Q CONVERSATION

APRIL 2021

COLLABORATIVE USE OF RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

As part of Monash Q Project's aim to improve the use of research evidence in schools, we want to develop a shared understanding of what it means to use research well. Facilitating rich and reflective conversations amongst practitioners is key to such understanding.

Q Conversation is a resource designed for school practitioners to promote discussion and reflection about research use attitudes and practices, using Q's emerging findings and considerations as prompts.
We suggest that this resource can be used in professional learning or discussion contexts within a school, a community of practice, or a school network.

WHAT IS THIS Q CONVERSATION ABOUT?

This *Q Conversation* is focused on the **social and collaborative ways in which educators use research** in practice.

From a research perspective, there is increasing recognition internationally of the importance of relational processes in research use (e.g., Godfrey & Brown, 2019). For example, studies focused on research-engaged schools have highlighted the importance of research-related relationships and networks with colleagues, other schools, professional associations and universities (e.g., Coldwell et al., 2017). Opportunities to engage with experts both within and outside school environments (e.g., Henrick et al., 2017) have also been highlighted as important, as have trusted relationships, particularly with school leaders (e.g., Brown, Daly, & Liou, 2016), and collaborative and inclusive ways of interrogating and using research and evidence (e.g., Supovitz in Brown, 2015).

From the Q Project's recent survey of nearly 500 Australian educators and interviews with 29 practitioners, early insights reflect the importance of collaborative research use. Our emerging findings suggest that Australian practitioners:

(i)   are influenced to use research and evidence based on advice and recommendations from colleagues;

(ii)   rely on colleagues' views when assessing the quality of research and evidence;

(iii)   believe that their schools offer and support collaborative learning, which helps with better research use; and

(iv)   use research in social ways, such as to discuss best practice with colleagues.

This *Q Conversation* draws on a suite of Q publications:

(i)   *Q Data Insight* reporting key emerging findings regarding the social and relational ways in which Australian educators find, assess, adapt and use research in practice;

(ii)   *Q Narrative* showcasing how staff at Dalby State School have leveraged strong collaborations to facilitate successful implementation of a research-based intervention; and

(iii)   *Q Behavioural Insight* outlining how relationships and social factors are key influencers of research use behaviours.

Q Conversation is designed to be: (i) informative – by sharing Q insights from Australian educators; (ii) thought-provoking – by encouraging leaders and teachers think about their own attitudes and practices in light of Q insights; and (iii) action-oriented – by prompting leaders and teachers to convert their reflections into actions for improvement.

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Several *Q Conversation* structures are offered – some shorter and more targeted around specific findings or behaviours, and others more encompassing and challenging by drawing on broader findings and complementary research. Accompanying presentation slides are available.

Q CONVERSATION SUGGESTIONS

Reflecting on the *Q Narrative*, the following questions may be used as prompts for individual reflection or small group discussion, with insights shared with the broader group:

(i) How is research and evidence being used in this narrative and why? What benefits and opportunities emerged from the approaches or behaviours adopted?

(ii) In what ways does this narrative resonate (or not) with our own situation?

(iii) How might insights gained inform our own research and evidence use practices? What would our narrative be?

Drawing on the *Q Data Insight*, the following questions may be used as prompts for individual reflection or in small group discussion, with insights shared with the broader group:

(i) How would we describe our networks for finding and assessing research, both within and external to our school? How well are we leveraging these relationships? Are there other relationships that could be more beneficial?

(ii) How well are we using research to stimulate productive discussions and debate within our school about best practice? How could we have more or better discussions?

(iii) How well are we supporting collaborative learning or facilitating professional learning communities? What actions could we take to better support these types of opportunities?

Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) suggest that not all collaborative efforts in education are effective. They describe situations of low trust that result in either 'no collaboration' or 'contrived congeniality'. When trust is high, they suggest that 'informal' collaboration or 'collaborative professionalism' occurs. Applying the collaboration matrix in the paper (p. 5) to a recent initiative or problem and your use of research in that situation, use the following questions for individual reflection or small group discussion, with insights shared with the broader group:

(i) Thinking about different social and relational factors discussed in the *Q Behavioural Insight*, where would we place ourselves on the matrix? To what extent did our research use approaches and behaviours reflect the matrix quadrants?

(ii) Given the considerations for leaders outlined in the Hargreaves and O'Connor paper (pp. 14-16), how can we apply these to improve our collaborative use of research in our school?

According to the Q Project's **Quality Use of Research Evidence (QURE) Framework**, using research well involves the '*thoughtful engagement with and implementation of appropriate research evidence*'.
How educators build and leverage relationships to find, assess, adapt and use research in practice is therefore important.

Share your experiences and school's insights generated from *Q Conversations*. To connect with us, please visit:

🌐 https://www.monash.edu/education/research/projects/qproject

🐦 @MonashQProject