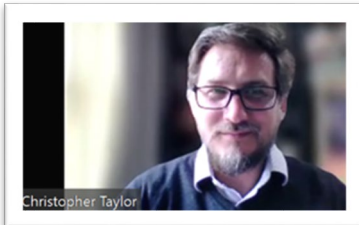


Q NARRATIVE

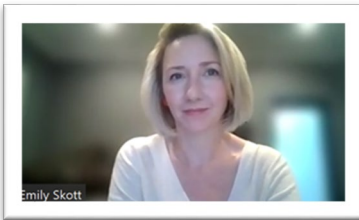
OCTOBER 2021

CHRIS AND EMILY'S STORY: INVESTING IN TIME



Christopher Taylor

Christopher Taylor (Deputy Principal) and Emily Skott (Head Teacher of English) are leaders at Dulwich High School of Visual Arts. A government co-educational specialist school located in an inner western suburb of Sydney, it is the only specialist school of its type in NSW. The school's population of 894 students, 46% from language backgrounds other than English, is supported by 66 FTE teaching staff.




Emily Skott

Chris and Emily's story is about two leaders who are passionate about using research well and are mindful of the need to manage the limited resource of **time** within **effective infrastructure** to support using research in **meaningful ways**.

"WE DID IT SLOWLY . . . YOU REAP THE BENEFITS IN THE LONG RUN"


Over the last few years, Chris and Emily have been working on building school-wide reading, writing and community of practice projects, while embedding research-informed processes and practices within the school's infrastructure. They wanted to *"build the capacity, intent, culture and expectation of a research-engaged community"*, and started with some foundational questions: *"Where can we create structure, from the structure of the school space, for professional life? How do we embrace this and make it work?"* Their story provides an example of the time, infrastructure, leadership and culture needed to create opportunities for educators to engage with research.

 "It's about developing a culture of professional learning and professional practice that is highly reflective of the impact of what we do . . . engage with research literature that's going to help guide it with a practice and a model to move forward." (Chris)

When implementing research-informed practice change, Chris and Emily were aware that they were asking teachers to invest their non-teaching time initially to read selected research and reflect on how their own teaching approaches may be impacted by the findings. They were aware as well that teachers each have different capacities and motivations when utilising such time, and there were risks that not all teachers would be on board with what they were asking. *"Asking a person to come to a half hour meeting, once a fortnight is not the issue. Asking a person to engage in some quite dense literature, outside in their own [ancillary] time is where it becomes an ask . . . so we did rely on a bit of goodwill to get a sort of 'coalition of the willing'"* (Emily).

Chris and Emily built 'goodwill' with the staff by streamlining other tasks. They scheduled structured professional learning time and ensured that this time spent was efficient and valuable by aligning it directly with individual teachers' classroom practices. *"We did it slowly, and slowly embedded it through one program . . . you reap the benefits in the long run; that you've firmly established a pedagogical approach [and] we all we have this language that we all speak now"* (Emily).

Working with the English faculty team first, using research well started with effective professional learning. *"Research fits, in my thinking, within the professional learning frame. It's what we do to improve our thinking, shape our thinking, guide our actions . . . teachers need to be informed [and] prepared to innovate"* (Chris). Using and sharing research was an explicit part of professional learning and through this time, Chris and Emily started to build teachers' appreciation of the value of research use. *"Build an understanding of what effective professional learning is [and] an understanding of what that requires. How do we operate that way? And . . . we want to sustain it. We need to put our structural investment in there."* (Chris)

 "It does take time in order to digest what you've read, distil, and synthesise as a group. We wouldn't have done it meaningfully if we hadn't slowed down." (Emily)

Building capacity to use research required collegial practice and the time to learn, practice and reflect. Collaborative processes triggered a spiral of energy, enthusiasm and commitment within the team. These teachers were engaged in a professional and research-informed process that not only satisfied their professional needs, but also produced time efficiencies in other areas of their practice. *"The planning of the implementation was highly collaborative, and it was distilled into a program. All the way through that you had teachers sharing practice, helping each other, visiting the classrooms. There were specific skills they were trying out, there were specific areas to get feedback on."* (Chris)

Q NARRATIVE

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CREATING THE TIME AND COMMON PRACTICES ACROSS THE SYSTEM

Building this collegiality was a key ingredient. Outside of professional learning time, teachers were encouraged to work in pairs while they experimented with new research-informed pedagogy. They could then share these experiences with the team at scheduled meetings or during informal encounters. *"It's about building intrinsic motivation, and empowering and enabling teaching practitioners to become expert and be able to lead", with a goal to improve the "quality of teacher practice not the compliance of teacher practice" (Chris).*

Moving quickly was not the answer. 'Slowing time down' so that teachers could absorb and synthesise their new understandings was a commonly-repeated expression. Building teacher expertise or capacity required an investment of time to change the 'procedural processes' and give teachers the time to adapt their practice. Instead, they focused on one small change and built up slowly from there, success story by success story. *"It was a fair bit of work, but we did it slowly, and slowly embedded it through one program. When we found it worked, we went to another program. As a result [the English faculty] found it very empowering" (Emily).*

 *"I invested my time, I tried to lead by example because I know everybody's time poor and I didn't want to dump it on my staff. ... It was about slowing things down, about understanding that long term you will save time and reap some benefits." (Emily)*

Emily also emphasised the importance of creating a 'safe' culture where teachers were supported to experiment with different research-informed ideas and practices and come together to make sense of the changes that they were experiencing. *"They can be quite daunted . . . a little bit afraid of putting themselves out there. So I've been asking teachers to just experiment with having a go. Making it an environment where we embrace a little bit of risk and experimentation in order to learn".* Additionally, Emily invested her own time in supporting others' classroom practice by observing and providing feedback. She also modeled research-informed change herself, inviting colleagues to observe her teaching. In these ways, the English faculty team were taking the time to learn together.

 *"Intrinsic motivation - it's when the student's cognition has flipped a switch they've been transformed. It's that evidence of impact that is going to empower teachers." (Chris)*

Chris highlighted a need for a system-wide culture of effective professional learning, with expert coaches made available to embed research-informed practice

within a school. *"There is a need for us to be allocated more professional learning time as part of our teaching conditions. I'm talking about effective professional learning, embedded in practice, ongoing feedback, sustained. It's about specifying an expectation around allocating time to professional work. But also, being able to create an understanding, create the common practices across the system of what is effective professional learning".*



Chris and Emily's story is one of mindfully building processes and creating goodwill - using time purposefully. Their passion for this work is very clear. This story is still unfolding with some exciting chapters ahead. We look forward to checking in with them in the future!



INFRASTRUCTURE IS A KEY ENABLING COMPONENT OF QUALITY RESEARCH USE

The Monash Q Project is interested in understanding how research can be used well in education. Investing *time to embed research use within school structures, processes, practices and culture*, is core to this undertaking.

Chris and Emily are investing in effective professional learning and creating the time and space for teachers to engage collaboratively and embed research-informed pedagogical processes into their practice. They are slowly building school-wide research-informed practices through providing supportive processes and spaces.

Taking time to use research well creates time for quality research use practices, and builds a solid research-engaged foundation for school improvement. This in turn fosters a research engaged culture and leadership team.