

Hard data

Not everything that can be measured is important, says Kevin Harcombe, who is struggling to get excited about RAISEonline and FFT...

Allow me to introduce RAISEonline and FFT! The former, available on the internet, is a Viagra-like pill to treat impotence, whilst the latter is the noise you make when the effects of the medication abruptly cease.

Would that it were, would that it were. RAISE and FFT are, in fact, data sets provided by the DfE and LA to enable schools to analyse their performance in

statutory assessments. If you've never heard of either of them, well done! You have a life.

RAISE and FFT, running to over a hundred pages of graphs and matrices, collate, in impressively mind-numbing detail, the attainment of girls and boys based on ethnicity, prior attainment and other factors such as free school meals, special educational needs, and, for all I know, shoe size and favourite colour. Ofsted use them extensively to hold schools to account, which perhaps explains recent anecdotal evidence of increasingly ill-tempered and rude inspectors – the poor sods have to read this tripe every day.

RAISE is historical, which is a nice way of saying 'out of date.' It tells you how good or bad you were six months ago, which is akin to a doctor telling a corpse that it was fit as a flea last year. FFT additionally predicts future results – like your horoscope, but less accurate. In fact, the standard deviation rate is an astonishing 15%, whilst the reliability coefficient is only in the range – 23 to +17. Now, because you read that last sentence in a respected professional journal (or it was till I started writing for it) you may simply accept these figures without question,

whereas they are plausible but meaningless gobbledegook that I've just made up. 93% of statistics are made up on the spot, or to put it another way, there are lies, damned lies, RAISE and FFT.

Not everything that can be measured is important and not everything important can easily be measured. Generate your own school level data and, better still, team up with some other schools so you can benchmark and ensure stringent moderation of levels. Show this data to Ofsted and, if they demur, insist that 98.6% of inspectors find school generated data more reliable.

I once advised that the ludicrous number of assessments for Foundation Stage Profile could be managed by using post-it notes, annotated and displayed on a board for future reference. Having run out of board, indeed wall, space I have now developed this further so that you stick the post-it notes actually on the child. When Ofsted ask for evidence you can simply point to the dozens of reception children skipping

round the playground, completely covered in yellow post-its, which flutter very prettily in the breeze. The downside is that when parents come to collect their children they can't tell which is which, resulting in a sort of lucky dip at home time. But, as I say, no assessment system is perfect.

Has the world gone mad? If so, how can you tell? Really, the task of teaching nowadays is difficult enough without the DfE and LA poking their noses in. If I wanted 60 pages detailing my shortcomings I'm sure my own teenaged children would oblige.

The new Ofsted framework has again raised the bar. It is now so high that it's partly obscured by clouds. Raw results are all, no matter how deprived or difficult your intake. Part of me admires this because it is right that every child should achieve no less than age-related expectations. Another part of me despairs at a dictat whose logical conclusion suggests Accrington Stanley Reserves have as much chance of winning the Premiership as Manchester United. Things are getting harder. Which, in a way, brings us back to Viagra.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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