



# Teaching for Learning Network

## CARET and Critical Friendship

### What is a Critical Friend?

Each department participating in TFLN will be supported by researchers based at CARET (the Centre for Applied Research in Educational Technologies). Their roles include acting as **critical friends** in which capacity they will:

- advise on the formulation of research questions and identification of priorities
- advise on ethical and methodological issues
- help in the interpretation of data
- facilitate decision-making in moving from reflection to action.

A critical friend is described by Costa and Kallick (1993) as:

... a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work. (p. 50)

Just as individuals enhance their learning through self-reflection and feedback, so too do departments which work at being learning organisations. The work of CARET critical friends includes asking questions to prompt reflection and providing feedback to the department. Bloom (1956), in his taxonomy of educational objectives, refers to critique as a part of evaluation, the highest order of thinking. The meaning of 'critical' as essential is also pertinent to the role of the critical friend.

### The Role of the Critical Friend

The role of the critical friend is:

- support departmental research associates
- to provide guidance and support in the planning, implementation and evaluation of strategies for supporting the development of TFLN practices in departments and supervisions
- to mediate the feedback of results from the analysis of data collected during the project so that the information can be used formatively in the department
- to reflect upon the process of working with the department
- to participate in discussions with other critical friends in order to work towards a degree of consistency and support their collective efforts



In carrying out this role, CARET critical friends *will*:

- observe, listen and learn
- demonstrate positive regard for the department and its community
- help to identify issues and explore alternatives
- offer sources of evidence and/or expertise
- work collaboratively
- encourage collaboration and the sharing of ideas among research associates and departments
- draw on the resources of an expert team
- offer a thoughtful critical perspective on supervision practice as appropriate
- abide by the project's agreed code of practice, expectations and commitments

In carrying out this role, CARET critical friends *will not*:

- assume a directive role
- offer solutions to problems, or provide 'quick fixes'
- rush to judgement
- pretend to know the department better than those in it
- have hidden agendas
- impose agendas of his/her own
- undermine the authority of others

## **Researching the work of the Critical Friend**

One of the roles of critical friends will be to act as researchers into their own practice. This will be achieved by each critical friend keeping a log in which a record of events is accompanied by a reflective commentary, and through the exchange of experiences within the critical friend team.

## **Teamwork within the CARET Team**

Critical friends need critical friends too, and there needs to be a source of support for critical friends. Regular opportunities to feed back and discuss issues, exchange experiences, and get feedback, reassurance and critique from other members of the team will be built into the programme of team meetings.

## **References**

Bloom, B.S. (Ed) (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook I: Cognitive Domain*. London: Longman Group Ltd

Costa, A. and Kallick, B. (1993) Through the Lens of a Critical Friend *Educational Leadership* 51 (2) 49-51