

Epiphenomena: Why school leaders are paying attention to the wrong things and what we can do about it

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“Just because you have looked at something doesn’t mean you have *seen* it.”

- Professor Jennifer L. Roberts



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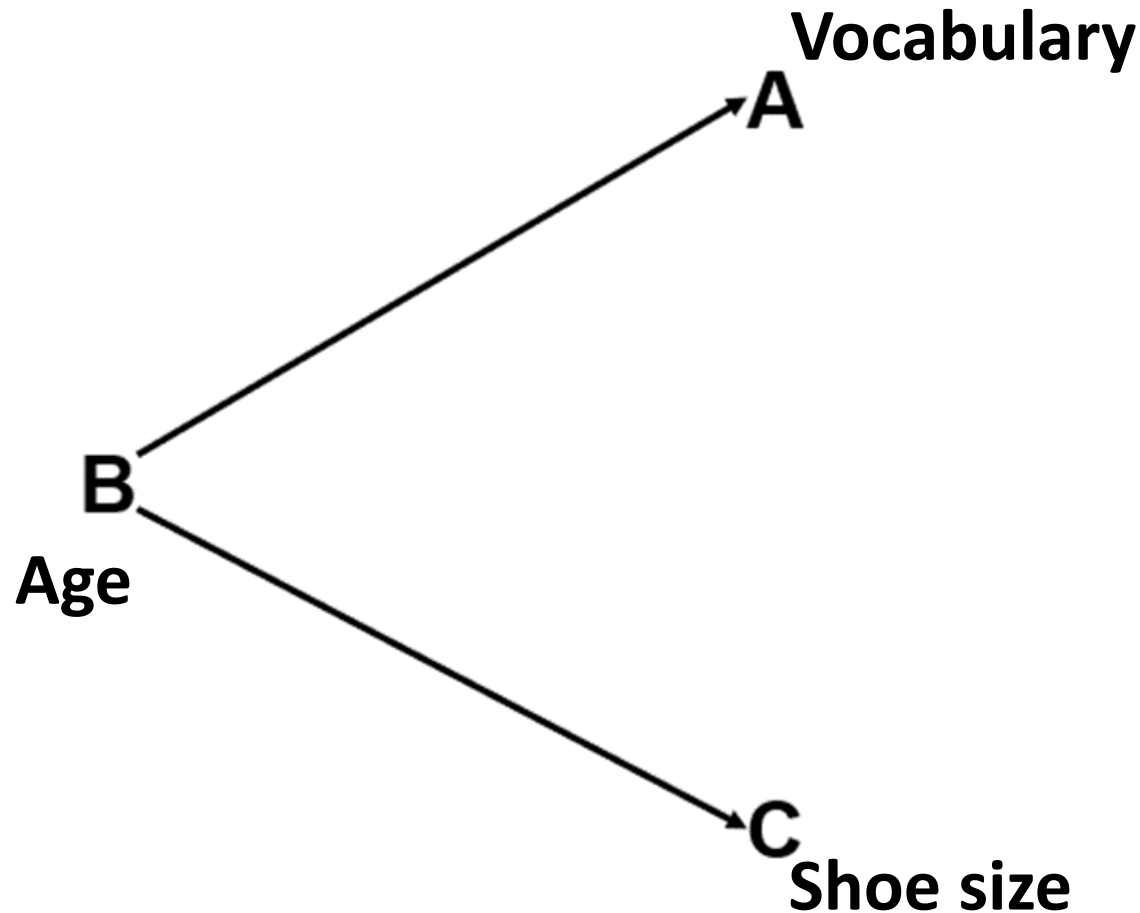
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A quiet eye

- Maryanne Wolf – *Reader, Come Home* (2018)

What we attend to matters

What we attend to matters





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So what can we do?

1. Be sceptical and questioning of surface features.
2. Be mindful of focal and subsidiary awareness.
3. Be 'students of our schools' (Evans, 2019).
4. Make decisions as best we can, built on sound arguments.

1. Be sceptical and questioning of surface features

- Remember that our attention is orientated towards novelty.
- Just because you have looked at something doesn't mean you have seen it.
- Consciously guide attention.
- Make deep structures visible.

2. Be mindful of focal and subsidiary awareness

- We can begin to make better meaning in schools through both focal and subsidiary awareness (Michael Polanyi, 1975).

2. Be mindful of focal and subsidiary awareness

E.g.

Role: Deputy head teacher

Tool: Assessment tracker

Focal awareness: Are the pupils in Year 7 making expected progress in English?

Subsidiary awareness: Knowledge of the specifics of the Year 7 cohort; knowledge of the Year 7 English curriculum and the wider English curriculum; knowledge of how assessment is used in the Year 7 English curriculum and the wider English curriculum; knowledge of English lessons taught to Year 7 and the specifics of how the curriculum is enacted in different topics; knowledge of Year 7 English teachers and their strengths and what they're working on improving; knowledge of the behaviour of the Year 7 cohort etc.

2. Be mindful of focal and subsidiary awareness

- Be professionally sceptical and questioning of tools and artefacts.
- Hold ideas lightly and acknowledge uncertainty:

“It would be nice to see people earn brownie points for acknowledging uncertainty in their beliefs [...] and changing their minds when the facts change, rather than being steadfast warriors for the dogmas of their clique.”

Steven Pinker, *Rationality* (2021)

3. Be 'students of our schools' (Evans, 2019)

- Know our settings and context.
- There are details and orders and relationships that take time to perceive.
- Look with a quiet eye.

4. Make decisions as best we can, built on rational arguments.

- Strengthen our cognitive immune systems (Pinker, 2021).
- Encourage questioning, different viewpoints, discussion, disagreement.

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