

Is educational neuroscience a waste of money?

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Educational neuroscience has little to offer schools or children's education, according to new research from the University of Bristol, UK.

In a controversial research paper published in *Psychological Review*, Professor Jeffrey Bowers of Bristol's School of Experimental Psychology warns that schools are investing in expensive interventions because they claim a neuroscientific basis. However, the paper points out that understanding the role of different structures of the brain does not actually help improve teaching or assessing how children progress in a classroom setting.

Professor Bowers said: "Educational neuroscience only tells us what we know already or gives us information that is irrelevant. The problems faced by classroom teachers dealing with learning difficulties can only be diagnosed and addressed through behavioural methods."

Examples of pointless educational neuroscience findings highlighted by Professor Bowers include:

- Using brain scans to detect whether dyslexic children have improved their reading skills, rather than testing these children's reading skills
- Describing learning as 'brain-enabled'
- Recommending interventions that require struggling children to do more of what they are bad at, rather than finding alternative routes to learning that involve identifying and playing to

children's strengths.

Professor Bowers said: "Head teachers should avoid all teaching methods that are marketed on the basis of neuroscience and pay attention to whether the methods improve performance, as assessed in randomized control trials."

Professor Bowers is an investigator in the University of Bristol's 'Morph Project' testing a new literacy intervention to help struggling readers in years 3 to 4.

More information: 'The Practical and Principled Problems With Educational Neuroscience' by Bowers, Jeffrey S. in *Psychological Review*, 2016.

Provided by University of Bristol

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