

Evidence-based practices?

Teaching has suffered both as a profession in search of community respect and as a force for improving the social capital of Australia, because of its failure to adopt the results of empirical research as its major determinant of practice. A major cause for this circumstance is the science-averse culture among education policymakers and teacher education faculties. There are signs that change may be afoot. The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy has pointed to, and urged us to follow, a direction similar to that taken recently in Great Britain (Rose Report) and the USA (Reading First) towards evidence-based practice in literacy instruction. Recently, the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership began a process for establishing national accreditation of pre-service teacher education to create consistency among the teacher training institutions. This initiative should also offer a strong direction towards research findings as the driving force in future training programs, a consequence that is taken for granted in many other professions, such as medicine, psychology, and agriculture.

Education has a history of regularly adopting new ideas, but it has done so without the wide-scale assessment and scientific research that is necessary to distinguish effective from ineffective reforms. At a system level, we have seen the ready and wholesale acceptance of literacy programs, such as Whole Language and Reading Recovery, that are based upon flawed conceptions of the reading process, and that are without acceptable evidence for their effectiveness.

At the consumer level, doubtful approaches have thrived in the absence of a culture of critical analysis. Program marketers, such as with the Dore program, proclaim *miracle* cures for reading problems, supplying only anecdotal evidence in support. Dore is only one of an array of unproven approaches to literacy, some others being Doman-Delacato, Arrowsmith's 19 brain areas, Cellfield, Megavitamins, Allergy treatment, Chinese herbs, Chiropractic, Cranial Sacral Therapy, Dolphin Therapy, Brain Gym, Sensory Integration, Active Breathing, Vision Therapy, InfinityWalk, Educational Kinesiology, Natural Eye Normalizer, Visionetics, Syntonics, Hippotherapy, and Melodic Intonation Therapy.

Tabloid television, rather than refereed journals, continues to be the more likely vehicle for the promulgation of such programs. Surely, it is time for a Choice-type initiative to offer protection to consumers.