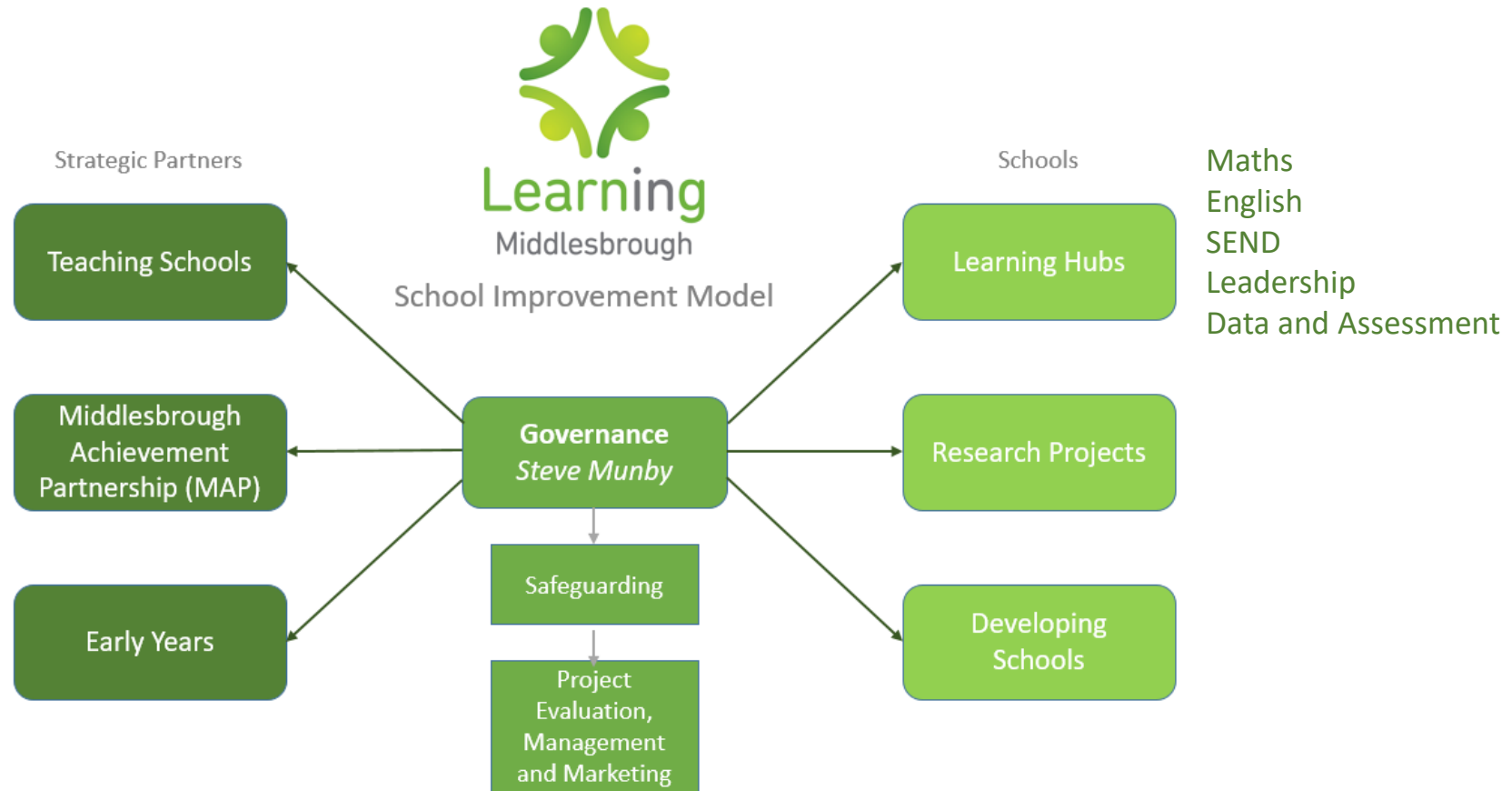# How can *collaborative* practitioner enquiry and use of research evidence impact on pupil outcomes?
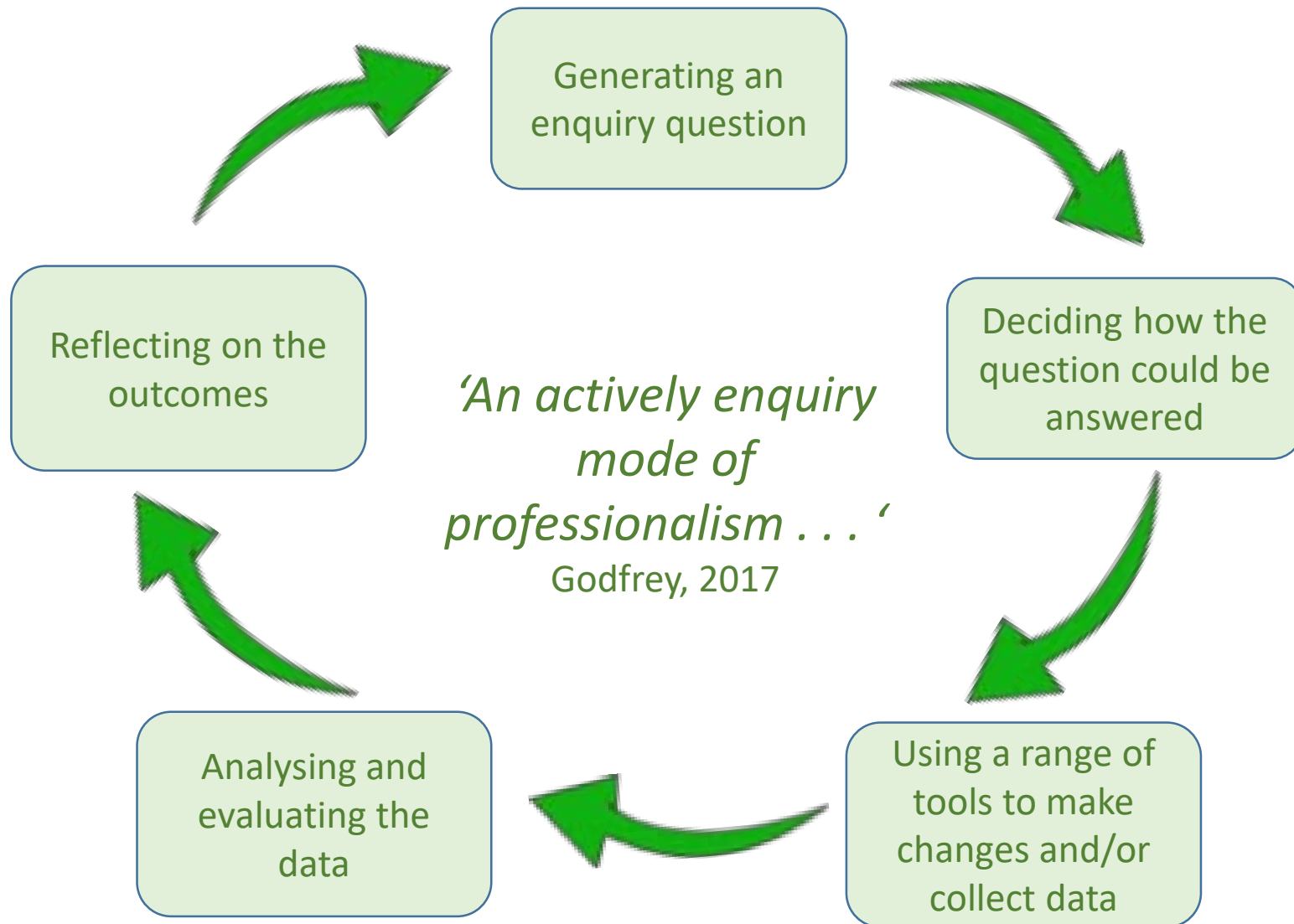
Middlesbrough's approach to developing a research network and local evidence base, driven by our context, intended to make informed leadership decisions about 'what works' at all levels

Our Context – A Local School Improvement Partnership

'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?

Generating an enquiry question

Deciding how the question could be answered

Using a range of tools to make changes and/or collect data

Analysing and evaluating the data

Reflecting on the outcomes

'An actively enquiry mode of professionalism . . . '
Godfrey, 2017

Lofthouse, Hall and Wall, (2012)

Our Context – SWOT Analysis

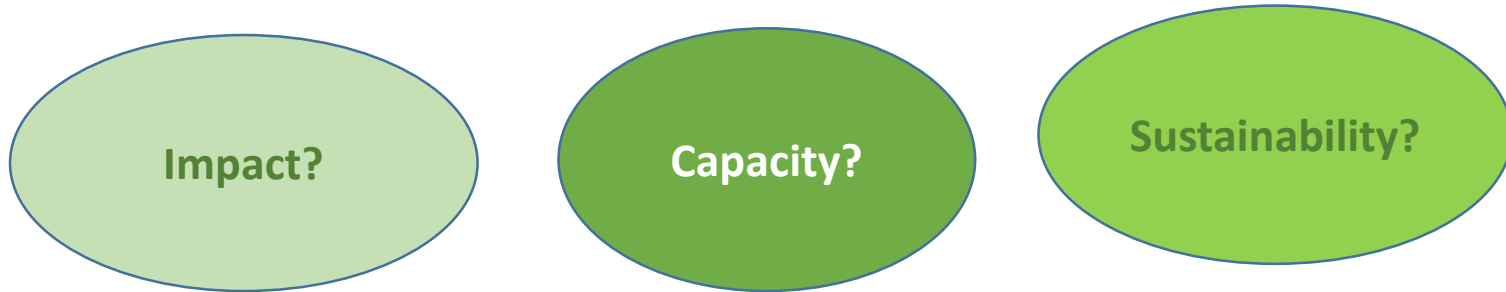| Strengths	Weaknesses
➢ Evidence of **knowledge, confidence, leadership** skills of teachers and middle leaders developing across several work streams ➢ Positive feedback from peer reviews evidence the **trust and accountability within the system**; reviews acting as a mechanism for sharing best practice 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**	➢ 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	**Threats**
➢ 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	➢ 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

Impact?

Capacity?

Sustainability?

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

Research, reflection and collaboration can contribute to capacity building in a locally led school improvement partnership or network – Bryant et al (2016) Fullan and Munby (2016), Gilbert (2012, 2017)

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)
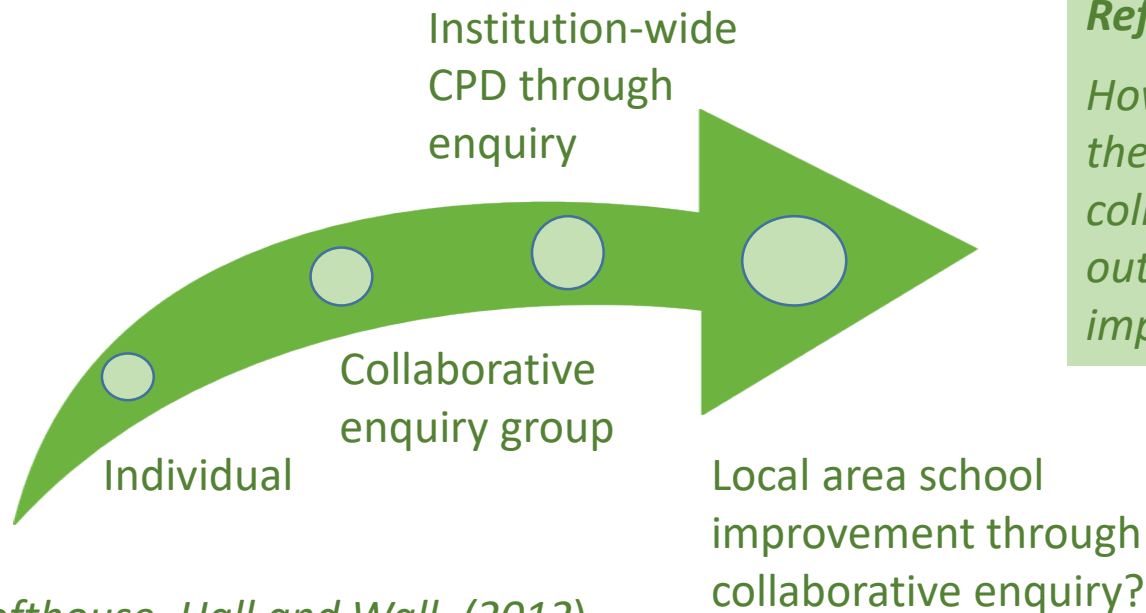
Less research available on action research *network* success – Zornes et al (2016)

Deciding how the question could be answered – literature review

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)

Institution-wide CPD through enquiry

Collaborative enquiry group

Individual

Local area school improvement through collaborative enquiry?

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

Impact?

Capacity?

Sustainability?

Using a range of tools to make changes – the intervention

	AIMS
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

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 craft-work 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
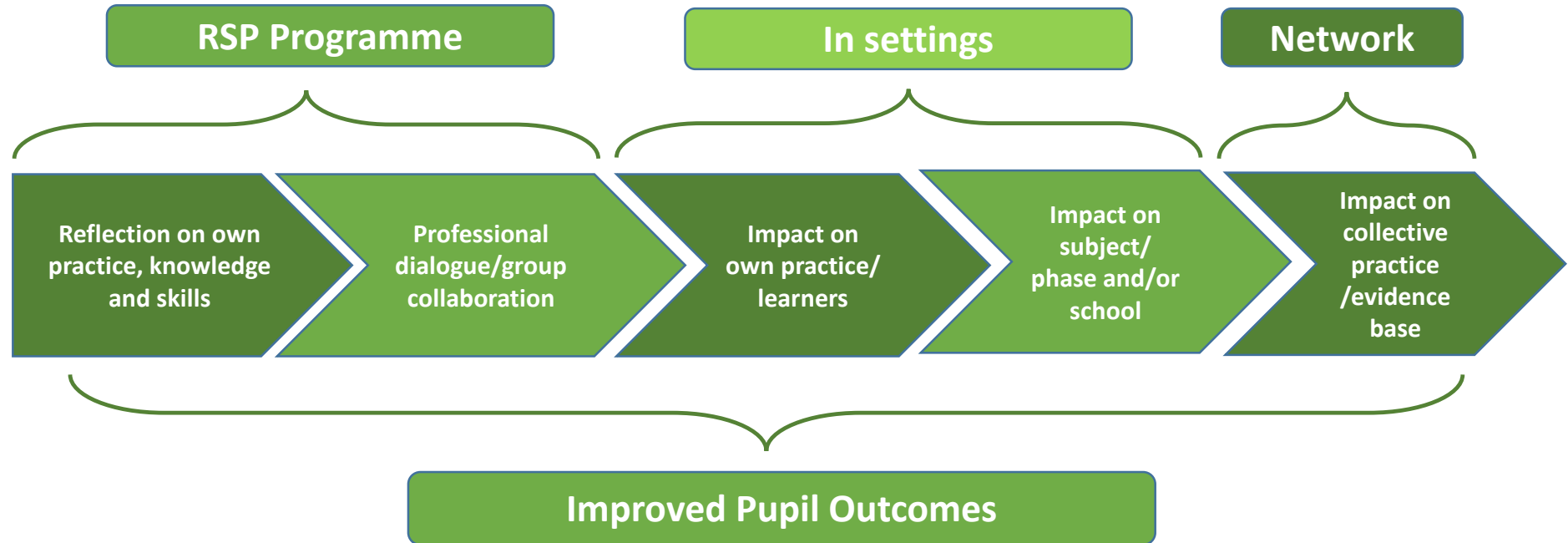
The role of the Research Lead in school:

- 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

The Intervention – Intended Impacts

RSP Programme

In settings

Network

| Reflection on own practice, knowledge and skills | Professional dialogue/group collaboration | Impact on own practice/ learners | Impact on subject/ phase and/or school | Impact on collective practice /evidence base |

Improved Pupil Outcomes

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

Learning
Middlesbrough

> ***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?*

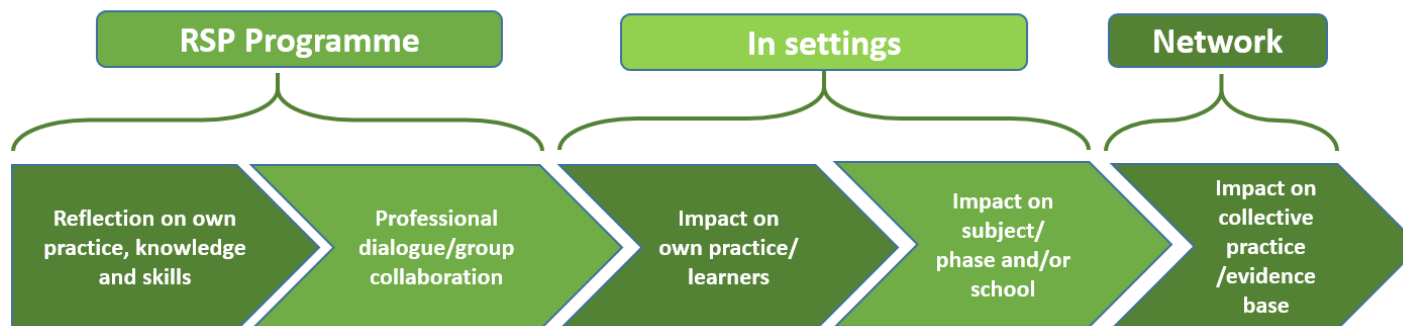| Teacher self-assessments* (before and after) | Observation of RSP programme | Interviews – 4 x case studies | Practitioners' documentation |

*'Capacity building invokes developing the collective ability – **dispositions, skills, knowledge and motivation and resources – to act together** to bring about positive change' (Fullan, 2005)*
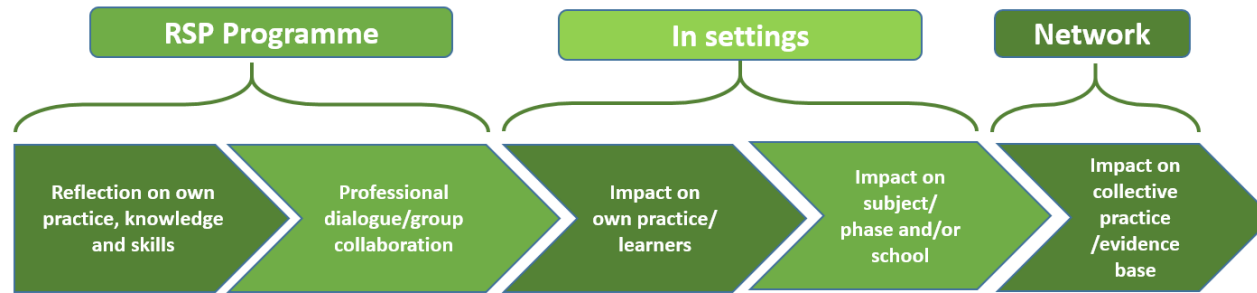
Analysing and evaluating the data - what are we finding?

RSP Programme		In settings		Network
Reflection on own practice, knowledge and skills	Professional dialogue/group collaboration	Impact on own practice/ learners	Impact on subject/ phase and/or school	Impact on collective practice /evidence base

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.

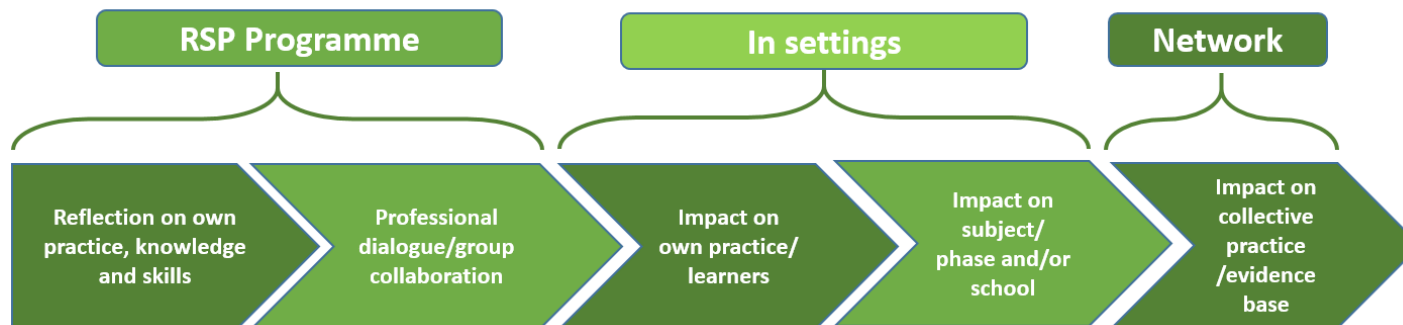# Analysing and evaluating the data - what are we finding?

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

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➢ Gilbert, C. (2017) *Optimism of the will: the development of local area-based education partnerships.* London: London Centre for Leadership in Learning

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➢ Kemmis, S. (1993) Chapter 12: Action Research in Hammersley, M. (Ed.) (1993) *Educational Research: Current Issues,* The Open University, Paul Chapman Publishing, London

➢ Lofthouse, R. (2014) Engaging in educational research and development through teacher practitioner enquiry: a pragmatic or naïve approach? *Education Today,* Vol. 64, No. 4, pp. 13-19

➢ Lofthouse, R., Hall, E. and Wall, K. (2012) Practitioner Enquiry in Briggs, A., Coleman, M., Morrison, M. (Eds) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*, London: Sage pp. 170-187