Working together with teachers and senior leaders in a teacher-led professional development through a model of action research, collaboration, and facilitation.

▶ Research question: what are the steps, issues, and challenges involved in the process of collaboration and facilitation of action research?

SHIFT Reviewers' comments

- An interesting study that depicts action research clearly and identified clear issues to be considered.

- Amazing and well written with all the necessary data and information to back it up. The attached figure explains the hard work put in this proposal.

Background

- A pedagogical shift to classroom-based research may require teachers in England to engage in action research to improve their practices (Cordingley, 2013). At the heart of this, is the need for collaboration between experts from university, teachers, and senior leaders in facilitating the process of action research, and this has been emphasised by the DFE's (2016) standard for teachers' professional development. Action research will advance teachers' pedagogy (Kemmis, 2010), and Bleicher (2014) consider this professional learning as an active process as it may change their knowledge bases, beliefs, and practices. It provides the teacher with the agency to accentuate their development in a collaborative environment fostering professional relationships with experts from the university (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith 2015) towards improving learning and school improvement.

Facilitation

- The university team was composed of a Professor of Education (over twenty years' experience working alongside teachers on action research), a research fellow (with expertise in research methodologies and teacher development), and four faculty members who are experts in teacher education, professional development, and educational research. The project was carried out for 4 years involving 150 early years, primary and secondary school teachers from London and Kent. The project included at least six-afternoon sessions (one academic year with one session every five to seven weeks) guiding the teachers through the steps of action research.

Facilitation continue:

▶ The study is based on the steps involved in action research (McNiff & Whitehead 2005; Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014) such as "reflect, plan, act, observe and reflect". The articulation between these steps of the action research cycle and the tasks involved in the facilitation and collaboration constituted the main structure of our model. The sessions involved an intensive work of collaboration among the participants and between the participants and the facilitation team as Mitton-Kukner (2016) considers this type of interaction as a major source for reflection about practice.

Context:
Research in schools

▶ In England, as the result of a whole-system reform and structural change (DfE 2010), Teaching School Alliances and Multi-academy Trusts (stakeholders of this so called "*school-led* system") have started promoting the development of teacher-led research in schools.

▶ Official documents and political discourse emphasize the role of research performed with/ by teachers as a way to improve the quality of teaching (BERA 2014, DfE 2014, NCTL 2015)

▶ Teachers' work contracts are starting to include the demand for the development of action-research (NTR 2011)

References:
_____

BERA (2014) *Research and the Teaching Profession*. British Educational Research Association.
    Available at: http://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/BERA-RSA-Research-Teaching-Profession-FULL-REPORT-for-web.pdf\
Department for Education (2014) *Improving the quality of teaching and leadership* (Policy issue – updated, 2nd September 2014).
European Union (2010) *Teachers' Professional Development: Europe in International Comparison. An Analysis of Teachers' Professional Development Based on the
    OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Union.
National College for Teaching & Leadership (2015) *What makes great pedagogy and great professional development: final report*.
    Available at: *http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22157/1/What_makes_great_pedagogy_and_great_professional_development_final_report.pdf*
National Teacher Research Panel [NTRP] (2011) *Habitats for teacher research: teacher perspectives on research as a sustainable environment for CPD*. [Online]. Coventry: Centre for
Use of Research and Evidence in Education [CUREE].
    Available at: http://www.curee.co.uk/files/publication/1313750504/NTRP%20survey%20report%20FINAL_0.pdf

Action research – concept throughout time
'Educational ideal'? School improvement agenda?

Leaders' views on the values of school-based research (Bryan and Burstow 2016):
'As far back as 1929 Dewey was considering the relationship between teachers and education research'(p.1)
*'**Stenhouse's (1981)** notion of the **teacher as researcher** and **Elliott's (1991)** belief that action research could be a means by which to achieve the **'educational ideal'** position the teacher at the heart of the decision-making process'*(p.2)

*'The **school improvement agenda** arguably altered the gaze of research from that which was determined by the teacher, or teachers, to one that emerges from, and is framed by, school improvement needs. **Elliott's 'educational ideal' takes on a new shape when regarded through a school improvement lens'***(p.3)

References:

Bryan, H. and Burstow, B. (2016) Leaders' views on the values of school-based research: contemporary themes and issues. *Professional Development in Education*, 1-17.

Action research in schools: Approaches

Approaches to action research portrayed by Carr and Kemmis (1986, p.202-204):

- *Technical Action Research (TAR):* aims to achieve greater efficiency or effectiveness and takes an instrumental view with externally formulated questions and issues with the teachers being co-opted into the research process.

- *Practical Action Research (PAR):* aims to develop professional knowledge and is not externally imposed, it goes beyond a purely technical approach and involves cooperative relationships between practitioners and external facilitators.

- *Emancipatory Action Research (EAR):* aims to emancipate participants from 'tradition, precedent, habit, coercion or self-deception' with the practitioner group itself taking 'responsibility for its own emancipation from the dictates of irrationality, injustice, alienation and unfulfillment.

Action research in schools:
Aims

Carr and Kemmis (1986) describe action research as being about:

- the improvement of practice;
- the improvement of the understanding of practice;
- the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place.

References:
_____

Carr, F. & Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research.* Lewes: Falmer Press

Our project – Action Research facilitation:
Aims

Since 2015 a group of School Alliances/academies has been offering opportunities for schools to build teacher-led systematic research into everyday practice with the collaboration with the U. Greenwich

Locus: Regular meetings (6-8 meetings a year– 90 minutes)
Duration: one academic year
Nature of the sessions: open/ interactive using a combination of inputs from practice and theory.
Participants: primary and secondary school teachers and research team - U. Greenwich.

Our project – Action Research facilitation

Participant teachers' role:

- Identify a specific aspect of their practice they would like to improve.

- Engage in cycles of action research

- Talk to colleagues on the project, observe other teachers teaching, read related professional/academic articles and collect appropriate data to inform the action they undertake in class to affect change

- Evaluate their professional actions with colleagues and the University team

- Write up their work for 30 credits at MA Level (optional)

- Have the opportunity to publish their findings in professional journals supported by University tutors

- Have the opportunity to present their work at national conferences

Our project – Action Research facilitation
Our role:

- ▶ Facilitate research – but not lead
- ▶ Help teachers to design projects
- ▶ Provide support about Ethical issues
- ▶ Support in designing data collection tools and analysis
- ▶ Provide research literature to inform action
- ▶ Provide opportunities for groups of teacher to peer review each other's work
- ▶ Promote the dissemination through publication and conference attendance
- ▶ Mediate the process of MA accreditation (optional)

Our project – Action Research facilitation

Conceptual framework:

▶ **Action research cycle:** 'reflect–plan–act–observe' (Kemmis, and McTaggart, 1988, Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014).

▶ **'Model of conceptualising collaborative action research'** designed by Lofthouse et al (2016) which defines nature and implications of the zones of activity between all participants

☐ **'Zone of Collaborative activity'** ('during collaboration' - specific period and set of actions when both partners set aside time to undertake a joint enterprise based on strong task and team support characterised by shared labour for a common purpose)

☐ **'Zones of Contributory activity'** (each partner takes on activities that make a direct contribution to, or are a direct response to, the collaborative activity but which draw on their individual skills or designated roles)

☐ **'Zones of Proximal Activity'** (occurring 'before collaboration' and 'after collaboration' and referring to the individual labour of each partner related to the themes of collaboration – practical knowledge bases which are both drawn upon and fed by the collaborative activity. The proximal activity happening after the collaboration may be expanded/ influenced by the outcomes of the collaboration).

▶ **'Pedagogy of Facilitation of teacher inquiry'** proposed by Poekert (2011) which comprises six stages: Introducing, Wondering, Experimenting, Evaluating, Learning, and Sharing

MODEL OF COLLABORATION/ FACILITATION

	PARTICIPANTS	FACILITATORS	
BEFORE COLLABORATION	*'Zones of Proximal Activity'*[1]		**Training: Launch session** *Embracing an action research approach and methodology*
	Tacit/ practice knowledge Classroom experience Local/ insider knowledge Research experience (if any)	Knowledge about educational research Knowledge and experience about research skills	

Support:

Research cycle[1]	Tasks	PARTICIPANTS — *'Zone of Contributory Activity'*[2]	*'Zone of Collaborative activity'*[2]	FACILITATORS	Sessions	Online	Contact
Reflect	Definition of the field of action	Motivations Concerns	Reflection Discussion Peer review	Research focus Questioning	**Research Log** *Area of interest*	**Resources** AR cycle Literature repository VLE	Support via email
Plan	Planning the action	Criticality		Research skills	*Data to inform the action*	Looking for information Reading critically	1:1 Tutorial
Act	Action	Power relations		Ethical Awareness	*Design of the action*	Ethical Guidelines	Progress report (check-in)
Observe	Evaluation of the action	Professional Judgement Peer review		Links theory-practice	*Data to evaluate the action*	Data collection tools Data analysis	
Reflect	Reflection (Re) planning	Transformation		Sustained development	*Report framework*	Examples of reports	Report writing support

	'Zones of Proximal Activity'[2]		
AFTER COLLABORATION	Publication/ presentation Postgraduation	Publication/ presentation	

DURING COLLABORATION

[1] McNiff and Whitehead (2005) and Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014)
[2] Lofthouse et al (2016)

Methodology

The research study conducted alongside the facilitation process followed a case study approach. Data was collected through interviews, reports, evaluation surveys and field notes from the facilitation team meetings. The varied sources of data helped to further the course of triangulation (Robson, 2011).

Results

We identified 5 steps of development of teacher-led action research and highlighted the issues and challenges to be considered in each step:

► ***Defining the field of action:*** involved participants reflecting about their practice, discussing their ideas with other participants and facilitators, and using their own professional knowledge and classroom practice to identify a specific area of interest they want to address.

Issues to be considered: addressing motivations and concerns, finding a research focus, and questioning. We argue that schools need to define clear criteria to regulate the recruitment of participants to avoid co-opted participation and 'compelled inclusion' (Lambirth & Cabral, 2017, p. 8).

Results

▶ ***Planning the action:*** participants are encouraged to read selected literature in their field, challenge each other's ideas, and work as peers. The facilitators play a key role in developing criticality by promoting moments of reporting, discussing the design of the studies, reflection, and ethics

Issues to be considered: time, research skills, and criticality. To develop this step of the action research cycle, participants received dedicated support at the level of research skills (Ross & Bruce 2012). Through collaboration, teachers can find their own meanings by engaging with research evidence critically and reflecting to gain new perspectives and change their practice (Procter, 2015).

Results

▶ **Action:** involved teachers in reflecting and developing their context-awareness with the help of the teachers from their school, other schools, and facilitators. Facilitators provide prompts for discussion about ethics and power relations based on Ethical Guidelines (Research log) (BERA 2011) and teachers prepare the collection and analysis of evaluation data about the action (Research log: Data to evaluate the action). Participants implement the action and during that period received specific support via email and individual tutorials based on the use of Progress Reports (individual check-ins).

Issues to be considered: power relations and ethical awareness. Mockler (2014) recommends that we discuss the issues of informed consent; 'voice' and ownership; transparency and negotiation; confidentiality, anonymity, and trust; and deliberative action in the context of both practitioner inquiry and classroom practice.

Results

▶ **Evaluation of the action:** teachers are invited to discuss their experiences and issues associated with the implementation of the action – 'evaluating' (Poekert 2011, p. 24) based on the data collected to evaluate it. Facilitators promote moments of questioning and facilitate discussions about the differences between practice and theory.

Issues to be considered: professional judgment, peer review, and links between theory and practice. The achievement of agency should emanate from the 'complex interplay of individual capacity and collective cultures and structures' (Biesta et al. 2017, p. 52).

Results

▶ **Reflection and (Re)planning:** participants and facilitators are involved in group reflections and discussions based on a set of transformation stimuli involving the confirmation or change of perspectives and innovation and opportunities for learning and sustained development. These group reflections and discussions about the results of the action are the starting point for the development of the topics to be included in the final report (Research log: Report framework). To support this step, participants receive the report framework based on guiding questions for each section and are given access to examples of reports.

Issues to be considered: Involves sharing good practices and collaborating with other participants as co-researchers. It places teachers in position to review their learning in the context of researchers improving their classroom practices, however, can be difficult due to lack of knowledge in research. Hence, the support given, and opportunity provided for them to disseminate outcome by moving from a transmission model to a transformative model of professional learning (Kennedy 2007).

Conclusion

▶ Teachers learn from their interactions with each other and from the combination of individual knowledge (Kennedy, 2007) in addition to support from facilitators. We have developed and published an innovative model of action research, collaboration, and facilitation with the participants (Lambirth et al., 2019). This model (Fig 1) helped us theorise practice and construct knowledge based on our experience driven by the interpretation of the contexts we worked in and, therefore, this is a model contextualised by nature. The model can be used by other facilitators, senior leaders, and teachers planning to engage in or review action research projects in collaborative environments.

TasR
TEACHERS AS RESEARCHERS

School of Education, FEHHS.

theoria poiesis praxis

FACILITATING TEACHER-LED ENQUIRY IN SCHOOLS

THE NEED

Official documents and political discourse emphasize the role of enquiry performed with/ by teachers to iimprove the quality of teaching:

According to the BERA/RSA (2014: '*Research and the Teaching Profession*') the most effective forms of professional development involve:

• the use of specialist advisors and external experts;
• collaborative enquiry and structured peer support;
• the opportunity to explore why things do and don't 'work';
• the exploration and challenging of teachers own beliefs and assumptions.

However, '*enquiry-orientated learning is not a quick-fix but needs to be a sustained over time to ensure that learning (for both teachers and pupils) actually takes place*' (p.26).

References:
BERA/RSA (2014) Research and the Teaching Profession. British Educational Research Association/RSA. Available at: http://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/BERA-RSA-Research-Teaching-Profession-FULL-REPORT-for-web.pdf

OUR ANSWER – TasR Hubs

Schools commission our CPD programme (September- July):

AIM: inspire teachers to investigate their practice in ways which would have long-term, sustainable outcomes.
The emphasis is put on collaboration and peer review with teachers being encouraged to tailor their actions to the singularities of the contexts of their practice and the specific needs observed.
MECHANISM: Support is provided by experienced researchers in the following ways:
Six 90 minute twilight meetings and extra individual support
Access to selected literature/ information to support the study
Training in relevant data collection techniques (including ethics)
Support with the analysis of data
Support with planning, action, evaluation and reflection - discussion and interaction
Support with the dissemination and publication of results
MEETING SCHEDULE:
Session 1: Engaging in teacher-led enquiry (aims, roles and expected outcomes) and selecting the focus
Session 2: Interrogating the literature, seeking information and ethics
Session 3: Planning and implementing an action plan
Session 4: Monitoring the plan and collecting data
Session 5: Evaluating, reflecting and learning from the experience
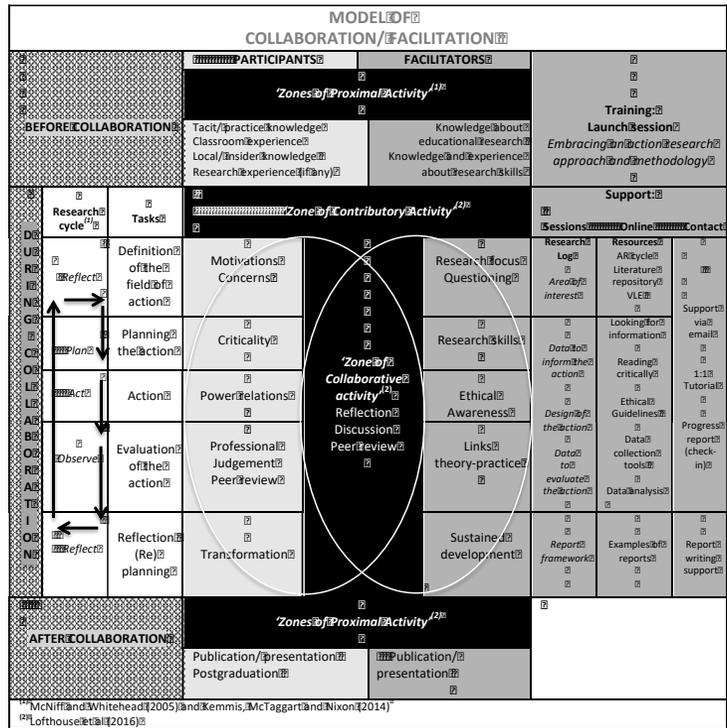**Session 6:** Planning dissemination

OUR RESEARCH - TasR – Research Project (since 2014)

RESEARCH QUESTION: what are the steps, issues, and challenges involved in the process of collaboration and facilitation of action research? **Participants:** teachers – early years, primary and secondary.
Data collection: interviews, field notes/observations, teachers' reports and evaluation surveys

OUR FINDINGS

MODEL OF COLLABORATION/ FACILITATION

		PARTICIPANTS	FACILITATORS	Training: Launch session
BEFORE COLLABORATION		'*Zones of Proximal Activity*'[1]		
		Tacit/ practice knowledge Classroom experience Local/ insider knowledge Research experience (if any)	Knowledge about educational research Knowledge and experience about research skills	*Embracing an action research approach and methodology*

DURING COLLABORATION	Research cycle[1]	Tasks	'*Zone of Contributory Activity*'[2]		'*Zone of Collaborative activity*'[2] Reflection Discussion Peer review		Support:		
							Sessions	Online	Contact
	Reflect	Definition of the field of action	Motivations Concerns			Research focus Questioning	Research Log *Area of interest*	Resources AR cycle Literature repository VLE	Support via email
	Plan	Planning the action	Criticality			Research skills	*Data to inform the action*	Looking for information Reading critically	1:1 Tutorial
	Act	Action	Power relations			Ethical Awareness	*Design of the action*	Ethical Guidelines Data collection tools	Progress report (check-in)
	Observe	Evaluation of the action	Professional Judgement Peer review			Links theory-practice	*Data to evaluate the action*	Data analysis	
	Reflect	Reflection (Re) planning	Transformation			Sustained development	*Report framework*	Examples of reports	Report writing support

AFTER COLLABORATION		'*Zones of Proximal Activity*'[2]		
		Publication/ presentation Postgraduation	Publication/ presentation	

[1] McNiff and Whitehead (2005) and Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014)
[2] Lofthouse et al (2016)

OUR IMPACT

Teacher's professional development:
'*A rewarding experience that has had a significant impact on my teaching and understanding of pupils*' (Evaluation Survey)
'*Transformed teaching practice and methods, allowed reflection*' (Report)
'*The journey has been a transformative one, both within me and my pupils*' (Report)

Children's learning/ attainment:
'*The 'buzz' in my classroom was unmistakable; children were choosing to read for pleasure*' (Report)
'*Grades have increased*' (Field notes)

Schools' needs and targets:
'*It has had a tremendous impact on classroom practice in all the schools involved*' (Headteacher's comment)
'*It seems to be one of the most effective ways to plug a gap or address a need, because you are constantly directly involved with the target market*' (Evaluation Survey)

Teachers' aspirations:
'*The project exceeded my expectations because it actually led me on to further Masters study*' (Evaluation Survey)
'*It has allowed me to realise the need to incorporate regular research into teaching practice*'