

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Bolton		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Education		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Theories in Action – A practical approach to facilitate whole school improvement		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2016-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
David Hopkins	Professor	2016 - 2020
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 to 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Research carried out at the university of Bolton produced a set of “theories of action” which has informed the pedagogic practices of 28 schools, with 3000 teachers, and resulted in an improved educational experience for over 19,000 students. Similarly, the Leadership for Powerful Learning school improvement programme which consisted of a series of six workshops for nominated school leaders of primary schools in Bolton has significantly enhanced their capacity provide high quality teaching and enhanced student learning.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The case study is underpinned by a lifelong commitment to school improvement and the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Much of the origins of the theoretical basis on which the Powerful learning series was designed can be traced back to Hopkins’ School Improvement Trilogy (Hopkins 2001, 2007 &amp; 2013) which put forward an ‘integrated model of school improvement’ that provided a guide to strategic action for school improvement.</p> <p>The passion for school improvement then led Professor Hopkins to pursue a practical yet theoretical approach to pedagogic strategies that could act as a mechanism to facilitate meaningful change and whole school improvement. The practical strategies looked to adopt a “curiosity” approach to drive powerful learning and first introduced the concept of “Theories of Action” for teaching and learning [3.4].</p> <p>The “theories of Action” adopted the approach that teaching is a profession, and just like any other, there is a series of actions which can result in a presumed set of outcomes. The research established professional protocols that were substantiated by a high level of empirical educational research literature [3.2].</p> <p>As the research continued to deepen its understanding of the theories of action and began to embed them within instructional rounds five important findings were produced [3.5]. The first was that despite the phase or context of schooling, the theories of action were in most cases very similar. Second, this is not a ‘pick and mix’ approach—all the theories of action have to be integrated into the teacher’s professional repertoire if they are to impact in a sustained way on student learning. Third, and most importantly, all the theories of action are characterised by an approach to teaching that has enquiry at its centre [3.1]. Fourth, some of the theories of action</p>		

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relate to the school and some to the practice of individual teachers. Fifth, all the theories of action have a high level of empirical support in the educational research literature.

As a result of the series of Powerful Learning Manuals Professor Hopkins was then invited to apply his theories of action, in action, as his research attracted the attention of local schools within the Bolton Learning Partnership (BLP). As such, the instructional rounds were then further refined through the development of Theories of Action which emerged out of collaborative Instructional Rounds. The process included the participation of 28 schools, 3000 teachers and over 19,000 students all of which developed and refined the Theories of Action protocol for teachers to utilise in their approach to teaching.

However, despite the well documented success of the theories of action with the BLP Professor Hopkins noticed that framing Theories of Action, and ensuring access to professional learning, did not always result in enhanced student achievement. Nor did these steps necessarily lead to the Theories of Action becoming embedded in a school's professional practice. This then led to "Leadership for powerful learning" which documents overwhelming importance of leadership in the pursuit of realising a collective moral purpose. The findings stepped through four contrasting, but complementary styles of leadership each tasked in their different ways with achieving the goal of school improvement, the underlying proposition being that a synthesis of these styles and skills should overcome both the challenge of 'social complexity' and the paradox of 'change and no-change' [3.3], [3.6].

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1. Hopkins, David (2014) *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research*, (Fifth Edition) Buckingham: Open University Press, [ISBN-13: 978-0335-26468-1].
- 3.2. Hopkins, David and Craig, Wayne (2015) Curiosity and powerful learning. *Education Today*, 65 (2). pp. 4-11. ISSN 0013-1547
- 3.3. Hopkins, David and Craig, Wayne (2015) *Leadership for Powerful Learning. Curiosity and powerful learning series*, McREL Australia. ISBN 978099265326 [Kindle Edition available on Amazon].
- 3.4. Hopkins, David and Craig, Wayne, with Knight, Oli (2015) *Curiosity and Powerful Learning. Curiosity and powerful learning series*, McREL Australia. ISBN 9780994265319 [Kindle Edition available on Amazon].
- 3.5. Hopkins, David and Baumber, J. (2019) Getting to the Heart of System Reform – A micro strategy for large scale educational change. *Educational Futures*, 10 (2), December, pp 3-27. ISSN: 1758-2199
- 3.6. Hopkins, D, (2020) *Unleashing Greatness – A Strategy for School Improvement. Australian Educational Leader*, 42(3), pp. 8-17.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words).

The impact that has arisen as a result of the research documented in section 2 has positively influenced primary and secondary schools across Bolton through the adoption of pedagogic practices and protocols that are substantiated by a high level of empirical educational research literature and refined in practice.

The Bolton Learning Partnership brought together 28 schools, 3000 members of academic staff and over 19,00 students to utilise the theories of action and instructional rounds documented within the curiosity and powerful learning. The BLP reported that the use of theories of action and instructional rounds were seen to increase academic success amongst pupils, improved recall during reviews of prior learning and in response to test questions indicated a stronger vocabulary.

Chris Bingley, Assistant Head Teacher at Thorn leigh Salesian college stated that through adopting the instructional rounds model has had an informal link to academic success, Improved

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recall during reviews of prior learning and responses to test questions has indicated a stronger vocabulary size, there's been a positive shift in learning climate because of the expectations that students use academic vocabulary in the classroom [5.2].

Simon Cordell, Assistant Vice Principal at Little Lever School stated that they have looked to create the perfect learning environment by adopting an entry protocol for all staff and students which is having a positive effect on the pupil engagement at the start of the lesson [5.3].

Rebecca McCarthy, Word of the week Strategy Lead at Rivington High School stated that the introduction of the language mastery initiative at Rivington had helped the students to access tier two vocabulary which assists students in developing their understanding in the curriculum in all of their subjects [5.3].

The impact however goes far beyond the 19,000 pupils detailed above as the BLP documented that their engagement with the research had significantly enhanced professional repertoire of all staff at the schools who had developed their own technical skills and knowledge through adhering to the protocols implemented. Through embedding the theories of action into school culture the positive effects are expected to pertain for the foreseeable future as the school adopts the practical guides to whole school improvement which has the potential to alter the trajectory of the next generation of children within the borough.

The Leadership for Powerful Learning school development programme took the next steps to ensuring those witnessed benefits to student outcomes then fully embedded within school practice as it delivered a series of six workshops to nominated educational leaders of primary schools in Bolton which increased the awareness of leadership in the pursuit of realising a collective moral purpose. To date the programme has supported at least 25 primary schools in strengthening their capacity to provide high quality teaching, enhancing student learning, and managing change effectively. Engagement with the programme has already resulted in a more strategic approach to school improvement, enhanced student outcomes that are attested to by LA school advisers. An example of the impact of the programme is provided by OFSTED in their inspection of St Ethelbert's RC Primary School, Bolton, in 2018, which states that as a result of the programme "...leaders are successfully developing the curriculum in areas such as reading, writing and mathematics. Subject leaders work well together to provide pupils with opportunities to make connections in their learning across the curriculum and to undertake learning activities that excite and engage pupils' thinking."

As the understanding and evidence grew for the beneficial impact teachers and school leaders could have when implementing instructional rounds so did the attention of leading academics and practitioners around the world. As such, Professor Hopkins was invited to be a keynote speaker at several internationally acclaimed conferences such as; The Ministry of Education Cyprus (2016), Bastow Leadership Institute Melbourne (2016) and the Australian Council for Educational Leadership (2017, 2017) which significantly increased capacity within the field as the dissemination of the key research findings enhanced the fields understanding of school improvement and system leadership. The findings were then also presented at the British Educational Studies Association annual International Conference in 2018 which was hosted at the University of Bolton. In January 2018 Professor Hopkins presented his findings on the success of his newfound Curiosity and Powerful Learning approach in a keynote speech for the TEDxUniversityofBolton and as of today has been viewed a total of 5,888 times on YouTube alone and was also published on the official TED Talks account which holds more than 21.4M subscribers.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of ten references)

- 5.1. <https://www.boltonlearningpartnership.org.uk/case-studies/> Confirms the Inclusion of Professor Hopkins in designing “theories of action” across school within BLP
- 5.2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX1UWQMslc&t=192s> Confirms the use and impact of the research led by Professor Hopkins on the Academic Vocabulary of students at BLP schools.
- 5.3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBl3Eo0-vsE> Confirms the use and impact of the research led by Professor Hopkins on the Learning Environment, Expectations and Relationships of students at BLP schools.

St Ethelbert’s RC Primary School OFSTED recent school inspection.

*“Senior leaders receive a range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills further. For example, connections made with a local university enable leaders to look in detail at ‘leadership for powerful learning’. As a result, leaders are successfully developing the curriculum in areas such as reading, writing and mathematics. Subject leaders work well together to provide pupils with opportunities to make connections in their learning across the curriculum and to undertake learning activities that excite and engage pupils’ thinking.” P.3*