

## Assessing and evaluating the impact of professional learning

### Framework for a critical professional conversation

#### Note

What follows has appeared in a slightly different form on this website as a Framework for Making Critical Sense of Professional Learning. Here is the link.

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_intro.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_intro.pdf)

I am again trying to stimulate conversation about the professional learning of educators. Accompanying this framework are two worked examples, one written as though by a school and representing its collective professional learning and the other written as though by a newly qualified teacher.

All over the world there are organisations that host such conversations. I want to draw attention to one. It is the International Professional Development Association (ipda). Here is the link to its website.

<http://ipda.org.uk/>

This framework for assessing and evaluating the impact of professional learning allows for different professional contexts, complexity and change. It is in sequence and as a diagram would be a spiral rather than a loop and lead to further professional learning. It is not a closed process.

It allows people to bring different perspectives to bear; to draw attention to and examine a range of factors that might be at work; to problematise, for example, policy and examination results; and to challenge theory and generate new knowledge. The framework does not encourage a pass/fail or graded approach. It emphasises enquiry, critical sense making and allows for the dynamics of professional life.

The concepts of assessment and evaluation can overlap and different cultures have historically emphasised one rather than the other. My view is that *assessment* is largely the process of making critical sense of what has happened and *evaluation* is largely the process of establishing the significance of what has happened. The latter is not the same as giving a score though it can lead to that.

[www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk)

The relevant literature on assessment and evaluation is extensive and not confined to the field of education. This, however, is not about grading, measuring and scoring: it is about discovery and exchange.

My **purposes** are as follows.

- a) Stimulation of international research into the impact of professional learning.
- b) Facilitation of the exchange of knowledge.
- c) Dissemination of the research outcomes of professional learning.

### **Background history**

The framework will be familiar to some members of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (<http://www.ucet.ac.uk>) because it draws upon the paper that underpinned the ten year long annual evaluation of the impact of the programme of masters and doctoral degrees known as postgraduate professional development (PPD) operated in England by the former Training and Development Agency (TDA). The framework has also been adapted for use as a critical professional learning framework as mentioned in the note above and, in a different form, was the basis for work on critical learning journals, including (under UCET's name) those used by the National Strategies in England. In a much earlier form it was the subject of a funded research project which led to a set of UCET principles for the use of portfolio evidence in masters degrees and they underpinned the UCET bridging assignments connecting programmes of what was then known as the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) with PPD. And in an even earlier form it was an assignment for the masters in education programme of the University of Liverpool where it was called the Record of Continuing Professional Development (ROCPD) and used perhaps five thousand times. The link below is to the research project.

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/1\\_report.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/1_report.pdf)

Information about all of the above is available under **RESOURCES** on the ipda website [www.ipda.org.uk](http://www.ipda.org.uk). They are also to be found here

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/activities.html#masters>

The potential exists for: conferences/seminars on this theme; research projects; publications or series of publications; and more. If people wish to share use of the framework I believe that it will be useful to exchange with people from different countries.

[www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk)

## More useful links

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/activities.html>

- <http://leonardo-pactt.wikispaces.com/file/view/PaCTT%20Executive%20Summary%20Sheet.pdf/438167672/PaCTT%20Executive%20Summary%20Sheet.pdf>

- <http://leonardo-pactt.wikispaces.com/file/view/PaCTT%20CPD%20Framework%20Tool%20-%20Final.pdf/438254384/PaCTT%20CPD%20Framework%20Tool%20-%20Final.pdf>

## The Framework

*Each numbered part of the framework has some rationale plus guidance and a question to stimulate response. Separately there is a worked example for an institution and another for an individual professional.*

### 1. Analysis of identified professional learning needs (institutional and/or individual/small groups)

*The word 'analysis' is crucial here. A mere listing of needs without thinking about where they come from or what they imply is inadequate.*

*This and the next stage contribute to the conceptualisation of professional learning. They also begin to indicate the kind of literature and sources of data that will be needed.*

**So, how did you set about analysing identified professional learning needs and what was the significance of what you found?**

The following link might help. There is a further link to a worked example.

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_sub\\_1.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_sub_1.pdf)

### 2. Context setting and baselining

*Awareness of the various contexts in which professional learning takes place enables the use of more perspectives from which to make critical sense of the learning. It enriches the approach to the assessment and evaluation of impact and prevents its confinement to the simple hitting of targets.*

**What can you tell us about the context(s) in which the professional learning took place and the baseline(s) from which it started?**

This link might help.

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_sub\\_2.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_sub_2.pdf)

### 3. Intended Professional Impact Outcomes

*Having analysed needs and examined contexts it becomes possible to clarify what we might also call intended professional learning outcomes.*

**What was it that you intended to happen, develop, learn or discover?**

**This link might be useful.**

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_sub\\_3.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_sub_3.pdf)

### 4. Expected Evidence for Impact

*In other words, what might happen as this period of planned professional learning begins? This can be done with some confidence because there is now an idea of need, of baseline, of values and of intention. These are a basis for reflection upon the significance of actual evidence when it is generated. But I suggest not being too prescriptive here.*

*The word 'expected' has been chosen as a match for the word 'intended' at 3. Both are somewhat tentative and allow for other things to happen and to be considered.*

**What were your preliminary thoughts about the kind of evidence that you might generate?**

**Another link that might help**

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_sub\\_4.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_sub_4.pdf)

### **5. Activities designed to demonstrate outcomes**

*What, in other words, were the plans for carrying out the intentions as set out at 3? It is likely that there were a range of such activities: internal and external; formal and informal; and individual and collaborative. Professional learning is not always tidy, timed, tangible and targeted. Often it is untidy, untimed, intangible and untargeted. Nevertheless, it is possible to look back at our intentions and describe how we intend to carry them out.*

**What plans did you have to make things happen?**

**The next link might help.**

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_sub\\_5.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_sub_5.pdf)

### **6. Monitoring and Observation arrangements**

*We collect evidence of the impact of professional learning in all sorts of ways. There is some very formal collection of evidence, particularly when it relates to inspection and the achievement of targets. The significance of such evidence may, however, be rather narrow. The danger is that we fall into the trap of only compiling for consideration evidence that is tangible and considered to be unproblematic. There can be considerable significance in evidence that is problematic or not easy to classify.*

**How did you observe what happened and how was evidence collected?**

**Another link.**

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_sub\\_6.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_sub_6.pdf)

## **7. Review of Evidence for Impact, including unexpected evidence for unintended outcomes**

*Here we are looking back at what happened. This is often the point at which what might have appeared to be successful now seems less so having been examined critically. By the same token what may look like failure to carry out planned intentions may, after the same critical examination, be a significant and useful unintended outcome.*

*It is important to make sense of the nature, strength and significance of evidence. It may be tangible and unassailable but not significant. It may be intangible, weak or highly problematic but, nevertheless, highly significant.*

*Reporting on the impact of professional learning should not become a pass/fail exercise. People in the education business are always making discoveries that they did not expect to make and examining them for significance and value before deciding to adopt or discard them. We should do this also for professional learning.*

**How did you review the evidence for professional learning?**

**You might try this link.**

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_sub\\_7.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_sub_7.pdf)

## 8. Substantiated Impact Claiming

*This is where attention is drawn to what has been achieved. In doing this, of course, claims are made about what is believed to be significant. This means that when departing from the original set of intentions it is important to show that all claims for the impact of professional learning, whether direct or indirect, can be shown to have undergone thorough examination.*

**So, what was the impact?**

**Almost the last link**

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_sub\\_8.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_sub_8.pdf)

## 9. Plans for following up

*This is simply what you might reasonably wish to do next. Because this Framework is a spiral it becomes natural after a while to see the past as a foundation for the future. There are unforeseen events that pop up and have to be dealt with. Nevertheless, working like this allows you to build momentum from the experience and dynamic of your or your institution's own professional learning experience.*

**So, put simply, where and what next? This is, after all, a spiral.**

**Final link.**

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework\\_sub\\_9.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Framework_sub_9.pdf)

## Comment

The danger to be avoided when assessing and evaluating is that we only look for what we want to find. This is why, although the framework encourages thinking about intended outcomes and expected evidence, the review and interrogation of evidence stage also calls for the examination of any unexpected evidence for what might be significant unintended outcomes.

## **Annex**

**Below are the VALUES and PURPOSES of ipda. They are included as reference points for the above.**

### **VALUES**

- **Commitment to consultation and open decision-making**
- **Respect for and understanding of different cultures**
- **Willingness to support, encourage and exchange the learning of professional educators**
- **Commitment to the importance of research and dissemination**
- **Respect for dialogue and critical debate.**

### **PURPOSES are to:**

- **stimulate critical insight and provide support for policy-makers, providers and professional educators;**
- **share among members ideas, practice, concepts and theories relating to professional learning in education;**
- **provide opportunity to share problems, interests and concerns through critical friendship.**

**Cliff Jones**