Selecting evidence-based practices fact sheet

The Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) framework guides schools to select and implement a continuum of evidence-based practices and interventions to support student social-emotional and behavioural outcomes. However, it can be challenging for schools to identify whether programs or practices are evidence-based and suitable for implementation in their context.

Terminology

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) defines evidence-based practice as "an educational approach that is supported by evidence. The approach has been the subject of academic research and there is broad consensus within the research community that it works."

AERO also uses the term "evidence-informed practice" to describe the use of research evidence in combination with teacher professional expertise and judgement.

Why use evidence-based practices?

Educational programs or practices which are evidence-based have been shown to produce positive outcomes in multiple studies across different school contexts and with different groups of students. Schools can be confident that if they implement the practice correctly that it will work. When schools use evidence-based practices they are giving students the best possible chance of success.

Conducting rigorous research in educational settings can be costly and challenging so it is sometimes the case that not enough evidence has been collected to determine that a practice is evidence-based. The next best option is to select a practice which is evidence-informed. This means that schools consider the existing research evidence alongside the professional knowledge and expertise of teachers.

Guidelines for PBL schools

PBL provides schools with a framework to select the evidence-based or evidence-informed practices known to produce the most positive effect on student outcomes. These practices have also been shown to be readily implemented in schools by regular school staff. It is important that practices are feasible and acceptable and that they do not require a disproportionate investment of time to implement. PBL does not recommend specific programs but can provide professional development and advice on the practices which work and the systems which need to be put in place to support implementation. See the table for examples of evidence-based and evidence informed practices and procedures to improve social-emotional-behavioural outcomes at each tier.

Queensland Government

Tier 1 (universal) practices	Tier 2 (targeted) practices	Tier 3 (individualised) practices
• Explicit teaching of expectations and procedures • Providing frequent behaviour-specific feedback • Prompting and pre-correcting • Giving multiple opportunities to respond • Actively supervising • Differentiating instruction according to need • Structuring the environment • Providing non-contingent attention	• Intensifying teaching and reinforcement • Increasing structure • Increasing feedback • Mentoring • Goal setting • Social skilling	• Function-based interventions • Individual support planning • Team-based planning • Progress monitoring • Wrap-around case management

Questions to ask

It is important that schools critically appraise claims from professional development providers and vendors of programs. Asking the following questions can help schools to determine whether claims that a program is evidence-based are justified:

- How many academic research publications are there documenting positive outcomes?

- Were researchers independent (no conflict of interest)?

- Have outcomes been replicated across several studies?

- Has it worked in a setting similar to ours?

- What are the costs (time/money) versus benefits involved?

- Are there clear implementation steps?

- What staff training is needed?

- Are tools for measuring outcomes and evaluating implementation included?

Further information

- Australian Education Research Organisation
- Evidence for Learning
- Education Endowment Foundation
- What Works Clearinghouse
- Early Identification System (EIS) Intervention Hub

Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)