



Monitoring and evaluation



Professional Learning Communities:
source materials for school leaders and
other leaders of professional learning

Assessing the impact of your professional learning community

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Introduction

A critical but sometimes neglected process in creating and sustaining a professional learning community (PLC) is assessing the impact of your efforts and feeding this into the future development of the PLC. The difference PLCs make can be judged in three ways.

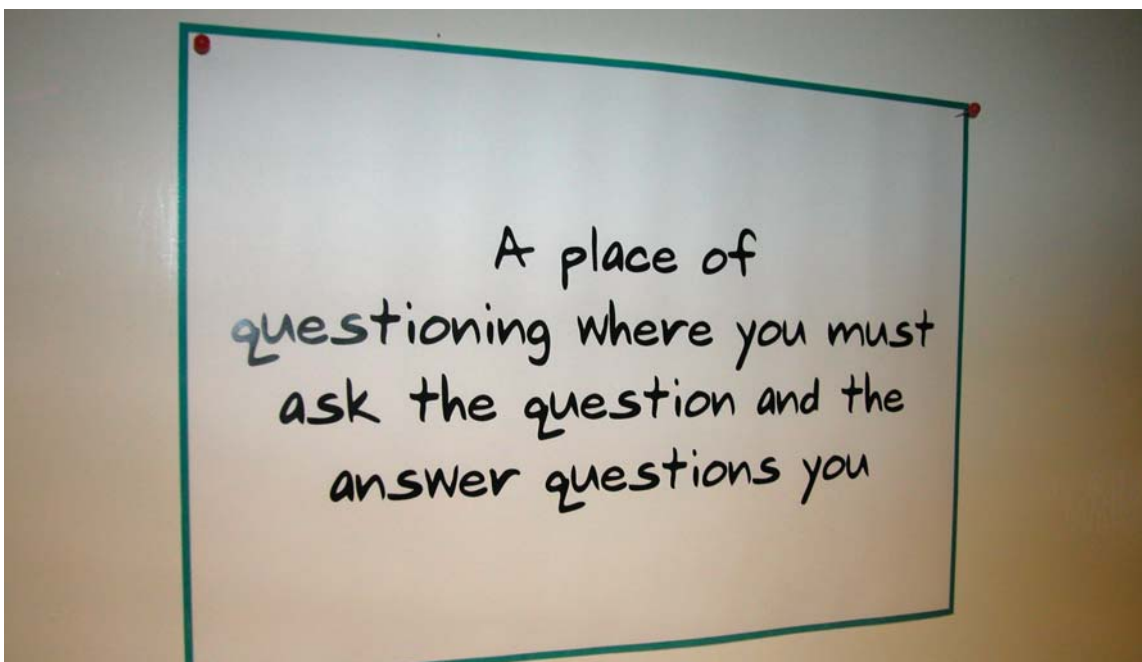
- 1 Ultimately an effective PLC makes a difference to *pupil outcomes*. Our research found evidence of this¹, and while this is difficult to assess, it's vital to keep this in mind as the bottom line and be considering what evidence you have of this.
- 2 An effective PLC also makes a difference to *staff morale and practice* and should help to build *leadership capacity* throughout the school.
- 3 A PLC is also effective when *all of the characteristics are in place and the processes are operating smoothly as a matter of course in order to sustain the PLC*.

Purpose of this activity

This activity is designed to help you:

- assess where you have had an impact that you can attribute to attention you have paid to developing your PLC
- give examples of the evidence you have to demonstrate that this is the case

Asking questions is at the heart of this activity. 'Inquiry mindedness'² is also centrally important to professional learning communities; a need to understand better what you are doing, to whom it makes a difference and how. One of the headteachers in the project had a poster on her door which exemplified this.



Notice on headteacher's door

How can you use this activity?

Work collaboratively to complete the following charts to answer four questions.

Question 1: What is the overall impact?

Using the scale of 4=high and 1=low, rate the extent to which you feel your efforts to develop a professional learning community have had an impact on:

- each of the eight characteristics of professional learning communities (*write in the numbers at the top of Evaluation Grid A*)
- staff and leadership practice (*write in the numbers at the top of Evaluation Grid B*)
- pupil outcomes (*write in the numbers at the top of Evaluation Grid B*)

Question 2: What is the evidence of impact on your PLC's characteristics?

The eight characteristics of professional learning communities identified in our research are listed as headings at the top of *Evaluation Grid A*. For each characteristic where you feel you have had a positive impact, write down in the grid *specific evidence* you have of particular processes you have used that you think have contributed to the positive impact. We have given some examples of the kind of processes that we found in our project in the vertical column in the framework, but you will find others on the resource card, ***What is a professional learning community? A summary*** in the introductory source materials.

We suggest that you focus on each process in turn, first reflecting on what actions you took and then considering how the action impacted on the different PLC characteristics. For example, under 'optimising resources and structures', if the allocation of rooms were changed so that each subject department, several year groups/grades or a key stage group had classrooms close together, what effect has this had on staff collaboration on learning? Has it increased? You may well have done additional things that you would categorise under each process. You can add these at the bottom of the grid.

Question 3: What is the evidence of the characteristics' impact on outcomes?

Using *Evaluation Grid B*, first answer questions 1b) and 1c) rating the impact you feel your efforts have had on staff, leadership and pupil outcomes. Then, for each area of staff and leadership practice and each pupil outcome where you feel your work in developing a PLC has had a positive impact, write down in the grid specific evidence you have of links between specific characteristics and these outcomes.

Question 4: What can you learn from this, and how will you apply your learning?

Having gathered the evidence, review it and ask yourselves questions about what you can learn from the data and how you intend to apply this learning to your processes of PLC development in order to enhance impact even further. There is a sheet at the back where you can make notes on your dialogue and decisions.

¹ Bolam, R, McMahon, A, Stoll, L, Thomas, S, & Wallace, M, with Greenwood, A, Hawkey, K, Ingram, M, Atkinson, A, & Smith, M, 2005, *Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities*, DFES Research Report RR637, University of Bristol. Available at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR637.pdf

² Earl, L, & Lee, L, 2000, Learning, for a change: School improvement as capacity building, *Improving Schools*, 3 (1): 30-38

Evaluation Grid B	Staff and leadership practice outcomes					Pupil outcomes		
	Staff morale	Staff learning and teaching practice	Leadership capacity throughout the school/centre/college		Attitudes, attendance and well-being	Engagement with learning	Academic progress and achievement	
<p>Question 1b: Rating of level of impact 4=high, 1=low</p>				<p>Question 1c: Rating of level of impact 4=high, 1=low</p>				
<p>Question 3: Examples of evidence of the characteristics' impact on outcomes</p>								
<p><i>Shared values and vision</i></p>								
<p><i>Collective responsibility for learning</i></p>								
<p><i>Collaboration focused on learning</i></p>								
<p><i>Reflective professional enquiry</i></p>								

Evaluation Grid B	Staff and leadership practice outcomes					Pupil outcomes			
	Staff morale	Staff learning and teaching practice	Leadership capacity throughout the school/centre/college	Attitudes, attendance and well-being	Engagement with learning	Academic progress and achievement			
Question 1b: Rating of level of impact 4=high, 1=low				Question 1c: Rating of level of impact 4=high, 1=low					
Question 3: Examples of evidence of the characteristics' impact on outcomes									
<i>Individual and group learning</i>									
<i>Openness, networks and partnerships</i>									
<i>Inclusive membership</i>									
<i>Mutual trust, respect and support</i>									

Question 4: What can you learn from this, and how will you apply your learning?

Learning from the data



What do these data tell you about your efforts to develop your professional learning community?

Are you more successful in certain areas of PLC development than in others?

Have you had a greater impact on certain aspects of your school, centre or college and on certain groups than others?

What else do you need to know, and how might you find this out?



Applying your learning



What should you continue doing?

What should you start doing and how might you go about this?

What should you stop doing?



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Reflecting on the progress of your professional learning community
Assessing the impact of your professional learning community

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