

Q NARRATIVE

NOVEMBER 2022

SEADALE PRIMARY SCHOOL'S STORY: ESTABLISHING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR QUALITY RESEARCH USE

Seadale Primary School (PS) is a co-education primary school located in the metropolitan area of Sydney, New South Wales. The school values a whole-school approach to research use and practice improvement so as to gain consensus amongst staff and to enable all staff to work towards the same goals. A key priority within this approach is to build and sustain a learning culture for staff and students.

Seadale PS's story is about a school where the leadership team is passionate about promoting quality research use among staff. This is achieved through **embedding research use into the school infrastructure**, including in structured meetings and professional learning. Given their strong focus on learning and practice improvement, they also **deliberately schedule time and provide resources** for teachers to engage with research. These investments are seen as crucial to support the school's *"culture and way of thinking"* around research use.



EMBEDDING RESEARCH USE IN SCHOOL PROCESSES, ACTIVITIES, AND PRACTICE

When it comes to research use, Seadale PS adopts a whole-school approach that is led by a long-serving leadership team who have *"a passion for research evidence"* and share *"a very similar understanding"* about its role in practice improvement. Along with the Principal, the leadership team emphasises the importance of making sure *"everyone knows [research use practice] is valued"* and spends considerable effort gaining consensus from all about the benefits of using research well. Such buy-in delivers a strong message about *"what matters"* in the school. Importantly, these shared values for research use are embedded in four structured processes that are a central part of staff daily practices.

The first process revolves around the [Teaching Sprints](#) framework. Over the last four years, Seadale PS has supported all staff to engage with and draw on research to solve practice issues in short weekly sessions, thereby *"improving teaching and learning in the classroom"*. These sessions, led by stage supervisors, take place every Monday after school hours. Every term, there are two sprint cycles, with each comprising five sessions of 20–45 minutes in duration. In these sprints, stage-based teaching teams use student data and/or school performance goals to define specific areas of need or identify topics of interest. The teams then design research-informed strategies to implement, and collect and analyse evidence to measure impact. While the foci of sprints are different, *"there'll be a professional learning need that drives the reason behind the sprints"*. To ensure the teaching sprint process is efficient and staff's investment of time is maximised, stage leaders and/or assistant principals usually identify the relevant research and locate the exact texts for staff to read and understand the *"what"* and the *"why"* of the research-informed change.



Another structured process used at Seadale PS is professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs, comprising whole teaching teams, meet once a term during dedicated staff development days for a minimum of 90 minutes. This time spent together helps to minimise the number of meetings held outside of school hours. Prior to these events, teachers are required to read a piece of research. One example of this process in action involved understanding the teaching approach of *"number sense"*. Initiated by one school leader after several classroom observations, all staff learnt about the approach during PLCs and then spent time together in teaching teams discussing and evaluating implementation through the use of surveys, peer feedback, classroom observations, and reflections on the implementation fidelity of the research-informed approach.


The third way in which Seadale PS embeds research in school structures is through regular staff meetings. During these meetings, all teachers are encouraged to collaborate, irrespective of their stage, in order to get *"different perspectives"* about their own work. The leadership team makes efforts to connect research topics with all staff meetings, with the purpose being to increase staff awareness of and engagement with research, as well as to improve their professional knowledge.

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Hazel, in her role as Deputy Principal, also facilitates 'professional learning time', where for two hours each week, teams of teachers can spend time with Hazel and collectively determine how best to support a particular student cohort and address their needs through using the most effective research-informed practice ideas. Depending on the school's priorities at the time (e.g. assessment or new syllabus), or different students' needs, this professional learning time is allocated and made relevant to different teaching teams each time. The school also provides regular additional professional learning time for teachers who are new to the school, but not new to teaching, so as to help them come up to speed with key research, such as [Rosenshine's principles of instruction](#), that underpin Seadale PS's teaching principles and approaches. In teams of four, these teachers are scheduled to meet with Hazel together for "good collaborative discussion".


 "We've tried to reduce superfluous administration and replaced it with more meaningful things like focus on research and built it into the timetables as well."


TAKING THINGS AWAY TO CREATE TIME FOR RESEARCH



The Seadale PS leadership team recognises that using research well takes time and has taken deliberate steps to reduce teachers' compliance and administrative tasks so that they could schedule time for research use. For example, weekly 30-minute staff meetings, that "were starting to turn into a large amount of administration and talk", were reduced to fortnightly. Agendas for these meetings were also changed to focus on "curriculum and pedagogy primarily, [and] not managerial [work]". Alongside these changes, it was decided that administrative tasks would be communicated and resolved primarily via email. The leadership team also shifted the responsibility for certain tasks from teachers to other staff within the school, including assigning the entering of students' reading and writing

assessment data into relevant databases to the Principal's personal assistant. By taking these actions and managing teachers' schedules differently, the leadership team effectively "built time within the school hours to release collaborative groups for either professional learning or research engagement." The effects of these changes have been positive, with one school leader noting:

 "Now we're actually developing learning intentions together. It's such a different level of collaboration. I think it's much more purposeful. It's much more research oriented, and it's much better."

 "We source the research so that the teachers aren't having to wade through and try and find research. So, that's one of the ways that we help keep it on track and make sure it's reputable, but it's not too arduous."

PROVIDING NECESSARY RESOURCES FOR QUALITY RESEARCH USE

The leadership team at Seadale PS are aware that teachers need a range of support to help them use research well in practice. For example, certain leaders take responsibility for sourcing relevant and credible research that teachers use in their weekly teaching sprints. The research is curated into short, digestible formats, that allows teachers "to work with a small amount of research but keep coming back to it" in order to support their sustained learning. Instructional leaders also coach PLC team leaders in how to locate and curate research, so that research use skills are built and sustained in a distributed leadership model.

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. *Establishing a supportive infrastructure for improving teachers' research use at the whole-of-school level* is core to this undertaking.

Overall, Seadale Primary School's story is one of establishing supportive infrastructure to underpin a clear school vision around quality research use. They do this by: (i) incorporating research use into school structures and processes; (ii) deliberately reducing teachers' administrative and compliance tasks to allow time to be built into teachers' schedules for research use; (iii) curating and providing usable research; and (iv) establishing a distributed coaching model to improve leaders' and teachers' research use skills.

Note that pseudonyms have been used for the names of both practitioners and schools in this story. Resources referred to in the Q Narratives are examples used by practitioners, not endorsements by the Q Project of particular research publications or research-informed strategies.