



Teacher Learning
Academy

Creating impact Demonstrating impact

An independent evaluation of the Teacher Learning Academy
approach to professional learning



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“There are lots of different CPD activities around, but it’s hard to identify what impact they have on schools...For teachers the TLA is self-driven and not forced in any way. Plus it’s not just academic – you can see there is a real impact on the individual, and on the school community too, especially the pupils.”

RICHARD BALUKIEWICZ, HEAD TEACHER, BLURTON HIGH SCHOOL

Making an impact with the TLA

Securing effective, relevant and sustained professional development for teachers is vitally important. But how do schools know that professional learning is having the impact they seek?

Last year, the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) – with additional support from the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) – asked the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out independent qualitative research investigating the impact of the Teacher Learning Academy (TLA).

The evidence gathered by the NFER validates the power of the TLA’s approach. Their evaluation shows that the TLA works, creating widespread, demonstrable and continued impacts that can exceed expectations. Significantly, it makes an explicit connection between teacher learning, pupil achievement and school improvement.

For schools, the clear message is that engaging with the TLA:

- creates impact; and
- provides evidence of that impact.

Key points

- The TLA has a demonstrable impact on teachers’ practice, school improvement, pupils’ learning and the overall learning culture of school.
- The TLA’s impact often extends beyond completion of the teacher’s original project, exceeding expectations.
- TLA involvement helps to create an open learning culture in schools, where staff talk about and share their learning.
- The TLA’s impacts are enhanced by a range of supporting factors. Most critical are school and senior leadership backing for the TLA, coupled with a supportive CPD ethos.
- It is possible to capture and evidence a range of impacts from a variety of sources, beyond the teacher’s own report.
- Evidence highlights a clear pattern of impact development spanning three phases – immediate, subsequent and later development.



Creating a buzz

Using evidence gathered from examining 30 TLA presentations and evidence from 18 case study schools, the NFER study demonstrates that the TLA has an impact upon:

- teaching in the classroom;
- pupil motivation, their enjoyment, learning opportunities and outcomes;
- school policies, strategies and learning cultures; and
- the wider professional community.

In most cases, the impacts of TLA involvement extended beyond the original project. This was evidenced by continuing advancement in practice and school improvement, up to two years after the work was completed.

Many schools reported that TLA involvement had rekindled a sense of excitement and discovery about teaching and learning in the classroom, alongside a similar buzz in the staffroom.

“For me, the important point is that the research project doesn’t have to be big and formal to be important and make a difference. My very first TLA submission was about an idea I had for approaching homework with my own class. It was simple, but the impact was huge.”

LOU HARRISON, HEAD TEACHER,
HEATHER PRIMARY SCHOOL

Making a difference

The TLA has immediate, sustained and multiple impacts, which:

- spread over time, leaving a clear trail;
- often extend beyond the original TLA project or a teacher's expectations; and
- enhance the impacts of other forms of enquiry and professional learning.

In general, the study shows that:

- TLA Stage 1 and 2 presentations have a higher concentration of impacts at the classroom level;
- TLA Stage 3 and 4 presentations have a greater impact at school level and beyond; and
- even a teacher's TLA Stage 1 activity can have an impact on the practice of others and make a difference at school level.

“The bit that always catches people’s attention is when we talk about the impact of the TLA on student learning. That’s what teachers are in school for and it’s such a key part of the TLA. It is relevant to what is happening in your classroom, with your youngsters, and it is about sharing your knowledge.”

DAVE GOODE, DEPUTY HEAD TEACHER,
SAMUEL WHITBREAD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Group	Most frequent impacts
Teachers	Improvements in or changes to practice Enhanced capacity to reflect on practice Actual professional or career development
Pupils	Enhanced enjoyment, motivation and engagement in learning Improved progress and achievement Enhanced knowledge and understanding
Colleagues	Improvements in or changes to practice New knowledge and understanding Improved access to or availability of resources
Schools	New approaches or structures for CPD School development or improvement Heightened school reputation

Sustaining impact

The study highlights a clear pattern of impact development. The majority of TLA impacts are sustained over time, with evidence showing that several schools experienced an impact up to two years after the original TLA activity took place.

- Typically, immediate impacts appear as part of the process of undertaking TLA work, including 'softer' impacts on teachers and pupils, such as increased confidence and enjoyment.
- The majority of impacts occur as subsequent impacts, through new phases of the project, such as recording the presentation or sharing it with others.
- In most cases, later impacts follow, often as a result of wider dissemination of the project, or of embedding learning and practice within the school.

Beyond expectations

Participation in the TLA often leads to positive outcomes for teachers and schools beyond those originally anticipated by the teacher. Some were unexpected because they were not required for that stage of the TLA; others became apparent when the case study schools were visited.

Adding value

As a process, rather than a specific programme, the TLA provides the discipline and framework for creating, identifying, recording and sharing impacts across all forms of enquiry and professional development.

For example, at Stage 1, the TLA can help teachers apply learning from short courses; meanwhile Stage 3 can help teachers move towards a Masters in Education or the new Masters in Teaching and Learning.

"The TLA provides a vehicle to share good practice, engage with the knowledge base and have professional dialogue. It fosters a deeper level of learning that is much more likely to last."

JEAN THWAITES, DEPUTY HEAD TEACHER,
FRYENT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Demonstrating impact

THE NFER evaluation clearly demonstrates that it is possible to find evidence to support a range of impacts arising from TLA involvement, by probing numerous sources that extend beyond a teacher's own report.

There are 12 broad types of evidence found to demonstrate TLA impacts:

- Teacher self-reports
- Staff perceptions and feedback
- Teaching and learning resources
- Performance review reports
- Pupils' views
- Classroom observations
- School policy and planning documents
- Assessment records of pupils' learning and progress
- Events or activities
- Parents' views
- Examples of pupils' work
- Publications.

From teachers' self-report...

Teachers' self-reports are a critical component of the learning and evaluation process. Through their TLA presentations, teachers reflect on what they have learned, how they applied this learning and what impact it had on their teaching experience and on others. This reinforces a sense of ownership, which is central to the TLA ethos. The quality of these self-reports benefits from the TLA process and its independent verification.

...to a range of corroborating evidence

Significantly, independently gathered and evaluated evidence from a range of other sources often corroborated the views expressed in teachers' self-reports. In many cases it pointed to impacts beyond those identified by the case study teacher.

Evaluators probed these sources of evidence by:

- examining before and after **lesson planning documentation**, in conjunction with the case study teacher, to identify changes in practice;
- identifying the impact of TLA project work on pupils via **pupil feedback**;
- exploring school-level impact by looking at the **school improvement plan and CPD documentation**, in conjunction with interviewees; and
- examining **colleague feedback**, via evaluation forms devised and used by the case study teacher.

What enhances the TLA's impact?

A number of factors enhance the breadth and depth of TLA impacts. Some concern the TLA process itself, while others centre upon the individual teacher or their project. However at the outset, leadership support for the TLA and a strong CPD ethos are vital.

- **Leadership support for TLA**, both in terms of sharing learning and a commitment to integrating processes with performance management and wider CPD strategies.
- **A strong CPD ethos.**
- The ease and extent of **access to resources** to support the project.
- The six core dimensions that underpin the **TLA process.**
- **Working with and involving colleagues** to spread the practice and impact of new techniques and promote dialogue.
- **Opportunities to disseminate and share** learning and impacts with colleagues, local schools and more widely throughout the profession.
- The **relevance of the research topic to the teacher** and the school context.
- **Sufficient time** devoted to the writing, planning, delivery and evaluation of the project.
- **Giving consideration to the** characteristics, motivations, role and development needs of the **teacher taking part in the TLA.**
- **Other project-related factors**, particularly in the early stages. These include pupils' enthusiasm to experience new approaches and activities, and how different approaches transfer to colleagues and different contexts.

“Teaching practice has altered in relation to what teachers are discovering, with lessons tailored much more towards pupils’ needs. You can see that it’s made a real difference and pupils are much more engaged. They have increased understanding of what they are learning and why.”

KAREN JAEGGI, HEAD TEACHER,
CAPEL MANOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

Why should your school get involved with the TLA?

Demonstrating the impact of CPD is a big challenge for schools. While individual teachers can participate in the TLA, this powerful model of enquiry-based learning is most effective when embedded throughout a school.

The TLA creates impact

The TLA has an immediate and continuing impact at many levels across its four stages, leaving an impact trail that can be identified and evaluated.

Involvement in the TLA supports both individual and institutional priorities: school improvement and teacher development go hand-in-hand.

Teachers can enhance their classroom practice as well as career progression opportunities by using TLA as evidence for performance management. At the same time, schools and the wider profession benefit from teacher-initiated projects that are 100% focused on improving teaching practice.

The TLA provides evidence of impact for your school

TLA activity provides a range of demonstrable impacts that can be strengthened and extended. For example by:

- **using practical, classroom-based approaches** to support the in-built teacher evaluation process, such as pupil feedback notes, before and after questions, pre- and post-enquiry documentation;
- **periodically reviewing TLA projects** after the presentation has been submitted to capture and document further impact;
- **involving the whole school** in strengthening and deepening the impact evaluation process, for example through learning conversations and consultations with staff; and
- **sharing evidence of impact at school level** with teaching staff to reinforce a whole-school culture that values and is committed to evaluating and evidencing impact.

Not only does the TLA create and evidence impact, it also offers schools **a means of evaluating** impact for themselves.

Find out more

How does the TLA work?

The TLA helps teachers to make small changes in their practice that can have a sustained impact in the classroom. Taking part in the TLA involves connecting with the available research, gathering evidence, and evaluating and reflecting upon learning.

Engaging with the TLA at one of four stages enriches individual teacher's knowledge, helping them to improve their own practice, enhance student learning, create innovation and share their learning with colleagues.

For schools, the TLA provides a rigorous framework for professional development that supports a range of school initiatives and fosters a highly effective learning culture.

How can your school get involved?

Find out how to become a TLA Centre or School at www.teacherlearningacademy.org.uk
Contact the TLA at enquiries@teacherlearningacademy.org.uk

How was evidence gathered and evaluated?

The NFER evaluation developed and trialled an innovative approach to evaluating the impacts of CPD activity in terms of teachers' participation in the TLA. This identified and documented an 'impact trail' across time, beginning with an individual teacher's TLA presentation, before looking at evidence from across the school.

The study sought to explore impacts, evidence, factors affecting impact and the attribution of impacts, through:

- an analysis of 30 TLA presentations and 18 in-depth school case studies over a one-year period, involving eight Stage 1, seven Stage 2, two Stage 3 and one Stage 4 TLA projects covering a range of learning foci drawn from seven primary, nine secondary and two special schools;
- analysis and probing of evidence from teachers' self-report, through interviews with teachers, other staff and pupils and from a range of additional sources including assessments, examples of work and whole-school documents;
- mapping this evidence against a specially created 'impact-evidence matrix', which drew on existing research to outline the range of possible impacts that could result from TLA participation;
- recording impacts on different groups at different stages, the evidence by which these were demonstrated and any inhibiting factors in a case-study template;

- codifying the findings into an impact trail to depict the sequence and consider the attribution of impacts; and
- gathering feedback on the potential use of the impact-trail approach by schools.

Recommendations from the findings of this report will help teachers, schools, TLA partners and other stakeholders to:

- optimise the longevity and reach of CPD impacts for teachers, pupils and their schools;
- strengthen connections between TLA enquiry-based learning, performance management, pupil achievement and school improvement;
- give cohesion to whole-school CPD strategies;
- share learning and impacts across the profession;
- establish structures for evidencing the full 'impact trail'; and
- shape future development of the TLA framework.

Download the executive summary or the full NFER report at:
www.teacherlearningacademy.org.uk

