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Evidence-based education and the role of teacher education

During the last decades, educational policy has turned towards evidence-based decisions. Evidence helps to identify problems early, serves as a basis for planning, gives feedback on developments or justifies programmes.

Educational policy also follows with interest what research is finding out, e. g. about conditions of successful schooling. Even when researchers conclude that the quality of teaching is more important than the quality of school structures, politicians may get convinced. Consequently, they suppose that scientific evidence could help to improve educational practice. This hope is still shared by teachers who may want to know e.g. how to cope with the increasing diversity in their classrooms.

What are implications of these observations? First of all, it seems that fundamental debates on evidence-based education have become obsolete. Nevertheless, we still have to discuss approaches and methods for synthesizing findings. And we have to continue and intensify research on “what works” in education.

Before this background my presentation will focus consequences of the shift towards evidence-based education for teacher training. Teacher education can play a key role for the successful implementation of evidence-based education; but strategies are needed to address these new challenges. In order to discuss such strategies, possible functions of teacher education for evidence-based education should be differentiated.

Teacher education could be adjudicated e.g. the function of a filter (critical analysis of evidence), the responsibility of qualifying teachers in initial teacher training as well as across their career, the task of implementing evidence (in materials, tools, technologies). Last but not least, teacher education has to take care that teachers learn to decide responsible-minded and in line with professional standards of a goal- and value-oriented education. Based on that, some specific challenges shall be addressed in the end: Teacher education has to develop competence in target-group-specific science communication. And could teacher education benefit from approaches of translational research?

- Prof. Dr. Manfred Prenzel, EARLI2017 Keynote Speaker, May 2016.

