

Institution: University of Wolverhampton		
Unit of Assessment: 23 Education		
Title of case study: Improving collaboration between schools and among schools and other agencies to reduce disadvantage		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Michael Jopling	Professor of Education	2007-14; 2017 to the Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-20		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Research on schools and school performance conducted at the University of Wolverhampton led to changing education policies as well as collaborative and support practices in Hartlepool Borough Council, Liverpool City Council, and schools across the North East of England. The change has resulted from a sustained programme exploring school practices extending over 13 years. Over 37 participating schools and the two local authorities redesigned their processes and support mechanisms for disadvantaged students and families. The research also influenced regional policy debates and approaches to address the effects of social and economic disadvantage on students' achievements in the North East, which encompassed all 12 local authorities.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Research at the University of Wolverhampton focused on three interdependent areas, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifying the structures, processes and roles associated with school-to-school collaboration and the contextual factors (in and beyond schools) that influence their effectiveness; applying this evidence base to schools and interventions designed to reduce disadvantage; and extending the research and findings to new areas, such as advanced, innovative services to support disadvantaged families. <p>The research evidenced by references [R] has led to three distinctive findings [F], namely:</p> <p><u>F1.</u> Despite its emphasis on school-to-school support, the combination of marketised competition and traditionalism imposed on schools in England through recent education policy has not just ignored but also magnified the contextual factors that impede the development of effective collaboration in isolated and disadvantaged areas [R2, R5, and R6]. This finding has influenced the development, evaluation and refinement of local and national school collaboration and improvement services, particularly in North East England.</p> <p><u>F2.</u> Contextually sensitive and collaborative approaches to assessing school performance at local, regional and national levels are imperative to counter the negative effects of national changes in</p>		

education policy. For example, the research explored the extent to which changes to school structures, e.g. the increase in academisation following the Education Act (2011) and subsequent reforms to assessment and curriculum, have impeded schools' capacity to collaborate [R2]. They also challenged the divisive policy rhetoric, which has undermined morale in schools, for example, the identification of a North-South school performance divide [R3]. The research has identified new factors affecting the integration of an established, collaborative process (lesson study) into school improvement locally and nationally in the largest study of lesson study undertaken at the time the findings were published [R5]. Importantly, these findings have strongly influenced service redesign in local authorities and schools, and led to a regional debate on and among schools and school stakeholders in North East England, exemplified by [I1] and [I3] to counteract disadvantage.

F3. Tensions are an inevitable part of inter-agency working, including those between education and social work [R1]. Their occurrence and impact need to be anticipated and built into the implementation and evaluation of new interventions in a whole system approach. Such an approach places children, young people and families at its core [R4] and promotes prevention and early identification [R6].

Extending the research focus beyond schools to new areas, such as early years settings [R4] and then inter-agency collaboration and early help services [R1, R6 and Grant] has enabled the development of a multi-level model of collaborative leadership, in which new, key elements affecting the coordination and development of leadership capacity in inter-agency collaboration involving schools have been identified. These theoretical advancements have led to improvements in practice and policy in both schools and family support programmes, exemplified by [I2].

3. References to the research

The following references have been assessed by peer-review and are points of reference for further research beyond the original institution. For example, compared to other publications in the same field, R5 is highly cited, having received 8.96 times more citations than average. Evidence of external funding relevant to the impact is also presented below.

R1. Jopling, M. and Vincent, S. (2020) Education and Social Work working collaboratively to support vulnerable families in Williams-Brown, Z. and Mander, S. (eds.) *Childhood wellbeing and resilience: influences on educational outcomes*. London: Routledge. ISBN 9780367342432.

R2. Jopling, M. (2019) How neoliberal policy inhibits partnership-building in the primary phase: a new social movements approach, *Power and Education*, 11(3), 252-267 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757743818823788>. (REF 2 Output)

R3. Jopling, M. (2018) Is there a North–South divide between schools in England? *Management in Education*, 33,1, 37-40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020618782861>.

R4. Hadfield, M. & Jopling M. (2018) Case study as a means of evaluating the impact of early years leaders: steps, paths and routes, *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 67, 167-176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2018.01.005>. (REF 2 Output)

R5. Hadfield, M. & Jopling, M. (2016) Problematizing lesson study and its impacts: studying a highly contextualised approach to professional learning, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 60, 203-214. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.08.001>. (REF 2 Output)

R6. Jopling, M. & Hadfield, M. (2015) From fragmentation to multiplexity: Decentralisation, localism and support for school collaboration in England and Wales, *Journal of Education Research Online*, 7(1), 47-65. <https://www.waxmann.com/artikelART102816>.

Grant

2014-15 Evaluation of the Families Programme, City of Liverpool, £60,000 (Jopling PI).

4. Details of the impact

The research highlighted above led to a number of key positive changes in schools and much needed improved processes and services for schools and families at local authority level.

I1. Redesigning processes and support mechanisms in schools and local authorities to improve provision for disadvantaged students and families

Jopling collaborated with two local authorities in the North East to effect change in how processes and support mechanisms in schools help disadvantaged students and their families. The following sections describe these impacts in detail for each of the participating local authorities.

a) Reshaping Hartlepool Borough Council Policy: Enhancing Collaboration and Improving Service Level Agreements

The research findings [F1 and F2] have led directly to the reshaping of Hartlepool Borough Council's approach to school improvement through new service level agreements with its 30 primary, five secondary and two special schools, aimed at enhancing communication and collaboration [C1]. In order to do this, Jopling advised and undertook collaborative research with the council's senior school improvement adviser and worked directly with leaders, teachers and students in 11 schools. The work involved several stakeholder interactions and research methods including: conducting a dedicated workshop at a head teacher briefing; nine structured meetings in four of the five secondary schools; and eight structured meetings in six primary schools, alongside numerous feedback and planning meetings with council advisers between 2015 and 2020. Jopling was also a member of the town's 11-25 Education and Employment Forum (until its demise in 2017), which involved council staff and the leaders of all nine post-primary providers in Hartlepool.

As will be seen below, this work has given the senior school improvement adviser new insights into and knowledge of the complexities of collaborative school-to-school support and improvement. The adviser has shared these with the school advisory team and also, importantly, with the Director of Children's Services, thereby providing the opportunity to achieve the impact. The interventions and recommendations provided as part of the research findings have led to revisions to school improvement policy and service level agreements between the council and schools. These resulted in the following positive changes: better communication; reduced competition among schools; and enhanced collaboration between the council and schools. This has further led to better relationships between the council and its head teachers and schools, and improvements in some schools' results and Ofsted ratings. Following these interventions, 90% of Hartlepool's primary schools are now rated outstanding or good (compared to 80% five years ago) and that research has been undertaken and findings shared with four of the five secondary schools. The comprehensive redesign of school improvement and support systems [C1] promoted collaboration and support in a town characterised by high levels of disadvantage.

b) Redesigning and Expanding Liverpool City Council's Families Programme

The second change relates to the enduring impact of the research into Liverpool City Council's Families Programme [F3]. The research resulted in the redesign of the programme, expanding its size and scope and reflecting the research findings by focusing on whole system change through a preventative and early identification approach. This resulted in a threefold expansion on the numbers and types of families being targeted for support from 2,105 in the first phase, which was the focus of the evaluation, to 6,760 by 2020. In particular, changes were made in 2015 to ensure that families were at the centre of the programme and to improve the integration of support services [C2]. In 2018, Liverpool was awarded earned autonomy status in recognition of its partnership work on the Families Programme, which supported the programme's subsequent expansion.

To achieve this, Jopling worked closely with Liverpool City Council officers and a range of professionals from education, social services, health, and psychology to share their research findings and propose recommendations aimed at more effective collaboration and emerging new impact. Mechanisms for delivering the envisioned change included four workshops and presentations in which research findings were shared, and new interventions in which the programme's effectiveness and impact were explored. The research activities involved a range of stakeholders to ensure holistic change and awareness such as council staff and key service providers including 83 family support, early help and other social service professionals, staff from 22 schools, and 14 educational psychologists.

The significance and reach of the research is exemplified by the large-scale redesign of Liverpool City Council's services for vulnerable and disadvantaged families, which went far beyond the requirements of the second phase of the national Troubled Families programme.

12. Shaping and informing policy debate to counteract disadvantage in the North East Region

The research findings [F1 and F2] have led to new, more informed debate about school policy, notably in relation to research undertaken in and with schools to explore the impact of the North-South school divide rhetoric perpetuated by Ofsted [F2]. These findings influenced regional policy debate in the North East UK region around collaborative school improvement and provision for disadvantaged children and young people before and after the intervention of Covid-19 [C3].

Mechanisms for achieving this impact centred on engagement with Schools North East (SNE), a network involving all 565 schools in the 12 local authorities in the region. SNE cited the research into the north-south divide on its website [C4 and C5] and invited Jopling to take part in its first Social Mobility Commission roundtable in February 2019 [C6] to speak to school leaders about the research and to make a keynote presentation about tackling underachievement among white working class students [C7]. Following from this, recent work with school leaders in Hartlepool and other local authorities in the region has focused on how to counteract the additional effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on disadvantaged students. This is expected to deliver further impact.

The significance and reach of this impact relate to changes in policy debate around the importance of adopting contextualised and collaborative approaches to overcoming educational disadvantage across the UK's North East region, which is characterised by high levels of poverty and disadvantage.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1. Testimonial from Senior School Improvement Adviser, Hartlepool Borough Council.

C2. Testimonial from Families Programme Manager, Liverpool City Council.

C3. Testimonial from Schools North East.

C4. Hinds' major speech on complexities of disadvantage, Schools North East, 21 June 2019 citing Jopling's research.

<https://schoolsnortheastblog.wordpress.com/2019/06/20/hinds-major-speech-on-complexities-of-disadvantage/>

C5. Schools North East calls for urgent government review into the effects of high impact disadvantage on student attainment, 1 August 2019 quotes Jopling.

<https://schoolsnortheastblog.wordpress.com/2019/08/01/schools-north-east-calls-for-urgent-government-review-into-the-effects-of-high-impact-disadvantage-on-student-attainment/>

C6. Invitation to take part in first Social Mobility Commission roundtable, Schools North East, 26 February 2019.

C7. Thinking differently about aspirations and engagement, Schools North East conference, Durham, 9 March 2017 (c120 delegates).
<https://schoolsnortheastblog.wordpress.com/2017/03/09/experts-present-brand-new-research-at-north-east-evidence-based-education-conference/>