

**Developing a network of teacher researchers to build capacity within a department,
across a school and within a Local Authority**

Julie Roberts
Gateshead LA

Abstract

This paper describes how a Local Authority (LA) has embraced a Government Initiative on Assessment for Learning to build capacity within subject departments, across a school and within the authority. Primarily, it has focussed on developing teachers as researchers and change agents within a network. It considers how the LA can play a supportive role in enabling practitioner researchers to develop a deeper understanding of learning. A multi-level model is used to enable teachers to have a forum to disseminate and collaborate with others. It also shows how structures are set up within the schools with the Senior leadership teams and within the department to ensure that the work feeds into whole school improvement. Two teachers from each school attend a termly network meeting which provides them with an opportunity to develop their own understanding of learning and teaching issues. Each of these teachers then work with their department, with the support of the consultant, on an identified area. The results after one year show how this collaborative approach assists schools to institutionalise assessment for learning across the whole school. It also shows how the support of a consultant enables teachers to move forward on an initiative and begin to take ownership of it. This work has been influenced by the principles underlying the HertsCam network (see David Frost's paper in this symposium). The present author is currently the Local Authority Consultant involved in the work accounted for here and continues to belong to the HertsCam network. She completed her MEd in 2002.

The decision to develop systems of Assessment for Learning (AfL) in Gateshead Secondary Education began in 2004. This built on the work already begun in Gateshead Primary Schools in late 2000 (Roberts *et al.*, 2006). All Secondary schools had dabbled with AfL. Some had had whole school training on it as part of one of the modules from the Secondary National Strategy. However no school had fully embedded it within its structures. One Gateshead teacher noted

After receiving one Whole School INSET on AfL it has been pretty much left to the individual or in some cases the department to develop. No other opportunities for further whole school discussion have arisen. What a shame because without constant reflection it will be seen as 'another initiative' and be quickly forgotten. AfL must be constantly reinforced on a Whole School plan for it to become embedded into the teaching and learning culture within school.

Recent literature suggests that only when a sufficient number of teachers have been actively involved in the change process then successful embedding of practice becomes possible (Frost, 2006; Priestley and Sime, 2005; Swaffield and MacBeath, 2006; Cuban, 1998; Priestly, 2005). The decision to focus on AfL was partly driven by a Secondary National Strategy Government Initiative. In 2004, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) encouraged schools to adopt a Whole School Initiative focussed on an aspect of Teaching and

Learning. Schools were given a choice of ‘Coaching’, ‘Literacy and Learning’ (LaL), ‘Leading in Learning’ (LiL), and ‘ICT across the curriculum’ (ICTAC) and ‘Assessment for Learning’ (AfL). The DfES also provided schools with a financial incentive of £2000 to get involved. Up to this time, the Secondary Strategy had focussed on individual departments (primarily English, Mathematics, Science, ICT and two Foundation Subjects). This tended to result in departments working in isolation of each other and thus not impact on whole school improvement. This Government initiative sought to bring some of this work together into a cohesive whole in which all teachers within a school were working towards a common goal.

In 2004, eight of the ten Secondary Schools decided to adopt Assessment for Learning (AfL) as their Whole School Initiative. This decision was based on four main influences. Firstly, the outcomes of research conducted by Black and Wiliam and the Government’s emerging intent.

Recent research shows that innovations, which include the strengthening of formative assessment, produce significant and often substantial gains, over ages, subjects and countries. Many studies show that it benefits low attainers in particular.

(Black and Wiliam, 1998)

They defined Formative Assessment as

An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback by the teachers, and by their pupils, in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes ‘formative assessment’ when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning need.

(Black & Wiliam, 1998)

The drive to improve learning was seen as fundamental to raising standards, and the use of formative assessment was viewed as integral to this. This was a view upheld by the Government. David Miliband summarised the government intent, 18th May 2004,

The biggest driver for change is Assessment for Learning and the use of data and dialogue to diagnose every students’ learning needs....this is now at the heart of our drive to ensure critical self review of performance in every School.

(Miliband, 2004)

Secondly, the findings from Gateshead LA’s ‘Themed visit focus on AfL’ showed that where AfL was being implemented in the classroom pupils were making good progress in learning. The ‘Themed visit’ consisted of a number of senior leaders paired with a LA inspector or consultant. These pairs then visited a number of schools, interviewed headteachers, staff, pupils and observed lessons. The findings from these visits were then drawn together in a booklet to illustrate what was good practice. A workshop was also organised to disseminate some of the ideas and to show what primary and secondary pupils could do as a result of AfL. At this event pupils talked to Headteachers and Senior leaders about some of the strategies and how they were helping them to learn more effectively. This enabled Secondary Senior leaders to actually see what Primary School children were capable of and how this could be developed for Secondary pupils with a positive impact on learning and attainment. One History department presented their findings at this workshop. They had found that by implementing AfL principles across their department with their Year 11 cohort had brought

about a number of significant changes. Firstly, it had improved its GCSE results. Secondly, the pupils had achieved 0.5 grade higher in history than in their other subjects. Finally, it had enabled the department to shift from being a disparate department to a collaborative and enthusiastic group of teachers who felt invigorated by the changes in the pupils' responses and engagement in lessons.

Thirdly, a number of Gateshead Primary Schools had already embarked on this focus and were reporting back notable differences in children's attitudes to learning. In particular, teachers and children felt that it was enabling them to take more ownership of their learning.

It has brought an enthusiasm for learning that wasn't previously evident amongst learners... It is helping to develop greater independence in learning giving pupils control, as they understand more clearly and gain the skills to be in charge of their own learning.

(Roberts *et al.*, 2006)

The Secondary schools, having seen what some of the primary children could do, wanted to build on this work.

Fourthly, a number of teachers and some departments had been dabbling with Assessment for Learning (AfL) within the ten Secondary Schools. They therefore had some expertise and experiences of success within each school to tap into.

However, out of these influences, it was the independence of the Primary children both from within the Themed visit workshop and the Action research project which generated an interest amongst Senior School leaders to focus on AfL as a Whole School Initiative.

The Gateshead Secondary AfL Whole School Initiative

Schools were asked to see this not as a one year initiative but as a five year development. Training was provided for senior leaders on how they might develop AfL within their schools. In addition, a whole range of approaches were employed to develop formative assessment systems in Gateshead Secondary education. These included:-

- Spreading awareness of formative assessment and how it helps to develop understanding in learning and greater pupil independence.
- Involving School Strategy Managers and/or a person with responsibility for Teaching and Learning, and Advisory Teachers and consultants from the Local Authority (LA) who could help by working alongside and plan with teachers.
- Raising the profile of formative assessment and encouraging the development of practice through Conferences, displays and workshops. It was the focus for the Gateshead Common training Day in 2004. Most of the ten Secondary schools had the same training day. As part of this, a conference was put on for teachers not involved in management. It took place in a local venue and had a number of workshops run by Primary and Secondary teachers on different aspects of AfL.
- There were termly twilight network meetings on different aspects of AfL for teachers to voluntarily attend.
- As part of the Foundation Subjects strand of the Secondary strategy, senior leaders were given opportunities to reflect upon the learning climate in their schools and to

discuss how they could facilitate change. These training sessions offered a model framework for the development of formative assessment, as well as documentation and updates from research.

- Networking and sharing understanding through opportunities to discover best practice. This is key to improving practice both within the LA and with other authorities.

Much has been written about organisational change (Archer, 1988; Fullan, 1992; Hargreaves and Fink, 2005). Swaffield and MacBeath (2006) identify two key processes instrumental in school embedding of strategies: cultural and structural. These are not necessarily discrete but are either side of a continuum. The process of change here was based on a cultural view (Gladwell, 2000; Hargreaves, 2003). This first year depended on a

change –friendly culture where committed individuals are encouraged to develop their understanding and practice, and gradually share these with other willing volunteers.

(Swaffield and MacBeath, 2006:213)

In this first year, departments and teachers continued to work in isolation on the whole. Individual teachers and some departments spoke about a gradual change in their teaching and the pupils' response. It needed to be supported by structures within schools if there was to be any long term and widespread change (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2006). School Strategy Development plans did not really link in with Whole School Development Plans. Nor did these link in with the School Annual Progress Reviews (APR's) conducted by the LA Inspectors in each school. AfL needed to move from being in 'initiation/ implementation stages', in which a few keen teachers or departments embraced the strategies, to more of a cohesive embedded (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2006) or 'institutionalised' approach across the school (Miles *et al.*, 1987), if it was to contribute to whole school improvement and be more than 'this year's initiative'. In order for change to become embedded within the school structures, its organisation and resources the following need to be taken into account; a consistent approach across a school would need to be encouraged whilst competing or contradictory practices would need to be eliminated; strong and purposeful links to other change efforts, the curriculum and classroom teaching; widespread use in the school and local area (Secondary Strategy, 2006; Priestly and Sime, 2005; Swaffield and MacBeath, 2006).

Therefore in April 2005, a Research Project was developed with the ten Secondary Schools to promote the development of learning through formative assessment and related skills and techniques. This was led by the Foundation Subjects Secondary Strategy Consultant and supported by the LA through the inspector for Teaching and Learning and other Secondary Consultants. A model was created to combine both structural and cultural elements which would hopefully respond to some of the obstacles schools face when trying to embed change (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2006). Details of this model are discussed later.

Initially senior leaders, responsible for leading AfL in their schools, met to discuss the proposed model. During this meeting, time was given for them to review where they were in terms of embedding AfL using the Strategy Progression grid (see Appendix A), and then an opportunity was provided for them to share what they had done and how they would use the work from the action research project over the coming year. A stronger emphasis was placed here on building it on the current school systems such as departmental development plans, school improvement plans and the school strategy plans.

For the Action Research Group, senior leaders were asked to nominate two departments; one department which was experienced in an aspect of AfL and another which was just beginning. A timeline was produced explaining what training the teachers would receive and when all the year's meetings would take place. Time was also built in for the senior leaders to meet on a termly basis to discuss progress and to share experiences and obstacles.

This then acted as an exciting catalyst for those interested in developing best practice in their own schools, both within Gateshead and beyond. Some of the teachers involved with the project have delivered sessions to others and the project continues. Another cohort of teachers, two from each school, was set up in June 2006. This amounts to forty departments across the LA investigating the use of Assessment for Learning, meeting regularly and being supported by Gateshead Consultants.

The Gateshead Secondary model

The Secondary model sought to build on the work of the sixteen action research primary schools which had focussed on both implementing a set of classroom strategies collaborative talk about learning and teaching. It also integrated some of the findings from the LA AfL Themed Visit which had led to the development of the Gateshead model for developing Formative Assessment in Gateshead Primary schools (see Fig 1). The primary model consisted of six principles: raising awareness of formative assessment, ensuring teachers and schools became actively involved, raising and maintaining the profile of formative assessment, the role of the LA in facilitating change within schools and classrooms, developing a network for teachers to sustain the development of formative assessment strategies, extending the capacity of this work into secondary schools and monitoring the effect of these principles.

Following the same principles, a model was created to facilitate the development and embedding of AfL within departments, schools and across the LA (see Fig 2). The Secondary model sought to build in both structural and cultural strategies to embed AfL within the existing school and LA systems. Four embedding strategies of professional collaborative enquiry, external influences, integration and management mechanisms and cultural leadership (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2006) are contained within the Gateshead model. Some are more developed than others.

Structured opportunities for professional collaborative activity in the form of network meetings for both the teachers and Senior leaders with responsibility for leading AfL. As Frost (2006) argues

Practitioner research and leadership are really two sides of the same coin and they are both vital dimensions of the process of improving schools.

The development of networks both within the school and across the LA was seen to be an essential component to ensure the success of the work (Leadbeater, 2005; Hopkins *et al.*, 2005). This would provide teachers with the opportunity to collaborate across schools both within their subject areas and on their chosen focus of AfL. It would also enable the project to maintain momentum. Frost warns that if

the impact of the project is limited to the professional development of the individuals directly involved ... improvements tend to be small scale and unsustainable because colleagues have not been sufficiently involved in the process and the innovations have not become embedded in the fabric of the school.

(Frost, 2006)

Therefore this project sought to build in a breadth of opportunities for teachers to be able to collaborate and ensured that senior leaders were committed to supporting this work.

The external influences essentially consisted of the use of the LA consultants who provided termly training on aspects of AfL. However, two other external influences were LA organised conferences with key motivational speakers and the Government Whole School Initiative. Both of these influences provided schools with new perspectives and insights into practice. At times they also reinforced key messages from the network training days.

The model sought to integrate the project within the school and LA management mechanisms. Therefore it made it explicit from the outset how this work could be linked more holistically with Annual Progress Reviews (APR's), the Self Evaluation Forms (SEF's), Ofsted lesson observation schedules, departmental development plans and School Improvement Partners (SIPs).

To develop cultural leadership (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2006), senior leaders in their network meetings were also given some of the practical training the teachers had received. This enabled them to also trial some of the ideas in their own classrooms and be able to report back on what worked and what didn't. It also enabled senior leaders to be sympathetic to the amount of time it takes to change the learning habits of pupils and to see this as an ongoing process.

The use of teachers as researchers to develop formative assessment in schools and across the LA

The model also encouraged teachers to become researchers to enable them to develop the confidence to trial new strategies within their classroom, to discover what worked within their subject and with their pupils in their school. This would enable the collaborative discussions to be purposeful, rather than just 'talking shops' in which nothing actually changes (Archer, 1988; Priestly, 2005). It was hoped that opportunities would be created to enable teachers to adapt both new and old ideas and so remove or reduce contradictions (Priestly, 2005).

Teachers were not encouraged to research questions to investigate, rather they used progression grids (appendix 2) to identify where they were as a department/ or as an individual with a particular class. Then they identified where they would like to be at the end of a term/ year. Discussion then focussed on what strategies they would need to enable this change to happen. As Frost (2006) argues, this is different from traditional action research in which a research question is first identified. Here a more general notion linked to school improvement is the focus.

Practitioner research is likely to be more interested in school improvement. Rather than posing questions out of academic curiosity the practitioner researcher begins with

a purpose or concern that arises in the normal flow of professional reflections, deliberation and discussion.
(Frost, 2006)

To ensure that this project would not be seen as another initiative which would only engage a few interested teachers and not impact on the rest of the school or the rest of the authority, four main issues needed to be addressed to ensure that the findings resonated with senior leaders and other teachers.

Firstly, teachers would need to be able to critically reflect on how their pupils learnt and what were their barriers to learning. Secondly, they would need to know what forms of evidence to look for to help them to identify how the children were learning. Thirdly, they would need support in this reflection process as anything which was too time consuming would soon become dropped as the business of school life took over. Finally, schools would need to look at the learning culture. For some schools, for the project to be sustained, radical changes would need to take place. Schools would need support in making appropriate changes but also the evidence to suggest that making changes would benefit themselves and the children in the long term (Roberts *et al.*, 2006).

Firstly, an approach was needed to enable teachers to reflect on the actual learning of the pupils rather than just on their teaching strategies. As Smith reflected,

For formative assessment to work, teachers need to focus on how children are learning. They need to tune into children's minds, to connect with their thinking and feelings. Pupils need to know what they are supposed to learn and how to identify success, so teachers need to ask themselves, "Do I really know enough about my pupils' understandings to be able to help each one of them?"

(Smith, 2003)

However, as Perrenoud observes,

a number of pupilsare content to 'get by' Every teacher who wants to practise formative assessment must reconstruct the habits acquired by his pupils.

(Perrenoud, 1991)

Therefore teachers would need to be committed to the project for at least a year to enable them to have time to work with their class to reconstruct the learning habits of the pupils and begin to see results. This approach also needed to support teachers over a long period of time so that these observations and experimenting with practise was manageable and appropriate. Teachers are very busy and initiatives which do not benefit both the teacher and the learner are likely to fail as Gray and Wilcox point out,

Improvement efforts which duck the question of what's in them for teachers are likely to fail.

(Gray and Wilcox, 1995)

Therefore it was important to build in an expectation for teachers to reflect and report back on what they were trialling in the classroom and to note what impact it was having on the pupils' learning.

Secondly, the chosen approach needed to support the collection of evidence to enable teachers to be confident in their observations on teaching and learning.

The research-engaged school is one in which teachers believe it is in their interest, and in the interest of their pupils, ... to have a desire for evidence and to foster 'aggressive curiosity'.

In such a school, research and enquiry is integral to its approach to teaching and learning. It is built into the school culture. Fostering research and enquiry in collaborative groups within and beyond the school.... Persuading its outlook, informing its systems and stimulating learning at every level.

(Handscomb and MacBeath, 2004)

The LA wanted teachers not only to be innovative in what they developed but also to become more critically reflective on what helped children to learn and what didn't. A supportive culture in which it was ok to trial various ideas and fail needed to be created, to enable teachers to feel safe to experiment and to persist with some of these ideas. It was hoped that by building in this critically reflective, problem solving approach, teachers would become more confident in understanding how children learnt, what strategies helped them to learn and what could be done to enable children to make progress.

The art of teaching is about diagnosing the learning needs of young people and then selecting from a range of models the most effective learning strategy.

(Hopkins, 2005)

Thirdly, the LA wanted to provide a structure which would support this reflective practice,

It is hard for individual practitioners to explore their practice, and the issues and questions it raises about learning and teaching, on their own... We need the support of colleagues to make sense of the complexities of our practice.

(Jackson and Street, 2005)

The LA felt that a research project with a limited number of departments, who were committed for at least a year, would provide a supportive network to enable practitioners to become more collaborative when responding to some of the issues they faced in the classroom.

Finally, the LA was aware that this approach might provide more of a challenge to some teachers in some of the schools as this might be a radical change to their normal approach. All schools would find themselves reflecting on their learning culture. For some, for the project to be successful, changing the culture of the school may become a key issue.

Assume that **changing the culture of school is the real agenda**, not implementing single innovations. Put another way, when implementing particular innovations, we should always pay attention to whether the institution is developing or not.

(Fullan, 2001)

Therefore the LA wanted these twenty departments to become a network which would meet on a regular basis, share ideas, concerns and worries as well as success stories. This would be important to help schools reflect on the culture of their school.

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The role of LA consultant as facilitator of a developmental process

According to Swaffield and MacBeath (2006), one embedding strategy is the use of external influences. As such, the LA sought to support the embedding of AfL within schools through four different ways:

- a) to lead and manage the project based on an understanding of the Big Picture;
- b) to establish and integrate the project within LA and school structures;
- c) to foster opportunities for professional dialogue and collaboration;
- d) to support teacher research to impact on school improvement.

a) The LA consultant has a view of the Big Picture of the project across the 10 schools and a vision of how AfL will look if it is embedded. This is important for driving the project over a number of years and is one way of helping schools see this work as more than this year's initiative. With an understanding of the Big Picture as described earlier in the Gateshead model section (Fig 2), the LA consultant is also able to keep flagging up the importance of AfL within the LA but also how to integrate it with other initiatives and demands which continually hit schools. This helps schools to see how the work continues to fit in with their work. In addition, capturing and engaging teachers who are the 'spectators, [and] opponents' (Schatz *et al.*, 2001) takes time. The LA consultant can see how these patterns emerge across a number of schools and reassure school leaders that these teachers who engage more slowly follow a pattern. Having such an overview, depersonalises those who are reluctant and enables Senior leaders to look more strategically at what might be done to bring them on board. The network meetings are a useful forum to share some of their strategies for attempting to overcome this. This is really important to help schools to continue to try to include as many people as possible.

The LA consultant exhibits leadership in two ways, firstly through the adaptation of Crowther's idea of parallel leadership. He suggests that when teachers and their leaders engage in collective action then change is possible (Crowther, 2002). Here, teachers, senior leaders and the LA consultant engage in collective action to build schools' capacity. The LA consultant is able to facilitate networking opportunities and pull together common themes and adapt training sessions accordingly.

Secondly, Frost (2006) argues that skilful leadership is needed to negotiate through the mine-field of complex relationships, power struggles and patterns of vested interest. Through the use of the model which Senior leaders have voluntarily opted into, there is a professional concern already identified within a framework already negotiated and agreed for the teachers to operate within. The LA consultant has already done some of the negotiating and the school's commitment to the model frees up teachers to develop and research their ideas through the structure. This enables the teachers' work to be integrated within the school structures from the outset. Teachers are also clear about what the professional concern is that they are being involved with.

Frost (2006) identifies nine elements in the process of development: consulting colleagues, having discussions with colleagues, engaging in systematic reflection, reading, data gathering, networking, training colleagues, joint planning, trialling/experimenting. He argues that a combination of these activities along with skilful leadership is most likely to have maximum impact on professional practice. He concludes that it may be better to develop project management skills among teachers and school leaders instead. In this project the LA consultant models and creates opportunities for a number of these activities through the network meetings and with individual consultant visits to departments. For example, the LA consultant may be used to support a department with departmental/ whole school training or they may be used to help a department gather appropriate data. Teachers are also able to take the materials from the network meetings and adapt these for their own context.

b) The LA has played an important part in facilitating an organisational culture within LA and school structures in which all members can contribute. Gronn argues that

change comes from careful orchestrated deliberation and working with the organisational structures of the school.
(Gronn, 2003)

The model seeks to provide such a structure which has been collectively agreed upon by each of the schools. The Senior leader network meetings allow for the model to evolve and be evaluated on a regular basis, to identify where are the strengths and areas to develop both within a school but also across the LA.

c) Fostering opportunities for professional dialogue and collaboration has been done in two ways: i) through the organisation of network meetings and ii) the deployment of consultants to support teachers in schools.

The creation of the network has produced a useful environment for teachers to disseminate their ideas on a regular basis, to share concerns and provide them with regular opportunities to reflect on what is happening. The regular meetings have enabled formative assessment to maintain a high profile over the years. They provided support for teachers at the beginning as they sought to make sense of how they could apply the strategies within their schools, with their pupils. The use of outside speakers provided teachers with fresh input and the reinforcement of ideas being suggested. These meetings provided opportunities for teachers to reflect afresh on what they were doing.

One teacher commented that it took them almost a year for the ‘penny to drop’. They had needed to experiment with ideas and gradually the whole principle of assessment for learning began to make sense as they heard again what it was about.

This network has evolved over time, and now teachers are being encouraged to use the virtual learning environment to upload materials as they produce them to share with other teachers. These can be accessed by any of the teachers involved in the project.

The deployment of consultants to work with teachers has also been useful for maintaining and developing the work. In the first instance, the consultant visit provided motivation to begin to put ideas into practice. It provided teachers with an incentive to get started in preparation for that meeting. The development of these relationships has created a ‘have a go’ environment. In these informal meetings, teachers were able to raise any concerns they had, to discuss what

they were doing in detail and also to obtain reassurance that they were on the right track. Sometimes, these meetings would include joint planning, at other times, lesson observations and feedback. The consultants worked flexibly depending on the needs of the school and the teachers involved. The consultant was also used as a way of transferring ideas which were pertinent to what another teacher was trialling. These consultant visits helped the project to be more than a ‘talking shop’ and also provided the authority with a detailed understanding of what was going well and what were issues.

d) The Gateshead Secondary model seeks to supported teacher research to impact on school improvement in three ways (Frost, 2006). Firstly, achieved a mandate from the schools to focus on AfL. It has sought the commitment of Senior leaders and has tried to incorporate AfL within the school structures. There is sufficient support within schools and amongst teachers that AfL has something valuable to offer. Secondly, discussions amongst colleague have become more centred around pupil learning and how it can be recognised in the classroom. The variety of strategies used is becoming a secondary issue. Thirdly, Frost (2006) argues that for teacher research to have a greater impact on school improvement there needs to be a strategic dimension to the enquiry. His three suggestions about how this strategic dimension might look can be applied to this project. AfL has been brought to the attention of all teachers within schools and with LA staff. forty teachers across a range of subjects and Key Stages are developing their practice with their departments. The outcomes of the project are regarded with validity because they have arisen from the work of a team.

The following cases illustrate how two schools have taken different approaches to embedding AfL.

Case Studies which illustrate two different school approaches to embedding AfL

School A

School A is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive secondary school. It has 1317 number of pupils on roll.

Change within this school has taken more of a cultural approach. Initially AfL was embraced by the history department as described earlier within this paper. It achieved great success and this provided momentum for other teachers to trial some of the ideas. Their GCSE success also grabbed the attention of SLT who appreciated the significant difference it had made to the department’s GCSE results.

The two main embedding strategies this school has employed are professional collaborative enquiry and cultural leadership, though the two other strategies are also evident. In 2003, the school set up a voluntary Teaching and Learning group. This grew quite quickly to about twenty teachers representing most departments who meet half-termly. Some of the work from the History department was disseminated here and other teachers adapted and trialled it.

When AfL was launched as a Whole School Initiative in 2004, the teaching and learning group took AfL as it’s focus. This focus has continued to the present date. The Foundation Subjects Consultant provided input in each meeting and the teachers shared how they had implemented these ideas. This group were to be the experimenters and innovators, working out what worked with their pupils and what didn’t. Over the two years, the dialogue amongst colleagues has evolved. Those who were initially sceptical about strategies working within

their subject have gradually been won round. There is a willingness by everyone to have a go and they regularly bring examples of work by the pupils which demonstrate shifts in learning. It is also an honest forum in which it is safe to explore some of the difficulties teachers face with particular groups of pupils. Over time teachers do report back to having some success.

Two of the departments who are part of the research project are also members of this group. Therefore they are able to disseminate what they are trialling as part of the research project, but also gain ideas and support on a regular basis from their colleagues. This enables the project to maintain momentum in these groups. At times teachers from within the project were able to validate some of the strategies being suggested and explain how and why they worked. This has provided motivation and encouraged “the spectators, ... outright opponents and potential ‘emigrants’” (Schratz *et al.*, 2001 cited in Swaffield and MacBeath, 2006)

Another useful tool for promoting professional collaborative enquiry has been the use of co-coaching (Roberts and Henderson, 2005). This has helped teachers to have quality time with another colleague to reflect and discuss in detail what they are doing, why and how they know pupils are learning. One teacher said,

When do you get the time to have an hour’s discussion on AfL? The coaching conversation has really helped me to understand AfL better.

The coaching process had enabled them to see how pupils processed information and how they went about thinking. Through the use of the video camera, they were able to eavesdrop onto pupil conversations. Teachers enjoyed collaboratively planning as they felt it helped each other to understand what was going on in the classroom at a deeper level.

In terms of integrating AfL within the school management structures the Heads of Department also received the same input by the SLT to ensure that a consistent message was given. It was also hoped that members of the teaching and learning group would feedback into their departments some of the ideas discussed. Also each department was expected to have AfL as one of their priorities on their development plan.

This school demonstrates strong cultural leadership. The deputy head and two assistant headteachers are regular attenders and leaders of the Teaching and Learning Group. They regularly trial ideas and feedback what they find works in their own classes. They also feedback on where they have seen good practice as part of the schools lesson observations schedule. There is a strong sense of parallel leadership within this school

teachers and their principles (in this case SLT) engage in collective action to build school capacity.
(Crowther *et al.*, 2002:38)

This has been powerful in gradually building practices across the school. Their willingness to ‘have a go’ and to feedback honestly on how they find things has been motivating to teachers and provided teachers with support to experiment with practice themselves.

School B

School B is a mixed 11-18 Comprehensive school in Gateshead. It is a Leading Edge school with 1467 number of pupils on roll.

This school is now operating more towards to the structural end of the continuum. Initially the person responsible for driving Teaching and Learning was a head of department. In this role change within the school relied on a cultural approach. It operated on the basis of willing volunteers who were prepared to take risks and give things ago. However, as mentioned elsewhere in this paper, there were no long lasting changes within the school. When the head of department was appointed as a member SLT as an assistant headteacher, they were then able to utilise some of the structures within school to help embed AfL.

Again in this school all four strategies for embedding AfL are evident. For the purposes of this paper, the integration within management mechanisms will be drawn upon.

In the first year, all heads of department received a morning of training on AfL and were asked to audit where they thought they were and to select two or three things to focus on over the coming year. The departmental development plans were built around these and these areas were included in performance management conversations. Given that all the departments had different foci, it proved a hard thing to monitor and manage over the course of the year. Therefore in the following year, all departmental development plans had one focus (learning objectives) with one year group (Year 7). This then enabled whole staff training to be specifically on this one focus. Lesson observations by the assistant headteacher of all staff also focussed on this. This also coincided with the commencement of the research project. This school had three departments involved. Here, these departments had extra time provided for them to develop appropriate strategies and were able to feedback within school about what worked.

This work culminated in a Teaching and Learning Fair in the summer term. Each department set up a stall to demonstrate some of the strategies they were using and discussed the impact it was having in the classroom. This proved to be an enormous success and was a good opportunity for all teachers to see some of the things which were happening and to gain some new ideas. Those involved in the project who had perhaps developed more strategies were able to show some teachers the next step.

Other systems within the school which support the embedding of AfL are the Teaching and Learning Hour of directed time and coaching. The Teaching and Learning hour occurs one night a week, in which departments have time to plan, discuss and develop some of the strategies. This has been a useful way of supporting departments and staff to come on board. In addition, the six coaches have also been able to see practical opportunities to support the development of AfL through the coaching cycle. In this school the pre-lesson observation meeting is usually a joint lesson planning session. Therefore AfL strategies have been incorporated in response to the teacher's identified lesson focus and the impact of these have been discussed afterwards. The school's recent Ofsted report recognises that AfL is being embedded within the school.

Outcomes across the LA

There are a number of outcomes which are already evident. Firstly, teachers are engaging in research. Frost (2006) identifies four benefits to teachers engaging in research:

1. involves intense reflection
2. to become more confident and articulate in discussing educational issues

3. a stronger voice in the running of their schools and an enhanced sense of professionalism
4. engaging in research can also lead to improvements in classroom practice

The quality of the discussions both within schools and within the network is beginning to reflect these benefits. Certainly, teachers talk anecdotally of the improvements it is making to their practice. One teacher said,

I have been teaching for twenty-one years and certainly the last year has been the most exciting for me.

The project is benefiting both Senior leaders and teachers by providing them with time to reflect upon and to discuss some of the issues they face when trying to embed AfL.

Feedback in the network meetings and from the consultant visits have provided the following outcomes from the work. The outcomes are discussed from the teachers' perspective first of all and then from the pupils' perspective.

- Teachers are thinking and talking about the way pupils learn and the way they teach them.
- They are excited and interested about developing pedagogy.
- Teachers are being proactive and trialling ideas themselves.
- It has helped to develop a different learning climate, where there is an on-going dialogue about teaching approaches in a non-threatening way.
- It has helped schools to move forward from the culture that was embedded in summative assessment to a broader climate for learning, which uses AfL systems to improve learning.

Huberman raises the concern that,

By not addressing the impact on pupils, we will have indulged in some magical thinking as before: that adoption meant implementation... that implementation meant institutionalisation... that enhanced teacher capacity means enhanced pupil achievement or development ... If changes in organisational and instructional practice are not followed down to the level of effects on pupils, we will have to admit more openly that we are essentially investing in staff development rather than in the improvement of pupils' abilities.

To avoid the project being simply one of staff development, the LA felt it was important to also record over the course of the project the impact it had on the children. This was collected in a number of ways. At each central meeting, teachers were asked to sit in year group settings and to report back what differences they had seen happening. Teachers also collected quotes and written evidence of the changes it was making to the children. These are the outcomes for the children:

- It has brought an enthusiasm for learning that wasn't previously evident amongst learners.
- It has helped to build pupils' self-efficacy, which in turn has enhanced motivation for pupils to want to learn as they see they can succeed.
- It is helping to develop greater independence in learning giving pupils control, as they understand more clearly and gain the skills to be in charge of their own learning.

At the end of the first year of the project, teachers were asked three questions. Here are some of their responses.

1. How widely has AfL spread across your department?

Ten out of ten staff within the department have embraced AfL, some more enthusiastically than others. Each teacher has identified a KS3 class to work on AfL over the year. A few have adopted AfL in other classes as well.

There are two key members in our department that are active in AfL strategies within their classroom, especially using success criteria. After feedback within a department meeting, other staff members have tried to use some aspect of it within their own teaching. It isn't however embedded yet within our schemes of work. This is our next goal, to target certain topics within KS3 and to incorporate AfL strategies within them.

2. What impact is AfL having on pupils and how do you know?

Pupils are becoming more involved in the assessment of their own work. They also like to be able to assess other people's work and have their own work assessed by others instead of relying on the teacher all the time. Pupils are more motivated and on task more of the time when they have been given clear success criteria to work to. They know how to be successful in a lesson. They also like the idea of having more control of their work.

The most noticeable effect has been in terms of involvement of pupils in the lesson. Pupils seem to enjoy the increased level of engagement and ownership in the lessons.

Essentially pupils are more on task.

3. How deeply has AfL progressed?

The whole school has been focussing on AfL. Compulsory after school meetings have been set up to focus on specific AfL strategies. A voluntary group meeting regularly with staff from many departments attending.

Further developments

There are a number of developments within the LA with which this project feeds into or from which have evolved from it. The Primary and Secondary Research Groups have started meeting together at conferences focussing on collaborative dialogic talk led by Christine Harrison from King's College, London. This has enabled teachers to form collaborative partnership and be able to understand more fully what happens in each others' area.

The LA has just been invited to be part of a DfES funded transfers and transitions project. This involves one of our secondary schools working with a cluster of five of its primary schools on the development of AfL across the Key Stages.

The LA has just received Aim Higher Flexibility Funding. The aim of this project is to target boy heavy GNVQ courses in construction and engineering to identify what helps pupils learn

effectively. AfL is seen to underpin this work. All five Tyne and Wear Authorities are seeking to pursue a similar focus so that the outcomes of the project will be seen to have validity if replicated across.

A research project looking at identifying what thinking looks like in the classroom is to begin in January. This involves one secondary school and four of its feeder schools

Finally a research project in Maths for both primary and secondary school teachers was launched in December. This arose from four Maths departments involved in the secondary research project wanted to get together to share ideas. A number of Maths teachers within the authority in both primary and secondary had raised concerns at how to apply AfL in Maths. Therefore this project is to respond to this need.

Conclusions

The Gateshead model has provided a process for schools to be involved in school improvement. Over the past three years in particular there has been a shift in schools' emphasis on pupils' learning. The model has provided schools with a systematic approach to lead this change. Where the headteacher and SLT have taken an active role in leading and managing this change, the greatest impact has been seen. Practice is still not consistent across the whole school, nor across the authority, but this is an area we are working on.

Van Velzen describes School Improvement as

a systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning and other related conditions in schools with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively.

(Van Velzen *et al.*, 1985)

The research project is enabling both individual schools and the authority to undergo such a systematic, sustained approach. The research groups, covering both primary and secondary schools, illustrate a growing momentum within the authority.

The LA feels that through the bringing together of schools into a network, supported by consultants, and conferences with leading speakers, schools in Gateshead are moving from innovations for the few to a more institutionalised phase.

Many change efforts fail to progress beyond early implementation because those involved do not realise that each of these phases have different characteristics and require different strategies for success to be achieved. (Hopkins, 2001)

The Gateshead model and in particular the network provides schools and teachers a structure in which to focus on pupil learning. The network enables a wide range of teachers to hear and meet with other teachers of the same year group or subject. It gives a forum for them to share ideas and concerns, to learn from each other, to try out other people's ideas. This has empowered teachers and learners, and created a 'can do' approach which instils confidence and assurance in further developments.

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Contact

Julie Roberts
Gateshead LA
Dryden PDC
Evistones Road
Low Fell
Gateshead NE9 5UR
Tel: 00 44 191 433 8643
Email: julieroberts2@gateshead.gov.uk