

Q BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

NOVEMBER 2020

THOUGHTFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH RESEARCH EVIDENCE

This is a behavioural science perspective on what ‘*thoughtful engagement with appropriate research evidence*’ by school practitioners might look like in Australian schools.

If the ultimate goal is to support schools to further enhance the quality use of research evidence, identifying specific behaviours associated with this is a crucial step. It allows us to specify and analyse current practice, to gain insight into what best practice looks like, and to identify any existing gaps between current and best practice.

WHAT IS BEHAVIOUR?

Behavioural scientists use specific criteria for defining individual behaviours. This helps gather objective data on the prevalence of those behaviours and to evaluate the impact of interventions that are designed to change behaviours.

Behaviours are observable actions — they are actions that we can see people do. When defining behaviours, the team at [BehaviourWorks Australia \(BWA\)](#) uses [a framework known as AACTT](#) — action, actor, context, target, and time — which helps to specify *who needs to do what, when and where*. For example, a clearly defined behaviour regarding evidence use could be: *Teachers contact their colleagues within the school for informal conversations about research evidence they have read.*

THOUGHTFUL ENGAGEMENT: PROPOSED BEHAVIOURS AND COGNITIONS

According to the Q Project’s [Quality Use of Research Evidence \(QURE\) Framework](#), using research well involves ‘*thoughtful engagement with appropriate research evidence*’. How educators identify and source research, assess it for credibility and relevance, and ensure that it is adapted to suit the issue, decision or practice context is therefore important. Based on early practitioner insights, it is proposed that **one key group of actions and two thinking processes** are involved in ‘*thoughtful engagement*’.

Steps 1–3 outline these and provide examples of associated behaviours and cognitions.



Step 1 (ACT) involves behaviours associated with **finding and accessing appropriate research evidence**, which may include actions to keep up-to-date on relevant topic(s), actions that foster a culture of research evidence use in schools, and actions taken to address a particular issue. Examples of specific behaviours that represent this step include:

- Educators identify and follow relevant and credible researchers on social media;
- Educators access and search education databases for research evidence (e.g., ERIC [EBSCO], Education Database [ProQuest], A+ Education [Informit]);
- Educators read professional magazines and publications (e.g., Teacher Magazine) about featured research in the staff room;
- Educators contact their social network group (e.g., community of practice, social media network, and school colleagues) to seek advice about educational research evidence, and particularly regarding the underpinning of the intended practices;
- School leaders provide information grounded in research evidence in formal and informal ways (e.g., staff meetings, team meetings, water cooler conversations, and via staff newsletters); and
- School leaders facilitate regular research evidence exchanges between similar schools (e.g., via Zoom or in-person meetings).



Step 2 (THINK) involves **appraising the quality of the research evidence**, which may include educators appraising their own skills and considering their biases and assumptions in appraising educational research evidence. Examples of specific guiding points that may represent this step include:

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- Considering what knowledge individuals do not have, as well as what biases and assumptions they may have in judging the quality of the research evidence;
- Considering whether particular criteria are met regarding the quality of the research evidence, such as:
 - Whether the publication is based on a synthesis of several studies or just one study;
 - Whether the author, presenter, and/or source is credible (e.g., *where is a TED talk presenter from?*);
 - Whether the research methodology is rigorous (e.g., *what are the strengths and weaknesses of the research?*), appropriate for the problem or issue that the research was trying to address, and whether the claims made by the researchers align with the research methodology;
 - Whether there is evidence of impact from more than one study and in different contexts (e.g., *have the findings been replicated, and where?*); and
 - Whether there are alternative perspectives and explanations, and considering existing evidence for these (e.g., critical reviews and/or critiques of the research evidence they are considering using).



Step 3 (THINK) involves **appraising the contextual relevance of the research evidence** for its intended use.

Examples of specific guiding points that may represent this step include considering:

- Whether the type of research evidence is suitable for its intended use (e.g., a program evaluation might be suitable for establishing 'what works', while an in-depth case study might be suitable for understanding the needs of particular students);
- Whether, and the extent to which, the research is directly applicable to the intended context (e.g., *what are our specific needs/nuances? Can we afford it? Do we have the resources? What is the return on investment? What is the scalability?*);
- Whether, and the extent to which, the research evidence is generalisable to a broad audience or specific to a case (e.g., *was the research conducted in an applied setting or in a lab?*); and
- Whether, and the extent to which, it is easy to understand the research evidence (e.g., *how easily can other staff engage with it?*).

IMPLICATIONS

Behavioural science provides a valuable perspective on what thoughtful engagement with appropriate research evidence in education might look like.

In conclusion, we highlight the following considerations:

For teachers: *How can I go about broadening my access to research-based educational evidence and better justify its use in line with its quality and contextual relevance?*

For leaders: *How can I draw on the examples and guiding points provided and broaden the ways in which research can be sourced and considered by teachers and staff in my school?*

NEXT STEPS

As part of the Monash Q Project, our next steps are to identify and prioritise behaviours indicative of quality use of research evidence in education (using the [BWA method](#)), before collaborating with teachers and school leaders across Australia to understand the drivers and barriers that might motivate these prioritised behaviours.

To connect with the Q Project:



<https://www.monash.edu/education/research/projects/qproject>



[@MonashQProject](#)