

This Continuing Professional Development programme was created as part of a wider research project focusing on evidence gathering practices in Community Learning and Development work in Scotland

Grateful Acknowledgments

We would like to thank a number of people for their assistance with this project. First of all we would like to thank all the participants in the focus groups and pilot programmes who assisted us in developing our ideas about Statistics and Stories. They made the process both enjoyable and highly illuminating.

We would like to thank Sheila Brown, HM Inspector with Education Scotland, for her interest in the project and her advice and Shelagh Richardson for clerical and administrative support. Peter Taylor, Co-ordinator for Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland, has provided a focus for our work and his interest in the project has been well received by us.



Aim

To support CLD workers (particularly grass roots workers) to generate evidence of the effectiveness of their interventions and to build confidence across the field in doing so

Background

This CPD programme emanates from a project conceived by the Community Learning and Development Managers (CLDMS) network (see full report on the CLDMS website at www.cldms.org.uk). It was funded by Education Scotland and remitted to Aberdeenshire Council to undertake in 2011. Aberdeenshire Council in turn contracted Dr. Karen McArdle from the University of Aberdeen to assist with the implementation of the project. The project draws on and is a response to a study undertaken by Blake Stevenson for CLDMS that explored the use of Logic Models in particular in the Community Learning and Development (CLD) field. The authors bring to this project knowledge and expertise from their experience of CLD and for Sue Briggs as an Associate Assessor with Education Scotland. Karen McArdle brings a particular expertise in research across quantitative, qualitative and mixed method domains.

The report itself documents an action research process in which the views of CLD practitioners at a range of levels within the professional field concerning gathering the evidence of impact of professional practice were explored. One of the first things that the authors of the report did was to conceive of the title for the project which is ***Gathering the Evidence: Statistics and Stories***. The sub-title proved very important to the project as it was an accessible way of describing the evidence we were exploring and became an easily understandable phrase with which we could describe the processes we sought to explore and it was affirmed through our data collection as a useful means of conceptualising the purpose, methods and intent of gathering evidence.

The context for the project was coloured for us by the CLDMS Sub-Committee on Quality Improvement and by Peter Taylor, the Co-ordinator for CLDMS.

Methodology

We chose to adopt an action research approach to the project as we wished to explore the understandings of practitioners in the field of the purposes, methods and intent of gathering evidence and to use this as the basis for the development of educational programmes to be used by CLDMS managers and their staff, to train the workforce in gathering evidence of impact. We chose to use focus groups organised across Scotland as we intended that the data we would gather would explore our research questions in depth and seek contrasting views on the processes we were exploring.

Groups were held in Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Fife to cover the geographical agenda and events were also held, where this was requested, in Angus, and pilot training programmes in Aberdeenshire. A total of 66 people attended these and we were pleased with the geographical spread of participants. These included participants from entry levels of the professional field – people who were relatively new to the profession – to a member of senior management of a CLD service. The majority of our participants, as we had hoped, were grass roots practitioners rather than managers.

The focus group feedback was recorded and flipchart paper was used to record key points in the discussion. We produced summaries of the flipcharts and data was analysed using thematic and discourse analysis of the summary sheets and recordings. The focus groups were structured around 10 key questions that we identified on the basis of our own understandings of the significant features of gathering evidence. These questions were:

1.	Why does gathering evidence matter?
2.	What is evidence?
3.	Who gathers evidence?
4.	How do you go about gathering evidence?
5.	What is the best evidence you have gathered?
6.	Why was it the best?
7.	How did you get it?
8.	What happens to the evidence?
9.	What would be useful to people in gathering evidence?
10.	Where should tools and guidance be held?

Characteristically sessions lasted two and a half to three hours and involved around a dozen people in each. Discussion was vibrant, enthusiastic and focussed on the questions we had posed. The questions proved to be a fruitful means of gathering the data we were seeking and hence have formed the basis of the educational programme we have devised as part of this action research process. The 10 questions often overlapped in terms of the discussion they generated but we felt that they covered considerable ground and were a useful resource.

One of the key dimensions of action research is that it has a learning purpose and we decided to benchmark knowledge of gathering evidence before we engaged in the focus groups. This was done with a simple and accessible grid with which participants were invited to indicate their confidence levels in terms of gathering evidence of impact. Our simple grid showed that the research process did indeed result in a gain in confidence and knowledge about the processes involved in gathering evidence, which once again has influenced the methods we chose to use in the development of the educational dimension of this project.



Gathering the Evidence of the Effectiveness of CLD: Statistics and Stories

CPD Programme

Aims

- To promote awareness with CLD staff at all levels about how they can gather evidence of CLD effectiveness;
- To identify good practice in generating evidence in your local area and to spread the news of the importance of evidence gathering;
- To strengthen the ability of CLD workers at all levels to generate evidence of effectiveness.

Outcomes

By the end of this programme, participants will:

- Understand the importance of evidence gathering;
- Gain confidence in and motivation for evidence gathering;
- Understand approaches and methods for evidence gathering that are relevant at local level;
- Develop an awareness of the skills required for effective evidence gathering and how to access these skills;
- Identify and be motivated to employ creative and effective approaches to evidence gathering in their personal practice.

Introduction

This training programme is derived from a project sponsored by CLDMS and Education Scotland. The project researched Gathering Evidence in CLD using focus groups across Scotland to seek data on how CLD workers gather evidence of the effectiveness of their practice. The full report is available on the CLDMS website at www.cldms.org.uk

CLD is a way of working that is notoriously varied in its application. This reflects the communities and the practice that the work is embedded in. The outcomes for success for:

- achievement through learning for young people;
- achievement through learning for adults; and
- achievement through community asset building

are varied and diversely demonstrated.

External evaluation from Education Scotland focuses principally on the impact of our work. Inspectors/Assessors base their evaluations on what they: **Hear, See and Read** when they visit a learning community. The evidence produced to show impact of our work is vital in this regard. Also, as practitioners, employers and managers, we need to know ourselves that the work we do is good, is making a difference, is value for money and is worth it.

There are no rules around the shape of evidence. In the CLD field we have a great deal of creative leeway in what we provide to demonstrate that a piece of work or an approach has been effective. The important factor in successful evidence gathering is the capturing of feedback from participants and across the country we do that in different ways. We are of the opinion that the best means of understanding evidence gathering is to focus on: **Statistics and Stories**.

This is an accessible way in which CLD workers can understand the importance of both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Numbers matter but so do the personal, group and community stories behind what we do.

Who Should Attend?

The programme is designed for practitioners at all levels of CLD. It has been piloted with participants from Angus and Aberdeenshire and included heads of service at one level to new workers at another level. It is particularly useful for grass roots workers for whom evidence gathering may be to them a less attractive aspect of their practice. It can include sessional and part-time staff and is relevant for both qualified and less qualified workers. It is a refresher for qualified staff, who we found in our research had often forgotten their learning about research and evidence gathering if this had been covered. The programme is a good introduction for unqualified staff to raise confidence and motivation for evidence gathering.

We have run the programme in our pilots with two facilitators and groups ranging from 8 to 19.

Resources

For this programme, you will need the following resources:

- A flipchart stand, paper and pens;
- A set of assorted pictures of a wide range of settings and subjects (designed to stimulate discussion). These can be cut from magazines and stuck on card or you can purchase a set of excellent discussion starter pictures from www.innovativeresources.org we used the pack titled *Picture This – 75 colour cards for conversation and reflection*
- Resources for doing a collage: *optional* - flipchart paper (a long roll is ideal for a shared picture), coloured pens, assorted stickers, coloured paper, glitter pens and ribbon, etc.

Methodology

The overall programme is based on experiential learning. It draws extensively on the experience of participants who can learn from each other and co-construct knowledge of what constitutes good practice in their individual and shared contexts. Accordingly, stimulating discussion is what is required. Our own experience has been that people find it a subject that is close to their work and accordingly discussion has been free flowing.

The programme is devised around a set of 10 key questions that are designed to elicit ideas and shared dialogue about evidence gathering. They may appear at first glance to have quite obvious answers but we have found that they stimulate deep discussion across a range of contexts. At the end of the Methods section of this CPD programme you will find a summary of the discussions that we have enjoyed at the focus groups so that you can stimulate discussion across a broad range of subjects. For example, the first question asks WHY we gather evidence and it would be disappointing if the focus was entirely on Education Scotland inspections and conversely it would be disappointing if Education Scotland inspections remained unmentioned.

Practical Matters

We arranged people in a semi-circle facing the flip chart stand. The sessions varied in length but we recommend allowing a half day for this programme, say 2.00pm till 4.30pm. It has been our experience that people enjoy it so much that, if they can, they wait behind to carry on discussion.

Method

Welcome and Introductions

As participants arrive, ask them to put a tick on the Proforma which is included at the end of this section so that you can benchmark confidence in evidence gathering. In order to establish a positive environment and to get people talking, we provided cakes and coffee to welcome people and discovered an amusing (!) discussion starter. We asked people to introduce themselves and describe their favourite cake, piece or fancy. It certainly started discussion! Other ice breakers could be equally useful.

Questions 1 to 4

The questions worked well in the order in which they are presented in the programme at the end of this section. You may need to emphasise that these are not trick questions, with hidden difficulty in them!

WHY DOES GATHERING EVIDENCE MATTER? – often provides the opportunity for people to talk about what are current worries in the workplace, such as restructuring, feeling undervalued or job security worries. We recommend allowing this to be aired before moving on to the next question.

WHAT IS EVIDENCE? – we encouraged people to brainstorm this question so as to move beyond definitions and towards practical examples. We emphasised quantity was what we were looking for.

WHO GATHERS EVIDENCE? – we encouraged participants to think of people at all levels of the CLD organisation and to include external people such as partners, funders and senior officials.

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT GATHERING THE EVIDENCE? – here again, we looked for practical examples and also looked for creative ideas. It helped to think of the different ways in which evidence can be gathered ranging from formal external evaluations/research to the informal anecdote that can be captured in a reflective diary.

Questions 5 to 7

Here we have an activity which provides a welcome break to the questioning process. Arrange the pictures (have a good number of pictures to choose from) so that participants have to get up and walk around to look at them. Ask participants to **choose a picture which represents, in some way, the best piece of evidence they have ever gathered.** Give them a few minutes to look at the pictures and think about this. When they have all chosen a picture, ask them in turn to show their picture to the group and explain **why they chose this picture.**

We found that people talked in some detail about successful projects and enjoyed this immensely as it gives an opportunity for others to affirm their success. This often produces strong emotions in that it represents times when the CLD worker has really made a difference.

Once the participant has explained why they chose that picture, ask them (if they have not already done so) **WHY IT WAS THE BEST EVIDENCE?** and exactly **HOW THEY GOT IT?** You are trying here to focus on what it is that makes good evidence and the skills involved in getting the best evidence. Make sure each person has a chance to talk about their picture.

Questions 8 to 10

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE EVIDENCE? – this question gives an opportunity for participants to make explicit what happens to the evidence. Does it sit on a shelf? Does it make a difference? We have found participants discuss the importance of a two-way process of communication linked to evidence going up the line and down line as well.

WHAT WOULD BE USEFUL IN GATHERING EVIDENCE? – this question looks at what resources, support and further CPD would be useful in gathering evidence.

WHERE SHOULD TOOLS/GUIDANCE BE HELD? – this practical question draws on the previous question and is helpful for managers in determining how best to support the evidence gathering process.

Collage Activity (optional)

We choose to end on a fun and high point with a collage activity. We lay out the collage resources and ask people to do a collage which represents **what matters about evidence gathering**. This is an opportunity for individuals to identify what they have learned from the process and to synthesise ideas about evidence and evidence gathering processes. Doing the collage together allows for discussion of key points and for co-construction of meanings linked to evidence gathering.

Allow enough time so that participants can produce something that pleases them. Once it is complete, ask participants to step back and view the finished work and to explain their contribution to the picture. We have found that participants want to take photos of the finished collage to remind themselves of their work so having a camera or phone to hand is useful.

END – Ask the participants to fill in the Proforma again so that you can see if change has occurred. You might also want to do your own evaluation.

CPD Programme Resources

- 1. Facilitator Resource sheet for group discussion**
- 2. Benchmarking and Evaluation Proforma**
- 3. Questions Summary**

1. Facilitator Resource Sheets for Discussion

Why does Gathering the Evidence Matter?

One way of answering this question is to focus on the WHO?

External Bodies: Education Scotland; Councillors; Funders; Scottish Government SOA.

Partners: To inform partners of what we can do; what we have achieved.

Colleagues/Internal Processes: Staffing, appraisal, to meet local outcomes.

Self/Professional development: Reflection tool; improving practice; motivation; confidence.

Participants: Evidence for learners of progression; motivation for learners.

Thinking of the WHY question, there are 3 processes that can be covered:

Planning: Following the principles of needs analysis; evaluation; showing impact and the link to SOA and local priorities.

Management: Staff appraisal; affirmation of effectiveness; motivation of staff.

Reporting: Reporting to funders, Education Scotland, partners or participants.

What is Evidence?

Look here for hard and soft indicators.

Hard indicators will include things such as statistics, graphs and charts.

Soft indicators will include items such as anecdotes, reflective diary and more qualitative data.

It may include items such as:

CDs, photos, reports, case studies, exit interviews, Social Return on Investment reports, success stories, recordings of learner journeys, interview transcripts, quotations, film, self evaluation, peer review, certificates.

Issues that might be raised include:

The need for triangulation (using more than one method), the need for methods to be fit for purpose, language considerations need to be taken into account (e.g. literacy issues), goals need to be realistic in the first place, the voice of participants needs to be heard.

Who Gathers Evidence?

Discussion may focus on different levels of staff in the organisation.

Level: Qualified CLD staff, fieldwork staff, part time and sessional staff

Kind of Staff: Managers, practitioners, clerical staff, everyone.

Others: Elected members, senior officials, Police, Social Work, Schools, Education Scotland, funders, partners

Participants: Learners, learner groups.

Issues:

Who owns and claims the evidence of CLD practice?

How do you go about Gathering the Evidence?

Discussion may focus on 2 dimensions for this question. The first is linked to the previous question:

People: Sharing data between partners (e.g. youth crime statistic shared by police), peer reviews of performance, community forums, social networking, social reflection (reflecting in discussion with colleagues).

There is a wide range of methods and creativity is important and valuable.

Methods: Templates for recording outputs/outcomes, questionnaires, statistical counts, systems (e.g. Cognisoft), Voxur (Big Brother computer), video diaries, evaluation forms, surveys, photo diaries, observations, focus groups, assessment tools, benchmarking, reflective diaries, PPDs, artefacts (e.g collages, CDs), Facebook analysis, Illuminating Practice, case studies.

The following issues are example of what may arise.

Issues: Unintended outcomes need to be recorded; be clear about what you are evaluating; important for managers to reassure staff that evidence is being used strategically; dangers of learners being asked to tell stories of their learning too many times; need to be aware of ethical issues; need to start gathering evidence early in the process (e.g .benchmarking)

What is the Best Evidence You have Gathered?

The best evidence participants have gathered will be highly individual. Here are some examples of the kinds of 'best' evidence we have encountered.

Externally conducted evaluation, employability learning plans, River of Knowledge visual activities, collages by young people, peer evidence, an interview between an Education Scotland inspector and a young person, well designed questionnaire, learning celebration activity, commissioned research, findings that showed a different outcome from that which was expected.

Why was it the Best?

Here is an opportunity to pull out from participants' stories the aspects of their evidence gathering practice that made it the best.

Qualities: Evidence is robust, honest, relevant, fit for purpose, unquestionable, credible, high quality, realistic, authentic, jargon-free, simple.

Impact: Evidence that boosted morale, fitted the audience, showed outcomes, had impact and demonstrated impact, strengthened partnership, provided opportunity for reflection, influenced politicians.

Effect: Involved stakeholders, longitudinal significance, matched with performance indicators, strengthened partnership, sense of achievement, enjoyable, fun, numbers were powerful.

How Did You Get it?

This is an opportunity to focus on process rather than methods. Here are some examples of how practitioners described gathering the 'best' evidence.

Formal research processes used; carrot of cake and coffee used to engage participants; being creative in your approach; knowing participants and what they will respond to; asking the right questions; starting early enough in the process; encouraging participant reflection; being open and honest with participants and with the audience of evidence.

What Happens to the Evidence?

The destination of the evidence might be discussed in terms of feedback loops. It goes up the line but a response need to come back down the line.

Feedback loop: Feed back to participants the impact of the evidence; use it in staff meetings, for appraisals, peer reflection; self evaluation; team building, motivation; feed into planning at local level; self reflection; staff training.

Participants might also focus on the individuals who receive evidence.

For self: For reflection, for further study, for self assessment; for learning for oneself.

For external bodies: Education Scotland; use it to prove the need for one's existence (funders, elected members); to get funding for new initiatives or continuation funding.

For learners: Use it for certification (e.g Youth Achievement Award); use it to give learners a boost.

What would be Useful to People in Gathering Evidence?

This question focuses on the needs of participants to improve gathering evidence and may include the following kinds of resources.

Practical Resources: Examples of 'Tips and Tricks'; banks of examples of good evidence; templates to fill in; a good system of evidence gathering paperwork.

Feelings: Emphasis by managers on the importance of evidence gathering; feedback on evidence gathered; building confidence in evidence gathering.

Legitimation: Time for evaluating provided; time for reflection; stronger focus on evaluation.

Other: Clarity about good practice from Education Scotland; increased skill in both statistics and stories; more and better access to networks through CLDMS, COPAL, Education Scotland.

Where should Tools/Guidance be Held?

This question provides you with an opportunity to focus on where resources should be held and offered.

Our experience has been that this frequently focuses on the need for better links between the various websites. For you it may focus on in-house resources such as quality systems, proformas and templates. It may also focus on skills development and how this can be best facilitated beyond this programme.

2. Benchmarking and evaluation group proforma

Gathering the Evidence of the Effectiveness of CLD

(Print at A3 in landscape format for participants to tick with a large pen – once at the start and a second at the end. Using two different colours of paper to differentiate can be helpful)

I am very confident in methods of gathering evidence for outcomes in CLD work	I am confident in methods of gathering evidence for outcomes in CLD work
I have some confidence in methods of gathering evidence for outcomes in CLD work	I am not confident in methods of gathering evidence for outcomes in CLD work

Please put a tick in the box which best describes where you think you are in terms of methods of gathering evidence for outcomes in CLD work

3. Questions Summary

Statistics and Stories.....

gathering the evidence of the effectiveness of CLD

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