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Using research well to drive improvement

Mark Rickinson and Jo Gleeson

Independent Schools Victoria Principals' Conference

15 September 2025

MONASH Q LAB

Quality use of research and evidence in education

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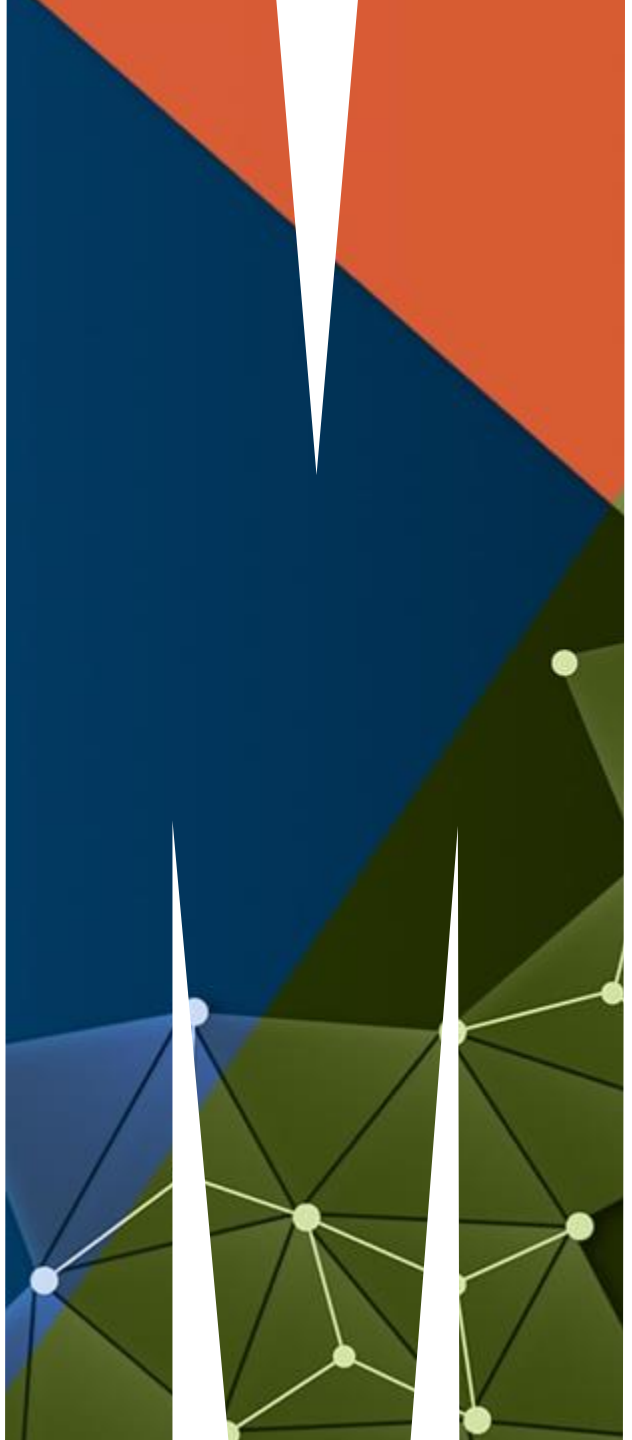
Our starting points

What does ‘using research well’ mean to you?



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Using research well…

1. is often a blind spot

Q Book 1

2. is all about practice

Practitioner Case Studies

3. is deeply professional

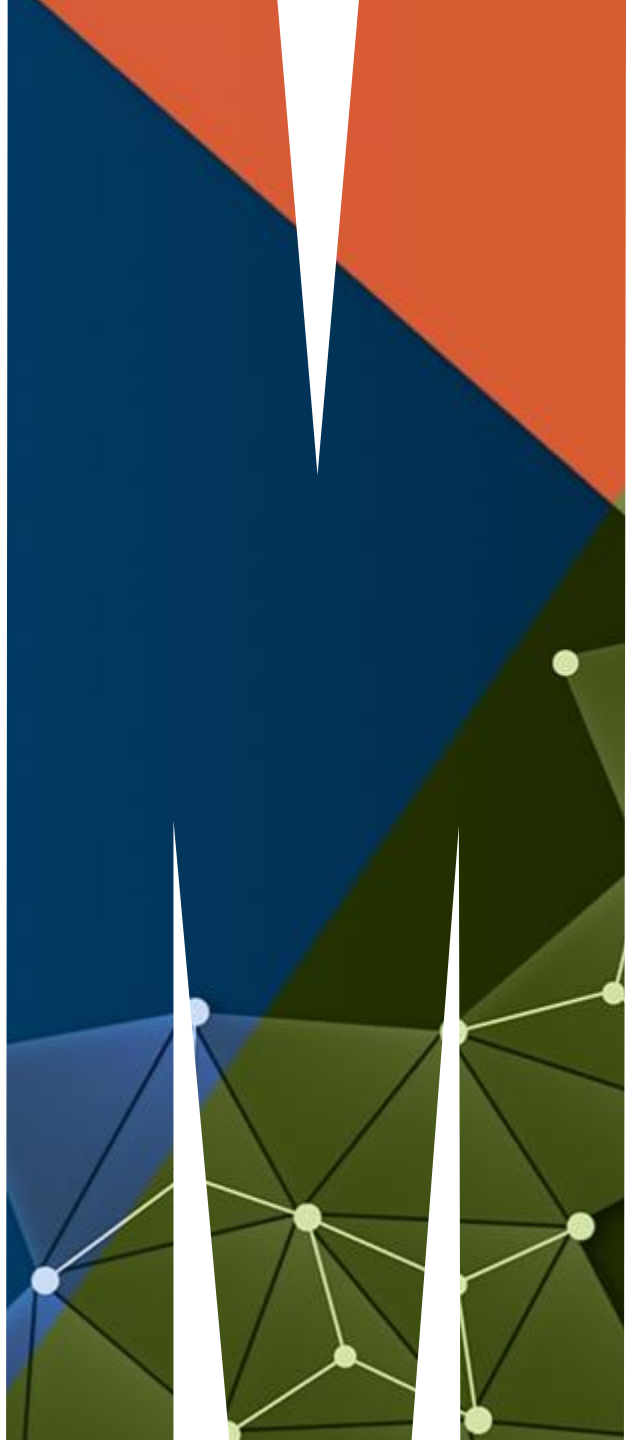
PL Courses

4. needs to be modelled

QURE Assessment Tool

5. needs to be supported

Q Book 2



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1. Using research well is often a blind spot

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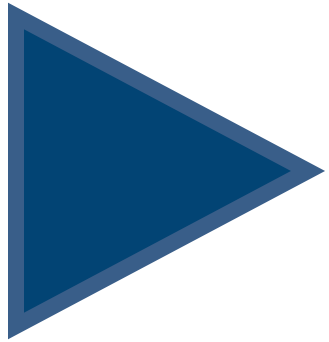
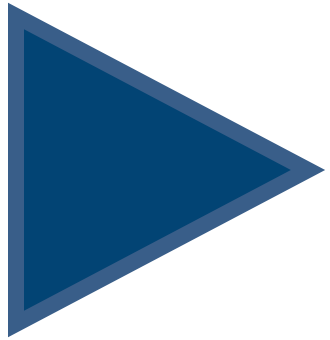
Quality of *evidence*



Quality of *use*

***Whether* we use research**



***How well* we use research**

Monash Q Project

What quality use means

Cross-sector systematic review and stakeholder consultation

What it involves in practice

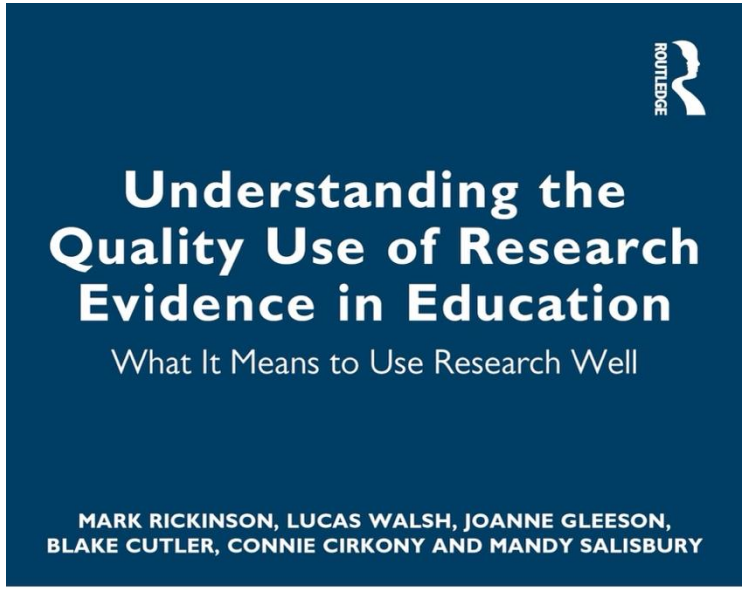
Surveys and interviews with 2100+ Australian educators

How it can be developed

Co-design and trials of professional learning resources

How systems can support it

Surveys and consultations with 200+ system actors



Helpful for understanding what using research well means and involves.

"The Q Project [helped us understand that] … it's not about reading copious amounts of research. It's about using the research. And the QURE Framework is a perfect tool to start the conversation."

School leader

"[Q did] an amazing job of unearthing what it means to use research effectively and in doing so, signpost to educators how best to achieve effective research-informed practices within their schools, for the benefit of all."

International researcher

bit.ly/qurebook

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2. Using research well is all about practice

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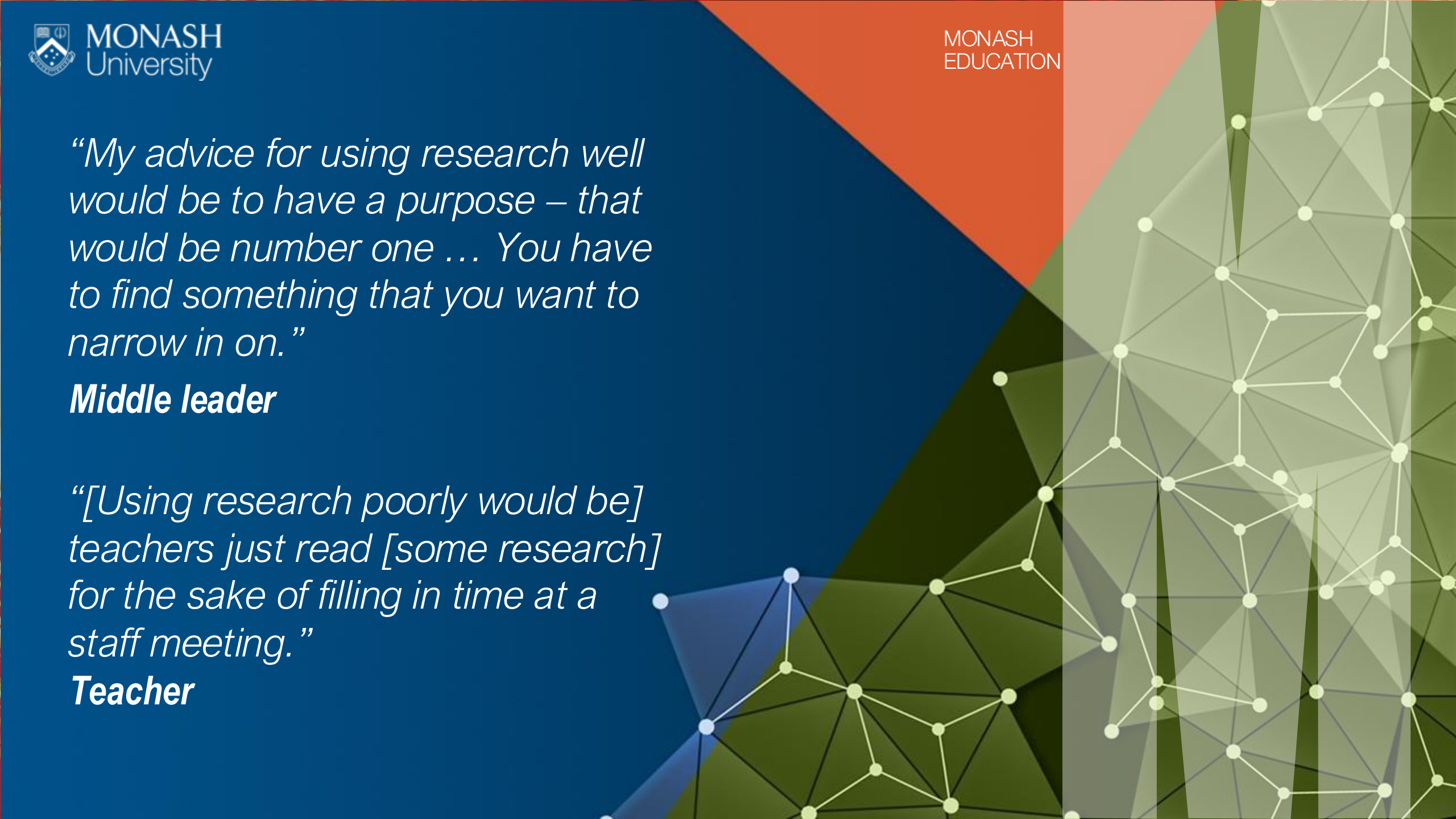
"My advice for using research well would be to have a purpose – that would be number one … You have to find something that you want to narrow in on."

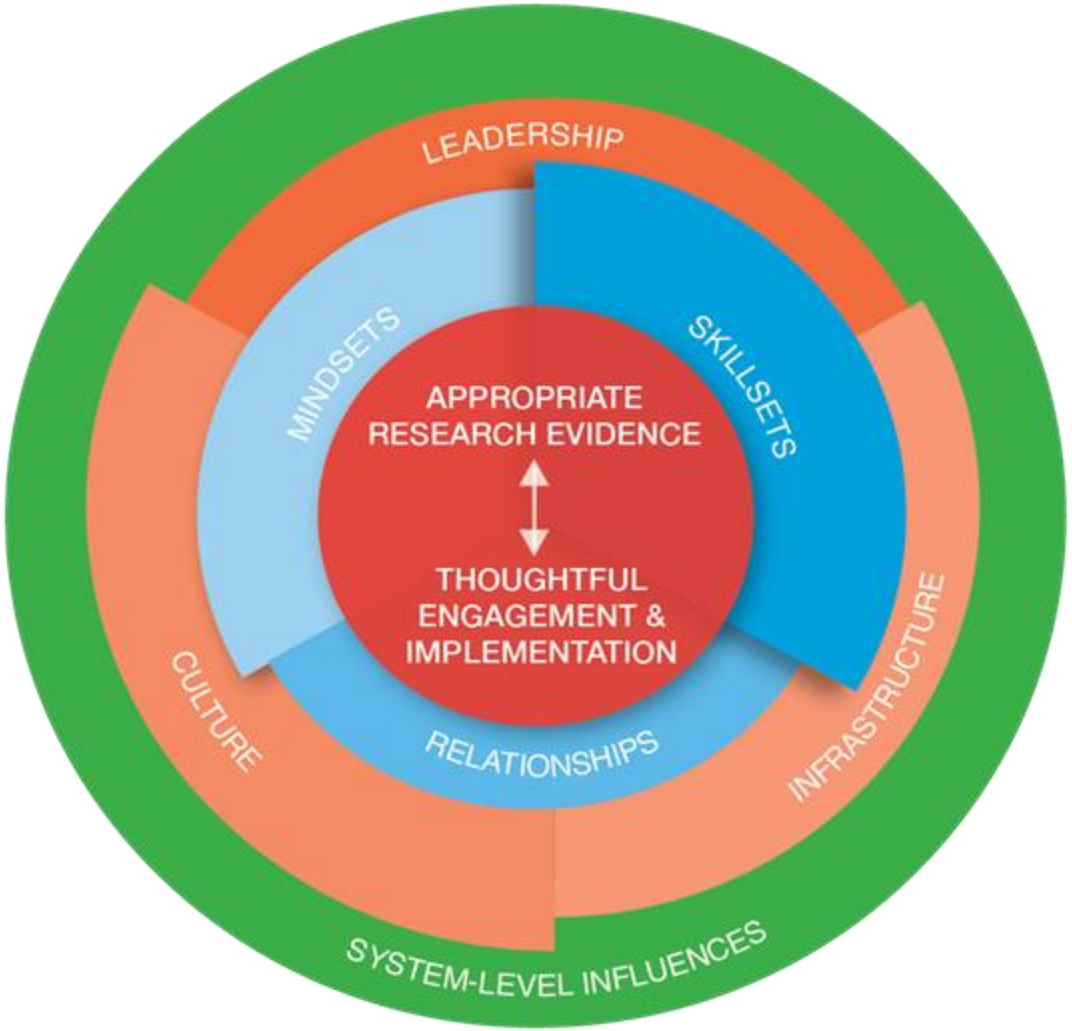
Middle leader

"[Using research poorly would be] teachers just read [some research] for the sake of filling in time at a staff meeting."

Teacher

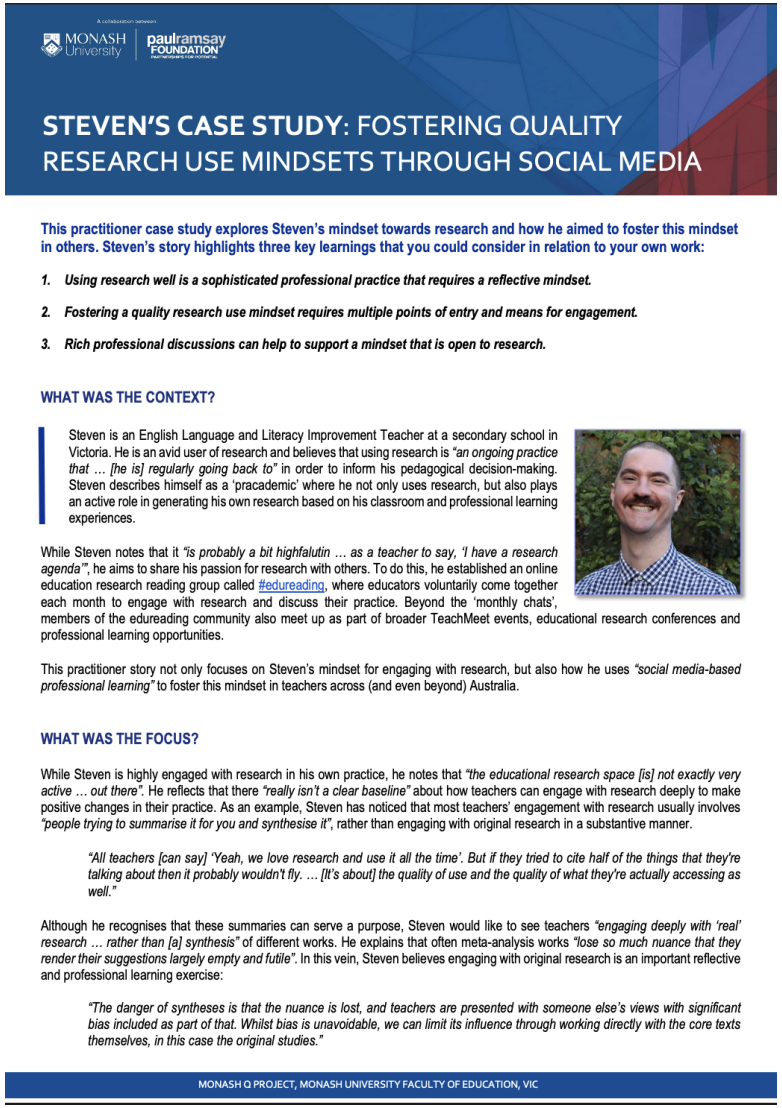


Appropriateness



APPROPRIATE RESEARCH EVIDENCE

The need for research evidence to be not only methodologically rigorous, but also appropriate for the educational issue, the context and intended use.



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STEVEN'S CASE STUDY: FOSTERING QUALITY RESEARCH USE MINDSETS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

This practitioner case study explores Steven's mindset towards research and how he aimed to foster this mindset in others. Steven's story highlights three key learnings that you could consider in relation to your own work:

1. ***Using research well is a sophisticated professional practice that requires a reflective mindset.***
2. ***Fostering a quality research use mindset requires multiple points of entry and means for engagement.***
3. ***Rich professional discussions can help to support a mindset that is open to research.***

WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT?

Steven is an English Language and Literacy Improvement Teacher at a secondary school in Victoria. He is an avid user of research and believes that using research is *"an ongoing practice that … [he is] regularly going back to"* in order to inform his pedagogical decision-making. Steven describes himself as a 'pracademic' where he not only uses research, but also plays an active role in generating his own research based on his classroom and professional learning experiences.

While Steven notes that it *"is probably a bit highfalutin … as a teacher to say, 'I have a research agenda'"*, he aims to share his passion for research with others. To do this, he established an online education research reading group called #edureading, where educators voluntarily come together each month to engage with research and discuss their practice. Beyond the 'monthly chats', members of the edureading community also meet up as part of broader TeachMeet events, educational research conferences and professional learning opportunities.

This practitioner story not only focuses on Steven's mindset for engaging with research, but also how he uses *"social media-based professional learning"* to foster this mindset in teachers across (and even beyond) Australia.

WHAT WAS THE FOCUS?

While Steven is highly engaged with research in his own practice, he notes that *"the educational research space [is] not exactly very active … out there"*. He reflects that there *"really isn't a clear baseline"* about how teachers can engage with research deeply to make positive changes in their practice. As an example, Steven has noticed that most teachers' engagement with research usually involves *"people trying to summarise it for you and synthesise it"*, rather than engaging with original research in a substantive manner.

> *"All teachers [can say] 'Yeah, we love research and use it all the time'. But if they tried to cite half of the things that they're talking about then it probably wouldn't fly. … [It's about] the quality of use and the quality of what they're actually accessing as well."*

Although he recognises that these summaries can serve a purpose, Steven would like to see teachers *"engaging deeply with 'real' research … rather than [a] synthesis"* of different works. He explains that often meta-analysis works *"lose so much nuance that they render their suggestions largely empty and futile"*. In this vein, Steven believes engaging with original research is an important reflective and professional learning exercise:

> *"The danger of syntheses is that the nuance is lost, and teachers are presented with someone else's views with significant bias included as part of that. Whilst bias is unavoidable, we can limit its influence through working directly with the core texts themselves, in this case the original studies."*

MONASH Q PROJECT, MONASH UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF EDUCATION, VIC

Helpful for illustrating what using research well looks like in varied contexts.

"The Q Project really helped teachers to feel valued and to have their actions validated. … [We] could see that [the] researchers were keen to see what we are doing as practitioners … to document our story."

School leader

""The [Q Project's] resources are concise, to the point and cut through. They don't dumb it down, but are still accessible."

System leader

bit.ly/qurecasestudies

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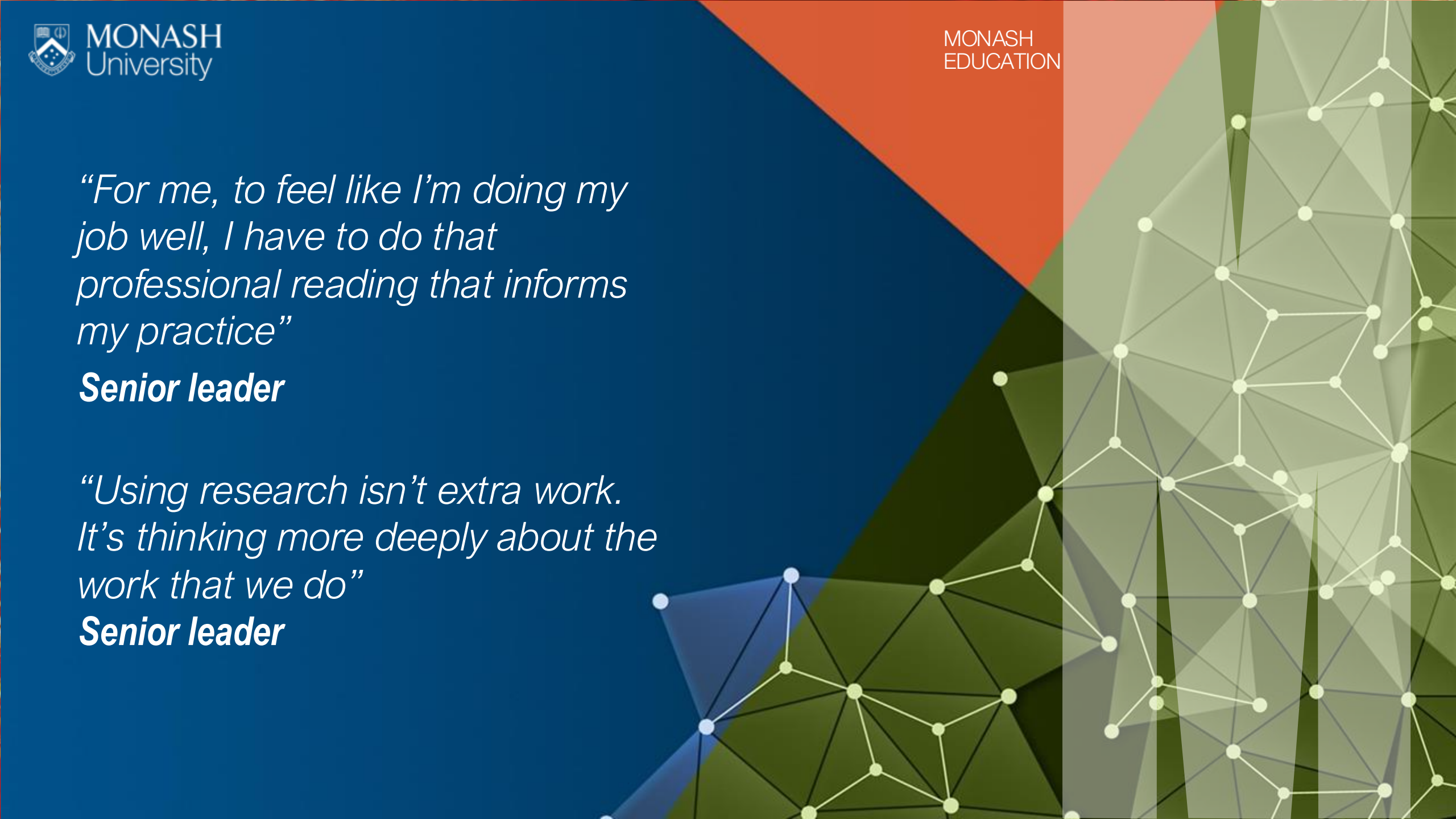
3. Using research well is deeply professional

“For me, to feel like I’m doing my job well, I have to do that professional reading that informs my practice”

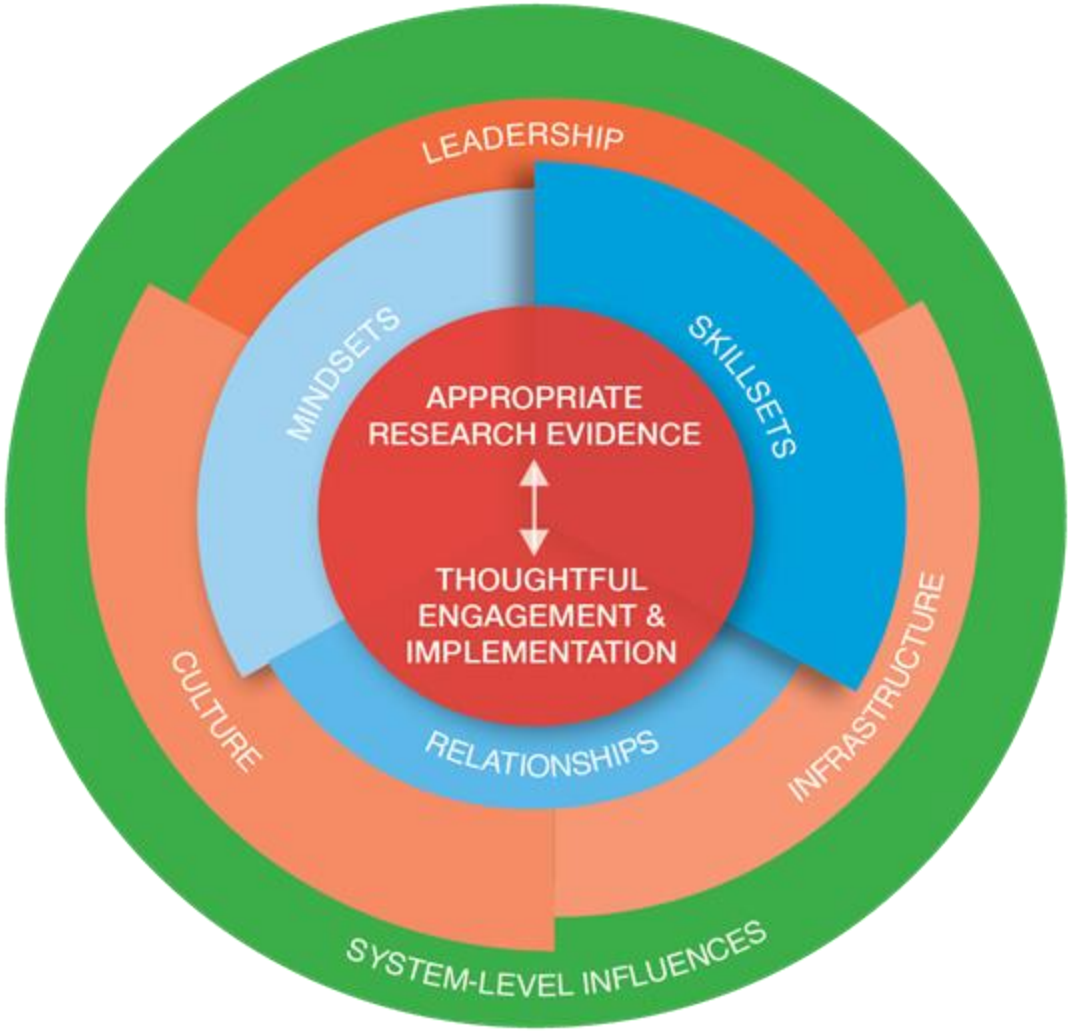
Senior leader

“Using research isn’t extra work. It’s thinking more deeply about the work that we do”

Senior leader



Thoughtfulness



THOUGHTFUL ENGAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Critical engagement with the research evidence, shared deliberation about its meaning and effective integration of aspects of the evidence within practice.

Module learning objectives

Upon successful completion of the module, participants will be able to:

1. Access research from a wide range of sources.
2. Conduct an efficient literature search of academic databases to find appropriate research.
3. Know how to appraise research for rigour and relevance.

Module activities

The following videos and readings about finding and selecting appropriate research are designed to help you engage with the **Module 2 project questions**.

FINDING AND SELECTING RESEARCH

- ***Watch*** this video (4 minutes) where **Blake Cutler** from the Monash Q Project provides tips for how to gain access to appropriate research.

Helpful for developing skills and capacity in using research well.

"The questions [in Q's professional learning program] were very helpful for me in a new [leadership] role. I could use those questions to help coach me through strategic thinking … how to contextualise for my own school and how important it is to do that when looking at research."

School leader

"What was most valuable [in the PL] was the coaching process and getting the feedback that you're on the right track. That encouragement and validation was invaluable."

Teacher

bit.ly/embedqure *bit.ly/introqure*

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4. Using research well needs to be modelled

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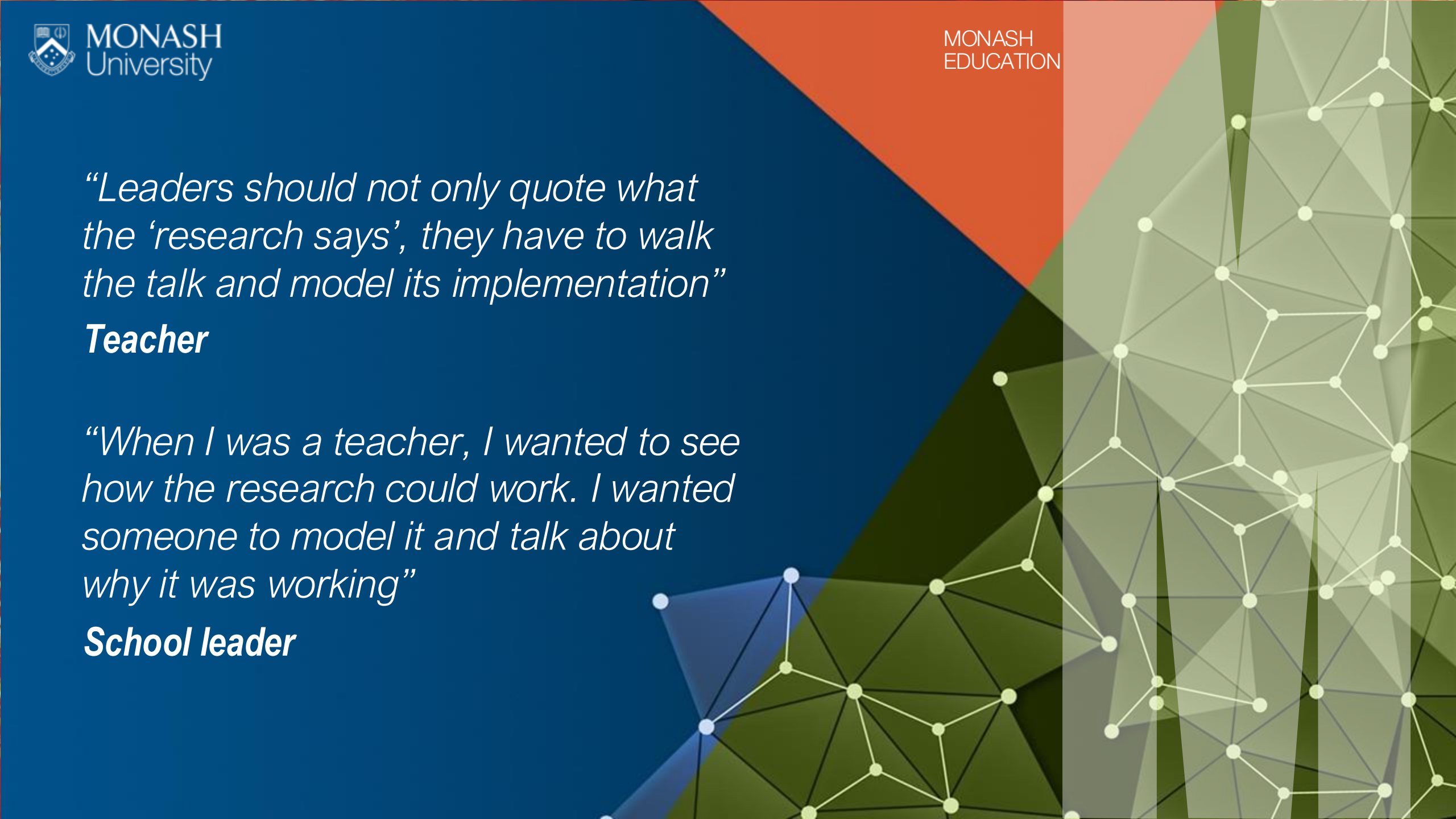
"Leaders should not only quote what the 'research says', they have to walk the talk and model its implementation"

Teacher

"When I was a teacher, I wanted to see how the research could work. I wanted someone to model it and talk about why it was working"

School leader



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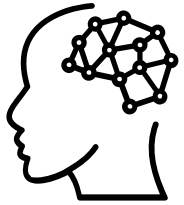
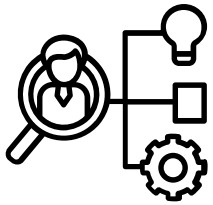
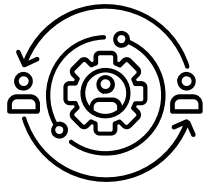
Modelling quality research use yourself by:



cultivating your own research-engaged mindset



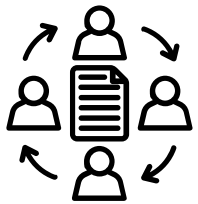
developing your research use skills and practices



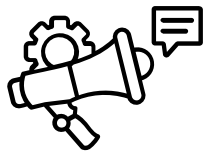
leveraging professional relationships

Demonstrating quality use to others by:

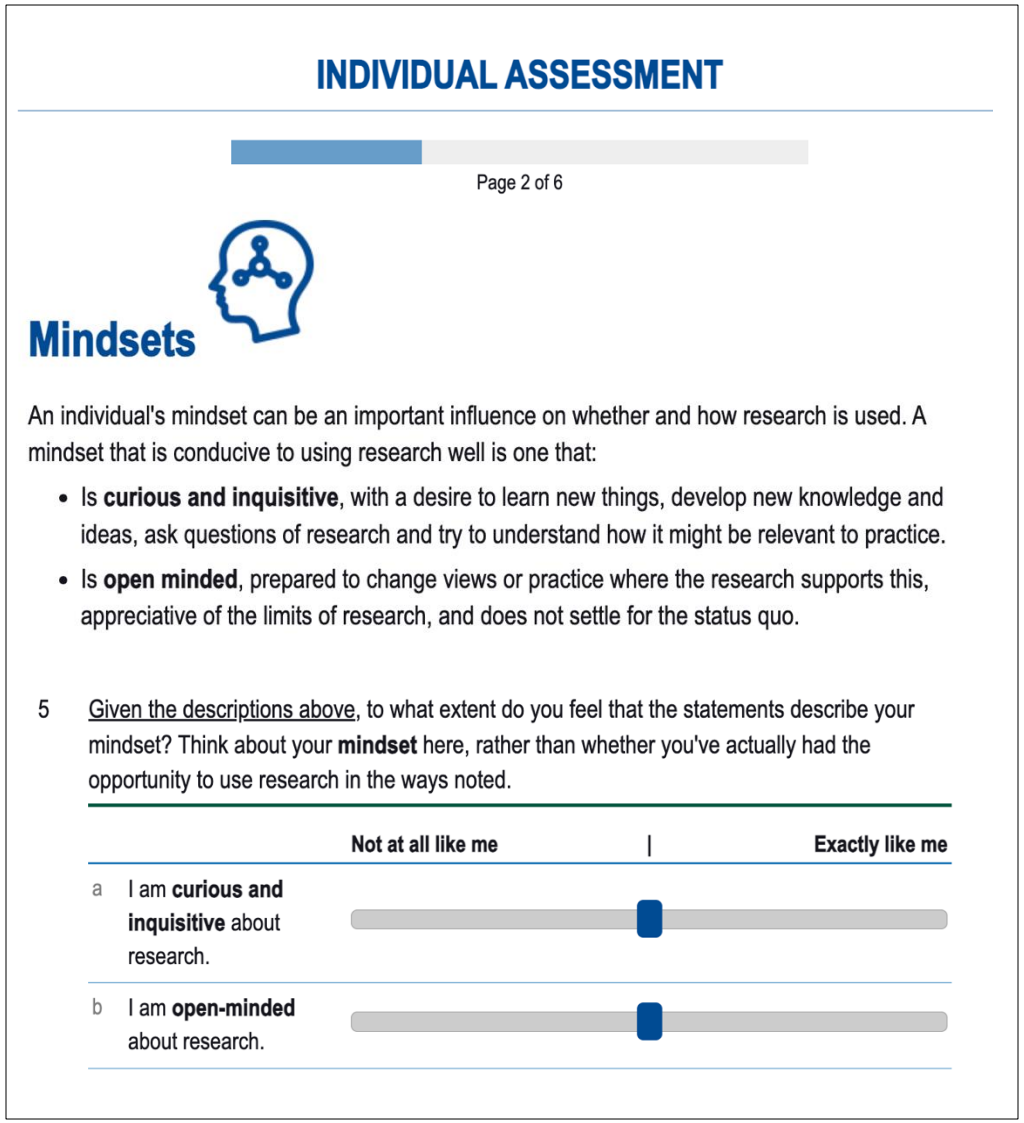
showing others how to use research well



leading a knowledge sharing culture



promoting the value of research use



INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT

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Mindsets

An individual's mindset can be an important influence on whether and how research is used. A mindset that is conducive to using research well is one that:

- Is **curious and inquisitive**, with a desire to learn new things, develop new knowledge and ideas, ask questions of research and try to understand how it might be relevant to practice.
- Is **open minded**, prepared to change views or practice where the research supports this, appreciative of the limits of research, and does not settle for the status quo.

5 Given the descriptions above, to what extent do you feel that the statements describe your mindset? Think about your **mindset** here, rather than whether you've actually had the opportunity to use research in the ways noted.

	Not at all like me | Exactly like me
a	I am **curious and inquisitive** about research.
b	I am **open-minded** about research.

Helpful for assessing current research use practices and improvement priorities.

"Using the QURE Assessment Tool] came at a time when I was going through the motions, and it sparked me to think about what's working or not working and how I can improve."

Teacher

"The QURE Assessment Tool was really fantastic for helping us to identify what we're doing really well as a leadership team, and also what to work on as a leadership team, and to make some real improvement."

School leader

bit.ly/quretool

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5. Using research well needs to be supported

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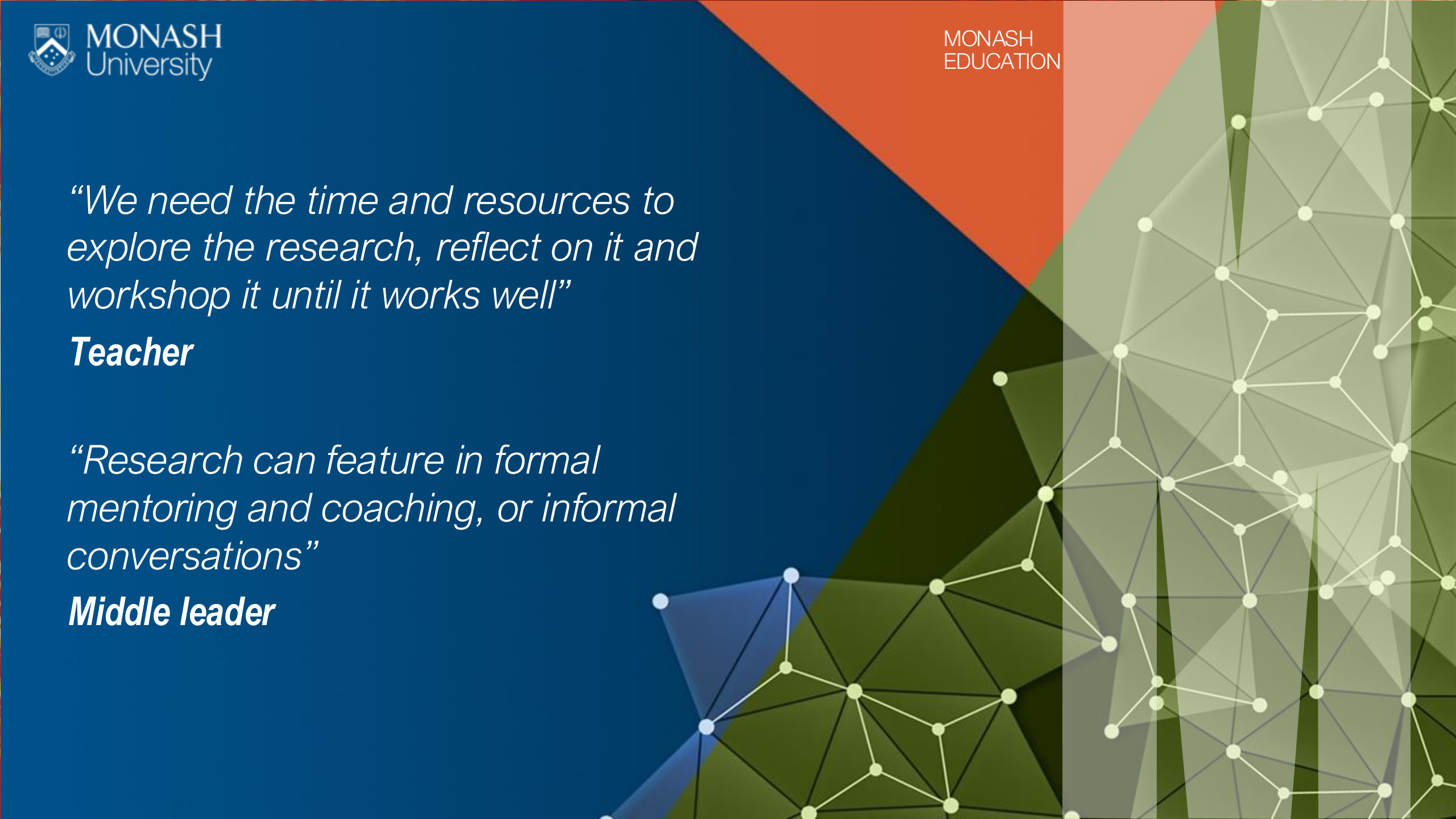
"We need the time and resources to explore the research, reflect on it and workshop it until it works well"

Teacher

"Research can feature in formal mentoring and coaching, or informal conversations"

Middle leader



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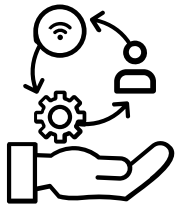
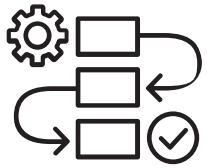
Providing tangible support for research use by:

Embedding research use in meetings



Building a research resource hub



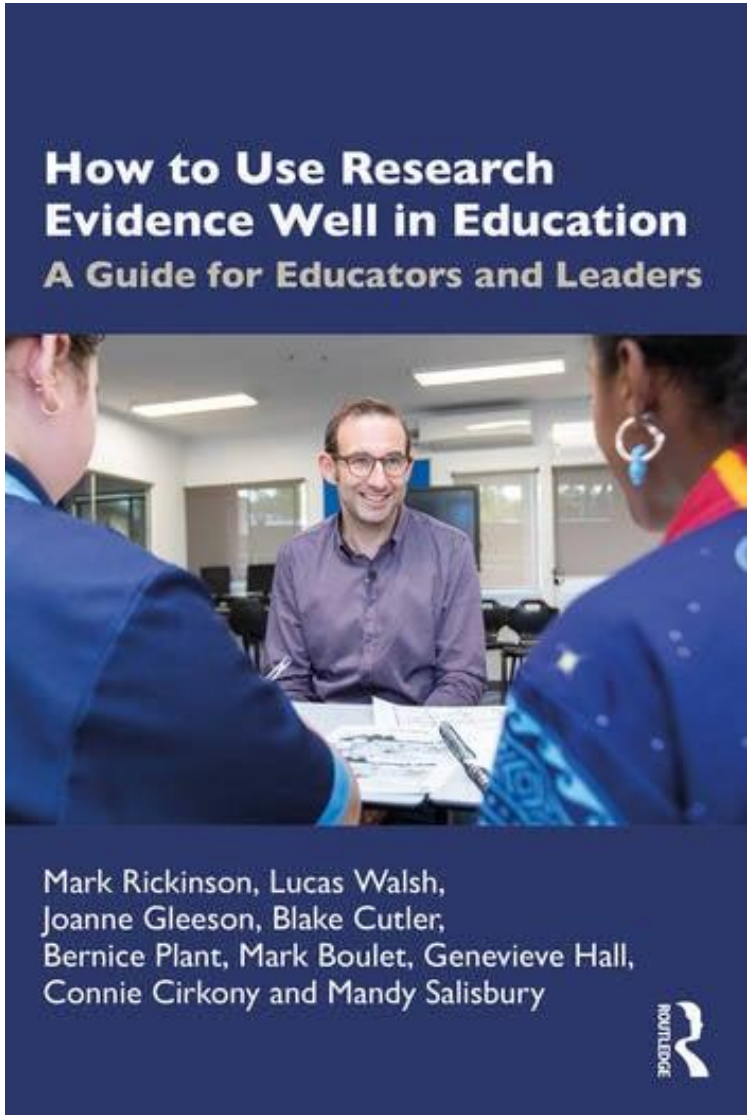
Using existing structures and processes

Building a supportive research use culture by:

encouraging experimentation

Involving others in leading

Celebrating research use successes



Practical how-to guide for all aspects of using research well in practice.

"Unlike many other books on evidence use in education, this highly readable and usable book is not doctrinaire about promoting some kinds of research over others, it is not driven by political agendas or commercial interests, and its authors do not blow their own trumpets. It's a beautifully humble book with depth, integrity, credibility, and practicality. Read it. Use it. You'll love it as much as I did."

International researcher

bit.ly/qureguide

Summary and Discussion Prompts

1. is often a blind spot
Q Book 1

2. is all about practice
Practitioner Case Studies

3. is deeply professional
PL Courses

4. needs to be modelled
QURE Assessment Tool

5. needs to be supported
Q Book 2

In your schools …

Which of the 5 insights could be relevant?

Which of the 5 resources could be helpful?

What next steps would be productive?

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THANK YOU

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bit.ly/monashqlab

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