

Q DATA INSIGHT

JULY 2022

EDUCATORS' RECEIVING AND SHARING RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

“Many educators in our case study schools mentioned that their principals were a critical link to research – bringing different types of evidence into more formal discussions and sharing practices that were used in other classrooms.” (Finnigan et al., 2013, p. 484).

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Our work to date has found that educators believe in the value of research and want to use it in practice, but often do not have immediate and open access to it (Walsh et al., 2022). This is one of the reasons why educators rely on a variety of sources, including school principals and leaders, to help them not only identify, but also acquire relevant research and evidence (Cain & Graves, 2019; Cooper et al., 2017). Yet, there is a limited knowledge base about how educators acquire, share, diffuse and/or use different research and evidence (Finnigan & Daly, 2014). Better knowledge about these practices is important, particularly for school and system leaders to be able to support the improved use of research in schools.

With these ideas in mind, this data insight draws on findings from a Monash Q Project survey with 819 Australian educators to shed light on:

- (i) how and why educators both receive and share research and evidence; and
- (ii) how different groups of educators have distinct 'evidence sharing profiles'.

WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS?

1. Educators **regularly receive research and evidence** and do so mainly from **colleagues within their schools**. Senior leaders are more likely to receive evidence from **sources external to their school** (e.g., leaders in other schools), while middle leaders and teachers are more likely to receive evidence from **colleagues within their school community**.
2. Educators typically **share research and evidence** with others on a **regular basis**, and do so mainly with **colleagues within their schools**. Senior and middle leaders share evidence mainly with teachers, whereas teachers share evidence mainly amongst themselves. **Sharing research or evidence with others beyond their schools does not occur often**, with just over one in ten educators reporting this practice.
3. Most educators believe that receiving and sharing research and evidence is a **key part of their professional responsibilities and identities**.
4. Educators have **different patterns** when it comes to **accessing, receiving, sharing and using research and evidence**. School leaders are more likely to be research-engaged, as well as access, share and use research evidence more frequently in practice when compared with teachers.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

For Teachers

Teachers are less active in accessing, receiving, sharing and using research and evidence. They largely rely on school leaders to bring relevant research and evidence into their schools and share it with them. Teachers may consider expanding their networks and connections (e.g., through social media networks or professional associations) so as to acquire research and evidence more regularly from sources that are external to their schools. This may help them to increase their engagement with and use of different evidence in practice.

For School Leaders

School leaders are critical when it comes to bringing relevant research and evidence into their schools and sharing it with staff to improve practice. If school leaders are aiming to improve the use of research and evidence in their schools, they need to be aware of this dynamic. By understanding their school community's patterns for receiving, sharing and using research, school leaders can foster leadership from engaged staff members and effectively target interventions for improving the use of research.

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For System Leaders, Researchers, and Research Brokers

Understanding the crucial role that school leaders play in bringing research and evidence into schools and sharing it with educators means that system leaders can support school leaders in these endeavours. System leaders may also consider resources and interventions that may help teachers in their use of research and evidence, or support them in expanding their connections and networks so as to access research and evidence that is relevant and useful for their practice.

Q PROJECT KEY FINDINGS

How and why do educators receive research and evidence?

Overall, our findings suggest that **educators regularly receive research and evidence from different sources**. A majority of educators indicated receiving evidence from someone else 'at least once a month' (69.2%), while nearly half (47.4%) reported receiving evidence 'at least every two weeks'. Just under one-third (28.6%) reported receiving evidence 'at least once a week'. There was a statistically significant¹ difference between how often educators with different roles received evidence, with 35.9% of senior leaders receiving it 'weekly' when compared with teachers (25.6%) and middle leaders (21.7%).

Overwhelmingly, **educators regularly receive research and evidence from colleagues within their school**². 'My school leaders' (76.8%) and 'teachers at my school' (74.1%) were the most frequent sources of research and evidence, with 'formal professional learning communities' also reported as an important source (49.7%) (see Figure 1). In comparison, research and evidence was less likely to be received from 'informal professional learning networks' (23.7%) or 'colleagues external to educators' schools (i.e., 'teachers outside my school' 20.6%; 'school leaders outside my school' 9.8%).

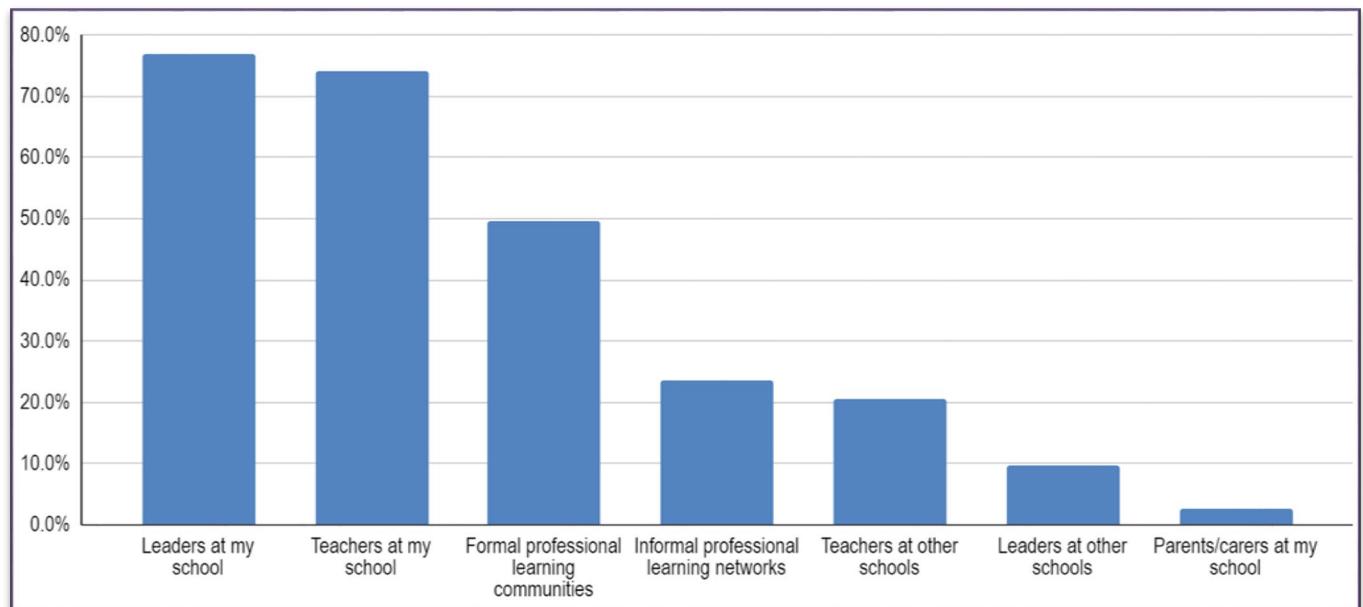


Figure 1: Educators' regular sources of evidence (n = 717)

¹ Using Chi-square test, $\chi^2 = 39.908$, $df = 15$, $p < .001$.

² Participants could select multiple options when indicating why they received evidence, who they received it from, and how they received it so the total percentage may be more than 100%.

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There were differences in the patterns of receiving research and evidence by role. **Senior leaders (38.9%) and middle leaders (19.6%) were significantly³ more likely to receive evidence from leaders in other schools**, compared with teachers (6.9%). Senior leaders were also significantly⁴ more likely to receive research and evidence from 'formal professional learning communities' (69.4%; middle leaders 46.4%; teachers 47.6%).

Senior leaders were an important source of research for the rest of the school community. For instance, both middle leaders (83.9%) and teachers (77.2%) indicated receiving evidence most often from their school leaders. For teachers, in particular, other teachers in their school were also regular sources of research (76.0%).

“Both external and internal linkages or relationships can influence access to research evidence as the 'knowledge' that flows throughout the organization.”
(Finnigan et al., 2013 p. 479).

“From my point of view, it would be careless and wrong professional conduct if we [did] not reach or try to gain as much evidence about student behaviour as we could.”

Middle Leader, Government Primary School, Queensland

When asked why they receive research and evidence, most educators believe that it is a key part of their professional responsibilities and identities. For example, three-quarters of educators (75.3%) reported that it was 'an important part of being an educator'. Approximately two-thirds (66.4%) believed it was 'normal practice' in their context, and over half (55.6%) perceived that it was 'related to their area of work'. Senior (61.1%) and middle (41.1%) leaders were significantly⁵ more likely than teachers (3.6%) to report that they received research and evidence due to their 'leadership profile'. They were also significantly⁶ more likely to receive evidence because of their perceived 'influence in the teaching community' (senior leaders 44.4%; middle leaders 37.5%; teachers 11.7%) and their capacity to 'share it on more widely' (senior leaders 30.6%; middle leaders 23.2%; teachers 7.7%).

How do educators share research and evidence?

Overall, our findings suggest that **educators typically share research and evidence with others on a regular basis**. More than half of all educators (57.5%) shared evidence with someone else at least fortnightly. There was a statistically significant⁷ difference between how often educators with different roles shared evidence, with senior (76.9%) and middle leaders (70.0%) sharing research and evidence at least fortnightly when compared with teachers (55.3%).

“They [school leaders] will identify areas for improvement, and often it will come from senior leadership about what sort of research evidence we might be looking at, or what sort of research we're basing an action on.”

Senior leader, Government Primary School, New South Wales

When sharing research and evidence, most educators do so with colleagues within their schools⁸. Teachers predominantly indicated sharing research and evidence with other teachers (88.0%), as opposed to with senior or middle leaders (18.5%). **Senior and middle leaders also shared research and evidence mainly with teachers** (81.6% and 84.2%, respectively), and to a lesser extent with other leaders (21.1% and 31.6% respectively).

Research or evidence is not often shared with others beyond their school, with just over one in ten (10.7%) of all educators indicating that they did so. If research or evidence was shared with others externally, **teachers were only slightly more likely to do this** (11.6%) when compared with senior (10.5%) or middle leaders (8.8%). When senior leaders shared with others externally, they were equally as likely to share with other school leaders (5.3%) and external teachers (5.3%). In contrast, when teachers shared evidence externally, they more often shared with other teachers (11.6%) and did not regularly share with other leaders (1.0%).

³ Using Chi-square test, $\chi^2 = 45.830$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$.

⁴ Using Chi-square test, $\chi^2 = 7.837$, $df = 3$, $p = .049$.

⁵ Using Chi-square test, $\chi^2 = 201.392$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$.

⁶ Using Chi-square tests; for 'perceived influence', $\chi^2 = 48.342$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$; for 'capacity to share it', $\chi^2 = 29.672$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$.

⁷ Using Chi-square test, $\chi^2 = 11.165$, $df = 3$, $p = .011$.

⁸ Participants could select multiple options when indicating why they shared evidence, who they shared it with, and how they shared it so the total percentage may be more than 100%.

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On-sharing of evidence did not appear to be a regular occurrence, with a minority of educators (17.8%) reporting that they thought the research or evidence that they shared was subsequently shared with others.

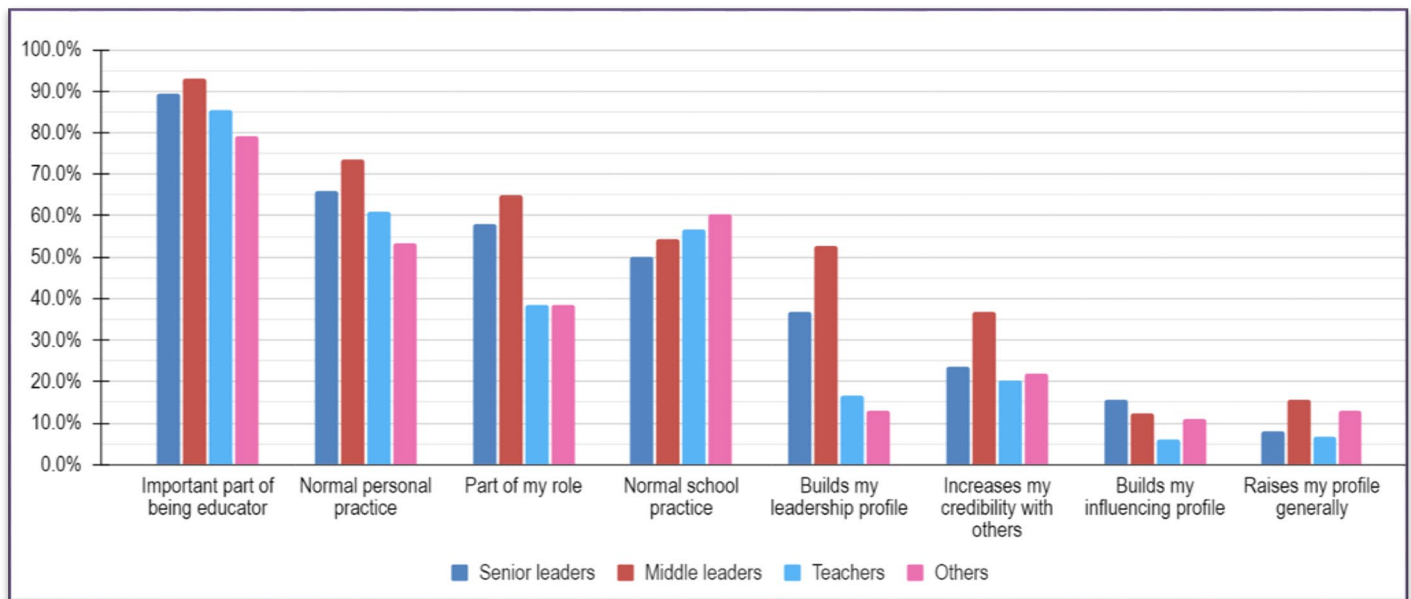


Figure 2. Educators' reasons for evidence sharing (n = 698)

Similar to reasons for receiving research and evidence, **most educators share because they believe it is a key part of their professional responsibilities and identities**. For example, Figure 2 shows that regardless of their role, a majority of educators (85.2% overall) reported that sharing was an 'important part of being educator'. More than half reported that it was their 'normal personal practice' (61.2%) or a part of 'normal school practice' (56.7%). Middle (64.9%) and senior (57.9%) leaders were significantly⁹ more likely to perceive research and evidence sharing as a 'part of their roles' when compared with teachers (38.6%). They were also significantly¹⁰ more likely to share so as to build their leadership profile (middle leaders 52.6%; senior leaders 36.8%) when compared with teachers (16.7%).

When research and evidence is shared, it is typically done so in informal ways. For example, 39.5% of all educators reported sharing research and evidence 'verbally via informal conversations', while only 12.9% preferred to do so 'verbally via formal discussions'. Further, 33.7% of all educators shared research and evidence 'informally via email', while only 13.8% indicated sharing 'formally via email'. While social media was not generally preferred for sharing research and evidence, when it was used, it was more likely to be used 'informally' (9.9%) than 'formally' (2.6%).

How can knowledge of 'evidence sharing profiles' help to improve research and evidence use in schools?

Our findings indicate that **educators have different patterns when it comes to accessing, receiving, sharing and using research and evidence**. Knowledge about these profiles and who's likely to fall into them may help school leaders, in particular, to understand the extent to which their staff are research-engaged. It may also assist them to understand which staff are more likely to help improve research and evidence use within and across the school community.

Our work identified five different profiles of how educators access, receive, share and use research and evidence (see Figure 3). Each of these profiles is different with regards to their research-engagement, as well as how they acquire and share research and evidence.

⁹ Using Chi-square test, $\chi^2 = 19.032$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$.

¹⁰ Using Chi-square test, $\chi^2 = 50.829$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$.

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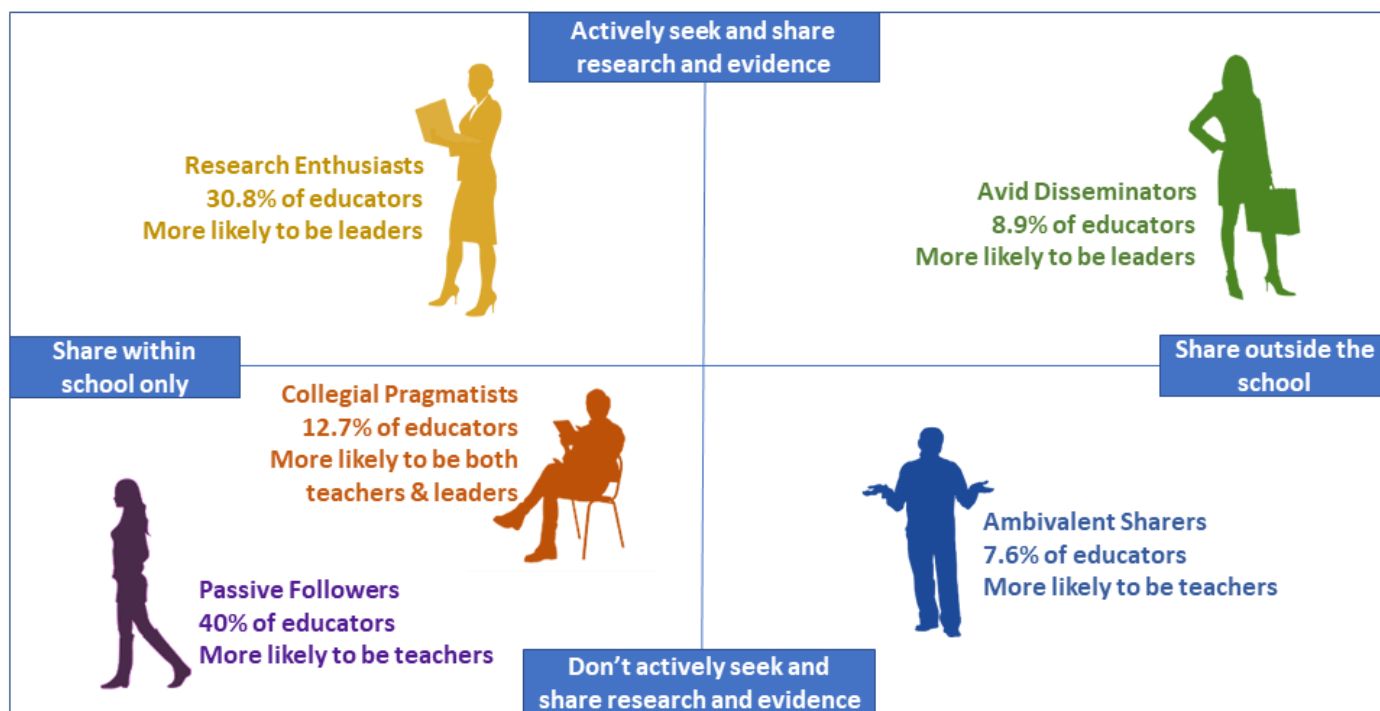


Figure 3. Educators' evidence sharing profiles (n = 819)

'Avid disseminators' are the most research-engaged of all profiles. They have the strongest beliefs in research use, are the most confident in their research use abilities and are most motivated to use research. They are the most likely to use research frequently in practice. This profile is situated to the far right of the top right-hand quadrant of Figure 3 because avid disseminators actively seek and share research and evidence, and do so most frequently, both within and external to their school. Leaders are more likely to be avid disseminators than teachers. Overall, this was one of the least likely profiles of all educators (8.9%).

'Research enthusiasts' are the next most research-engaged profile. They have strong beliefs in research use, are confident in their research use abilities and use research frequently in practice. They are slightly less motivated than avid disseminators to initiate actions around using research, such as starting discussions about research with colleagues. This profile is situated in the top left-hand quadrant of Figure 3 because research enthusiasts actively seek and share research and evidence, but are more likely to do so with teachers within their own school and, at times, with their school leaders. They tend not to share research externally at all. Leaders are more likely to be research enthusiasts than teachers. Overall, this is the second most likely profile of all educators (30.8%).

'Collegial pragmatists' are the next most research-engaged profile. They have reasonably strong beliefs in the value of research use, but at times, believe more in their own experience and knowledge than they do in research. Collegial pragmatists are less confident in their research use abilities than avid disseminators and research enthusiasts, and lack motivation to initiate actions around research use. They do not often use research in practice. This profile is situated close to the centre of Figure 3 because collegial pragmatists seek and share research and evidence, but are more passive in their behaviours than avid disseminators or research enthusiasts. When they share research and evidence, they do so mainly with teachers within their own school and, at times, with their school leaders. They tend not to share research externally at all. Collegial pragmatists are equally likely to be teachers or leaders. Overall, only 12.7% of educators exhibited characteristics of this profile.

'Ambivalent sharers' are not research-engaged, or if they are, this is only to a small extent. They rarely use research in practice, if at all, and value their own experience and knowledge over research. This profile is situated towards the bottom of the bottom right-hand quadrant of Figure 3 because ambivalent sharers do not actively access or share research and evidence often. If and when they share, they do so equally with teachers both within and external to their school. This profile is the least likely to share research with leaders within their own school. Ambivalent sharers are more likely to be teachers than leaders. Overall, this is the least likely profile of all educators (7.6%).

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'**Passive followers**' are not research-engaged, or if they are, this is only to a small extent. Similar to ambivalent sharers, they rarely use research in practice, if at all, and value their own experience and knowledge over research. This profile is situated to close to the bottom and to the far left of the least active quadrant of Figure 3. This is because passive followers access and share research and evidence the least frequently of all the profiles. If and when they share, they do so mainly with teachers within their own school, and at times, with their school leaders. They tend not to share research externally at all. Teachers are more likely to be passive followers than school leaders. Overall, this was the most likely profile of all educators (40%).

IMPLICATIONS

These findings highlight that **school leaders are critical when it comes to bringing research and evidence into their schools and then sharing within their school community**. They also play an **important role in driving and supporting increased and improved research and evidence use** by motivating teachers and colleagues who may be more passive or ambivalent in their practices and attitudes. In conclusion, we highlight several considerations:

- For teachers: *How research-engaged am I? How can I connect with others who can help me to acquire research? What research can I share with others that may help them to improve their practice? How can I share evidence in ways that are most helpful?*
- For leaders: *How can I better understand the research-engagement of my staff? How will this knowledge help me to improve research use within my school? How do we presently share research and evidence within our school and can these practices be improved?*
- For others: *How can research and evidence be diffused more effectively? How can school leaders be supported to improve the ways in which their school communities' access, receive, share and use research and evidence?*

ABOUT Q

These considerations form part of the broader conversation regarding research use that Q Project is seeking to foster. We invite all educators to join us at:



[Q Project Website](#)



[@MonashQProject](#)



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Source: This Data Insight draws on a survey conducted with a total of 819 educators from across VIC (27.8%), NSW (27.5%), QLD (21.2%), WA (10.6%), SA (7.6%), TAS (3.3%), ACT (1.2%), and NT (0.7%). All respondents were recruited through Whereto Research. The total sample comprised 12.1% senior and middle leaders, 71.9% teachers, and 16.0% other staff. Represented schools included primary, secondary, combined schools from government, independent, Catholic education, and other sectors.