

How research-engaged are Australian school educators?

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Educators' effective use of research to contribute to school improvement is gaining international attention. However, there remains little in-depth understanding, particularly in Australia, about the ways in which research use can be improved, as well as the extent to which educators are using research evidence and the quality of that use.

The concept of 'research-engagement' has been developed to examine the extent to which educators are motivated to seek and use research in practice. Research-engagement is based on the premise that educators' beliefs and attitudes towards using research in practice are a precursor to quality use. Drawing on Monash Q Project's recent survey findings from nearly 500 Australian educators, this paper presents the rationale for a focus on educators' research-engagement and then explains the combined Rasch and classical test methods that were used to construct a short eight-item measure of research-engagement. It then presents findings from cluster analysis that indicate the extent to which educators are research-engaged, and discusses the meaning of these insights for school and system leaders and the broader agenda of research use in educational practice.

Initial findings suggest that a minority of educators are highly research-engaged (23.2%), with other clusters of educators differentiated by their: frequency of sourcing and consulting research; beliefs in the value of research use; negative beliefs that teaching experience should be prioritised over research; and confidence in analysing and interpreting research for specific contexts.

The paper concludes by situating the research-engagement measure within an intended wider self-assessment framework of quality research use that is currently being developed by the Monash Q Project.

The significance of the paper lies in both the findings and the methodological approaches deployed to examine educators' research-engagement. In particular, it demonstrates how Rasch and cluster analysis methods can be used to validate a short, easy-to-use measure of research-engagement and to generate findings that provide system and school leaders with clear and insightful data about how to increase and improve research use in practice.

