

YELLOW WATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOL'S CASE STUDY: LEADING RESEARCH USE IN A SCHOOL

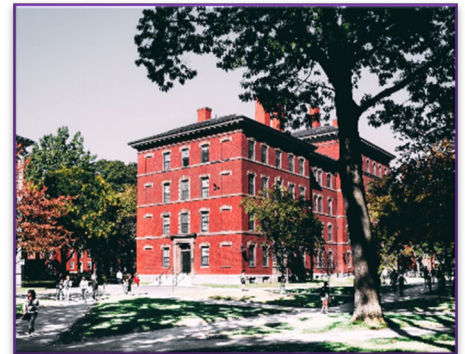
This practitioner case study shares the journey of Yellow Wattle Public School (YWPS) and how the executive leaders collectively supported the quality use of research across their school. It highlights three key learnings that you could consider in relation to your own work:

1. *Quality research use requires a clear vision from leadership.*
2. *Organising professional learning is a powerful way that leaders can support quality use.*
3. *Collegial buy-in is essential for supporting and embedding research use.*

WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT?

Yellow Wattle Public School (YWPS) is a moderately-sized primary school located in New South Wales with about 90% of students speaking English as an additional language. They are passionate users of research and reflect that the executive leadership team enjoys spending “a third to half of [their] week in the classroom” working with teachers to support their use of research.

In the past, the leadership team had recognised the school did not have a strong vision for the use of research. The team of 10 people sought to change this by thoughtfully supporting and embedding the quality use of research in their context.



“We ... want to make sure there's a research base behind it [school practices]. And we've been on this process for the last four years.”

WHAT WAS THE FOCUS?

Over the past four years, the executive leadership team at YWPS has collated a large evidence base of quality research that demonstrates which teaching practices are most effective in their context. This includes research-based practice books, such as [Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction](#) and [Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory](#); research-based resources from [Macquarie University's Centre for Reading](#) and [LaTrobe University's SOLAR Lab](#); and research summaries from department divisions, such as the [Centre for Educational Statistics and Evaluation](#).

Recently, members of the leadership team have “done a lot of work” around building their staff’s knowledge about research and its links to improved student outcomes. However, they emphasised that in order for this research to be used well, they had to support and embed its use in the school. To do so, the executive leadership team focused their efforts on the creation of a Teaching Excellence Framework. This framework summarises the research base behind key evidence-informed teaching strategies and “marries it up with what happens in the classroom ... [to make] it easier to see what [its implementation] looks like”.

YELLOW WATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOL'S CASE STUDY: LEADING RESEARCH USE IN A SCHOOL

HOW DID THE EXECUTIVE LEADERS AT YWPS LEAD RESEARCH USE IN THE SCHOOL?

The executive leadership team explained that the Teaching Excellence Framework consists of three main components: pedagogy, assessment and the 'Wattle Way' - a whole-school vision for citizenship. Embedded within each of these components is also a rubric that scaffolds teachers' engagement with the research base:

"From our understanding of the research ... we've put together the framework [and rubric] for the teachers to understand at each level - delivering, sustaining and growing, and excelling - [what the] teaching looks like, based on all the research evidence we have."

Given its strong connection with the school's strategic aims and mission, the framework outlines the aspiration for quality research use at YWPS. For this reason, the executive leadership team focuses on supporting and embedding the framework through clear and transparent leadership as well as the provision of professional learning.

ENABLING RESEARCH USE THROUGH CLEAR LEADERSHIP AND STAFF OWNERSHIP

YWPS emphasises that embedding the quality use of research in the school *"starts with the executive team"*, especially the principal, who is *"very hands on"* in supporting teachers to use research. When creating the Teaching Excellence Framework, the executive leadership team ensured that they set a clear direction and vision for research use across the school. They also outlined the resources, infrastructure and support that was needed. Throughout this process, the leadership team were transparent with their colleagues about the decisions being made and the underpinning rationale.



"It starts at the top [where] all the leadership agree ... and that's our decision for the whole school. It's transparent and we make sure all the staff have an understanding of what's expected and support them to get them along the way."

Along the same line, while the vision and direction for research use *"starts at the top"*, the leadership team emphasised that input and buy-in from the teachers was crucial. They regularly consulted with staff to ask for feedback and input so that the teachers were happy with the direction and goals they were setting. Following this, the staff collectively developed an agreement around the shared approaches and expectations for implementing the framework.



"From there we develop an essential agreement, how it will be taught, what it is expected to look like in the classroom, and we develop a scope and sequence for the teachers."

One core expectation in this essential agreement was that teachers would use the framework to *"self-analyse and self-reflect"* in order to identify improvement priorities that the leadership team could help them address through individual coaching and professional learning.

PROVIDING REGULAR RESEARCH-FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The provision of regular professional learning is key to Yellow Wattle Public School's approach for embedding research use through the Teaching Excellence Framework. The leadership team explains that staff come together *"every Wednesday for an hour ...*

YELLOW WATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOL'S CASE STUDY: LEADING RESEARCH USE IN A SCHOOL

Sometimes it will be in smaller groups where they're working with a level. But it's stable, locked in time [for research use]". In these sessions, the executive leadership team not only unpacks the research with their colleagues, but explicitly models the pedagogical choices that they are encouraging their colleagues to make for themselves. As an example, they note how they often begin the sessions with "a low-stakes quiz or some retrieval practice".

Following these sessions, the leadership team works with teachers in coaching rounds to apply the strategies to their daily practice. Again, they use these sessions to demonstrate the research-informed pedagogies, such as [modelled, guided, and independent teaching](#), and how they align with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. While the coaching rounds focus on teachers' "personal development" and are "not tied to any performance review process", the leadership team explained that many teachers discuss these rounds during formal evaluations of their professional development because of how they provide teachers with a scaffold and language to reflect on their practice.



"It starts with ... demonstrating lessons for them, showing them what it would look like in the classroom. And then supporting along the way and slowly taking away the support. So it's team teaching [until] they become independent [at using the strategy]. It's the same idea with what we do with the kids - going from modelled teaching, to guided teaching, and then independent work."

Importantly, these in-class professional learning sessions are also delivered by other classroom teachers. YWPS values the "wealth of knowledge" across the school, so the leadership team often involves expert teachers with particular skill sets and interests as coaches who can provide individualised and targeted support for staff who need it.

WHY DID THEY CHOOSE THIS APPROACH?

YWPS emphasised that the goal for the quality use of research in their school was to have teachers effectively applying research-informed teaching strategies in their practice. However, the executive leadership team recognised that this would not occur without "a continual process for supporting the teachers" to understand the research and integrate it into their day-to-day classroom routines. Consequently, the leadership team supported and embedded quality research use through the creation and implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework in two key ways.




Firstly, behind the framework was a clear direction and vision for research use from the leadership team. As a result of consulting with and seeking feedback from the staff body, the framework clearly articulated what the quality use of research "would look like in the classroom". This was an important leverage for fostering teachers' buy-in and ownership of the changes being proposed.

Secondly, the executive leadership team noted that the framework gave teachers clarity about what the research-informed changes meant for their practice, as well as which resources, infrastructure and professional learning opportunities would be provided to support them. While they valued after-school development sessions for building their colleagues' knowledge of the research, the executive leadership team understood that professional learning had to primarily occur in the classroom through coaching and

YELLOW WATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOL'S CASE STUDY: LEADING RESEARCH USE IN A SCHOOL

mentoring. These in-class coaching sessions also allowed leaders to use the framework as a scaffold for teachers' reflective practice to support the long-term sustainability of their research-informed changes.

Through these steps, the leadership team at YWPS successfully embedded and supported the quality use of research across their school. They note *"that as a school, we've shifted greatly towards using research"*, where research use has become a central component of many teachers' practice. For example, at their last school review, 80% of teachers reported that they were confident to use research-informed assessment strategies, with 85% also confident in their abilities to deliver the school's core program and Teaching Excellence Framework. Further, 88% of teachers believed that they would achieve their professional development goals through use of the framework.

 "[We] showed the staff, this is what the research shows ... and these are the results from other schools or similar schools. ... We got everyone on-board. Some people still hold their own beliefs, but they're on-board because they're seeing the results."

KEY LEARNINGS

1. **Quality research use requires a clear vision from leadership:** The executive leadership team at YWPS embedded a clear and transparent vision for research use in their school's strategic priorities by creating a research-focused Teaching Excellence Framework. *How might you, as a leader, determine a clear direction for quality research use in your school? Or, if you are a teacher, how might you gain the support of leadership for a research-informed change?*
2. **Organising professional learning is a powerful way that leaders can support quality use:** The executive leadership team supported their colleagues to understand and implement research-informed teaching strategies through regular professional learning opportunities and coaching sessions in the classroom. *What professional learning opportunities could support and embed research-informed practices in your school?*
3. **Collegial buy-in is essential for supporting and embedding research use:** By engaging colleagues in the development of the Teaching Excellence Framework, the executive leadership team successfully fostered whole-school uptake of the research-informed change. They also supported the sustainability of this change by using the framework as a scaffold for teachers' reflective practices. *How might you foster your colleagues' buy-in and ownership of a research-informed change?*

HOW DOES YELLOW WATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOL'S CASE STUDY LINK TO OUR QUALITY USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE (QURE) FRAMEWORK?

This practitioner case study connects with the organisational enabler of **leadership** given how YWPS supported the thoughtful use of appropriate research in their context. There are also strong links with the enablers of **culture** and **infrastructure** because of how the executive leadership team used the Teaching Excellence Framework and the provision of professional learning to foster and sustain a consistent school-wide approach to using research well.

You can find out more about the components of **leadership**, **culture** and **infrastructure** by accessing our [Q Project resources and publications](#).

This case study was generated by the Monash Q Project. The research publications and evidence sources referenced in this story are an illustration of the resources used by the practitioner. Their inclusion is not an endorsement of these sources by the Q Project. For further information, please refer to the [Monash Q Project's](#) website.