

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF LITERACY

Leading with **evidence**

Newsletter

Issue 12, March 2026

IN THIS ISSUE:

Feature: Behind the buzzword: Evidence-based Practice in Literacy

By Dr Serje Robidoux

- Study with us
- Myth versus fact
- PhD scholarship
- Street Library

Visit our website here:

[https://www.acu.edu.au/
advancing-literacy](https://www.acu.edu.au/advancing-literacy)

Improving students'
literacy skills
so they can pursue
their dreams



AUSTRALIAN
LITERACY CLINIC
literacy.clinic@acu.edu.au



**A PhD scholarship is
available** to join Dr. Signy
Wegener on an ARC-funded
DECRA Fellowship. The
project is titled: 'Bridging the
decoding-vocabulary gap
during children's reading'
Anyone interested in applying
should [email Dr. Wegener first](#).

BEHIND THE BUZZWORD: EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE IN LITERACY BY DR SERJE ROBIDOUX

When it comes to literacy, educators and practitioners are bombarded with products and ideas: phonics, whole word learning, Irlen lenses, brain gym, learning styles, and more. These are often promoted by groups with vested interests, relying on seductive marketing that appeals to intuition, tradition, and novelty. Adopting evidence-based practices (EBP) counteracts these pressures by helping educators ground their work in scientifically-backed, well-researched, and clearly effective methods.

[Read the full article here.](#)

GRADUATE CERTIFICATE SPECIALISING IN LITERACY Teaching Foundational Reading Skills

Expand your knowledge of the foundational skills necessary for the development of reading ability at any age. Learn the theory and research surrounding early reading instruction, and how to build, plan, deliver and evaluate evidence-based reading instruction that meets the needs of all learners. [Register here.](#)

ONLINE SHORT COURSES

Our interdisciplinary team of researchers and clinicians provide you with high-quality, evidence-based and practical knowledge. Here are the latest two courses:

- **Explicit Instruction and Differentiation**
- **Living with Dyslexia**

You can register here: catalogue.acu.edu.au

MYTH: "Poor spellers can just rely on spellcheck to write words correctly".

FACTS:

- Spelling aids, such as Spellcheck and Autocorrect, catch most spelling errors, but not all — missing at least 20% of mistakes.
- These tools often miss mistakes like brake vs break, or suggest wrong words for more distant misspellings (braid or brain for braik).
- Using these tools does not usually improve overall writing quality of accuracy of other elements, like capitalisation and punctuation.

[Read here for further information](#)

BEHIND THE BUZZWORD: EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE IN LITERACY

BY DR SERJE ROBIDOUX

When it comes to literacy, educators and practitioners are bombarded with products and ideas: phonics, whole word learning, Irlen lenses, brain gym, learning styles, subtitles, and more. These are often promoted by groups with vested interests, relying on seductive marketing that appeals to intuition, tradition, and novelty. Adopting evidence-based practices (EBP) counteracts these pressures by helping educators ground their work in scientifically-backed, well-researched, and clearly effective methods.

Done well, EBP prevents students from being subjected to ineffective or even harmful interventions. It prevents wasting limited resources and improves outcomes by directing time and effort toward what works. At its core, EBP has a simple goal: use the best available evidence to inform your classroom and clinical practices. Scratch beneath the surface, though, and the questions start to mount. What counts as good evidence? Which sources can be trusted? What if a program hasn't been evaluated? "Evidence-based" has even become a marketing term, with virtually every tool claiming it. How do you know if it's accurate?

Scientists recognise that evidence comes in many forms, but not all evidence is created equal. A critical part of EBP is understanding the strengths of different types of evidence. Anecdotes are the weakest form. Observational studies are stronger but limited - they can tell us that phonics knowledge and reading ability are correlated, but not whether one is causing the other. Experimental and intervention studies are stronger still, as they can unpack causes and effects. Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are the gold standard of experimental studies. And at the very top of the evidence hierarchy sits the systematic review.

Systematic reviews are highly regarded because they do what good EBP requires: examine all relevant studies, evaluate the quality of every study, and synthesise only the strongest evidence into a conclusion. They are challenging and time-consuming undertakings. For example, in a systematic review of phonics interventions [McArthur et al. \(2018\)](#) began with over 2,000 studies and ended with just 170 that were relevant and 14 of high enough quality to include. Because of this rigorous examination and filtering process, systematic reviews provide the strongest basis for evidence-based decisions.

When systematic reviews aren't available, the responsibility falls on practitioners to evaluate individual studies themselves. This requires careful critical thinking. Here are some questions to guide that process: What was the study design? Was it an RCT or another form of experimental study, or merely observational? How large was the sample? A study with only 10 children cannot provide strong evidence on its own. What are other researchers saying? Following citations through Google Scholar can reveal whether a study has been supported, criticised, or replicated - all of which can inform how much weight to give it.

EBP is not a one-time exercise. Evidence evolves as science progresses, and practices should evolve with it. When no strong evidence exists yet for a program or tool, practitioners can look to evidence about similar programs or the underlying teaching methods. But this means regularly revisiting practices and staying alert to new research. Even a systematic review can become out of date as new studies are conducted.

Our focus at the Australian Centre for the Advancement of Literacy is on the science, but EBP also must coexist with other realities of education. Administrative and parental buy-in and financial constraints are other elements that will shape the application of EBPs in ways that may be specific to the local context. Translating research into practice is challenging, which is why centres like ours play a vital role: staying at the forefront of emerging evidence and helping educators apply the latest findings to their own practice.

Learn more here:

- Rousseau, D. M., & Gunia, B. C. (2016). Evidence-Based Practice: The Psychology of EBP Implementation. *Annu Rev Psychol*, 67, 667–692. doi:[10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033336](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033336)
- Brief overview of different study designs: [Types of Scientific Evidence](#)
- Science podcast that takes an evidence-based approach to a variety of questions: [Science Vs](#)
- [EDER550 Evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence](#) is a postgraduate unit offered online at ACU that teaches the principles of EBP and how to evaluate evidence.

ACU Social Media Ban Survey
Parents of 10-15 year olds, please share your views and experiences [here](#) (15 mins).

Children aged 10-15, please [follow this link](#) to receive a \$20 gift card for sharing your thoughts and completing some reading activities (less than 30 mins).



Curtin University research
Do you know a child aged 10-17 with any form of language /communication difficulties? This research is investigating the experiences of children with language difficulties participating in community sport. [Read here](#) for more information, or to register your interest or [email](#).