

Would you rather...? Hypothetical questions in education research

Would you rather:

- Top exam results for your pupils – or £1 million in the bank?
- £1 billion additional schools funding going on teacher pay, student mental health support, or curriculum development?
- High workload and good behaviour, or low workload and poor behaviour?
- Fight a hundred duck-sized horses, or one horse-sized duck?

Is there any point in such questions? Sadly, Teacher Tapp can't offer you either top exam results, or £1 million. (The [top prize](#) in our Golden Ticket raffle is £3000 though, so keep tapping!) Yet, to date, we've asked three of these four questions. Why?

First, hypothetical questions get teachers thinking and talking. If we ask teachers "would you like a pay rise?" they'll say yes. If we ask "would you like more TA support?" they'll say yes. We've not learned much! A forced choice makes it interesting: "would you rather a £1000 pay rise or five extra hours TA support a week?" We're all in favour of nice things! We find it harder (and more interesting) to choose between them. In this case, we've asked teachers what they would have preferred as NQTs. Six in ten wanted a salary boost over a TA.

Second, hypothetical questions allow us to tapp™ into teachers' values and beliefs. For example, how much do teachers really care about academisation? Across the diverse experience of 450,000 teachers in over 20,000 schools, it's hard to know. So we asked teachers if, offered a job in two otherwise identical schools, they would prefer to teach in an academy, a maintained school, or would toss a coin to choose. When we last asked, seven in ten teachers preferred a maintained school, two in ten didn't mind, and just one in ten preferred an academy.

Why are hypothetical questions useful?

Why is this useful? Well, hypothetically speaking, let's say the government is ~~chasing an eye-catching headline~~ looking to make a lasting and meaningful change to improve schools. Let's imagine that delaying HS2 until 2059 has saved £1 billion, and it's going to education. We think it's worth the government knowing where teachers believe this money should go. We found that 43% of teachers would spend an extra £1 billion on a pay rise; 32% on mental health support; and just 2% on tutoring (other options were available). Or suppose a university or

charity or professional development provider is looking to create a free online course. They only have funding to cover one topic – what should it be? We think it's worth their knowing that, from a list of nine teaching skills, classroom management was the thing the most teachers wanted to do better. Knowing what a representative sample of teachers value and believe allows us to better tailor programmes, policies and support to their needs.

So to this week's excitement. What do teachers value most in a school...? Previously, we've tested whether workload or behaviour is more important: 57% of teachers would rather work in a school with high workload and impeccable behaviour; 43% would rather work somewhere with low workload and poor behaviour. We can imagine other possibilities, like schools with high workload and poor behaviour. We don't include this as an option, because it's hard to imagine anyone choosing to work there above the alternatives.

What matters more: autonomy or behaviour?

This week, we tested whether teachers cared more about autonomy or behaviour. (Actually, we can't take the credit, [@Shakinthatchalk](#) suggested the question!) Again, we assumed that high autonomy and good behaviour would prove too tempting, and that low autonomy and poor behaviour wouldn't tempt anyone... So we asked:

Which of these two schools would you choose to teach at if you had to?

- School A uses scripted lessons and prescribed resources that you *must* use, with fully supported behaviour systems.
- School B allows full teaching autonomy, is well-resourced, but there is no significant behaviour support.

Surprisingly (to us at least), the results were incredibly close! 52% of teachers prioritised autonomy; 48% prioritised behavioural support. We had a lot of suggestions as to what was driving this: did your priorities change with age, for example, or between primary and secondary school? We found:

- Older and more experienced teachers care more about autonomy. The majority (56%) of teachers in their 20s prioritised behavioural support; the majority (60%) of teachers aged 50+ prioritised autonomy.
- Secondary teachers are more bothered about behaviour: more primary school teachers (57%) prioritised autonomy; more secondary teachers prioritised support (53%).
- Trads love discipline – but less than you might think: 55% of teachers who describe themselves as traditional prioritised behaviour; 57% of teachers who describe themselves as progressive prioritised autonomy. Delightfully, teachers who said they were "neither traditional nor progressive" split almost perfectly, 51%/49% in favour of autonomy.

When a question attracts a 52/48 split in results, you can be sure it will arouse some passions. We were told it was "surprising" and "really interesting" and also that it was "unanswerable" and "gives no answer of any value." We know it was answerable, because 95% of tappers answered it – just 5% chose 'cannot answer.' We also think the answers have value. We know now that:

- Teachers value autonomy about as much as behaviour

- The desire for autonomy (or confidence, or scepticism about behaviour support!) increases with age
- Traditional teachers don't necessarily want tightly-constrained schools.

None of us would have guessed this – we needed to ask about it!

Would you rather...?

We've not yet asked if you'd rather fight a hundred duck-sized horses or one horse-sized duck. The answer seems obvious (at least to us), but when we run a question past 10,000 teachers, we usually learn something new. So what hypotheticals should we ask next? We know you'd rather take a class to Alton Towers than the National Portrait Gallery (although I assume that's because the National Portrait Gallery is closed for renovation until June). We know the school building improvement you'd most like to see is air conditioning. We even know what colour you want your classroom painted (white wins, amazingly, but kudos to the 4% of teachers who want it to be pink or purple). What other hypothetical questions should we be asking? We're keen on [James Handscombe](#)'s suggestion that we should "brighten up Thursdays by making them weird," and ask:

- Which is the best metal?
- Who should have been King of England in January 1067?
- What is the way to San Jose?

But we'd love to hear your suggestions! Tell us what questions you'd like to see [here](#), and keep tapping to keep learning!

And finally...

The most read tip this week was: [Using mini whiteboards](#)

And here are the rest for your reference:

- [Will retrieval practice help all students?](#)
- [Viviane Robinson: a summary of her work](#)
- [Prior knowledge and retrieval practice](#)
- [The shrinking of growth mindset](#)
- [Delayed and Immediate feedback](#)
- [The mundanity of excellence](#)