

Q BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

APRIL 2021

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL & RELATIONAL CONTEXTS ON BEHAVIOUR

This is a behavioural science perspective on the role that **social and relational factors** – such as **relationships and collaborations with others** – can have on behaviours associated with research use.

To improve quality use of research evidence in Australian schools, initiatives and interventions need to move beyond the individual to address social and relational factors across multiple contexts.

BEHAVIOURS IN CONTEXT

A common assumption about human behaviour is that it is primarily driven by factors ‘internal’ to the individual, such as their attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills. While individual factors are important drivers of behaviour, we can’t ignore the added influence of **context** on people’s behaviour. For example, an assumption like “*Teachers do not read research articles because they are not motivated to do so*” does not consider ‘external’ factors within and beyond the school that influence whether teachers read research articles. In this piece, we consider the influence of **social and relational factors** on behaviours associated with research use.

SOCIAL & RELATIONAL FACTORS ACROSS MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

It can be useful to think of behaviours associated with research use as emerging from a system, with the various factors that influence these behaviours grouped at different levels. *Figure 1* illustrates different **social and relational factors at the micro (individual), meso (school), or macro (beyond school) level** that could influence educators’ behaviours. It shows that research use behaviours are influenced by the interaction of a number of factors (rather than one single factor) across several levels. It is important to note that while we have chosen to focus here on social and relational factors, there are additional factors that could influence research use behaviours (e.g., resources and infrastructure, legal and regulatory frameworks).

Through research with Australian educators, the Q Project is building up a picture of how **social and relational factors can influence behaviours associated with research use in schools**. **Relationships within the school (meso level)**, such as between leaders and other staff, can help teachers to identify new and different research sources, make sense of research that they are reading through informal and formal discussion, or use research to reflect with others on their own practice. **Relationships beyond the school (macro level)**, in terms of collaborative structures and networks, can also influence educators’ research evidence use behaviours. For example, Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) or regional school clusters can strengthen the quality of research use by establishing broader norms within the sector, creating opportunities to share evidence-based teaching and learning materials that have been trialled in similar school settings, or by providing guidance on how to adapt research evidence to fit diverse classroom settings.

Educators have made clear that **social and relational factors can have a positive effect on not only the extent to which research is used but also the quality of its use**. Such effects can occur **directly** by increasing educators’ access to research or their resources to use research well (e.g., a colleague introducing you to a new database on research, or a school leader setting aside time to help you evaluate a new research-based practice or idea). In addition, social and relational factors can support research use **indirectly** by strengthening perceived social or cultural norms around research use in schools (e.g., research-based ideas being discussed regularly in staff meetings).

Social and relational factors across the meso and macro levels play an important role in influencing research use behaviours, including: relationships with colleagues, school-based research leads, and school leaders; relationships between schools, external experts, and communities of practice.

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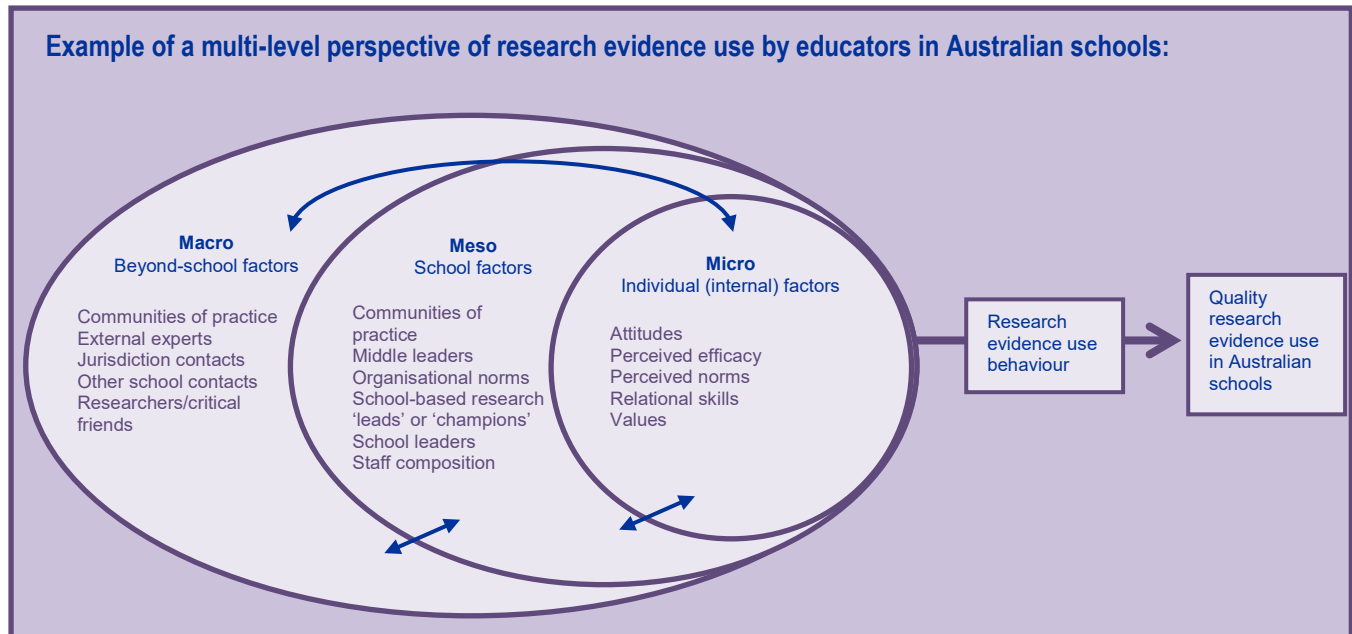


Figure 1. Examples of social and relational factors that may influence quality use of research evidence behaviours across multiple contexts/levels. Figure adapted from Boulet et al. (2021).

IMPLICATIONS

Considering the social and relational factors for research use across multiple contexts/levels can help to identify potential targets and settings for interventions to improve quality use of research evidence in Australian schools.

In conclusion, we highlight the following considerations regarding social and relational factors:

For teachers: *Research use can be strengthened by leveraging off your relationships and collaborations within and outside of your school. Consider who would be suitable to engage with or could provide a good gateway to research; when, or at what stage(s) of research use you could engage with others, and how to engage with them. Also consider: who you might have influence over, and how could you leverage this relationship to increase quality use of research in your school. For example: how you could make yourself available for others to engage with you; how you could demonstrate or model quality research evidence use; and how you are sharing, receiving, and responding to others regarding research use?*

For leaders: *Initiatives and interventions to improve quality use of research evidence need to enable such use via building relationships across contexts/levels to enable educators to draw on other suitable people (vs. only building knowledge or skills of individual educators). Which suitable research contacts or research organisations could you connect with and/or leverage to increase quality use of research at your school? For example, who might increase access to resources (tangible or knowledge)? How can you influence the staff at your school through norms, sharing, collaborating, and contributing to a culture of quality research evidence use?*

NEXT STEPS

As part of the Monash Q Project, our next steps are to collaborate with teachers and leaders across Australia to understand the drivers and barriers to behaviours around accessing, adapting, and trialling research (using the [BWA method](#)).

To connect with the Q Project:



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

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