

# THE ROUND

SUMMER 2018



## HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF 'PROJECT FOLLOW THROUGH'?

**Wouldn't it be great if education researchers compared a range of pedagogical approaches against one another and could tell us which ones fared better than others?**

It would be even better if they compared those approaches across a range of subjects over a three decades and based it on a huge sample.

Well, what if I told you that they actually did that? And that one educational approach fared better than the rest in almost every area?

What I've just described is 'Project Follow Through', the largest controlled comparative study of pedagogical techniques in history. It was undertaken between 1967 and 1995, and over 700,000 disadvantaged children participated in the study. It cost \$1billion to complete, making it the largest and most expensive US government-funded study in education ever conducted.

The study was designed like a horse race. Different sponsors delivered programmes using the sponsor's chosen pedagogical approach and these were evaluated against each other and against control groups. Some were enquiry-based, some were mastery based, some gave pupils choice about their learning.

But of all the approaches, there was one clear winner: Direct Instruction. It placed first in reading, first in maths, first in spelling and first in language. No other model came close to it, and in fact many of the other approaches actually underperformed the control groups. DI even beat approaches aimed to improve self esteem – it placed first in that category too.

You can read more about this research and about what a Direct Instruction programme actually entails [here](#) and [here](#).

# EVALUATING YOUR OWN

## KNOW YOUR COGNITIVE BIASES

Of all the discoveries in behavioural and cognitive science in the past 50 years or so, the idea that humans are essentially irrational thinkers at heart is probably the hardest one for us to accept. We all like to think that we are rational beasts, weighing up all the available evidence and making the best decision based on this.

But the fact is that our thinking is prone to error, and none of us are exempt from this. We make assumptions, have blind spots, take mental shortcuts and fall into pitfalls of thinking all of the time.

We call these errors *cognitive biases* – and the bad news is that we're all susceptible to them. But whilst we are all susceptible, we can at least make ourselves aware of them. The more aware we are, the more we can account for them in our thinking.

Since the 1960s, psychologists have been identifying and categorising these biases. Many are pertinent to the decisions we make in the classroom and are useful to anyone undertaking classroom enquiry of a pedagogical approach. The following pages detail some of the most useful to know, as shown in this [infographic](#).

### ANCHORING EFFECT

Relying too much on the initial piece of information offered when making decisions

“The first test seemed OK. Do we need to look any more.”

### AVAILABILITY HEURISTIC

Overestimating the importance of events given the greater availability of information

“I saw something similar to this online yesterday. It must be important.”

### BANDWAGON EFFECT

Uptake of beliefs and ideas increases the more that they have already been adopted by others

“Lots of other schools do this so must be a good idea.”

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# CLASSROOM ENQUIRY

<b>BELIEF BIAS</b> Basing the strength of an argument on the believability or plausibility of the conclusion	"I didn't quite follow your argument but the conclusion seems about right."
<b>BLIND SPOT BIAS</b> Viewing oneself as less biased than others	"Let's ignore her views on this because she's biased."
<b>CLUSTERING ILLUSION</b> Erroneously overestimating the importance of small clusters or patterns in large data	"This is the second week in a row that this has happened. There must be a problem."
<b>CONFIRMATION BIAS</b> Focusing on information that only confirms existing preconceptions	"I tested this out a few times. Most of these times showed there's no problem."
<b>COURTESY BIAS</b> Giving an opinion/conclusion that is viewed as more socially acceptable so as to avoid causing offence/controversy	"The evidence suggests that this is better but a lot of people don't like it so I won't mention it."
<b>ENDOWMENT EFFECT</b> The tendency for people to ascribe more value to things merely because they already have them	"I know it will cost more to make this work, but we've already spent loads so we can't stop now."
<b>ILLUSION OF VALIDITY</b> Overestimating our ability to make accurate predictions, especially when data appears to tell a coherent "story"	"This worked fine in my last school, it should work fine here."
<b>POST-PURCHASE RATIONALISATION</b> Tendency to retroactively ascribe positive attributes to an option one has selected	"We made a good call on that one."
<b>STATUS QUO BIAS</b> Preferring the current state of affairs over change	"If it ain't broke – don't fix it."





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# BLOGROLL

ARTICLES AND BLOGS YOU MIGHT FIND INTERESTING

[‘No Feedback, No Learning’](#) is a blog post from Paul A. Kirschner and Mirjam Neelen, summarising the evidence on feedback – how to do it right and how to do it wrong! There are some great visual models in this post.

[‘Expert Teaching: What is it, and how might we develop it?’](#) This is a great (and very short) paper by Peps Mccrea from the *Institute for Teaching*, pulling together the best available evidence to offer an overview of what expert teaching is and how it can be developed.

[Schooling Makes You Smarter: What Teachers Need to Know about IQ’](#) This is an excellent article by psychology professor Richard E. Nisbett for the equally excellent *American Educator* journal, detailing the common errors about IQ, as well as all of “the new knowledge that is most relevant to educators”.

***If you want to know a little bit more about any of the ideas in this edition, please don’t hesitate to email me – [j.theobald@wildern.hants.sch.uk](mailto:j.theobald@wildern.hants.sch.uk) - or come and find me in Block 9! James***