

The 'whole picture': Examining unconventional, uncomfortable or controversial ideas in your education research project

When researching, make sure you examine a range of literature, including that which puts forward unconventional, uncomfortable or controversial ideas. This will strengthen the criticality of your academic writing and help you produce a 'whole picture' of your topic and your approach to investigation.

'It is sometimes tempting to focus on positive elements of practice. However, there are less positive elements too: disadvantages, obstacles, tensions, even the lack of benefit, the failings. Try, therefore, to look at the whole picture...' (*A Beginner's Guide...*, pp.70-71).

Here are some examples...

1. Effective teaching

This important review concluded that 'some common practices can be harmful to learning and have no grounding in research': <http://bit.ly/1G1aVP2>

2. Role of teaching assistants

Note the uncomfortable findings of Blatchford *et al's* (2011) report:

Blatchford, P., Russell, A. and Webster R. (2011) *Reassessing the impact of teaching assistants: how research challenges practice and policy*. London: Routledge.

See also: <http://bit.ly/18ev3AX>

3. 'Learning styles'

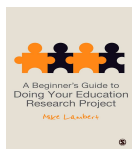
Look at material which is highly critical of this concept and its application to practice. For example: <http://bit.ly/1ziADJt>.

Also: Sharp, J.G., Bowker, R. and Byrne, J. (2008) VAK or VAK-uous? Towards the trivialisation of learning and the death of scholarship. *Research Papers in Education*, 23(3), September 2008, 293-314.

4. Use of computers with young children

'There is ever-mounting evidence that ... exposure to screen technology during key stages of child development may have counterproductive effects on cognitive processes and learning' (Sigman, 2011, p.285).

Sigman, A. (2011) Do not compute, revisited: screen technology in early years education. In R. House (ed.) *Too much, too soon? Early learning and the erosion of childhood*. Stroud. Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press, pp.265-289.



5. 'Gifted and talented'

'Educationalists should, at the very least, be keenly aware that the gifted and talented label is a gross, misleading over-simplification of learners' abilities and potential.' <http://bit.ly/1AFGa0Q>

6. Use of 'grounded theory'

Thomas and James (2006) provided a vigorous critique of this popular approach to research (described in 'A Beginner's Guide...', p.16):

Thomas, G. and James, D. (2006). Reinventing grounded theory: some questions about theory, ground and discovery. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(6) December, pp.767-795.

7. Education and equality

'Western Education has not been the "great leveler", but often has been complicit in reproducing inequality, racism, classism, ableism, ageism, gender difference, religious intolerance, cultural and ethnic discrimination, sexual discrimination, language prejudice, and other social difference discourses. Rather than alleviating xenophobia, it has often enabled it.'

Swanson, D. M. (2015) Education and social justice: an international perspective. Retrieved 22.2.15 from www.academia.edu. Online at: <http://bit.ly/1vp2ZVq>.

8. Class size

'There is no clear relationship between average primary or secondary school class size and educational attainment amongst OECD countries.'

<http://bit.ly/1MGKqll>

9. Pedagogy

These two seminal publications questioned the existence of 'pedagogy' in thinking and practice in England:

Simon, B. (1981). Why no pedagogy in England? In: Simon, B. and Taylor, W., *Education in the eighties: the central issues*. London: Batsford, pp.124-145.

Alexander, R. (2004). Still no pedagogy? Principle, pragmatism and compliance in primary education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 34(1), pp.7-33.

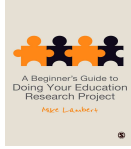
10. Learning in the 21st century

An unusual perspective: <http://bit.ly/1zWMGx3>

Top Tips on all aspects of your education research project:

<https://wlv.academia.edu/MikeLambert>

(You may need to register on the Academia website to access this material)



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A Beginner's Guide to Doing Your Education Research Project is published by SAGE:
<http://bit.ly/143AhdA> and available also on Amazon: <http://amzn.to/1e9xges>.

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