How can **collaborative** practitioner enquiry and use of research evidence impact on pupil outcomes?

* Middlesbrough’s approach to developing a research network and local evidence base, driven by our context, intended to make informed leadership decisions about ‘what works’ at all levels
‘In a self-improving school system, the focus should be on embedding a culture of professional reflection, enquiry and learning within and across schools . . . a major emphasis of the work of many partnerships is to develop local system leadership by using the expertise of practitioners in their schools’ Gilbert (2017)
Middlesbrough – A ‘research-informed’ Local Authority?

‘An actively enquiry mode of professionalism . . . ’
Godfrey, 2017

Lofthouse, Hall and Wall, (2012)
## Our Context – SWOT Analysis

### Strengths
- Evidence of **knowledge, confidence, leadership** skills of teachers and middle leaders developing across several work streams
- Positive feedback from peer reviews evidence the **trust and accountability within the system**; reviews acting as a mechanism for sharing best practice and addressing areas to develop
- Increased **networking and opportunities for reflective practice**/high numbers of schools engaging with SI mechanisms
- Deployment of SLEs increasing and there is **increased school to school support**

### Weaknesses
- Collection of **quantitative data** as evidence of impact of a wide range of interventions at local, school and practitioner level
- Capacity, particularly of school leaders who are driving SI work forwards

### Opportunities
- Ensure peer reviews lead to **more shadowing and school to school support** opportunities
- Use of staff engaging with NPQs and networks to **increase capacity and sustainability**; networks becoming ‘self-sustaining’
- Build capacity through involving more staff from more schools e.g. harnessing expertise, potential for more outreach from special schools and alternative provision

### Threats
- Lack of **quantitative impact data** to evidence strengths that are emerging through qualitative data
- **Capacity** within schools leading on SI work – how do we continue to deliver on key improvement priorities?
- Increasing capacity (and therefore **sustainability** of the work) if school leaders see capacity within their own schools as a barrier allowing other staff to lead locally
Enquiry Question: generated from SWOT analysis

How can we increase capacity across the partnership to sustain the work that is having an impact?

Additional emerging questions:
- What do we mean by capacity? How can we create it?
- How do we evaluate impact at school and work stream levels as well as holistically?
- What kinds of impact are most valued? Are we considering a range of impacts?
- What kinds of impact are we having at all levels and across all settings?
- Is sustainability only about funding? What other ways of ensuring sustainability are there?
Deciding how the question could be answered: literature review

Systemic/local school improvement - capacity building

‘There must be lateral development – that is, **people at one’s own level giving and receiving help** (in effect, building capacity and shared commitment) across schools’ (Fullan, 2003)

Capacity building is ‘the daily **habit of working together** . . . you need to learn it by doing it and having **mechanisms for getting better at it on purpose**’ (Fullan, 2005)

‘Capacity building invokes developing the collective ability – **dispositions, skills, knowledge and motivation and resources** – to **act together** to bring about positive change’ (Fullan, 2005)
Deciding how the question could be answered:

**literature review**

**Systemic/local school improvement/school improvement networks**


Teacher research can increase agency and autonomy, be a powerful form of professional development and collaboration and enhances collaboration; should not be viewed only as a means of evidencing impact - Godfrey (2017), Greany (2018)

Consider existing evidence combined with practitioner research. Research as a cultural norm underpinning a learning culture - Brown and Greany (2018)

Building capacity through collaboration, learning from others, harnessing the expertise of practitioners and using research and enquiry to provide opportunities for improving practice - Chapman and Hadfield (2010), Rincon-Gallardo and Fullan (2016)

Less research available on action research *network* success – Zornes et al (2016)
Practitioner enquiry: a ‘model of active teacher engagement in their own learning through which organisational improvement may be effected’ Lofthouse (2014)

‘The collaborative group can ensure that the teacher’s activities are channelled through a disciplined, robust and shared enquiry process’

Lofthouse, Hall and Wall (2012)

Refined research question:
How can practitioner enquiry and the use of research impact on collective capacity to improve pupil outcomes in a local school improvement network?

Lofthouse, Hall and Wall, (2012)
Using a range of tools to make changes – the intervention

March to July 2019
Research Support Partnership with Evidence Based Education (EBE) - training and support for practitioners to become Research Leads (RLs)

September 2019 – July 2020
Continued support from EBE to create a research network which allows RLs to collaborate in carrying out research and enquiry to collectively evaluate and improve practice; building a local evidence base

Cohort
- 5 LA Officers (EYFS, literacy, primary, pastoral)
- 7 Primary practitioners
- 2 Secondary practitioners
- 2 Special school practitioners
- 1 Alternative provision practitioner

Varied subjects, roles, experience, geographical spread, Ofsted judgements
Using a range of tools to make changes – the intervention

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| **Day One** | ➢ What is research? How does it differ from other activities?  
➢ The role of the Research Lead  
➢ Identifying school priorities  
➢ Asking good questions well |
| **Day Two** | ➢ The qualities of good research  
➢ Reviewing the evidence in your area  
➢ The EEF Toolkits and other summary resources |
| **Day Three** | ➢ Designing evidence-based interventions  
➢ Implementation planning  
➢ Support factors |
| **Day Four** | ➢ Measurement  
➢ Impact evaluation design  
➢ Process evaluation design  
➢ Analysis tools |

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Using a range of tools to make changes – the intervention

The aim of the RSP:

The normalised practice of integrating the best available research evidence into the craftwork of education

‘normalised’: robust, appropriate evidence is incorporated as a decision-making habit at all levels of education;

‘integrating’: the use of research evidence is systematic and pervasive; it’s not a bolt-on;

‘best available evidence’: the best in terms of relevance and validity.
Using a range of tools to make changes – the intervention

The role of the Research Lead in school:
• Help colleagues identify school priorities using internal data and professional judgement
• Find and communicate external research evidence that can be used by decision-makers to inform choices and actions
• Support colleagues to design interventions and approaches based on robust research evidence
• Support colleagues to use robust implementation strategies
• Guide colleagues to evaluate the impact of the interventions and approaches they design
• Lead the dissemination of new knowledge, and support others to use it in context

The role of the Research Lead in the network:
• As above including collaborating to implement interventions across settings
• To make decisions about direction of future research collaboration based on evidence

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Enabling teachers to influence practice development in their own settings, as well as developing a research network which can be used to disseminate and upscale research findings, ultimately leading to a cumulative evidence base driven by the local context which can be used to make informed leadership decisions about ‘what works’ in Middlesbrough at all levels.

Based on Lofthouse, Hall and Wall, (2012)
Using a range of tools to collect data – research design

Revised research question:
How can practitioner enquiry and the use of research impact on collective capacity to improve pupil outcomes in a local school improvement network?

Teacher self-assessments* (before and after)
Observation of RSP programme
Interviews – 4 x case studies
Practitioners’ documentation

‘Capacity building invokes developing the collective ability – dispositions, skills, knowledge and motivation and resources – to act together to bring about positive change’ (Fullan, 2005)

Analysing and evaluating the data - what are we finding?

**RSP Programme:**
- Challenged participants’ perceptions of how research informed they are and how ‘evidence-based’ their settings are;
- Developed participants’ ability to engage critically with existing research;
- Improved participants’ use of EEF Toolkit, Chartered College etc.;
- Enabled participants to refine research questions to an appropriate size;
- Participants able to design robust evidence based interventions and understand concepts such as bias, reliability;
- Allowed for professional support and challenge;
- Changed perceptions of each other’s settings/phases and increased understanding;
- Highlighted the similarities between settings/phases but allowed for sharing of best practice that could be built upon;
- Different relationship between LA and school colleagues – authentic collaboration.
Analysing and evaluating the data - what are we finding?

In settings:
- Better engagement with existing research (contacting authors of papers and renowned experts);
- Sharing of research question with colleagues and SLT (school improvement priorities);
- A more structured approach to carrying out enquiries; more confidence that impact can be measured and informed decisions made;
- Highly reflective practice (self and colleagues);
- Clear implementation plans and intended outcomes securing senior leader buy-in;
- Some participants’ influencing practice in own subject or phase; some whole school; influencing whole school CPD model; some increase of teacher agency (or agency as a barrier)
- Meaningful collaboration between LA officers and practitioners;
- Process evaluation: participants much more aware of reflecting on process as well as outcomes;
- Varied approach and commitment to use of research across settings.
Analysing and evaluating the data - what are we finding?

Network:
- Opportunities for sharing practice and identifying opportunities for collaborative interventions;
- Design of a research portal/platform – co-constructed with colleagues;
- Developing LA understanding of practice across settings and implementation of a different collaborative model;
- Benefits of collaborative working across LA and diverse settings clear to participants and senior leaders (imperative to move forwards);
- Barriers identified to network success: time, structure, clear aims - ‘working towards’ rather than ‘talking shop’ approach;
- Benefits of evaluating impacts of local practice ‘what works for Middlesbrough’.
Reflecting on the outcomes - what next?

July 2019
Programme day 5:
- Sharing findings
- Embedding and disseminating evidence
- Next steps planning for scaled-up research
- Work with LA/senior leaders to identify key priorities for Middlesbrough, ascertain common choices they face in schools, and to begin to explore foci for some ‘aggregated micro trials’ (testing out a single intervention in multiple contexts)

Autumn of 2019 – EBE/Rob Coe day with the RSP group and senior leaders. Securing commitment. Setting up aggregated micro trials to run over a relatively short period (one – two terms), building on discussions in July

September 2019 – July 2020
Continued support from EBE/LA to facilitate a research network which allows RLs to collaborate in carrying out research and enquiry to collectively evaluate and improve practice; building a local evidence base
References/Further reading

- Fullan, M. and Munby, S. (2016) *How leading from the middle has the power to transform education systems.* Education Development Trust