Journal Club

In 2017 you couldn’t move in schools due to mountains of fidget spinners and children insisting they needed to have them in class to help them focus. No sooner had their popularity exploded than they seemed to disappear and pupils across the land were once again able to work without them.

A recent study has looked into claims that fidget spinners can be used as ‘attentional aides with the potential to enhance student learning’. College-aged students were asked to watch educational videos while either using a fidget spinner or not. The research found that using a fidget spinner was ‘associated with increased reports of attentional lapses, diminished judgments of learning, and impaired performance on a memory test for the material covered in the video’, and this affect was found in both a between-subjects (different participants for each condition) and within-subjects (participants experience each condition) experiment.

The results of the study suggest that if there are any benefits, fidget spinners have limited benefits to learning and they can act as a distraction to memory. When applying this research to the classroom it is worth considering that the experiments were not conducted in classroom conditions or with school-aged pupils and that they do not draw conclusions about the use of fidget objects by pupils with learning difficulties, for emotional regulation or boredom reduction.

Tried and Tested

THAT'S A CLAIM!

thatsclaim.org is a website of resources from the Informed Choices Network, an ‘international, multidisciplinary group with a variety of backgrounds and a shared interest in promoting and supporting well-informed decisions’.

The website offers a framework for thinking critically about claims, evidence, and choices across a range of subject areas including educational interventions but also environmental, health, management and social welfare.

The key concepts for thinking critically in each area are categorised as ‘Beware’, ‘Think Fair’ and ‘Take Care’ and downloadable as a poster to display.

Evidence Based Resource Library

Evidence Based Education is an organisation developing and providing professional development, tools and services “to improve learner outcomes, worldwide and for good”. They have recently released a free resource library, collating a wealth of resources for those working in education.

Accessing the resource library requires signing up for a free account. You can then access what’s on offer in any order you like, whether you want to download a selection of ebooks on feedback and assessment, or work your way through a series of podcasts including ‘The Evidence Based Education Podcast’ and partner podcast with the Education Endowment Foundation ‘Trialled and Tested’, which feature topics including assessment, evidence-based school improvement, implementation strategies and conversations with well known figures in education.

There is also longer research available including Rob Coe’s ‘Great Teaching Starter Pack’ with downloadable pdf copies of key research and reports, covering what he thinks is an essential reading list for teachers.

With each of the resources is the opportunity to comment and discuss your thoughts.
The Maternity Teacher Paternity Teacher Project

Founded in 2016 by English teacher Emma Sheppard, the MTPT Project supports those who choose to complete CPD whilst on parental leave, through a supportive and inspirational network to help people do teaching and parenting in a way that makes them happy.

They believe that ‘parents are entitled to make decisions that support their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their families’. Whilst for some people wellbeing will mean forgetting the world of work, for others this will mean ‘maintaining a sense of that “teacher” identity during the “break” of parental leave’.

The project offers and promotes accessible activities that can be enjoyed with a baby or toddler in tow and have found that the network has had a ‘significant impact on the culture of schools, influencing organisations to be more equal and more inclusive’, not just improving working conditions for parents, but for all teachers.

Regional representatives, all teachers with young families, host a range of opportunities to engage with the project. Whether that’s through coffee mornings at cafes or sites of cultural and historical interest, teachmeets, workshops and conferences or other networking events, they are always keen to welcome new members and volunteers.

Their website outlines a wide range of CPD options for parents to think about including, online courses, conferences, qualifications, reading, school governance, school visits and research. They are active on social media and share case studies of ways other parents have engaged with courses, conferences, qualifications, reading, school governance, school visits and research. They also have partnerships with academics and think tanks and are working with them to find out more about the links between gender, motherhood, teacher retention and leadership.

Teachers approaching or currently on maternity or paternity leave may be eligible for their two-module MTPT Project Accreditation which is currently being piloted and is underpinned by coaching sessions to empower teachers on parental leave to document and reflect on their CPD in a more flexible, designed to work around the demands of teachers’ new families.

You can find out more at: www.mtpt.org.uk
@maternityCPD
facebook.com/MTPTproject

Edu-Blog Spotlight

Timothy Shanahan is a former first-grade teacher and one of the world’s premier literacy educators, studying the teaching of reading and writing across all ages and abilities. He blogs at shanahanonliteracy.com and tweets as @ReadingShanahan

A recent post responds to a teacher's question about dyslexia fonts such as Open Dyslexia, Dyslexie, and Read Regular, and explores the evidence around whether these are effective.

In the eight studies cited by Shanahan, most found no improvement with the fonts and some found both dyslexic children and adults ‘preferred reading standard fonts to the special ones’. There is evidence that some students read more quickly due to the spacing in the fonts, however this was replicated with spacing of standard fonts.

Shanahan finds no empirical evidence to show that some fonts are easier to read. The idea that dyslexia is mainly a visual problem has ‘largely been rejected in the scientific community’ and the theory behind the use of these fonts is that they will be ‘preferred by readers having trouble getting the print to stand still’.

He starts by reflecting on the work of psychologist Miles Tinker who focussed on ‘the impacts of print on reading and learning to read and on print itself’ and his conclusions that ‘most print features made little difference in reading or ease of reading, and none facilitated learning to read’.

The introduction of INSET days also included the requirement for teachers to attend five days of training in addition to the 190 days teaching required so the total number of days children are required to be in school was not changed.

Dates for INSET days are often set by local authorities, however academies and free schools are able to set their own dates.