Building Research and Evidence Informed School Improvement Capacity in GWE

Context

During the 2016- 2017 academic year CUREE designed, launched and supported a programme aimed at developing self sustaining capacity for research and evidence informed school improvement amongst a cohort of 30 Leads and Challenge Advisers. The programme provides *direct* and sustained support to Challenge Advisers and in-school Champions and *indirect* support to the schools they work with through access to a bespoke Research Route Map, through the enhanced skills and understanding of the core participants and through the launch of the research Route Map to a larger group of champions of research and evidence informed teaching and school leadership.

The process and content

CUREE worked in two parallel ways with participants:

- First CUREE is facilitating a carefully-designed, tightly-focused and research based programme of Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) through a series of 7 workshop sessions (to date), and interleaving gap tasks, micro enquiries and research and development (R&D) projects. This carefully planned sequence of immersion and interrogation of new knowledge and ideas, developing R&D and practice in coaching and enquiry skills is being used by participants to model and support research and evidence informed practice focussed on in-school and region wide priorities. Workshop content has focused variously upon evidence about effective school leadership and improvement (especially for vulnerable schools and communities), effective CPDL, and, in particular coaching (and the use of coaching tools) and Challenging every student, STEM, and literacy/oracy to ensure genuine access to the curriculum (see below for how these foci were selected). Each session was designed to build upon the starting points of the participants and, in subsequent sessions, the progress they had made, in order to secure impact.

- Second CUREE worked with colleagues from GWE and the programme participants to identify the four key challenges for the schools the cohort were working in or working with. Effective, research based strategies for each priority were identified by CUREE from analysis of systematic reviews. CUREE also researched, created and or selected a number of research based tools and resources to illustrate the strategies and enable participants and their colleagues to evaluate their use. The results were probed with programme participants and then organised into a series of intersecting, interactive, on-line research route map lines so that programme participants and their colleagues could integrate use of research and evidence into ongoing meetings and development sessions on a sustained, sustainable and evaluated basis.

This short report summarises briefly progress made during the first 8 months and describes progress at the point when the participants are completing their first round of experiments in using the route map and skills and planning to extend and support use during the autumn term.

The programme build directly upon four years of successful working in this way with a Teaching School Alliance of 30 plus schools on the outskirts of Liverpool and with significant numbers of individual schools who have used this approach to CPDL and school- wide use of research and evidence for school improvement for a number of years.

The programme was led by Philippa Cordingley, an internationally renowned expert in use of research and evidence for school improvement with support from a team of experienced CUREE facilitators.

Impact

Action planning

An overview of the ways in which participants were planning to act from what they were learning can be discerned from participants' free text "next steps" from each session: as can be seen from the list below:

Session 1: Using tools; Refining focus; Choosing best staff to work on enquiry with; Setting objectives.

Session 2: Coaching; Using case studies and research tools; Produce evidence from enquiry pool

Session 3 & 4: Creating enquiry plan; Coaching; Conducting research; Using Route Map and Thinking and planning framework; Sharing Route Map; Share with Governors and other staff

Session 5: Begin implementation; Share with Governors; Extend to others; Discuss with Headteacher; Implement plan with individual school; Collect evidence; Carry out classroom research; Plan strategy with others; Modelling to colleagues

Session 6: Coaching; Extending pupil pool; Discuss with SLT; Refine research question; Evaluation & monitoring; Commence project; Understanding variables and triangulate qualitative data; Continue implementation; Focus groups interviews; Having interventions; Structuring evidence ; Gathering evidence; Discussions with learners and staff

It is unusual to see so many champions and leaders so willing to model enquiry based professional learning explicitly as part of their leadership at the same time as helping others to act in this way through coaching. It is also worth noting the interest in and commitment to working with a wide range of stakeholders including Governors; something that began to emerge during workshop 4 when colleagues shared and tested their development plans with their personally selected guests who included Chairs of governors, head teachers (of SLs), other teachers and even a parent (chair of a parents' association).

Impact on the new Welsh professional standards

During the June workshop participants were asked to identify which of the new Welsh professional standards the programme and working with the route map was supporting.
All participants in the June workshop identified the high level components of the professional Teaching and Learning Standards which had been addressed in developmental ways for them throughout the programme. All colleagues identified collaboration and professional learning as central to the programme. Nine colleagues made an additional mention of these two standards as having featured very strongly in their own development. In addition 11 participants highlighted pedagogy as a particular focus, and 7 highlighted leadership as a particular focus reflecting the twin role make up of the cohort (Challenge Adviser and Subject lead)
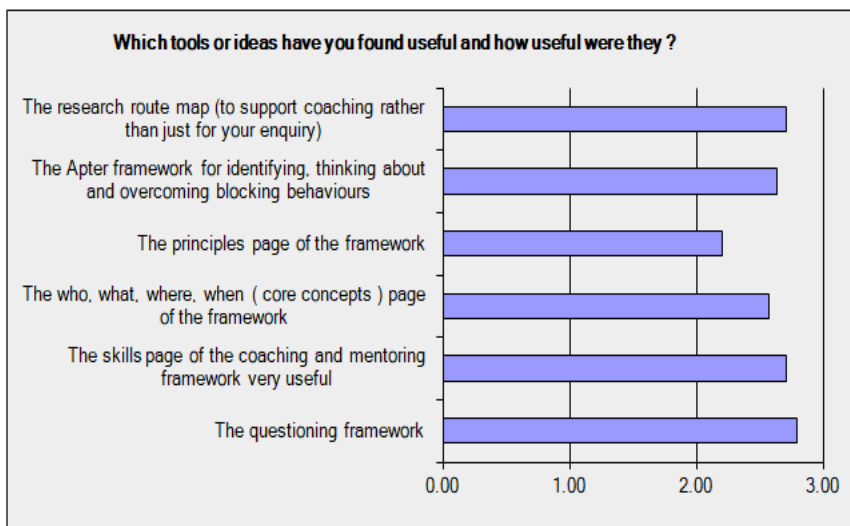
Within each standard colleagues also identified particular sub-categories which had been a key focus for the support they offered to colleagues and or their own R&D.

- **Pedagogy** was split into three sub components:
  - **Advancing learning through effective application of Subject knowledge and discipline** - Progression in learning was the most highly ranked sub component (singled out specifically by 4 colleagues). Exploiting areas of learning, real life, authentic contexts and cross-curricular themes were each singled out by 2 colleagues. 1 colleague highlighted purposes for learners.

  - **Refining teaching... towards sustained highly effective practice**. Involving learners in their learning and assessment were the most popular aspect of this component to be highlighted although all sub components were represented

  - **For the Involving learners component,** Learners leading learning was highlighted four times and listening to learners, reflection and sustaining effort were also identified as a key focus Listening to learners by three participants
- **For the professional Learning standard w**ider reading and research findings was highlighted by 9 participants and professional networks and communities and Continuing Professional Learning were both highlighted by 3 participants
- For the **Collaboration** standard, supporting and developing others was highlighted 9 times and enabling improvement was highlighted 8 times. Working with in-school colleagues was highlighted 5 times and seeking advice and support was highlighted 3 times.
- For the **Innovation** standard developing new techniques was identified by 7 individuals while a further 5 highlighted evaluating the impact of changes in practice.
- For the **Leadership** standard, 9 colleagues identified leading colleague projects and programme and 2 highlighted taking responsibility for self.

Impact of the route map and the tools

We collected evidence after each event about the specific elements, processes or activities that colleagues had found most helpful at the end of each session and, for the day when the route map was completed following the process of co-construction, there are 16 responses highlighting the route map itself and or working with it as particularly powerful. In this session 81.25 of the attendees rated the day as good or better and 91.6% said the work with the route map was good or excellent
A short on-line, pre event survey was used to ascertain the interim impact of several key building blocks prior to the June meeting. Participants in this meeting were asked for comments about how much they had used and found useful of programme tools and resources. Survey respondents (n = 23) gave very high score on a graphical scale for the utility of all of the major groups of tools listed in the survey. See (figure 1)

Which tools or ideas have you found useful and how useful were they?

(chart categories, top to bottom:)
- The research route map (to support coaching rather than just for your enquiry)
- The Apter framework for identifying, thinking about and overcoming blocking behaviours
- The principles page of the framework
- The who, what, where, when (core concepts) page of the framework
- The skills page of the coaching and mentoring framework very useful
- The questioning framework

(x-axis: 0.00, 1.00, 2.00, 3.00)

(Figure 1)

In response to invitations to add free text responses colleagues highlighted the way that new resources had been introduced, the illustrative case studies and the formal presentations (which we have provided so that they are able to use them with other colleagues).

Impact through modelling more extended enquiry

Although the route map contains a number of micro enquiries and many colleagues are already encouraging and helping their peers to use these, programme participants, particularly SLs, have been planning and undertaking larger scale enquiries that identify key in-school priorities and combine a number of research findings and tool, via a scaffolded enquiry framework into a programme for investigating bigger questions.

Of the 13 formal, *larger scale Enquiry Frameworks* shared with us,

- 9 focus on around tackling maths/numeracy

    - 3 focus on increasing the amount of challenge in maths - particularly for able and talented learners

    - 3 focus on numerical reasoning and solving/tackling approaches to solving reasoning questions

    - 2 focus on developing resilience/a growth mindset towards maths

- Others focus on feedback and it's impact on learners and standards; Raising quality of T&L through pupil aspirations; defining the learning destination for pupils and closing the gap between ALPS targets; and, attainment at AS Physics

- The frameworks also reveal some sub themes - Challenge (8) , Resilience (6), AFL (5), higher attaining pupils (2) , Feedback (3)

These larger scale enquiries are all being carried out by Subject Leads and senior school leaders who have much more direct access to teachers and pupils. In the main, Challenge Advisers are engaging colleagues with research and evidence informed practice via the route maps through a mix of coaching and

embedding their use in post ESTYN action planning. But a number are also planning to support such post Estyn action planning through larger scale enquiries at the start of the next academic year.

One colleague brought a 66% completed report to the June workshop and three others have already forwarded completed reports following direct coaching from CUREE colleagues on analysis and write up. CUREE has identified minor questions to resolve or areas where additional information could be provided to help other GWE colleagues make use of the resources, prior to up loading them onto the GWE route map. These four early completers have produced very impressive projects focussed upon:

- Improving cross-curricular Numeracy by providing engaging and motivating opportunities
- Can Pupil Voice identify the causes of underachievement in AS level Physics? Can this information be used to narrow the gap between ALPS Targets and attainment?
- Improving approaches to mathematical problem solving through structured problem analysis
- What is the impact of collaborative teaching and feedback on children's numerical reasoning skills and approaches to tasks?

Impact through support for others

When asked "What you're proudest of in what your colleague have done/achieved since you have started your professional learning journey on this programme", colleagues identified a wide range of benefits relating to forward planning and innovation, the exploration of different strategies within schools and classrooms and successful implementation of interventions. Illustrative comments include:

■ "The Primary school I am supporting has developed a 'language' for 'learning' which is beginning to have an impact on learners' ability to be resilient and independent in their learning."

■ Several relate to greater pro-activity in colleagues' development:
  ○ "The fact that colleagues have responded to greater involvement and become 'agents' in their own professional learning"
  ○ "They've explored further avenues and incorporated different strategies using secondary research to deliver the project."
■ Others are very learning specific and reflect the structured and action oriented nature of research and evidence informed development:
  ○ "Colleagues have adapted their language and use of praise in my classroom to support the identified children further."
  ○ "Action plan shared with staff. Audit of staff skills and training needs"
  ○ "Further developed numeracy in their planning and delivery"

Pattern in the use of tools

Enquiries address sub sets of themes in terms of the questions they pose and the interventions they explore. They evaluate quite a wide range of teaching strategies and learning challenges , Nonetheless, there is an interesting degree of shared use of three tools in particular: a practitioner friendly summary of Dweck's work on Promoting Learner persistence (7 participants), a summary of a research review on planning challenge (5 participants) ; and A micro enquiry tools exploring responses to the question "How can we use AFL practices to help our pupils challenge themselves (6 participants)?

Impact through coaching

An early response to the evidence about effective CPDL was the identification of keen interest in the research evidence about effective mentoring and coaching so workshop two focussed on this in depth, organising the session around the National Framework for mentoring and coaching prepared for the Welsh Government by CUREE (http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/140214-curee-leaflet-en.pdf) CUREE's bank of videos of common challenges in coaching and mentoring and ways of solving them and a series of very practical, research based tools that were subsequently placed upon the GWE route map. Many colleagues started to use the coaching tools straight away and a route for involving other colleagues in developing research and evidence informed practice and raising interest amongst other teachers and school leaders in the route map. The latter was particularly true of Challenge Advisers for whom carrying out direct, larger scale enquiries or micro enquiries was more challenging; for them the priority was to work with and through school colleagues.

Colleagues completing the pre June event survey said they were proudest of what they had achieved through coaching in relation to:

- ○ others' development and achievement,
- ○ helping others navigate their own obstacles/tricky situations and also
- ○ working collaboratively along with witnessing a change in attitude to coaching/mentoring.

for example colleagues reported their delight in :
- ○ "The change in behaviours and willingness of staff to adapt their practice and to take ideas on board."
- ○ "Helping to overcome obstacles and forward planning.
- ○ "Achieving positive results in the classroom due to discussion with colleagues on how to implement enquiry ideas".

As can be seen from the comments on Tools (see figure 1) the very practical and structured support mechanisms for scaffolding and sustaining coaching relationships were particularly welcomed including the definitions of core skills and the questioning framework. The main the coaching tools were used to add structure to ongoing professional relationships that sit at the heart of the role of Challenge Advisers (in the context of ESTYN reports and school development planning and supporting "stuck" teachers) and Subject Leads (in the context of supporting specialist and non specialist colleagues and teaching assistants and or feeding back thought provoking and potentially uncomfortable evidence from their enquiries).

But coaching was not the most effective mode of operation for everyone. Seven colleagues who took part in our survey identified that they had not used the coaching tools since the start of the programme ; two felt they needed and lacked a partner, one lacked time and 2 did not see the skills as relevant to their role.

Participation and retention

At the start of the programme there were 16 Challenge advisers and 20 Subject Leads were invited to participate. Four did not attend at all and seven attended only the first workshop having decided the programme was not for them or would not fit in with their role.

The pattern of meetings was agreed at the start with GWE and although there were attempts to make adjustments in the light of direct clashes with newly arising GWE and Welsh government initiatives, by and large sticking with the already booked timetable suited marginally more colleagues than making adjustments seemed to do. But it was clear from the start that attendance would be patchy (almost all

colleagues had to miss particular workshops because of clashes) so a number of colleagues agreed to act as "buddies" briefing each other about sessions they had missed, The CUREE and GWE team were also assiduous in contacting absentees to help them catch up with what had been missed and offering support in moving forward.

Broadly the group split into three sub groups:

- "Champions of Champions" who were able to attend most of all workshops and to implement and also evaluate the tools and ideas very quickly. This group comprised 68% of the participants who attended more than the first session;
- Enthusiasts who attended a good number and kept in touch via colleagues in between (this was particularly true for a number of Challenge Advisers whose workload is significantly affected by volatility in the schools they support) - 17% of continuing participants
- a small number of colleagues who were interested in tracking progress across the programme but who were unable to attend regularly and or felt a need to wait to learn from the progress of other GWE colleagues or reach a point in the academic year when use of the route map could be integrated into whole school planning before committing. Some of this group are now planning to make substantive use of the approach within their role next year. This group made up the remaining 15%.

Overall, including those who did not attend at all, 7 CAs and 10 SL s attended over 70% workshops, 3 CAs and 2 SLs attended over 40% of workshops and 5CAs and 9 SLs attended 2 sessions or less.