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**Understanding school engagement in, and with research**

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**Objectives/aims**

There are increasing calls within Australia and internationally for schools to be research engaged, jurisdictions to be evidence ecosystems and for researchers to engage with end-users. Efforts to create new evidence and promote ‘what works’, mean schools are regularly approached to participate in academic research projects and encouraged to engage with the findings. But how much is actually known about Australian schools engaging in, and with research?

This presentation will report on a study, the Understanding School Engagement in Research (USER) project that explored this question amongst 67 Melbourne Catholic schools. Schools provided rich feedback about their involvement in academic research projects and their engagement with research evidence.

**Methods**

The initial USER study involved gathering data through an online survey, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. 73 school staff (predominantly school leaders) from 67 Melbourne Catholic schools provided feedback on their experiences of engaging in academic research projects, and with research evidence. Following the empirical study, a literature review was conducted in partnership with Monash University to compare and contrast the USER project findings with the broader international literature on school research engagement. The USER project findings were re-analysed from the perspective of the wider literature, and the wider literature was viewed from the perspective of the USER project. The net result was the identification of five clear themes.

**Main findings**

Many points of connection were found between the USER empirical study and the associated literature on school research engagement, and these were encapsulated in five key themes:

- schools are selective about their research involvement;

- schools are discerning about what the research is on and how it is conducted;

- schools access research in indirect and informal ways;

- schools value research more than they use it; and

- schools need much more than research access.

The five themes will be presented as well as the introduction of a conceptual framework that portrays the interdependent factors required to improve school research engagement.