



# Foreword

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I can see this book becoming a firm favourite for a great many teachers given the scope of ideas and research covered and the intelligent, down-to-earth blend of theory and practice through the case studies. As well as putting so many ideas in one place, this book also pulls off the clever trick of feeling timeless and contemporary all at once. It's going to last!

I don't think there has ever been a better time to be a teacher. At long last, the worlds of education research and frontline teaching practice are talking to each other in a dynamic fashion and I sense a sea change in teachers' and leaders' attitudes to the idea of developing an evidence-informed profession. Increasingly, over the last five years or so, the level of teacher engagement with the insights from cognitive science and other research fields has grown significantly. There's an enormous appetite for knowledge about how students learn and, with limited time to invest, what the best bets might be for the classroom activities and strategies that we design and enact.

At all times, however, it's not simply a case of teachers taking ideas from research and implementing them in some kind of mechanistic, standard fashion. Far from it. The challenge is to make sense of research evidence in the context of teaching your subject to your particular students who arrive with a wide variety of prior knowledge, attitudes to learning and life experiences. It's complex. But, importantly it's not so complicated that we can't do it well and do it better. Schools wouldn't work at all if students didn't have a great deal in common in the way they learn or if it were not the case that some strategies simply are more effective than others.

In Graham Nuthall's seminal *Hidden Lives of Learners* he expressed deep reservations about teachers being forced to follow recipes; of teachers being told what to do. He suggests that '*teaching is about sensitivity and adaptation. It is about adjusting to the here-and-now circumstances of particular students*'. However, he also goes on to add this important qualification: '*As a teacher, you make adaptations. You must. The important question is: what adaptations do you make? You can do it by a kind of blind trial and error, but it would be much better if you knew what kinds of adaptations were needed, and why.*'

That final 'why' is vital. 'Evidence-informed wisdom' is the goal; a blend of teachers' experience and expertise informed by evaluating their own practice and the successes and difficulties their own students experience, together with insights from research underpinned by a model for learning that explains why things work and don't work.

This is where a book like *The Fundamentals of Teaching* comes in. In essence, Mike Bell's excellent book is a guide to developing the evidence-informed wisdom teachers need. He has done a superb job of synthesising ideas from multiple sources to great a clear coherent framework for exploring and delivering effective teaching. There's an important examination of the evidence and the science of how learning works, reinforcing a shared understanding of concepts and terminology. Mike's Five-Step learning cycle builds on a wide range of studies to provide a simple model from which teachers can spring-board in different directions, according to their contexts.

The great strength of the book then comes from the extensive exploration of putting the evidence into practice, modelling the learning process through the way readers are encouraged to engage with the book. As we encounter a range of strategies to deliver each of the steps, we are invited to consider: What do we know already? What's the underlying model and evidence base? What new learning do we need to move forward? Can we make sense of it via some case study examples? Now, how well have we understood the concepts and their applications? This repeated structure is clever and powerful. It makes you stop to think about your own knowledge all the way through and, in doing so, succeeds in building a model for teaching far greater than the sum of its parts.

In his concluding comments, Mike suggests that we 'arm ourselves with the evidence' as we embark on our continued journeys through the profession, bombarded by commentators on all sides. I'd say that he's given us plenty of ammunition.

Tom Sherrington