Designing and Evaluating Impact for Postgraduate CPD Fieldwork

# CPD Impact Evidences and the role of the TDA

The Training and Development Agency (TDA) for schools in England introduced a funding scheme for qualified teachers called Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD), which is made competitively available through Higher Education (HE) accredited partnerships. As a condition of funding for this PPD scheme the TDA requires all HE providers/partnerships in England to produce an annual report on Impact-related field evidences drawn from teachers' practice in schools linked to the PPD programme of accredited continuing professional development (CPD). Impact is currently a widely debated and contentious term that is understood to relate to diverse evidences of school improvement such as pupil learning, teacher quality and institutional gains etc. Impact evidence was also reported by Ofsted (2004) as making a difference to school improvement through appropriately designed award-bearing CPD. More recently the TDA intends to use the process of levering CPD impact in schools to deliver objectives such as the new professional standards for teachers. This linkage between CPD impact and teaching standards is illustrated in the new TDA (2009) National Framework for the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL). The philosophy and requirement of developing impact evaluation methods and results also extends to other public sector areas such as health and the wider Children’s Services professions.

Consequently, there has been a need for PPD HEI-led providers to develop a more systematic and knowledgeable approach toward impact evaluation of accredited CPD. Impact evidence case studies and their framework methodology and reporting instruments have therefore been compared and contrasted across several partnership universities operating in the southwest of England and this project was funded through an ESCalate development grant.

# Overview of the Southwest Impact Evaluation Project

In January 2007 the Southwest Regional Group for Professional Development (SWRGPD) began an ESCalate funded project entitled: ‘Developing a systematic approach towards impact field research’. The project intended to deliver three key objectives:

1. To develop a framework model for impact related research outcomes from accredited PPD activity, building upon the framework developed in Harland and Kinder's (1997) seminal work.
2. To develop a systematic approach and set of standard research approaches to holistically define impact that can be adopted in CPD fieldwork.
3. To evaluate the various techniques and approaches towards obtaining impact led field research from the teaching profession. Thus, tools, techniques and various field case studies exemplifying impact evidence will be collected and reviewed across Southwest Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) partnerships that is funded by the Training and Development Agency (TDA) for schools.

This research agenda involved an analysis of PPD annual impact evaluation reports provided by each of the South West HEIs funded by the TDA through the PPD programme. The aim was to identify the diversity of approaches that different HEIs adopted towards developing and capturing impact evidence from their CPD programmes. From this diversity a CPD Impact Evaluation framework was to be identified and shared amongst partners.

This small-scale project key aim was to therefore build upon and develop a framework model for impact related to the research outcomes from accredited PPD activity. The conceptual framework developed in Harland and Kinder's (1997) seminal work on CPD outcomes was reviewed and linked to the Soulsby and Swain (TDA, 2003) report on accredited CPD work funded by the TDA. This literature along with the southwest’s diverse approaches to evaluating and reporting CPD impact is considered in terms of how this might inform the future development of PPD Impact methodology and any other TDA funded accredited CPD. This would include recent TDA initiatives such as the MTL and the proposed new SENCO National Qualification that is also linked to masters level accredited CPD; both of which require some form of impact evaluation. A key assumption behind the idea that accredited CPD services should lead to impact evidence in the workplace also means that such CPD programmes need to be designed according to a work-based professional learning needs-driven agenda.

This integration of postgraduate in-service training opportunities with practice based, impact-led teacher research evidence will therefore be of interest to both UK and international colleagues and government agencies working in the area of professional development across education and other similar agencies.

# Relating CPD Outcomes to Impact

A key question to answer is what are the wanted CPD outcomes? The TDA clarifies what is meant by ‘children and young people’s outcomes’ by reference and linkage to the five outcome targets of the Every Child Matters national policy initiative for children’s services in general; as expressed in the UK government’s Children Act of 2004 (DfES, 2004).

These five governmental *target* outcomes relate to:

* P*hysical and mental health and well-being*
* *Protection from harm and neglect*
* *Education, training and recreation*
* *The contribution made by them to society*
* *Social and economic well-being*

Whilst the attainment and performance of pupils in schools is a key impact objective for CPD programmes the TDA is also seeking impact evidence in relation **to all** the above Every Child Matters outcomes.

It therefore appears that the TDA accepts that impact can be obtained across a wide range of sources and that both qualitative and quantitative data are valid as diverse evidence of impact, however, there is still much ongoing debate in the educational sector as to what actually constitutes impact as well as to how impact data can be gathered and measured (Coombs, Lewis & Denning, 2007).

The issue of assessing the impact of professional development programmes in schools is multidimensional and, despite much discussion within the sector over recent decades, this issue still proves to be highly problematic. A number of authors e.g., Flecknoe (2000 & 2003), Lee & Glover (1995), have noted the difficulties of measuring the impact of professional development. Various typologies have been proposed by Joyce & Showers (1980), Fullan & Stiegelbauer (1991) and Harland and Kinder (1997) to try and frame the effects of professional development and therefore build some definition of impact in relation to the continuing professional development (CPD) of the teaching profession.

Consequently, CPD programme related impact was defined by Coombs and Denning (2005) who maintain:

* That impact means an improvement in learning for the learner.
* That the *learners* include *all* the social players and stakeholders engaged in the learning process.
* That we have identified the learners as being pupils/students, teachers and their peers, school leaders and the wider workforce including parents and governors.
* That impact embodies the concept of school improvement within a learning organisation.

From this background research of CPD literature the project developed the following framework model illustrated in figure (1) for CPD that relates CPD programme outcomes to various orders of pedagogical impact linked essentially to participant change of practice (Coombs, Lewis & Denning, 2007).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CPD Order**  Increasing level of Impact | **CPD outcome types linked to Impact as Change** |  |  |
| 3rd Order | Provisionary | Information | New awareness |
| 2nd Order | Motivation | Affective | Institutional |
| 1st Order | Value | Congruence | Knowledge and skills |

**Figure (1) Relating CPD outcomes to Orders of Impact**

# The Diversity of CPD Impact Evidence

Various HEI provider reports were compared for their diversity of impact evaluation processes and compared and contrasted. This led to an ESCalate project interim report in June 2007 that disseminated a table of provider practices against various sources of impact as identified from the provider PPD annual impact evaluation reports from November 2006. This findings table was expanded upon to include a qualitative analysis of identifying and articulating various categories of impact evaluation. This led to a ‘toolkit’ of various CPD methodologies and practices that can be identified from which to design and embed impact evidence into provider PPD programmes and resulted in the taxonomy of impact evaluation evidence illustrated in Table 1 reported to the IPDA conference (Coombs, 2007). A key finding from this project is the CPD concept of a taxonomy that classifies diverse impact evidence base types, e.g. Impact for Learning that links to summative and formative impact evidence. Following on from this is the distinctive concept and ontological assumption connected to formative *versus* summative impact evidence and how this relates to the design and implementation of diverse CPD activities. Thus, formative impact suggests a relationship between on-the-job teacher self evaluation of CPD processes and a new Impact-for-Learning agenda. Such a CPD policy considers impact as a pro-active CPD force for change and therefore dynamically built into the instructional design of HEI accredited CPD activity.

**Table 1: Taxonomy of Impact Evaluation Evidence**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Impact Evidence Mode** | **Research Instruments** | **Framework** |
| Formative Impact | Real-life assessment tools such as school leadership documents (SIPs/SDPs) and self evaluation forms (SEFs) for performance management. | Impact as real-life formative assessment or impact as organizational situated learning. |
| Impact-for-Learning | Evidence drawn from CPD assignments and projects where impact is related to on-the-job change. | Action research and enquiry through content-free modules enable this kind of CPD activity |
| Summative Impact | Usually related to end-of-module evaluation instruments/forms and interviews. | Impact is assumed as an outcome product rather than as an integrative process. |
| Learner Impact | Student voice captured through observations, interviews and other forms of survey as well as CPD developed new learning products. | Assumes a real-time CPD activity is taking place within the classroom and can gain on-the-job evidences |
| Partner Impact | Interview of key stakeholders from partnership school. | Case study approach towards field evidence. |
| Provider Impact | Bespoke feedback of PPD programme through partnership team meetings etc. | In-house evaluation systems. |
| Latent Impact | Follow-up interviews, focus groups and surveys of former PPD participants. | Develops a system for collecting longitudinal impact evidence |
| Organizational Impact | Tailored content-free CPD projects carried out within the school as learning organization. | Action research/enquiry for institutional change. Useful for middle and senior leadership CPD projects. |
| Impact Knowledge Transfer | Dissemination of a variety of impact evidence. | Second-order impact benefits achieved by wider dissemination in the public domain of best practice. |
| Teaching Profession Impact | Impact evidence that gleans evidence of impact PPD completion/engagement upon teacher retention. | Influences and informs TDA policy for retention, recruitment and promotion of teachers linked to CPD PPD activity. |
| Impact QA Support | Investing PPD funds on strategic personnel to support Impact QA requirements | The idea that each provider needs a dedicated impact evaluation researcher as a key team member. |

# Impact Futures and Recommended CPD Policy

What the project has not clarified is how, within all the constraints, objective, reliable and valid evidence of positive impacts *on children’s and young people’s outcomes* can be systematically revealed. The reactions of learners to changed practices (using ‘pupil voice’ and ‘participant voice’) is one vehicle for collecting impact evidence that providers are already using. It would be valuable to know more about the specific mechanisms being deployed for this kind of research and, consequently, to move towards more systematic ways in which it is done. This could be achieved through, for example, learner-centred questionnaires, or interviews that are based on rigorous research such as those suggested by McCombs and Whisler (1997). If a key imperative of the TDA PPD programme is observable outcomes among learners; it is recommended that the TDA should commission work in this area that then helps all providers to develop transparent procedures they can be usefully applied. One approach might be the adoption by all providers of standardized ways of eliciting this data from learners using an agreed impact research protocol that would achieve this goal. Such an impact research protocol would also assist in determining the relative effectiveness of different PPD programmes. This approach to systematically evaluating impact could then be extended to other TDA funded CPD programmes such as the new MTL and SENCO national qualification.

In addition to pupil voice, however ‘heard’, there is of course the use of assessment data in establishing the nature and extent of impacts on learners’ outcomes. Unfortunately, this approach can be particularly problematic. Practice oriented professional development is, by definition, concerned with change, (though it may also be concerned with adaptation or consolidation, or with extension of existing practice), so that the effects of change (or adaptation or extension) need to be assessed or evaluated against what might have been the case without change. A positivist approach to research suggests the need for control groups in order to identify the specific effects attributable to change. But such an approach encounters profound methodological, ethical and moral factors that also need to be considered. These include issues such as pupils’ equity of entitlement and the variables of practitioners’ (PPD participants’) individual differences and researcher effects upon any obtained results.

Thus, it is recommended that a more intrepretivist ‘improve’ research paradigm is adopted that concentrates on local school improvement projects, qualitative data and takes into account local human ethics and encourages/validates a more participative and inclusive approach to CPD activity within educational situations. Such an approach doesn’t try to avoid the positivist interpretation of the Hawthorne Effect, but indeed celebrates it as teacher empowerment to effect local educational change and improvement to teaching and learning (Coombs & Smith, 2003). The project findings suggest a new taxonomy of classifying different types of impact evidence and also suggest a diverse range of CPD research methodologies and approaches, i.e. the notion of a CPD toolkit from which to develop impact evidence as a form of integrative practice (Coombs & Harris, 2006), which has been summarized in Table 1. The key CPD policy recommendations from this project are as follows:

1. That the whole issue of the role that learner assessment data might play in evaluating PPD and other TDA-funded CPD impact is fully examined through a new rigorous research project.
2. That the efficacy of the assessment of the five outcomes as defined by the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda needs to be much more fully understood than it is at present.
3. That there is a full professional and academic discussion about any movement towards direct linkage of Postgraduate Professional Development to the assessment of the ECM outcomes and what research paradigms are commensurate toward evaluating CPD impact.
4. That the TDA conceptual framework for evaluating impact shifts to accommodate the wider benefits and methodologies suggested in the higher-order taxonomy provided in Table 1.

It is hoped that this project has made a useful contribution to the conceptual thinking and framework assumptions underpinning teacher quality and accredited continuing professional development. And how this relates to improved practice through a better understanding of impact and how providers can both engineer and evaluate it. It is also hoped that this project’s findings will assist in the future evolution and informed design rationale of all the TDA’s funded programmes for accredited CPD and that this will benefit all ‘learners’ working within Children’s Services and the wider educational system.

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