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Informing the art of teaching: What's research got to do with it?

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In recent years the answer to the question as to what should inform teaching has become 'research!'. Research can, of course, mean many things, but increasingly it has been understood as empirical research rather than, for example, historical, theoretical and normative investigation. And there is a strong push to allow for only one kind of research, namely the randomised controlled experiment that should provide clear evidence about what works and what doesn't work. This narrowing-down of the understanding of what research is and should be is causing problems for the practice of teaching. The way out of this predicament has to begin with a proper consideration of the specific nature of the practice of teaching, because it is only then that we can begin to ask meaningful questions about what should inform this practice. In my presentation I explore these questions, focusing on the idea of teaching as an art that has more in common with the legal domain than with contemporary medicine.