

# JASON'S CASE STUDY: PURPOSEFUL & CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH USE

This practitioner case study shares the journey of Jason and how he set out to be both purposeful and contextual in his use of research in his school. Jason's story highlights three key learnings that you could consider in relation to your own work:

1. **Clear identification of a problem or issue will help you to target relevant research for use.**
2. **Purpose and meaning are given to research use when you connect the research to strengths and opportunities in your context.**
3. **Ensuring all stakeholders – school leaders, teachers, parents, students and jurisdictions – understand the purpose for certain research use helps you to facilitate buy-in to change.**

## WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

Jason is the Executive Principal of Eastern Garden's Senior College, a medium-sized, low socio-economic government secondary school located in Victoria. Traditionally, the school has accommodated Years 10 – 12 students, however, from 2023, will expand to a Years 7 – 12 offering and take on its first cohort of Year 7 students.

This change of strategic focus is one of several changes that Jason is initiating in 2022, which is his first year of being Executive Principal at the school. In conjunction with his newly appointed senior leadership group, Jason has developed new values for the school and reset expectations around students' learning and well-being outcomes. Alongside intended changes to [Victoria's senior secondary school curriculum](#), Jason has also commenced work with the senior leaders and the broader school community to transform the school curriculum across all year levels.



## WHAT ISSUE HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR RESEARCH TO ADDRESS?

A recent school review revealed that there were several issues within the school's curriculum and teaching approaches that were constraining the students' abilities to engage with a range of subjects and learning experiences in meaningful ways. Jason was very aware that *"we've got to shift what we're doing"*, and looked to relevant research and evidence that could be useful. He turned to the [OECD Learning Compass 2030](#) as a *"sophisticated and holistic"* evidence-based model to help him and the senior leadership group *"structure and think about"* a new curriculum and pedagogy. As defined by the OECD, the Learning Compass is a framework that sets out *"the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that learners need to fulfil their potential and contribute to the well-being of their communities and the planet"*. It is a framework, says Jason, that captures *"the nature of what good education looks like"*.

From the outset, Jason was keen to integrate research with the existing knowledge and teaching strengths of the senior leadership group and broader teaching staff. He acknowledged that he, as well as his staff, *"actually do know a lot about what makes for successful outcomes, [but] the research is in, so let's go and engage with it"*. Jason has focused on positioning the OECD research as a *"great way of providing us with a learning compass, a means of navigating ... as a school. Where all [we do] will be aligned, and I can align it all to [Victorian] department [curriculum requirements]"*.



*"I've used [the Learning Compass] to shape my thinking, and have managed to do some big picture structuring of the pedagogy and curriculum. I've then started working with the senior leadership. And I think they're just beginning to get the sense that I'm serious about research"*.

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## HOW HAS THE RESEARCH BEEN USED TO DATE WITH PURPOSE AND IN CONTEXT?


Jason and his leadership team are using the Learning Compass framework to guide a rebuild of the school's curriculum. The Learning Compass delineates between 'transformative competencies', such as 'creating new value' and 'reconciling tensions and dilemmas', and core foundational skills and knowledge. This delineation is helping the leadership team to build a curriculum that allows for a "very specific pedagogy" that has a stronger focus on trying to improve students' academic outcomes, but also accommodates a "more blended pedagogy" with a focus on students experiencing "applied learning, project and challenge-based learning, testing, transferable skill development, [and] making meaning". As Jason explained:

*"We've actually built our curriculum based around the Compass. This notion [where] there are areas of the curriculum that are privileged, which is English, Maths, and all aspects of Health. Also, Data Literacy and Digital Literacy. That's the core that we privilege [and it's] explicitly delivered. And then everything else is what we call 'the transformative competencies', which, through this research basis, is where the [students] can have opportunities to make meaning, make sense, create new knowledge, make meaning of the world [that] they're living in [and] how to apply their learning to a range of different contexts to prepare them effectively for what we don't quite know is around the corner."*

As Jason worked with the senior leadership group, he began "drip feeding" the research and "referenced it in some of his language". For change to occur across the school community, Jason believes it is important that this group, in particular, are engaged in the research and understand it. He soon realised though that "people hadn't really engaged [with it] at a deeper level meaningfully" and set about encouraging them to read it. As Jason explained:

*"[I said] 'You need to read this if we are going to be an effective group. And [if we're] going to have the level of dialogue [we] need to have, you need to read it'. And the next thing I knew, these things were getting printed around the leadership group and people [were] sitting down and reading it."*

Having read the research, a common understanding and language around the research began to build within the group. More importantly, the senior leaders started to appreciate how the research was relevant for their school community and change agenda. Jason explained that for any research to be used well, it needs to be positioned in regards "to a narrative in your context, and that connects to a history or where there has been some success". In this context, Eastern Garden's Senior College has a long history and pedagogical strength in vocational education and applied learning. Jason explained this to his team: "This speaks to our strength and our history and our DNA". This connection of the research with the history and strengths of the school has helped the senior leaders to "relate" to the research. It has also allowed them to understand the rationale behind certain decisions, which, in turn, has helped them to convince others of the reasons for why certain changes are occurring within the school.

 "There was a general sense that 'This makes sense; this is good'. And this enabled me to tie a narrative around how [the Learning Compass] connects to the history of the school with its strength in applied learning. Well, that's the 'transformative competencies'".

Jason commented that the broader teaching community have been "unbelievably positive" about the changes to date. He explained that many teachers had expressed appreciation of the research-informed approach and had commented on the lack of research and evidence use in the past. Teachers had told him:

*"Things weren't evidence-based or research-based here ... things changed from one year to the next, on a whim, [or] someone had a new idea. Things just sort of came in left-field. And we would stop doing that and start doing this."*

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## IN WHAT OTHER WAYS IS THE RESEARCH 'APPROPRIATE'?

Overall, Jason believes that through using the Learning Compass research, he has been able to move quickly in a school context where student outcomes need to improve significantly and as soon as possible. Not only has the research enabled him to “*short circuit a process to do the work to find the [curriculum] structure*”, it is a practical and relevant way forward that makes sense to teachers. This relevance and logic have given Jason “*the traction to get things moving*”, he believes. It has also enabled him to convince the school community that the approach is one that will remain a consistent and singular focus.



“Overall, people are looking at it and just going ‘OK, it makes sense’. And that’s given me the traction to get things moving quite quickly. And then, as I’ve said, we will stick with it. And we will just dig deeper and deeper into it, and make more sense from it, and apply it to context”.

Jason explained that even though parent engagement is fairly low in the school community, presenting new ways forward that are research-informed, and communicating consistently with parents and students alike using a common language that is informed by the research, will start to create change. He believes that “*using [the Learning Compass] as the backdrop has really helped*”. He went onto explain:

*“I think it’s given structure to [the change], it’s given meaning to it. It’s got a narrative to it. And I’m always looking at anything that happens here [at school] – ‘How do I connect it all together so it just makes sense?’”*

Given the holistic nature of the Learning Compass, Jason emphasised another reason why this particular research is appropriate: “*I can align the whole thing with the Department of Education’s goals*”. Jason believes that it is not only important for the school to have a curriculum and student outcomes that are “*aligned with what we’re doing within the system*”, but that jurisdiction leaders understand and support schools’ change agendas. In recent interactions with the jurisdiction, Jason explained that there was a general acknowledgement that the research-informed changes at Eastern Garden’s Senior College encapsulated a “*narrative*” that “*resonated with what’s here [at the school]*”. This buy-in, not only from jurisdiction leaders, but the broader school community is critical, Jason believes, to bring about the degree of change necessary to ensure that students’ future learning and well-being outcomes are supported and maximised.

## KEY LEARNINGS

1. **Clear identification of a problem or issue will help to target relevant research for use:** Jason was clear that the school’s curriculum and pedagogy needed to be transformed, and targeted relevant research that would help him and the senior leaders do this. **What key issues can you identify in your school/organisation that would benefit from being addressed through research use? To what extent can you narrow the focus of your intended improvement agenda to help others understand your priorities?**
2. **Purpose and meaning are given to research use when the research is connected to strengths and opportunities in context:** Jason created a clear and compelling narrative that connected the relevant research with the history and strengths of his school. This helped others to relate to the research, and understand the rationale for certain decisions and changes. **What strengths or opportunities exist within your context that you can connect with research use to encourage improved research engagement and understanding?**
3. **Ensuring all stakeholders understand the purpose for certain research use can facilitate buy-in to change:** Jason’s story is about using appropriate research to inform new ways forward that “make sense” to others. It is about being consistent and ensuring that change decisions and communication are clear and purposeful. **How well does your school/organisation understand the purpose for any current research use? In what ways can you improve this understanding and ensure that all stakeholders are clear?**

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## HOW DOES JASON'S CASE STUDY LINK TO OUR QUALITY USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE (QURE) FRAMEWORK?

This practitioner case study connects with the core components of our QURE Framework - **thoughtful engagement** with and implementation of appropriate research evidence. In particular, it demonstrates the importance of ensuring that quality research use is purposeful and both relevant to and connected with context.

You can find out more about the core components of our QURE Framework 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.*