

## **Fireside chat - What works in education? How to promote evidence-informed teaching and learning**

*Prof. Inge de Wolf & Prof. Becky Francis*

During this fireside chat, Becky Francis and Inge de Wolf discussed how evidence-informed teaching could be implemented and improved.

Professor Becky Francis is currently CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation. The foundation mainly focuses on improving learning outcomes of 11 to 24-year old individuals and is one of the key drivers behind the Pupil Premium Toolkit. Previously, Becky was the Director of the UCL Institute of Education.

The second guest is Professor Inge de Wolf. She holds a professorship in Education Systems at Maastricht University, where she is cofounder of the Education Lab NL. The Education Lab is involved in bridging the gap between research and practice.

The first discussion point broadly introduced the topic of how evidence-based learning and teaching works in education.

Becky Francis started by emphasising the key approaches that the Education Endowment Foundation is following, namely generating knowledge and mobilising this knowledge. She highlights the important shift toward experimental evidence to not only fill gaps in the literature, but also to answer questions of policymakers directly. This together with systematising existing knowledge led to the teaching and learning toolkit which is currently used by two-thirds of school leaders throughout England. Overall, the Education Endowment Foundation has what she calls 'a mission-driven focus', the ultimate goal being to provide school leaders, teachers and policymakers with the tools they require. It also has a special focus on narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and others. Mobilising the evidence makes it necessary to work out particular guidance reports in close collaboration with policymakers, contractors for the UK government and regional schools. Here especially, scaling up and establishing well-proven interventions, such as the national tutoring programme, is an important factor.

Inge de Wolf followed this by talking about her views on this topic. She described her work as being inspired by the 'what-works-movement'. She considers collaboration between researchers, teachers and policymakers to be vital to improving teaching. This is why she and Tijana Breuer founded the Education Lab in 2020 with the goal of improving education through evidence-based insights and sharing the knowledge gained. She highlights the importance of applying high-quality research methods, such as randomised controlled trials (RCT) and comprehensive literature reviews. Although the lab has only been founded recently, it has already been quite successful in obtaining funding and fulfilling its goals. Inge, for instance, talks about the organisation of Lab Days that successfully connect teachers and policymakers. To bridge the gap between academia and practice, the lab meets the requirement of involving teachers in every research project.

Another discussion point concerned ways to effectively implement and scale interventions in practice. Becky Francis is sceptical about a one-size-fits-all solution. A current issue is that the

most effective programmes often lack the scaling that would be required to roll them out nationwide. Therefore, the Education Endowment Foundation not only ensures the quality of projects, but also works on possibilities to scale programmes.

Inge de Wolf agrees that in the Netherlands it is often challenging to scale well-functioning programmes. She emphasised that calculating the cost-effectiveness of programmes is important prior to implementation. As an example, she mentioned 'high-dosage tutoring' which was found to be effective, but at the same time also expensive.

The discussion concluded with the willingness of schools to participate in research. Inge de Wolf mentioned that very different types of research are required to answer questions about the effectiveness of certain methods. Getting the schools to participate in randomised controlled trials, however, is not the most difficult challenge as they are mostly eager to try out different methods. Furthermore, Becky Francis did not report any difficulties in finding schools willing to participate in the studies they performed, which is also reflected in the high number of 1.6 million children being involved in their trials.