahead with the intervention.

All may not be lost. Just because an intervention has negative unintended consequences, this does not automatically mean that the intervention should be abandoned. For example, graded lesson observations may have a negative impact on teacher motivation. On the other hand, well-structured and supportive peer observations may be beneficial for teachers, moving from a system of graded lesson observation to non-graded peer observations.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Kahneman D (2011) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London: Macmillan.
- » Klein G (2007) *The Power of Intuition: How to Use Your Gut Feelings to Make Better Decisions at Work*. Carmarthen: Crown Business.
- » Zhao Y (2017) What works may hurt: Side effects in education. *Journal of Educational Change* 18: 1-19.