

Joint Practice Development Summary

Background

The Joint Practice Development (JPD) strand of the Loyne Learning Alliance (LLA) was designed to provide support to schools who received seedcorn funding to undertake action research within their schools. In 2013, there was a common focus looking at the use of Lesson Study (DfES, 2008) and peer coaching (Lofthouse, et al. 2010), for further discussion of the outcome of the projects see Briefing Papers 2 and 3. During the academic year 2013-14 although the range of research projects was more open there were some common features including the use of RUFDATA (Saunders, 2000) evaluation planning tool, ongoing support provided by Dr Ann-Marie Houghton, and a work in progress workshop to provide additional research support and disseminate emerging findings.

The research topics for 2013-14 included new and continuation projects:

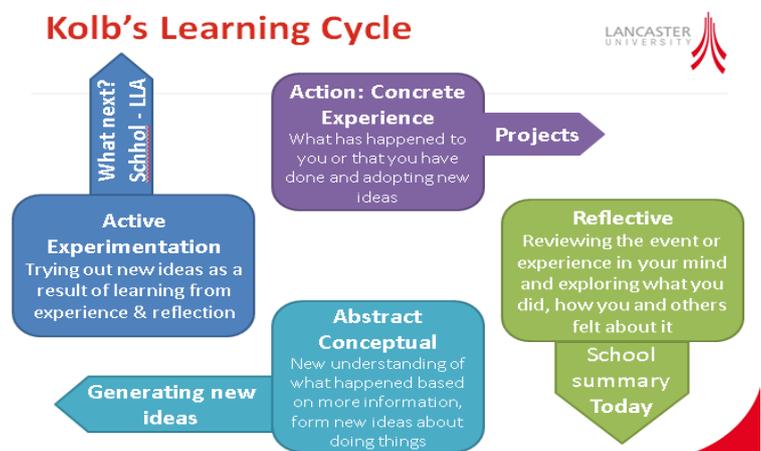
- > The Loyne Specialist School and Red Marsh School both explored the use of the Lesson Study approach with Teaching Assistants (see Briefing Papers 9 and 10 for further details), Ridgewood also expressed an interest in use of TA Champions which maybe explored in 2014-15;
- > Ridgewood were piloting the use of Listen and Move in a primary school, this built on the work at the Loyne and reported in Jackson and Houghton, 2013 (Briefing Paper 5)
- > Holly Grove were working with Lancashire County Council (LCC) to pilot an alternative Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Tracker system which would support tracking and monitoring the progress of pupils working at P level

The Good Practice event (See Briefing Paper 7) focuses on development activities within the LLA, had also identified a number of initiatives which might usefully be evaluated. In addition, staff from other schools expressed an interest in pursuing research in the next academic year and were therefore invited to the work in progress workshop.

Joint Practice Development Workshop

In July 2014, Kolb's learning cycle was used to place the projects and the day into context. Staff representing the five schools participated in a JPD workshop that was designed to:

1. Share experiences of undertaking a research project and identify research and evaluation support needs;
2. Generate key messages that might be communicated and transferred to other schools;
3. Gather evidence of impact for teachers, pupils and schools;
4. Identify how schools intended to continue initiatives in their school;
5. Identify ideas for future research foci for similar projects in the Loyne Learning Alliance.

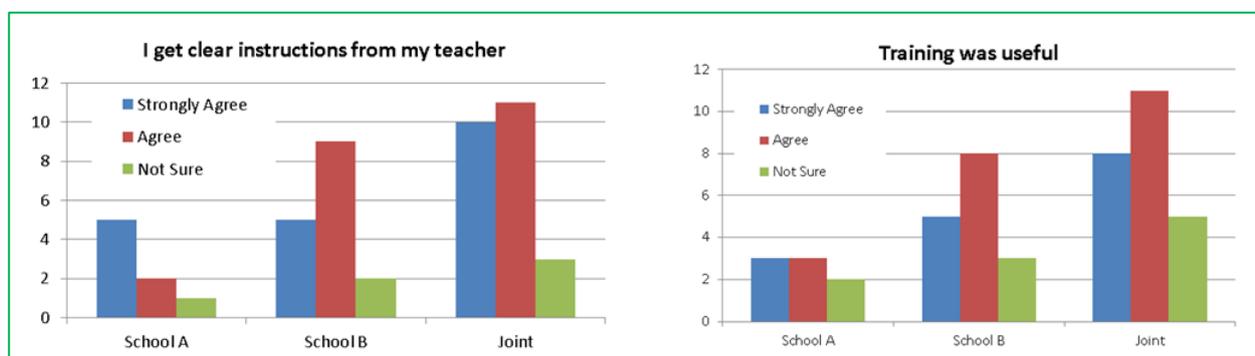


Adaptation of Lesson Study

The two research projects focused on providing training and opportunities for Teaching Assistants to engage in observing teaching and learning. At the Loyne the focus was on independent learning and involved classroom based HLTA and TA 3 staff who worked in pairs to: observe ways in which their peer was encouraging pupil independence; debrief and share insights from the observation and then participate in semi-structured interviews to gather further reflections on the factors which help or hinder TAs in promoting independence, a natural progression from the LLA work on Maximising the Impact of TAs research with Institute of Education and MENCAP (See Briefing Paper 7 for further details). At Red Marsh the focus was on ways in which TA 3s are involved in the marking and feedback of pupils' work, which is an aspect of the school's revised record keeping and assessment policy. Here staff participated in training about reflective practice; they then undertook peer observation and shared their experiences in a focus group interview, which also focused on factors which influence them in fulfilling this new role.

Collaborative working sharing research tools

The LLA is committed to working collaboratively, the JPD. For instance, the research with Teaching Assistants provided an opportunity for the two schools to share some common questions which allowed for comparison of the results in the two schools. Using this example, participants at the JPD discussed other ways in which they might be able to share research tools, such as questionnaires.



One of the difficulties with small scale projects is that it is hard to make generalisations about the findings which can be used to modify an activity or identify an area of concern. The use of standardised questions allowed the two schools to compare their results and for the LLA to have a combined response. For both schools there was positive response to the statement '*I get clear instructions from my teacher*'. If there had been a difference it would have been possible to explore the features of clear instructions given at one school and use these to support training in the other. Comparing feedback on training provided by a member of staff and an external trainer suggests that both approaches can be effective, this may be helpful in allowing teachers to develop ideas within their own school and then deliver in other schools. Prior to the research concern had been expressed that TAs may be more at ease with someone familiar.

Collaborative working piloting a common resource

The Holly Grove **EYFS Tracker** and Loyne **Listen and Move** projects both illustrated how schools can support the research agenda. The focus of the EYFS tracker is on *How schools measure the small incremental steps or progress when it is very gradual?* Following some initial development work by the school and LCC colleagues, feedback and further suggestions for improving the statements on the tracker were sought during a meeting with representatives from other Lancashire special schools. The record sheet is intended to enable teachers to indicate if a pupil is entering an EYFS stage, developing or has confidence. Expressions of interest in piloting the tool during Autumn 2014 were obtained during the meeting which also confirmed the tool is meeting a need identified by a number of schools. By working with LCC the hope and intention is to lead to change within the County.

For **Loyne's Listen and Move initiative**, training was the initial resource to have stimulated interest from Ridgewood, who were keen to explore the benefits of on-going Listen and Move sessions for targeted groups of students throughout school and to increase staff understanding about the needs of sensory level students. Ridgewood provided an example of how a research project undertaken by one school can be developed and extended by another. They have collected comparable data as well as making some adaptation in response to their school context. They have explored collecting video evidence to complement TA observations. Initially they had received feedback from TAs on the challenge of trying to observe and record results had led to changes to the recording system. The next stage in their project was to analyse in more detail their results, a presentation by Jemma Jackson (Loyne) highlighted a number of factors that needed to be taken into consideration.

Learning from other schools experience of research

During the JPD Jemma Jackson (Loyne) disseminated findings from her research project about Listen and Move. This provided a valuable opportunity not only to learn about the impact of the intervention, but also to discuss some of the strategies used to collect and analyse the data. Jemma also reported on feedback from training that now includes both the practicalities and

findings from the research. Teacher feedback from the research suggests the intervention is transferable and useful in other contexts: *'Since I attended the course we have rolled the programme out across the school. I gave feedback to quite a large group of staff members and showed them the programme. We now have a sensory integration group first thing in the morning 3 times a week, and the programme also being used in some P.E. lessons. It is proving to be really valuable and is having a positive effect on the pupils taking part.'*

Key Messages from Joint Practice Development

- Schools typically generate very ambitious research plans, the RUFDATA tool and opportunity to discuss the proposed research was valuable in helping schools to scale down their plans.
- The time taken for the research elements of development projects is frequently underestimated, although staff reported it was valuable to *'step back from the action'* and reflect on emerging issues this can be difficult due to the inevitable school culture which is typically one of action.
- Based on evidence collected in 2013 and 2014, investing in staff to pursue a higher qualification such as an MA supports the identification of staff interested in research as well as giving them a personal motivation to prioritise the work from what is generally a long list of competing demands on their time.
- Building in time to enable staff to undertake the research component, and / or to work with partners with research experience who can support the research component seems to be most effective.
- In common with findings for both coaching and lesson study research projects the basic action research model which includes some training on what is required and an opportunity to develop a shared understanding appears to be very effective.
- Senior leader commitment and interest in the work is helpful for securing 'buy in' from other staff, especially at the start of a research project.
- Emphasising how the research will benefit the individual members of staff as well as the pupils is an important incentive, especially for TAs, many of whom were uncertain about the idea of observing or being observed by their peers.
- In common with teachers in 2013 lesson study projects, the Teaching Assistants welcomed focusing on pupils' learning rather than their performance.

Listen and Move

- Its aim is to provide routine and predictability, soothing, rhythmical music, deep pressure, linear movements, rocking movements, flexion and warmth in order to allow the child to modulate arousal levels and encourage a more adaptive response to sensory stimulation.
- The ultimate aim of the intervention is to impact on learning, where behaviour caused by sensory sensitivities has previously been a barrier.

Key messages continued

- Interviews highlighted the quality of TAs' observation skills; however the detail was not always reflected in the written records which may be due to previous experience or lack of time.
- Staff with existing experience due to having trained as a teacher and / or needing to provide evidence for assessment portfolios seemed to find it easier to capture their observations – piloting training for TAs to record their observations would be something that might be offered by the LLA.

Impact of JPD and individual projects on staff, pupils and schools

- Sharing good practice during the JPD event provided opportunity to network and exchange resources
- Support from the collaboration with colleagues in LCC and considerable interest in piloting the EYFS tracking tool from special schools throughout the county.
- Staff have observed aspects of pupil learning behaviour that may otherwise have gone unnoticed. For example, the impact that pupils can have on each other's learning, time constraints sometimes reducing opportunities for independence and the chance to share feedback with teachers.

Staff Development	TAs reported gaining insights into the teaching and learning of pupils with whom they worked, the adapted lesson study approach offers an in house staff development opportunity which could be used with or without the research component.
Another perspectives	From the TA interviews in the Lesson Study projects it is clear they can provide another perspective on the teaching and learning within the classroom
Time	It was essential for time to be allocated, involvement of TAs does present some logistical challenges, building in some extra time slots at the start may be useful
Relevance and Trust	When introducing peer observation or other new ways of working it is beneficial to allow TAs to work with peers who are working in a similar key stage and with whom they feel comfortable. This will provide a more secure foundation for future work in other key stages or with other staff.
External evaluation	Similar to last year, the inclusion of someone external allowed the TAs to comment in confidence ... this revealed things schools would not necessarily have found out, however, if schools are able to identify staff with an interest in research it is possible they could offer to collect data for each other, if this approach is pursued clarity regarding ethical issues of confidentiality would need to be agreed at the start of the project.

Future Plans

The JPD workshop provided a valuable opportunity for colleagues to network, identify resources which schools agreed to share, and gain further support with research. Schools that have started their projects will be finishing these in the coming academic year and others who have expressed an interest in engaging in research will be supported in a similar way to 2013-14. The JPD events confirm there is teacher interest and enthusiasm for getting involved in research, however teachers do experience and report a major constraint is lack of time, consequently, the LLA will look at ways of working with PhD researchers who could support the research process.

References

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Learning Alliance website: <http://www.loynelearningalliance.co.uk/>
 Loyne Specialist School, Sefton Drive, Lancaster, Lancashire LA1 2PZ
 Loyne Website: <http://www.loyneschool.org.uk/Loyne>



Reference this briefing:

Houghton, A. (2014) *Joint Practice Development: Summary Briefing Paper 8*, Lancaster available at <http://www.loynelearningalliance.co.uk/Projects.html>

