Designing and evaluating impact evidences for the UK’s TDA Postgraduate Professional Development Programme


Institute of Education: London

Steven J. Coombs: Bath Spa University
s.coombs@bathspa.ac.uk

Malcolm Lewis: University of Bristol
malcolm.lewis@bristol.ac.uk

Alison Denning: Bath Spa University
a.denning@bathspa.ac.uk

Abstract

The Higher Education (HE) accredited postgraduate funding arrangements by the Training and Development Agency (TDA) for schools in England has been radically changed through the introduction of a new scheme called Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD). The PPD requires all HE providers in England to produce an annual report on Impact-related field evidences drawn from teachers’ practice in schools. This led to the UK’s Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) to set up a Special Interest Group (SIG) looking into the issues of impact related research.

Many Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs offered through UK universities have consequently championed the concept of Professional Learning within the workplace and have redesigned their postgraduate curriculum to fit into the TDA’s funding rules for delivering PPD. The TDA now requires HE-accredited in-service programmes to provide evidences of organisational impact of teacher quality and work-based learning in schools as part of the school improvement agenda (Ofsted, 2004). Thus, all PPD HE providers in England are now required to build-in impact evaluation instruments into their mainstream postgraduate qualifications programmes that enrol qualified teachers, for which in return they receive an annual funding grant subsidy. Such an outcomes-led policy of CPD suggests to many HE PPD providers new opportunities to integrate programme delivery with impact-led educational research (Coombs & Denning, 2005). This approach towards integrating CPD teaching and learning with new professional-led practice based research that delivers impact evidences for evaluation and ownership by the teaching profession is considered as being timely by UCET (Coombs & Harris, 2006) and has also been recommended by the OECD (2002) in their recent report on the state of educational research in England. UCET has recently set up a special interest group (SIG) to report findings on CPD-based Impact in order to shape new policy proposals with key stakeholders such as the TDA and UK’s former Department for Education and Skills (DIES).

The authors of this paper wish to build upon and develop a framework model for impact related research outcomes from accredited PPD activity. This research project builds upon the conceptual framework developed in Harland and Kinder's (1997) seminal work, which is also
linked to Soulsby and Swain’s (TDA, 2003) report on accredited CPD to the TDA. Impact evidence case studies and their framework methodology and reporting instruments will be compared and contrasted across several partnership universities operating in the southwest of England funded through an ESCalate development grant. This integration of postgraduate in-service training opportunities with practice based, impact-led research will be of interest to both UK and international colleagues working in this area.

Introduction

The issue of assessing the impact of professional development programmes in schools is multidimensional and, despite much discussion within the sector over recent decades, 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 to 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. This position paper outlines the discussions which have been taking place regarding this issue within the UK’s South West Regional Group for Professional Development (SWRGPD) and discusses progress with an ESCalate funded project whose aim is to begin to develop a systematic approach towards the gathering of impact field research data across the South West region.

The implications of the TDA’s Postgraduate Professional Development funding scheme and its requirement for evidence of Impact

In 2005 the Training and Development Agency (TDA) for schools in England launched a new Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) programme, to subsidise English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to provide Master’s (M) level CPD courses for qualified teachers residing in England. A requirement in the criterion for funding under this programme is that each of the institutions running courses subsidized by the programme would, on an annual basis, be required to submit a report detailing the impact of its provision on the programmes participants as well as the effects on the pupils and the schools in which they teach. This requirement is sustained in the 2008-11 criterion for funding for those HEI’s who intend to apply for an allocation of places for the next triennial round of funding as a part of the PPD programme. The requirement for this triennial round states that:

*Applicants should make clear:*

2. how the impact of the provision on children and young people and on participants will be evaluated and how it will be subject to rigorous internal and external quality assurance
The TDA does give guidance to support the writing of applicant’s responses to this criterion. The guidance states that:

‘The TDA understands that PPD can have a positive impact in a variety of ways. This can include impact on values and attitudes, self-confidence and motivation, knowledge, performance, risk-taking and on a participant’s ability to reflect. These are all valid examples of impact. The TDA does expect, however, that providers will relate such areas of impact to tangible improvements in professional practice which make an observable difference to children and young people’s outcomes.’ (TDA (2007b), PPD Application Form, Guidance, Criterion 2).

It expands upon what is meant by ‘children and young people’s outcomes’ by reference primarily to the five outcomes of Every Child Matters as expressed in the UK government’s Children Act of 2004.

These five target outcomes relate to:

- Physical 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

The guidance goes on to explain that ‘attainment and performance is key, but the TDA is interested in impact in relation to all the outcomes above’.

In making the above statement it does appear that the TDA accept that impact can be obtained across a wide range of sources and that both qualitative and quantitative data are valid as evidence of impact, however, there is still much debate in the sector as to what actually constitutes impact as well as to how impact data can be gathered and measured.

A recent literature review conducted through this project of the impact of continuing professional development has highlighted the problematic nature of the assessment of impact in the area of accredited CPD. Many authors have attempted to frame the effects of impact. Each of these models has provided a typology of the effects of professional development in order to try to make some definition of the types of impact that could be expected after a programme of professional development. Joyce and Showers, in their 1980 model proposed the following framework of outcomes:
1. Awareness of new skills;
2. Concepts and organisation of underlying concepts and theories, ordering knowledge;
3. Development of new skills;
4. Application of concepts, principles and skills to practice.

Joyce and Showers (1980) presented further findings focusing on measurement of ‘effect size’ on pupil learning. This begins to address the issue of direct effects of training on pupil achievement. They proposed that by assessing pupils’ learning and producing marks as a set of curves of distribution it is possible to note mean and standard deviations. It would therefore be possible that the effect of training could be shown as an improvement in mean and standard deviations. In answer to this model Powell and Terrell (2003) argue that:

‘this apparently neat and tidy, cause and effect relationship ought to be treated sceptically. It suggests a simplistic conceptualisation of teaching as a technical-rational pursuit, which can be understood solely, in this case, through a scientific lens’

This system of quantitative measurement does not take into account the wealth of qualitative data that is generated as a result of PPD and is indicative of the problems of trying to adapt procedures and conventions of quantitative methods to qualitative analysis as discussed by Miles and Hubermann (1994) and Seidel (1991). It is therefore essential that consideration of the place for both qualitative and quantitative types of data should be given and protected within a study of the impact of a PPD programme.

Harland and Kinder (1997) have built on the Joyce and Showers model and in 1997 proposed a nine-point typology of INSET outcomes.

1. Material and provisionary outcomes
2. Informational outcomes
3. New awareness
4. Value congruence
5. Affective outcomes
6. Motivational and attitudinal outcomes
7. Knowledge and skills
8. Institutional outcomes
9. Impact on practice
In the same seminal paper Harland and Kinder move on to propose a tentative hierarchy of the above outcomes through a study of teachers accounts of an in-service (INSET) experience and classroom observation of practice. They concluded that ‘it was apparent that the presence of certain outcomes was more likely to achieve developments in practice than others’. The assumption was made that the ultimate goal of INSET was to influence and improve classroom practice with situated learning changes linked to pedagogical impact and the following order of CPD outcomes was proposed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPD Order</th>
<th>CPD outcomes types linked to Impact as Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd Order</td>
<td>Provisionary Information New awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Order</td>
<td>Motivation Affective Institutional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Order</td>
<td>Value Congruence Knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The evidence of their evaluation suggests that ‘CPD experiences which focus on (or are perceived as offering) only third order outcomes are least likely to impact on practice, unless other higher order outcomes are also achieved or already exist. The presence of changes in value congruence and knowledge and skills constantly coincided with substantial impacts on practice although these in turn might well require the presence of other lower order outcomes…… to achieve sustained implementation’

They conclude that ‘in order to maximise the chances of CPD leading to a change in classroom practice, all nine ‘outcomes’ need to be present as pre-existing conditions or be achieved by the INSET activity’

The benefits of the professional development to the teachers that undertake this type of CPD activity also needs to be a consideration in the discussion of impact linked to the various types of CPD outcomes illustrated in figure (1), whereupon Harland and Kinder’s 9-point typology represents an instructional design checklist (or rubric) from which CPD activity can be both designed and evaluated against. Powell and Terrell (2003) argue that ‘Impact should not be concerned with quantifiable data with value expressed exclusively in terms of pupils’ achievements. Teachers’ judgments, insights and reflections on what constitute significance and value in relation to their own personal, academic and professional needs and development are equally important’
Many authors have noted the difficulties of measuring the impact of CPD, particularly the difficulties of claiming a causal link between a CPD event and an increase in pupil achievement, especially in the context of an increase in academic performance indicators.

The typologies detailed above all provide frameworks to help providers assess the impact of CPD on the participants engaged within a particular programme. None of these models consider the direct impact of the CPD on pupils, either in the form of their learning or achievement. The epistemological assumption is that an impact on the participant will have a ‘system wide’ impact that will eventually result in an effect on pupil learning and achievement. This assumption supports the argument that any improvement of ‘teacher quality’ will have an indirect impact on pupil learning and well being and that research should explore a methodology to provide evidence of this effect. The complex distillation of such impact from the time of the CPD activity will therefore lead to a decreased ability to be conclusive about the causality in terms of the original CPD input. This implies that the positivist paradigm assumption of simplistic evidence gained through hypothesis testing may be inappropriate for the measurement of such CPD impact.

Flexneoe (2000) also discusses these problems relating to the demonstration of impact of a CPD programme and describes it as threefold:

1. **The difficulty of showing that any pupil is gaining more against a particular criterion than they would have done under a different educational influence. To overcome this a control group would need to be used with its inherent ethical issues;**
2. **The issue of causality because of the many influences on a pupil that may have nothing to do with the teacher (or the latter’s exposure to particular training).**
3. **The influence of the temporary Hawthorn effect. This effect is centered on the theory that when teachers intervene in their own practice of teaching to improve standards, they stand a good chance of raising the achievement of their pupils whatever they do.**

Each of these areas must be considered prior to the creation of any toolkit designed to gather impact data. Once again, the assumption is that impact is to be evaluated through a positivist paradigmatic approach, i.e. causal links, control groups and quantitative data linked to statistics etc. A more humanist approach to obtaining research evidence that assumes data drawn from the qualitative ‘improve’ rather than positivist ‘prove’ paradigm might be a more useful approach.

In addition to these complexities it is also important to consider a research paradigm that is commensurate to the ethics of the process, i.e. who is asking the questions about impact, what is
their agenda or personal motivation, and what will the outcomes and conclusions from the data be used for?

The dialogue above should begin to identify that the issue of impact is complex, multi-faceted, problematic and, to a degree, contentious. In addition to this the establishing and evidencing of causal links between CPD activity and ‘outcomes’ as defined by the Every Child Matters agenda, particularly to identify what makes an ‘observable difference’, is, to say the least, a highly sophisticated process and requires a social science research paradigm suited to the nature of engaging with this problem that helps to identify local improvements to teaching and learning practice. Clearly, methodologies such as action research embed this improvement agenda and represent one useful way in which impact could be built constructively into CPD programmes rather than just passively evaluated.

All of these issues to achieve CPD impact are made more challenging because the ‘outcomes’ as defined by the Every Child Matters agenda are couched in such generalised terms and the TDA’s guidance for PPD funded providers of CPD state that ‘information collection mechanisms should draw on existing resources wherever possible and at all times aim to minimise any additional administrative burden. In particular, providers must not burden schools and Local Authorities (LAs) with requests for data that is additional to that produced as a natural outcome of running or participating in the programme’.

Taking full account of the kinds of issues raised above, this requirement suggests a real tension between what the TDA expects as valid impact evidence and the difficult conditions it imposes on providers. It could be said that fulfilling the TDA’s expectations (and, therefore, meeting the stated criteria) requires exactly the kind of burdening of schools and LAs with requests for data that is expressly proscribed. It is also necessary to ask whether providers have and can draw on ‘existing resources’ for information collection mechanisms that are fit for purpose. In this respect, the assumption of what is or constitutes ‘a natural outcome’ of running a programme of professional development is open to diverse interpretations, and much will depend on the way the programme is resourced. Beyond that, there is a fundamental question about the extent to which causal relationships (or even clear links) between certain kinds of pedagogical activity (whether or not resulting from professional developmental experiences) and learners’ outcomes can be reliably researched within the positivist paradigm. Evaluating ‘observable difference’ requires the establishment of such causal relationships if one adopts the assumptions of a positivist ‘hypothesis’ testing paradigm. Whereas, if a more interpretivist research paradigm is adopted then evidences of local improvements in teaching and learning practice would be useful data.
defining CPD that led to enhanced teaching and learning practice that indirectly affects impact on all learners within an educational establishment.

Without the exercise of sophisticated and methodologically robust and valid (and hence burdensome and resource-consuming) mechanisms, it is likely that providers of the TDA’s PPD must rely on whatever research procedures are pragmatic – and, hence, not necessarily definitive – in order to evaluate the impact of programmes in terms of the specified outcomes, particularly in relation to outcomes observable among children and young people.

The South West analysis of PPD Impact

In January 2007 the South West Regional Group for Professional Development (SWRGPD) began a project, funded by ESCalate, involving an analysis of the first PPD annual reports provided by each of the South West HEIs funded by the TDA through the PPD programme in the 2005/6 academic year.

The evaluation for this project involved three stages. Firstly provider reports from each of the institutions in the SWRGPD funded by the PPD programme were benchmarked against the TDAs (2007a) ‘Summary report of national responses’ produced in March 2007. The aim of this analysis was to identify areas of best practice within the region and to identify items from the national analysis which needed to be addressed within the region.

The second stage of the evaluation looked at the Harland and Kinder (1997) framework for assessment of impact and benchmarked each of the provider reports against this model to once again assess those areas of best practice that could be utilized in the third phase of the evaluation, which would be to develop a framework of tools which could be used to gather impact data about the PPD programme at both a regional and national level.

Currently the evaluation is moving into its third phase. The initial stages of the evaluation have identified a variety of diverse enterprising ways, both locally and nationally, in which the impact of PPD on participants is being measured and evaluated.

Conclusions and recommendations

What is not so clear 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’) is one vehicle for collecting such evidence that providers are already using. It would be valuable to know more about the specific
mechanisms being deployed for this, and, perhaps, to move towards agreed and possibly more systematic ways in which it is done, through, for example, learner-centred questionnaires that are based on rigorous research in this field such as that by McCombs and Whisler (1997). If a key imperative of TDA PPD 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 usefully apply to their programmes. One approach might be the adoption by all providers of standardised ways of eliciting this data from learners using an agreed impact protocol that would achieve this goal. Such a protocol would also assist in determining the relative effectiveness of different PPD programmes.

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. Thus, it is recommended that a more interpretivist 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/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).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to enlarge any further on this debate, but it is nevertheless recommended that:

1. the whole issue of the role that learner assessment data might play in evaluating PPD impact is fully examined;
2. the efficacy of the assessment of the five outcomes as defined by the Every Child Matters agenda needs to be much more fully understood than it is at present; and,
3. there is a full professional and academic discussion about any movement towards direct linkage of PPD to the assessment of those outcomes and what research paradigms are commensurate toward evaluating CPD impact.
There are hostages to fortune in this, for example, PPD that is highly positively received by participants for personal, academic or professional reasons that is, nevertheless, afforded low priority on learner assessment counts. However, all the above recommended issues deserve to be fully considered and evaluated by the educational profession.

This paper is entitled ‘Designing and evaluating impact evidences for the UK’s TDA Postgraduate Professional Development Programme’. It has not yet proposed a particular model or set of principles defining a systematic approach, but has, instead, been concerned with illuminating and critically evaluating some of the conceptual, theoretical, practical and professional issues pertaining to such an approach. It is hoped that this paper has made a useful contribution to the conceptual thinking and assumptions underpinning teacher quality and continuing professional development in general terms. And that this will assist in the future evolution and design of the TDA’s PPD programme for the benefit of all learners.

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**South West Regional Group for Professional Development**

Professor Ron Ritchie (University of the West of England), Chair
Elisabeth Barratt Hacking (University of Bath)
John Blewitt (University of Exeter)
Carolyn Bromfield (University of the West of England)
Steven Coombs (Bath Spa University)
Dave Dickson (TDA Provider Link Adviser)
Cliff Harris (The College of St Mark and St John)
Chris Lee (Plymouth University)
Malcolm Lewis (University of Bristol)
Amanda Pill (University of Gloucestershire)
Sheila Steer (TDA Provider Link Adviser)

Co-opted Members:

Alison Denning (Bath Spa University)
Charles Sisum (Bath Spa University)
Ros Sutherland (University of Bristol)