

GENEVIEVE'S CASE STUDY: APPRAISING AND ADAPTING RESEARCH FOR RELEVANCE

This practitioner case study shares the journey of Genevieve and how she approached the quality use of research in her context. Genevieve's story highlights three key learnings that you could consider in relation to your own work:


1. **Relevant research is crucial for quality use.**
2. **If necessary, you may adapt relevant research to your context.**
3. **Networks can support your appraisal and adaptation of relevant research.**

WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT?

Genevieve is a classroom teacher at Sandy Hills School, a small government special school located in Queensland. She teaches students with intellectual disabilities, many of whom are also on the autism spectrum.

In Genevieve's school, one of the core improvement priorities for the coming years is to better use evidence-informed strategies to support students' learning. In her own practice, she understands *"the importance of looking at the evidence and looking at the best practice"* and regularly engages with research to deliver the best outcomes for her students.




 "[We don't want to be] walking in and going 'Oh, I'll just do this because I've done [it] in my last school and this works', but rather looking at what is the best research out there for the students, what's been trialed before and found to be successful."

WHAT WAS THE FOCUS?

Genevieve explains that the current reading and writing programme at her school is underpinned by research as well as a strong evidence base demonstrating its effectiveness for *"students with disabilities in various areas"*. However, recently, she noticed that her students were *"progressing past"* the current program.

In response to this need, Genevieve and her colleagues looked to engage with research to update and strengthen their evidence-based teaching strategies. Yet, Genevieve understood the importance of accessing research that was relevant to her school context and the unique needs of her students. Consequently, as Genevieve engaged with the research, she critically appraised whether it was rigorous and relevant to her context. She also worked with her colleagues and networks to help adapt the research to her specific practice needs.

 "In our school...we have students with a lot of additional needs. ... We have some students that use alternative pencils or different communication devices. So, just because the research says 'This is how it's done' – it might be how it's done, but we may need to look at a slightly different way for [our] students."

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HOW DID GENEVIEVE APPRAISE AND ADAPT RESEARCH FOR RELEVANCE?

Before Genevieve examined whether research was contextually relevant, she first emphasised that it had to be rigorous. She looked for research that was recent and had a suitable research design. For example, she preferred studies that involved large numbers of students over time, rather than a small case study, as this helped her to determine whether a research-informed strategy had a high success rate. Genevieve also looked for research that came from a quality source, such as an established researcher. After establishing this baseline for the rigour of the research, Genevieve then considered the relevance of the research to her students and drew on her networks during this process.

APPRAISING RELEVANCE TO THE STUDENTS

Genevieve emphasises that the key to effectively appraising the relevance of research is “*getting [her] own evidence together*” in order to have a deep knowledge of her individual students. This allows her to ensure that the research not only provides guidance on issues that she is facing in her practice, but whether it is appropriate in relation to her students’ individual learning needs.

“You look at what the evidence says and then think, ‘Well, really, does it fully categorise what I’m looking for?’ ... They might be students on the autism spectrum, but then if I add in they’ve got other medical conditions or they’ve got intellectual disabilities on top of it, I’m [reading the research and] going, yep, ‘That’s great for that part of them, but it’s not necessarily great for the other parts of them.’”

Recognising that the expectations for a Year 12 student in her context are quite different to what would be expected for the same-aged student in a mainstream school, Genevieve also looks for research that is appropriate for the students’ developmental stage alongside their

chronological age. For this reason, as she engages with the research, she looks for “*extra information to contextualise [the findings]*” in her setting. She reflected on a specific example in relation to research about developing students’ writing skills.

However, Genevieve notes that there are “*not really many examples around*” of research that specifically addresses these concerns. So, often she draws on her networks as she appraises research and adapts it to suit her context.



“[With research] I’m looking [for] something in there that shows me for students of 18 years of age, but working at a seven-year-old or six-year-old level, how they should be progressing, or what’s the best way [to teach] writing for them.”

THE VALUE OF NETWORKS WHEN APPRAISING AND ADAPTING RELEVANT RESEARCH

When discussing how she appraised research for its relevance, Genevieve emphasised how she drew on her professional networks and connections with her colleagues. For example, she noted how her principal, Kerrie, sits down with the classroom teachers once a week to “*unpack*” the research and talk through its relevance to their context. She appreciated these opportunities to discuss the

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research because it provided her with additional perspectives about *“how it could be used [and] what's the difficulties with it”*.

Building on this, Genevieve also drew on her networks beyond the school to access relevant research and consider how it could be adapted to suit her students. Discussions with her regional office provided Genevieve with directions to consider what other schools in the area were doing. She felt that *“if a number of schools are using [a research-informed strategy], it must have something good about it”* and seeing how they had adapted the research to their specific context provided a strong *“starting point”* for her own efforts.



“Actually going and seeing, ‘How is someone else using the same information in a different context?’, ... ‘Is it something that could be useful for what we're doing?’ ... So, trying to look at [it] from [a] different perspective.”

WHY DID SHE CHOOSE THIS APPROACH?

Genevieve had *“hit a need”* for research when she identified that her students could be making further progress in their reading and writing. She emphasised that research was appropriate for this practice problem because it provided the teaching staff with strategies that could be used across the school as well as the evidence to understand why these strategies were the ‘best practices’.

Genevieve understood that in order to use research well, she needed to ensure that it was rigorous and relevant to the students in her unique context. She examined pieces of research for connections between the students involved in different studies and her own students in relation to their developmental stage, age, and/or disabilities. This allowed her to determine whether the recommended strategies and evidence-based practices were relevant for *“this [particular] situation with this group of students”*.


“[We need] to be able to show ‘Well, there’s a reason [behind] why we do it’... When we explain it and understand it, everyone's all on board for it, but it's that step for, ‘Yep, this is what we're doing. This is why we're doing it.’”

However, given the specific and unique needs of her students, Genevieve also identified that she would need to *“slightly adapt some of [the research] for [her] students”*. By discussing the research with her principal and collaborating with other schools via the regional office, Genevieve sought additional perspectives on how to *“adapt research to cater for different students”* and their needs. Importantly, these connections helped her to successfully adapt the research in her own context, while still maintaining the rigour of the research behind the strategies.

WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES?


Genevieve established a *“small trial”* to measure the effectiveness of her research-informed strategies for teaching reading and writing. This involved collecting *“pre-data”* such as teacher observations, attendance records and student learning data, to establish an initial reference point for determining the impact on the students' learning. She reported a significant improvement, with *“some children [having] improved a further [chronological] year's worth of reading levels”* over the period of her research-informed change.

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 "We [had] our regional office person come down to talk with us further and ... work on [adapting the research] until we think it's right. ... [We] reviewed it to see, 'Are we still doing it with fidelity?' and 'What changes [are needed] over time to cater for the students changing?'"

At the same time, the quality use of research had positive impacts for the teachers. Genevieve noted that because the research was rigorous and relevant, it could be implemented consistently across the whole school. This *"made it a lot easier for staff"* by fostering a better understanding of what was happening in other classrooms. For example, the Teacher Aides - who move between classrooms - were able to more consistently support the students, while the teachers were able to engage in substantive conversations about collectively improving their practice.

Similarly, Genevieve explained how she was able to share her evidence of impact to "convince other schools" to appraise and adapt research for rigour and relevance in similar ways. In turn, this fostered a focus on research-informed improvement across her region:

 "Knowing that everybody's on the same page across our staff [is of great benefit]. So, knowing 'This is how things are done' and 'That's how it's worked for the writing-reading programme' ... a [colleague] can step in if someone's not there, and they know, 'This is what I do. This is how it runs on this day with these kids'."

"So, knowing that you could talk to another school when you went into regional meetings, and you could say, 'I'm doing this. What are you doing?', [that] made those conversations a lot better. Whereas before, they couldn't compare things, it was just like, 'Oh well, they can't read. Let's just look at this.' in a lot of areas."

KEY LEARNINGS

1. **Relevant research is crucial for quality use:** To appraise the relevance of research, Genevieve considered how it aligned with the contextual factors of her school. Given that she worked in a special school, these included her students' ages, developmental stages, and/or disabilities. [When appraising research, which contextual factors will you consider?](#)
2. **If necessary, you may adapt relevant research to your context:** After ensuring that the research was relevant, Genevieve made some adaptations to ensure the research-informed intervention was appropriate and could be delivered during her lessons. [What adaptations might you consider to be necessary in your context?](#)
3. **Networks can support your appraisal and adaptation of relevant research:** By engaging with her colleagues, principal, and schools within her regional network, Genevieve was supported to consider how to best adapt research in her context. Doing so, also fostered more effective communication and collaboration around the use of research. [Who in your networks could support you to appraise relevant research?](#)

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

This practitioner case study connects with a core component of our QURE Framework, that is, **skillsets** by demonstrating how Genevieve appraised research to ensure that it was relevant.

There are also strong links with the individual enabler of **relationships** given how Genevieve leveraged her connections with her colleagues and teachers at other schools to effectively adapt research for her specific context.

You can find out more about the components of *skill sets* and *relationships* 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.