

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS CREDIBLE RESEARCH?

For anyone new to educational research, working out what constitutes a 'credible' source can be a minefield.

One of the problems is that different organisations have different standards of what counts as 'evidence'. Some say that personal observations of a trained professional in the classroom are reliable enough evidence (albeit on a small scale). Others believe a more systematic comparison is necessary, such as a Randomised Control Trial (RCT) across multiple different schools, in order to objectively assess the effectiveness of a certain theory.

So as teachers, rather than academic researchers, how can you discern a good piece of research from an unreliable one?

First, there is **not a definitive type of good evidence**. Research is good when the claims made match the evidence available. For example, personal observations are not appropriate evidence for one approach being the best approach for any possible context. However, as an indicator of success in your classroom context, personal observations are valid.

When looking for research, it is important to **find a credible source**. Look at who is behind the publication (researcher, organisation, publisher). If it is endorsed by a university or another educational research organisation that you know has high-standards for its publications, the claims are more likely to be well-supported by evidence.

The next thing is to **use your practitioner instinct**. Ask yourself some initial questions: *Do the claims made by the researcher seem likely to be true? How does it correspond to my own experience? Does anything seem to be missing here?* This will help to frame your reading.

Finally, **look at the detail**. You can tell a lot about a study from its 'small print'. *How many students were involved in the research? How many schools? What is their evidence and how have they evaluated the impact?* Read with a critical eye, and you will be able to judge if the data seems substantial enough to support their conclusions.

Remember, even if a piece of research has a lot of solid data behind it, it doesn't guarantee that its claims will be true for your case or your school. It only means that it has worked well elsewhere.