

Q NARRATIVE

JULY 2022

MARCUS' STORY: RECEIVING AND SHARING RESEARCH

Marcus Harris is the assistant principal of learning and teaching at Malahide College, a Catholic Secondary School located in the metropolitan area of Melbourne, Victoria. The school has a population of approximately 900 students, with nearly two-thirds from a language background other than English.

Marcus' story is about a leader who is passionate about promoting quality research use among staff by purposefully **accessing research from multiple sources and networks and setting up effective structures for sharing research** within the school. These research use practices help him and his staff to make **informed decisions** and contribute positively to **teacher development**.



LEVERAGING DIFFERENT SOURCES AND NETWORKS TO ACQUIRE AND RECEIVE RESEARCH

When we spoke with Marcus, he and his colleagues were working on an initiative aimed at gauging teachers' abilities to support high-capacity learning in the classroom across multiple subjects. Keen for the initiative to be evidence-informed, Marcus and his colleagues approached research use as "two-fold"; that is, using "a blend of evidence of what's going on in classrooms and evidence about what empirical research is saying about learning". Marcus was mindful that to be across a wide range of research, you needed to be skilled at finding and using research, as well as connected with different networks and sources.

For example, as a part of Marcus' own post-graduate studies, he "did a unit called evidence-based learning and the unit was speaking about exactly this, the types of research that impact schools and learning". He affirmed that undertaking this qualification had "equipped me so much better to be able to lead this [research-informed initiative]" because he had knowledge of relevant research, as well as the skills and knowledge to search for additional evidence. He reported that colleagues were also useful sources of research, particularly other learning leaders within the school, who often shared with Marcus research that they were interested in or believed was relevant. In turn, Marcus read widely himself and shared new knowledge with his colleagues. He was fortunate that he had access to educational journals and professional magazines through his school's subscriptions. He found these to be good sources of new ideas: "And so I'll read articles in there, and if it's got some research, I'll just follow the rabbit down the hole. I go to the [original] research myself, and then I will try to disseminate that to others".

"So, I attend, probably every term, a meeting with people in my role, in Melbourne Catholic education. And we often share research, not [always] formal research, but we share experiences from our schools. And sometimes that is informed by data collected by the original office."

Marcus reported participating in different forums and networks that proved helpful sources of research and evidence. For example, he participated in regular meetings with those holding a similar position within schools in his region of Melbourne

Archdiocese Catholic Schools. He was also involved in other regional events that brought schools together to exchange information about evidence-informed practice and initiatives. He found these events very helpful, both to receive new ideas about research, but also to share what his school was doing. "When you brought people in, you would show them a particular program. You would explain the research behind why you're doing the program and some of your findings as you're working through the program." Additionally, Marcus explained that his school's partnership with Monash University was not only an excellent source of research, but also another way for he and his colleagues to share ideas about research. For example, on one occasion, the local university conducted a small study on behalf of the school to measure the impact of having extra teaching staff in several subjects; the findings of which were shared and discussed with Marcus and his colleagues.

SHARING RESEARCH TO IMPACT STUDENT LEARNING AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

For Marcus, curating research and sharing it with colleagues formed a part of his professional responsibilities as a senior school leader. He believed that by doing so, the decisions that he and his colleagues made would be better informed and ultimately, lead to enhanced student learning. He also believed that by sharing research within the school and encouraging its use, he was helping to promote teacher professional development. Again, Marcus emphasised the importance of academic research being integrated with school action research. For example, he had recently

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conducted his own classroom research into project-based learning, supported by specific academic research, which he shared with staff as he looked for ways to embed the ideas in practice.

"It's part of my role formally to collect and curate as much research as I can in order to inform my team [and] myself. [This is] so I can help - not only to impact learning, but also to impact teacher development that [in turn] impacts learning."

As another example, Marcus spoke about his school's commitment to a program focused on empowering students by creating conditions and structures for teachers to access, implement, and evaluate research. He explained that all teachers engaged in the program needed to first read Dr Nancy Sulla's research: [Students Taking Charge](#). "Every teacher that teaches in that program has to read that book. So, they have to be evidence informed, and then they have to apply that evidence to the classroom and continually get feedback." Marcus emphasised that sharing research in collaborative settings was key to the ongoing success of this program. While implementing the research, "the teachers have weekly meetings to discuss the progress and the impact they're having", which encouraged collective buy-in for sustained change.

Marcus' school also utilises professional learning teams as a way of sharing research and collaborating around new ideas. Members of each team both conduct their own research into specific areas and apply research findings from academic studies, which are then subsequently shared within their teams in what Marcus calls "a shared learning approach". For example, Marcus explained how a Year 7-9 learning area coordinator recently used her own knowledge of using research to help lead her professional learning team. "She was very, very used to using research. She was also doing her master's degree, and so she did an inquiry into knowledge curriculum and thinking curriculum. So, she used a lot of external research and then applied it with internal research to come up with the best way to support our Year 7 [students] to learn and retain mathematical learning". She then encouraged feedback from her learning team about this research-informed approach, as well as have them apply it in practice, which generated further insights and discussion. This type of "shared learning" not only refined and improved practice, but contributed to teachers' professional development.

"And then [leaders of professional learning] did the research and disseminated that research within a team approach at school. And so therefore that started to develop a collaborative approach and a shared learning approach."



Wanting to maximise the acquisition, sharing and use of research within his school, Marcus explained that having a dedicated 'research lead' role would be of significant benefit. He explained that such a person would be an "expert" at finding research specific to certain topics/subjects and would be able to help staff interpret the research and use it to improve practice. But for a role like this to have maximum impact, Marcus explained that the person would need time and no other responsibilities to detract from them helping teachers to use research. He emphasised that such a role would not replace professional learning teams, rather work with them to improve their use of research.

Marcus' story is one of how using different sources and structures to acquire and share research, both within and external to the school, supports both shared learning and practice improvement. His story also emphasises the importance of focused leadership to promote and facilitate quality use of research within a school community.

LEADERSHIP 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. [Accessing and receiving research, both from within and external to schools, and then sharing it with colleagues](#) is core to this undertaking.

Marcus is modelling how he, as a school leader, utilises various sources and networks to acquire research. He is also investing in collaborative structures and learning opportunities within his school so that research is frequently shared, discussed, and used by staff. Such practices contribute to teacher professional development, which in turn, positively impact practice change and student learning.

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.