

# Q DATA INSIGHT

APRIL 2021

## EDUCATORS' COLLABORATIVE USE OF RESEARCH



"Through collaborative activities, teachers can introduce research evidence to their collective practice for the benefit of their students". ([AITSL Research Spotlight, 2021](#))

### WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

According to the Q Project's [Quality Use of Research Evidence \(QURE\) Framework](#), the process of engaging with research is 'not an isolated, individual activity - it requires effective input from, and ongoing interactions with, varied others both within and beyond the school' ([Rickinson et al., 2020, p. 10](#)). These collaborative interactions can support educators to engage deeply with research, understand its meaning and ensure that it is thoughtfully implemented within their school context.

But what does such collaboration for research use look like in practice? What tasks are educators collaborating on and what are the opportunities for further, more meaningful collaboration? Monash Q Project is seeking to answer these questions by understanding how educators collaboratively use research in their practice. We [surveyed nearly 500 Australian educators](#) to gain early insights as to:

- (i) how educators collaboratively engage with research and evidence; and
- (ii) how collaboration and collaborative school environments can support the quality use of research.

### WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS?

1. **Social and relational factors**, such as 'word of mouth' recommendations from others, play key roles in how educators source and assess different forms of evidence. **Teachers** (as opposed to leaders), **less qualified** and/or **less experienced** (<10 years) **educators** are likely to be influenced more by these factors.
2. Educators indicate strong preferences for using research in **collaborative and social ways**. Irrespective of their role, qualification or years of experience, **educators consistently rank 'discussing best practice with others' as their top reason for using research**.
3. Again, regardless of their role, qualification level or years of experience, **educators consistently identify collaborative learning environments as the most important school-based support** underpinning their engagement with research. In these collaborative environments, **educators hold more positive beliefs about the value of research and feel more capable to use it in practice**.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

#### For Teachers

Improving teachers' understanding of the importance of collaboration may help them to consider their existing relationships with others, within and beyond their school, and how these (i) currently support their use of research; or (ii) could be leveraged for improved use.

#### For School Leaders

School leaders play an important role in guiding their school's use of research. School leaders are better placed to improve processes and resources within their schools if they understand: (i) the importance of and ways in which research can be used collaboratively; (ii) who is using research collaboratively within their schools; and (iii) what productive networks, experts and collaborative structures (e.g., professional learning networks) exist beyond their schools that can be leveraged.

#### For System Leaders and Researchers

When system leaders and researchers understand the collaborative ways in which research is used, they are better equipped to: (i) ensure that schools are provided with the resources to further support such use; and (ii) disseminate research in formats which are conducive to collaborative use.

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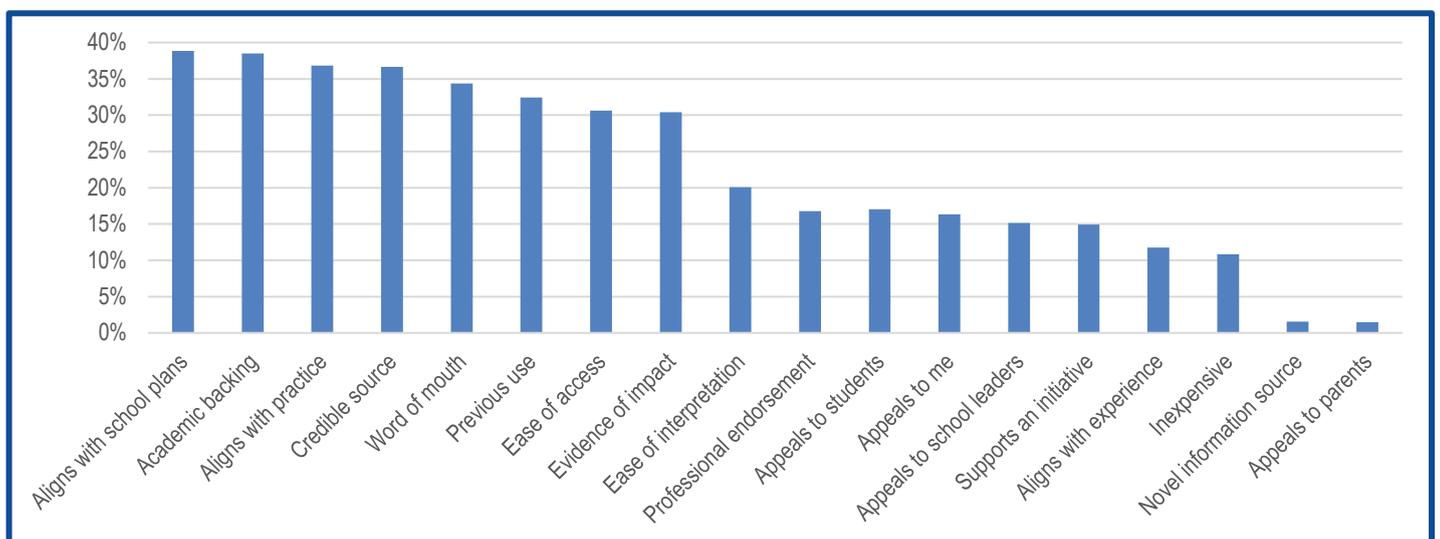
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### Q PROJECT KEY FINDINGS

#### Role of collaboration when sourcing and assessing evidence

Our findings suggest that collaboration plays an important role in how and why Australian educators source different evidence types. Alongside factors such as contextual relevance and perceived credibility, relational factors such as **'word of mouth' recommendations** feature strongly in educators' ranking of why they choose to consult certain evidence sources (see *Figure 1*).



**Figure 1: What influences educators to source different types of evidence? (n=492)**

Educators are more influenced by these social 'word of mouth' recommendations if they are: a **teacher** (2<sup>nd</sup> ranked influence) compared with a leader (8<sup>th</sup> ranked); hold **undergraduate** (5<sup>th</sup> ranked) compared with postgraduate research qualifications (11<sup>th</sup> ranked); and/or have **less than 10 years of experience** (1<sup>st</sup> ranked) compared with more than 15 years (6<sup>th</sup> ranked).



Research evidence "should be studied and examined carefully in a collaborative way so that it is not one person's interpretation".

School Leader, Independent Primary School,

Similar patterns are also observed in relation to how educators assess the quality of an evidence source. Educators are more likely to rank 'word of mouth' as a suitable assessment strategy if they are: a **teacher** (6<sup>th</sup> ranked assessment strategy) compared with a leader (8<sup>th</sup> ranked); hold **undergraduate** qualifications (8<sup>th</sup> ranked) compared with postgraduate research qualifications (9<sup>th</sup> ranked); and/or have **less than 10 years of experience** (5<sup>th</sup> ranked) compared with more than 15 years (8<sup>th</sup> ranked).

#### Collaborative uses of research

When educators are asked how they use research in practice, they frequently report **using research collaboratively**, such as to **'discuss best practice with colleagues'** (76% of all educators). Regardless of their role (see *Figure 2*) or qualification level, the majority of educators report this as their top use of research, with the only notable exception being educators with less than 5 years of experience (4<sup>th</sup> ranked use).

However, other collaborative uses of research differ by role. For example, **school leaders use research in influential ways**, such as to 'mobilise support for an important issue or decision', 'persuade others to agree with my point of view', or 'debate a school or departmental policy or decision' – and are significantly<sup>1</sup> more likely to use research in these ways than teachers (see *Figure 2*).

<sup>1</sup> Using Fisher's exact tests. Threshold for statistical significance was  $p < .05$ .

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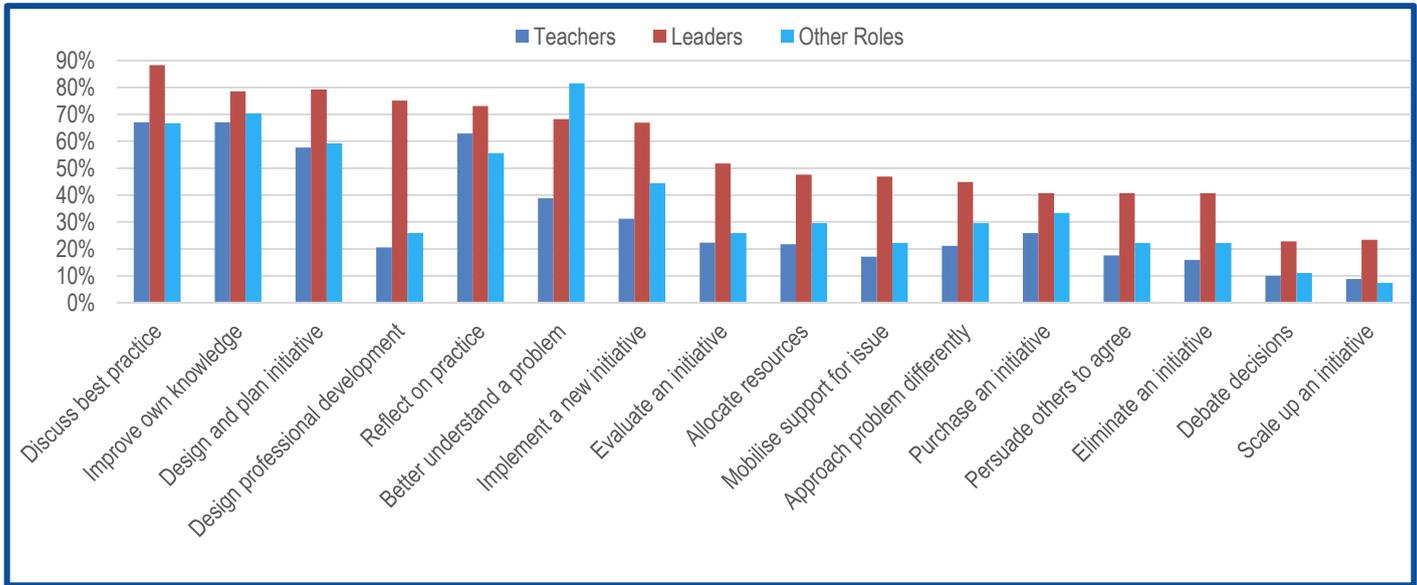


Figure 2: How have educators (by role) used research in practice over the past 12 months? (n=342)

### School supports for collaborative engagement with research

The majority of educators (87%) believe that their schools support research use by **'facilitating a professional learning community or supporting collaborative learning'**. Educators consistently identify these collaborative learning environments as the top school-based support underpinning their engagement with research, regardless of their role, qualification level or years of experience.

**Educators who believe that their school supports collaborative learning are significantly<sup>2</sup> more likely to use research consistently in practice** (see Figure 3). For example, 45% of educators who view their schools as supporting collaborative learning, indicate frequently consulting 'university research'. This compares with only 30% of educators who perceived their school as being less supportive of collaborative learning. Similarly, 'university-based guidance' is frequently accessed by 38% of educators in collaborative environments, compared with 22% of educators in less collaborative environments. In addition, **educators in schools that support collaborative learning are significantly more likely to feel confident to engage with research** (see Figure 3). For instance, 67% of educators in collaborative environments 'know where to find research', compared with 46% of those in less collaborative environments.

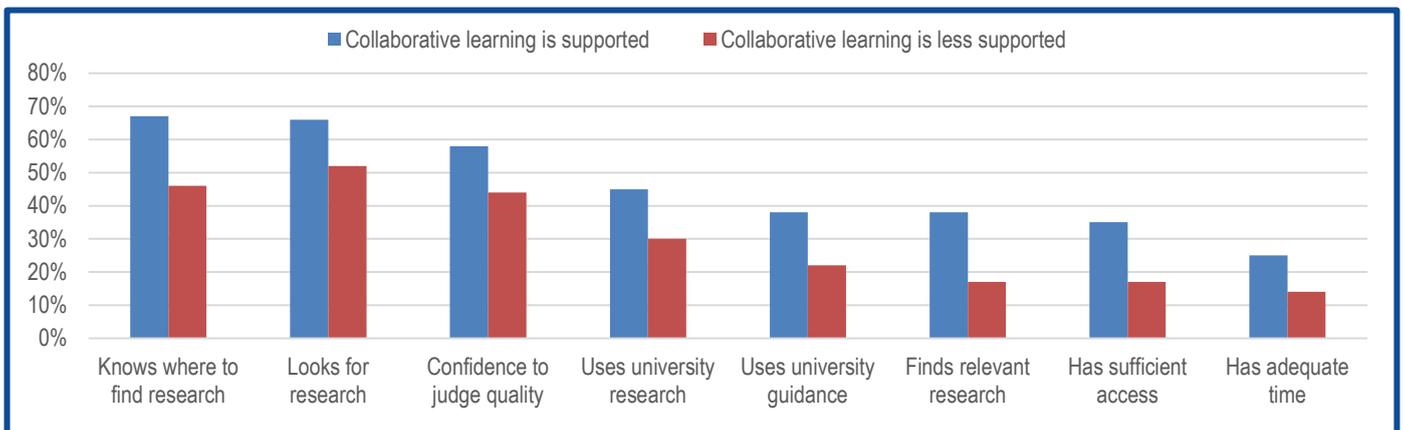


Figure 3: How do educators' research use practices differ in schools that support collaborative learning? (n=492)

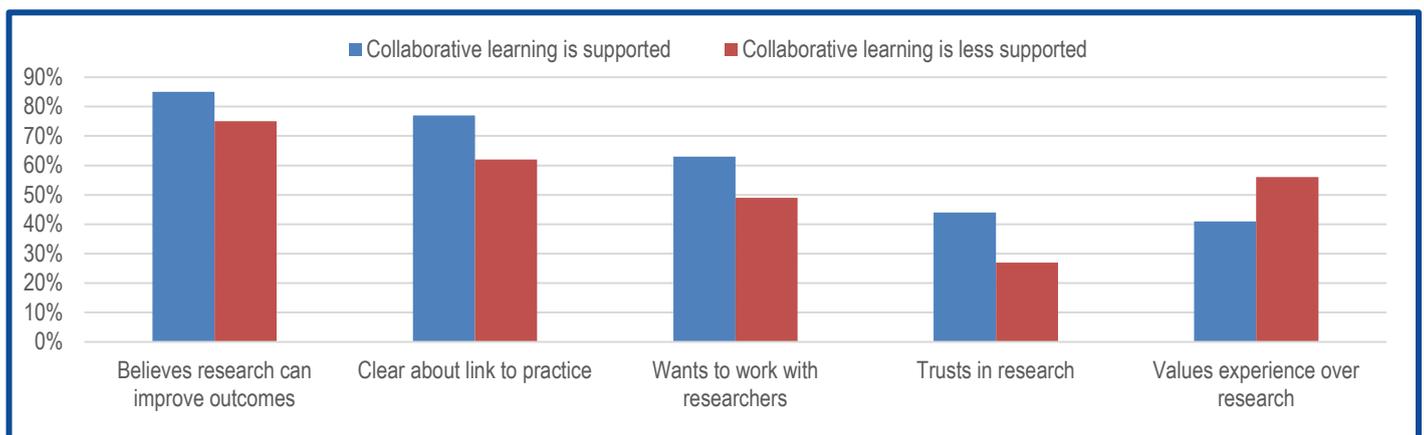
<sup>2</sup> Using Fisher's exact tests, there were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) differences between more and less collaborative environments for all items graphed in Figures 3 and 4.

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Educators in schools where collaborative learning is supported also have significantly more **positive beliefs about the value of research** compared with those whose schools are less supportive of collaborative learning (see *Figure 4*). For example, 85% of educators in collaborative environments believe that 'using research will improve student outcomes', compared with 75% of educators in less collaborative environments. In contrast, 56% of educators in less collaborative environments value 'personal experience over research'. This compares with 41% of educators in environments where collaborative learning is facilitated and supported.



**Figure 4: How do educators' research use attitudes differ in schools that support collaborative learning? (n=492)**



Quality use of research "relies on developing a collaborative learning culture across the school...common goals, consistent ways of working and a common language. Everyone was rowing the boat together, not just sitting in it or having one leg in". School Leader, Government Primary School, New South Wales.

### IMPLICATIONS

These findings suggest that educators' engagement with research is often underpinned by relational processes and that collaborative learning environments are an important enabler for the quality use of research in Australian schools. In conclusion, we highlight several considerations.

For teachers: *How might my colleagues and I work together to use research more to improve our collective practice?*

For leaders: *How can I foster a culture of collaborative learning that supports educators' engagement with research?*

For others: *How can we ensure that schools are provided with the appropriate resources to support educators' collaborative engagement with research?*

### ABOUT Q

These considerations form part of the broader conversation regarding research use that Q Project is seeking to foster. We invite all educators to join us at:



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



@MonashQProject

Access the Monash Q Project Quality Use of Research Evidence [Framework Report](#) and [Discussion Paper](#).

Source: [Monash Q Project survey](#) involved 492 educators from 414 schools across NSW (30%), SA (6%), VIC (40%) & QLD (24%). The sample included 125 Q participating school respondents plus 367 respondents recruited through a panel with The Online Research Unit. The total sample comprised 32% senior and middle leaders, 57% teachers, and 11% other staff. Represented schools included primary, secondary, combined and special schools from government, independent and Catholic education sectors. The survey comprised 5 parts: 8 open-text questions; 8 quantitative questions. The survey was administered online between March - September 2020. Quantitative-based statistics use the sample sizes associated with each question/graph as noted. Qualitative-based statistics represent key-word frequencies across all open-text responses and use the total sample of 492 respondents.