AfL and Action Research: Ripples through the System
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It has been reported that a ‘focus on improving tests results compromises teachers’ creativity in the classroom’ (House of Common, 2008) and the ARG literature review (2002), identified strong evidence of the negative impact of testing on students motivation and the consequent impact on their future learning and went on to further promote formative methods to help students to ‘learn better’. Strategies to encourage formative assessment are not new; studies from the KMOFAP (Black et al, 2003) recognised the need to report formative innovations in real classroom environments.

North Tyneside AfL Science + 1 (AfLS+1) action research project was launched in December 2007. There are 11 secondary schools in the LA, 5 of which were chosen to take part in the AfL Science +1 initiative; one member of the science department and one member of another department were invited to work together (science + 1). A brief school profile is included below. Although this initiative was driving through at the departmental and classroom level at not at the whole school level, drawing upon the experience of the DFES/Secondary National Strategies Assessment for Learning 8 Schools project was advantageous as the criteria for joining the AfLS+1 project followed a similar theme. Schools involved in phase one (P1) were selected on the following criteria:

1. Capacity in the science department and one other subject to enable AR in the classroom to be carried out;
2. Desire to increase/review current AfL practice;
3. Commitment and support from the SLT .

There were 2 ½ days of funded support were provided for networking and developing of action research planning. The launch in the autumn was organised into 5 key sessions, including up to date research and tried and tested methods of formative assessment:
- Sharing learning goals and success criteria (LO/SC);
- Effective questioning and dialogue (QD);
- Effective teacher feedback (TF);
- Peer and self-assessment (P/SA);
- Action Research (AR).

In addition to this the group met once as a twilight session and interim personalised support was provided for all the participants. From here teachers conducted their own projects with support from a local authority consultant. The decision to encourage an AR approach was supported by personal experience of the author and by the wealth of literature emphasising the impact of AR models in education (Elliot, 1995, McNiff & Whitehead, 2006).

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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Teacher profile</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>School background</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Both Subject Leaders (teaching for 5+ years)</td>
<td>Science and Geography</td>
<td>11-18 mixed comprehensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Science teacher was a SL (teaching for 8+ years) English teacher was NQT</td>
<td>Science and English</td>
<td>11-18 mixed comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>All classroom teachers (teaching for 3-5 years)</td>
<td>Science x 2 (one part time) and Drama</td>
<td>11-16 mixed comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Both classroom teachers. Science teacher was new to the school (teaching for 3-5 years)</td>
<td>Science and Media</td>
<td>11-18 mixed comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Both classroom teachers (both 4+ years)</td>
<td>Science and English</td>
<td>11-18 mixed comprehensive</td>
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Table 1.1: School profile for P1 AfLS+1 project.

The evidence for assessment for learning techniques promoting learning was our starting point, we wanted to exploit the excellent work already being done by teachers across the country while
employing action research methods to support change in classroom practice. The focus would be to challenge the current AfL practice in schools and to support the progress of effective AfL in the classroom. The purpose of the project was to provide a support pathway, using the fundamental principles of action research (AR), to enhance teachers' professional development from professional knowledge users through the nurturing of their capabilities to professional knowledge makers (Waters-Adams, 2004) and to develop a clearer understanding of the significance of formative assessment in raising achievement and to gain confidence in the methods. The project was two fold, firstly to pilot a large-scale action research project for a consortium of schools, something that had not been done in this way before and secondly to provide a platform for teachers to actively review their classroom practice with respect to formative assessment. In terms of predicted outcomes, the first point would evaluate the practicalities and appropriateness of AR as a method to enhance classroom practice, the second would address how these have been accommodated into the whole school/LA.

Harlen, 2007 states that 'what is assessed influences what is taught and how it is taught and hence the opportunity for learning'. On the 14th October 2008, Ed Balls, the current Minster for Children announced that the Key Stage 3 tests were to be scrapped, thereby meaning there would be no formal external assessment for students due to sit maths, English or science SATs in May 2009. He stated that this was part of the wider reaching reforms for KS2 and 3.

Last year also saw the National Strategies/DCFS/QCA ‘The assessment for Learning Strategy’ launched. It has set out the Governments pledge to fund high quality training to support effective AfL with £150 Million for the next 3 years (2008-2011) ‘in order that schools can use formative assessment to drive pupil progress’ (DCSF, website, 2008). The aims of the Assessment for Learning Strategy are to ‘to make assessment for learning more wide spread, systematic and consistent’. The strategic approach to assessment aims to link 3 aspects of assessment: day-to-day with periodic and transitional assessment…. Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) will replace the formal SATs examinations. Prior to this, in 2004/2005 the Secondary National Strategies produced a vast quantity of materials supporting the roll-out of AfL in schools, through whole school initiatives (WSI) and through subject specific materials. There is a plethora of useful resources here, in folders all over the country, alas materials that were seen, and in some cases delivered as, units or 'modules' to complete rather than materials for refection and for supporting an on going dramatic shift in grassroots classroom practice. Yes, we have the folder, yes I have 'done' the INSET, but has the point been missed? In the 8 schools project (DfES, 2007) the key findings illustrate this tension between coverage of the content of teaching and pedagogy behind the delivery recognising that ‘at times the teaching outpaces the learning’ possibly supporting the ‘We have ‘done’ AfL’… can we now get back to covering the National Curriculum?’ approach to innovation. If this is not the ‘best’ way, then can AR be more successful where the ‘unit’ approach has failed? AfL may have become a box to tick rather than a process embedded within classroom pedagogy’.

‘Teachers will not take up attractive sounding ideas, albeit based on extensive research if these are presented on general principles, which leave entirely to them the task of translating them into everyday practice’. (Black and Wiliam 1998).

Practitioner research is generally concerned with school improvement, yet there is a wealth of research demonstrating how difficult it has been to implement significant change in schools. Fullan (2004) identifies the key points of change as being rapid and non linear, in fact messy, explaining that the paradox is that transformation would not be possible without messiness. Most change occurs as a response to disturbances, be it internal or external influences, to initially challenge the thinking of the participants will act as the ‘disturbance’ to initiate change. The structure of this study intends to act as an external catalyst for change. He further describes what ‘change’ feels like ‘people feel anxious, fearful, confused, overwhelmed, deskilled, cautious… leaders need to help through the early anxieties of change’. An aspect of the process of change worth allowing for here is the implementation dip. An implementation dip is experienced as successful organisations/individuals move forward as they engage in innovations and acquire new skills and new understanding. If the AILS+1 project is to be successful, then we are to expect the implementation dip to occur during the AR process.

The social theory of Archer (1988) regarding change in schools suggests that people can be influenced by but never determined by the cultural systems and structures that surround them underpins the ethos of this study. Focusing on the ‘complementaries and the contradictions’ that present in the context of change, using ‘morphogenesis’ and ‘morphostasis’ to signify change or lack of change respectively for any social setting, in our case schools. Her theory outlines that complementarities relate to innovations that promote change consistent with ideas, norms and values that already exist within the social structure. Thus creating change that is less problematic. In contrast
to this, contradictions are ideas in tension with existing norms, values and beliefs and therefore by
definition, more problematic. Using Archer’s theory Priestley and Sime (2005) conducted a small-scale
study AfL for all: a whole-school approach to pedagogic change. They referred to the 3 potential
consequences of contradictions as being: 1) ‘New ideas are modified to fit with existing ideas, norms
and values and change does not take place: this is morphostasis; 2) existing ideas, norms and values
are modified to fit with existing ideas, norms and values producing a form of morphogenesis; 3) both
new and old ideas are adapted to remove or reduce these contradictions. Morphogenesis occurs and
socio-cultural interaction leads to elaboration of the cultural system and the generation of new
knowledge’. While the AIFS+1 study is initially at the individual level, we are looking to answer how
these consequences have been accommodated in schools; the theory of morphogenesis will be useful
to our analysis of this and for subsequent projects.

The overarching research questions for the project are below. These reflect the process and support
given and the use of AR as an appropriate method to facilitate change.

RQ1: What are the consequences of teachers researching their practice for their school and for
the LA?
RQ2: How have these consequences been accommodated?

Methodology

Data was collated from questionnaires; lesson observations; student focus groups and learning
journals and through the researchers notes and feedback sessions.

An online questionnaire programme was used to collate data from students and teachers. The
structure enabled filtering for teacher, year, subject, school and for each question. The questionnaire
followed the format of the action research planning: learning outcomes and success criteria;
questioning and dialogue; teacher feedback and peer and self-assessment, an example is provided
below. The questionnaire for both teachers and students were completed prior to the start of the AR
period and again after the showcase event.

Focus groups are used in educational research but are more apparent in the business and political
setting (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2006). Elevated importance placed on ‘student voice’ in schools
has increased the use of some form of focus group setting in schools and when done carefully is an
invaluable way of gleaning thoughts and views from the most important people in a school. The focus
groups would consist of 4 (mixed gender) students selected by the class teacher, either at random or
as a deliberate selection. Leading stems were used for consistency and to promote discussion, with a
series of pre-determined prompt questions to keep the discussion focused on the research aim and to
help students extend their answers. An informal approach, allowing a 45-minute discussion with each
group was chosen.

Lesson observations were part of the coaching offered to the participants and enabled observations
from an external source. Participants were given a journal note-book at the start of the project and
asked to record their reflections after AfL focused lessons. They would be required to write up their
journey through the project and they were encouraged to keep a record of pertinent times so that they
could use them at the end of the project. Teachers were asked to keep records of lesson plans, lesson
resources, examples of rich questions used etc and any student responses that demonstrated the impact of the strategy employed.

The aim was to collate and triangulate data from students, teachers and external (researcher) observations (Cambell, McNamara et al 2004). Collecting data from different people using the same questionnaire and focus point enables a variety of perspectives to be sort, to look for patterns, contradictions and for evidence to move forward and consequently change practice. Cohen et al 2007 defines triangulation as ‘the use of 2 or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour’. These techniques attempt to further explain the richness and complexities of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint. The exemplification of triangulation as deployed in this study is shown below.

Data Analysis
The analysis is grouped into 4 key areas of focus for the AR: LO/SC; QD; TF and P/SA. In line with the suggested methodology, where appropriate and possible, it includes analysis of the teacher responses, student responses and external observations.

The initial teacher questionnaire was completed by 10 out of the 11 teachers; all teachers completed the final questionnaire. Of the 11 only 5 completed a final learning journal, 6 teachers were observed with their selected class: 1 English; 1 media and 4 science lessons.

256 students completed the pre-AR questionnaire, the post AR questionnaire by only 66 students. The results were filtered to include only the students that completed both the pre and post versions, therefore a sample of 66 student responses were analysed. The participation onto the focus group component of the project was voluntary and 8 of the 11 teachers expressed a wish to be included, although due to logistics only 6 focus groups were conducted.
Below is the headline data from the online questionnaires. Data that showed either a positive or negative difference between the pre and post AR questionnaires has been included. Where possible this has been matched for student and teacher data.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>AFL Focus</th>
<th>Teacher online questionnaire</th>
<th>Student online questionnaire</th>
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| **Learning Outcomes and success criteria** | 60% (cf 30%) now *always* share LO at the start of the lesson  
70% (cf 0%) now *always* make it clear what they expect most/all to have learnt by the end of the lesson  
60% (cf 20%) now *often* give opportunities for students to reflect on how they have learnt as well as what they have learnt | 30% (cf 18%) now *always* review what they have learnt at the start of the lesson  
22% (cf 15%) now felt that they *always* had a chance to reflect on how they had learnt as well as what they had learnt |
| **Questioning and dialogue** | 80% (cf 40%) now *sometimes/rarely or never* ask for hands up  
30% (cf 10%) now *always* give thinking time | Interestingly, despite the issues associated with the student questionnaire, the results negate those from the teachers’ questionnaire.  
70% (cf 83%) are now *always* or *often* given time to think before answering a question  
50% (cf 40%) now think there is *always* or *often* only one answer to the question their teacher asks  
Encouragingly, 72% (cf 84%) are now *always* or *often* asked to put their hands up |
| **Teacher feedback**       | Sadly, or maybe a slip of the finger, 10% (cf 0%) now think *my written comments rarely* tell their students what they need to do to improve  
50% (cf 30%) now *always* give verbal feedback during the lesson  
90% (cf 60%) now *often* or *sometimes* build in time for students make improvements based on teachers written comments | 70% (cf 67%) now think *the written comments on their work always or often* tell them what they need to do to improve  
62% (cf 55%) now *always* or *often* have time built into the lessons to make improvements |
| **Peer and self assessment**| 80% (cf 30%) now *often* have students marking their own work against assessment criteria  
70% (cf 20%) now *often* show students how to give each other feedback | 28% (cf 15%) now *often have guidance from their teacher on how to give feedback to others so they can make progress*  
18% (cf 9%) now *often mark other students’ work against assessment criteria* |

The data from the questionnaire should be treated with caution, but there is evidence that during the process teachers at least were more aware of the AFL strategies deployed in their classroom with a shift towards enhancing learning opportunities and skills. Teachers spoke freely of the enhanced awareness and focus and that the research had not only encouraged them to try new things, but to also look more critically at current practice that promoted formative methods, combining new and old ideas and helping to remove or at least reduce contradictions (Priestley, 2005). The student questionnaire was not as clear in providing evidence either for or against, the qualitative data from the lesson observations, journals and focus groups was much more indicative.

Marshall and Drummond (2006) refer to the ‘spirit’ or the ‘letter’ of AFL when describing lessons watched. The ‘spirit’ of AFL, is characterised as ‘high organisation based on ideas’, where the underpinning principle is student autonomy. This is pertinent here to help distinguish between teachers making tentative first steps towards AFL practice and those who fully embrace the ethos of formative strategies in their planning and therefore switch from teaching subject content to having a comprehensive understanding of student learning.
An abridged version of the student focus group and lesson observation data is tabulated below and includes comments pertinent to the questionnaire data above. The lesson observation data has also been characterised either as to the letter or spirit of AfL. Rather than group the teacher journal data here, this has been used in the discussion referring to the research questions below.
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<tr>
<th>AFL Focus</th>
<th>Student focus group</th>
<th>Lesson observations</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Outcomes and success criteria</strong></td>
<td>If they don’t write it and just tell us then its harder to remember what to do, we wouldn’t have to keep asking what we are meant to be doing. If you know how to be successful then you know you are learning, then you know you can do your best. Without SC you don’t know if you have done it right or wrong. If you haven’t learnt it (meaning the LO) then you can ask the teacher about what you don’t know. Having LO gets you prepared to work. If you have SC for a piece of work you can keep going back to it to check. If you know what you are meant to have achieved in the lesson then you know if you have done well. I think it is a waste of time, they should just get on with the lesson rather than spending ages explaining what we are going to do. I prefer it, but it doesn’t happen all the time. You shouldn’t have to copy them down though. Just explain it and then do a starter.</td>
<td>Lesson 1 - LOs were given on a slide with clear progression thorough the learning. Students were talked through the LO and asked to think where they might be by the end of the lesson. This was completely new for this teacher and thereby at this stage evident of the letter of AFL. Lesson 2 - The LO was said to the class and was written at the top of their worksheet. Students had 6 SC decided by the teacher, they needed to choose 3 to work with on their interpretation of a poem. This was common practice for this teacher and the lesson and subsequent planning was clearly in the spirit of AFL.</td>
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<td><strong>Questioning and dialogue</strong></td>
<td>If the question is interesting then you think about it more. Its good when they (teachers) ask questions from the previous lesson, it makes links. It is better if the teacher doesn’t just tell you things, they should ask people to see what they already know. It is good when the teachers asks questions and say there isn’t a right or wrong answer; you just need to think about it. It takes the pressure off. The confident ones (students) put their hands up, you know they will answer the questions. Its not just students that don’t listen, sometimes when you are a bit stuck and you want to try and just as you are about to answer they move on to another person and they don’t think you have been listening. That’s annoying. When you can’t put your hand up, but you know the answer, it’s frustrating when you don’t get picked.</td>
<td>Lesson 1 - ‘Thunks’ (Gilbert, 2007) used to support rich questioning and deep thinking. The ‘big question’ approach to the starter was a new idea being developed to support rich questioning through the topics. The teacher commented that more students took part in the discussion due to the open nature of the question. Interestingly, despite being completely new, the discussion, student responses and flexible approach to the lesson was very much in line with the spirit, however, the teachers reservations about ‘time’ spent on discussion verses content coverage suggested this may not sit comfortably in future planning. Lesson 2 - The hook was the article, which naturally stimulated the students’ interest. The teacher was trialling out strategies to encourage rich questioning and extended responses. A ‘no hands up approach was applied and she began by asking what they thought the article was about. This was a difficult lesson to coordinate as the students were initially uncomfortable with the open ended nature of the questioning and at times it felt like ‘pulling teeth’, it as a mix of the spirit and the letter of AFL. At times there was a sense of the teacher doing it because she thought she should, rather than fully believing in the benefits. This is likely to come with time for this teacher. Lesson 3 - Sophisticated use of questioning by the teacher, while circulating around...</td>
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the groups to support the development of rich questions from the students. The teacher had been keen to develop students questioning skills and was careful not to lead students into a way of thinking, not do the thinking for them. Despite a new method applied to this lesson, it was very much in line with the spirit of AfL, with the teacher reassured that the open ended, student driven style was conducive for learning.

| Teacher feedback | You're not learning anything if you get the answer wrong and the teacher just writes the right answer next to it. Our teacher writes what we have done well and what we need to do to improve for next time. I think it is a good idea. If you got an E though, then just comments would be better, because you would feel like you had wasted your time. If you got a grade A* then comments would be helpful so that you know what you did well to be able to do it again, and get another A* I prefer a level/grade and a comment, because with the level, you know if you are doing well, the comments are like advice on how to improve it, like I and N (PIN) If I got a grade I liked, like a B, I wouldn't bother looking at the comments. They don't put negative comments on your work, it's good idea, well it's 50:50, if you did have it then you know I could do it better next time, a negative comment can be persuasive. |
| Peer and self assessment | Well if you get to see the work, you know what you have done wrong straight away. If you marked someone else work you will be able to help them using the PIN system. When we do peer assessment I can talk my friend through what she has done and how she can improve it. The best person is peers and yourself to mark to do the PIN. You get the hang of marking friends work quite quickly, once you have done a couple of them. In self-assessment people might cheat just to get good marks, but then you are not really learning anything, it is just sad to do that! You learn by your mistakes. If it’s your friend, you don’t know if they have put that just because they want to be nice to you. I prefer the teachers to do it just in case I get a low mark, I don’t want anyone else to know. |

No direct evidence of teacher feedback from the lessons observed.

Lesson 1 - Students were able to decide what makes good SC and how to use this effectively in peer feedback – using the 2 stars and a wish system. They also described how it was difficult at first to be specific with SC, but then reflected on the challenge during PA if the SC was not clear in the first place. Demonstrated the spirit of AfL throughout the lesson, the teacher is very aware of his own personal shift in expectation of students and the coverage verses understanding debate, its not easy but the determination is clear.

Lesson 2 - At the end of the lesson, each group showcased their work. The SC criteria chosen was shared with the class so that they could help to peer assess whether they had met the SC, evidence for meeting it or area to improve were provided as a class.
RQ1 – what are the consequences of teachers’ researching their own practice for their school and LA?

Has there been a change in pedagogy? The evidence from the questionnaire would suggest that there are steps in the right direction and most of all a more enhanced recognition of formative practice. The qualitative data supports this, eluding that the participants identify value in formative methods, through their own research. To coin a cliché, we are left with a group of teachers empowered by their AR, professionals able to make significant changes in their classroom practice. The research for some participants was not focused so much on something that wasn’t working but more on the general good practice already going on in their classroom and how they can maximise this potential (Street & Temperley, 2005).

I feel reassured in some ways and scared in others. Reassured because I recognise aspects of good practice in my teaching, although perhaps I haven’t called it the same thing or used correct terminology. Scared because I could do so much more. Being part of this project is making me think about teaching and learning and challenges many pre-conceptions. (Drama teacher)

I was surprised that including these strategies did not necessarily mean more work in terms of planning and marking. In fact they help to reduce workload. (Science teacher)

One of the strongest themes from discussions and learning journals was that this process had ‘made’ them make changes and they can become more reflective teachers as a result of this. They had tenacity for change driven by the supportive nature of the group as a whole (Jackson and Street, 2005). Many had also become more reflexive by becoming more aware of their influence within the classroom, their strengths and limitations and the consequences of this on the learning of their students in their classrooms.

I do think though that I need other people to bounce things off and to share ideas with, otherwise it is difficult to decide what to do next. (English teacher)

One of the things that I’ve really enjoyed about the project is actually getting to spend time with other teachers, including within my own school! Being a one-woman dept can be quite lonely at times so it has been great to meet other like-minded people. (Media teacher)

There was also an increase in enthusiasm for teaching their subject (70% cf 40% are now ‘always’ enthusiastic about their subject) mirroring the findings of Black et al, 2006, where on completion of their classroom based research found that teachers not only ‘work smarter, not harder, teachers ‘come to enjoy their work more and to find it more satisfying because it resonates with their professional values. This quantitative data was fully supported by teacher anecdotal feedback and well as being blatantly obvious during the discussion on day 2, the twilight and during lesson observations. Although I am cautious to attribute a cause and effect model here, I do believe that the reflection and reflexion encouraged the participant to think more carefully about their role as a professional facilitating learning.

Referring back to Fullan’s concept of external and internal disturbances initiating the shift, many spoke of the desire to continue even when the going got tough due to the high expectations set by the group themselves and the expectation that the work they were doing in their own classroom would add to the big picture of the project.

I don’t think that a year has been long enough to embed this process and would really like the opportunity to continue with it. I am concerned though that if it is not ‘monitored’ from outside, I’ll just let it go by the wayside as the mundane day-to-day stuff takes over. (Science teacher)

The implementation dip was evident throughout the year with many commenting on the small steps approach and the frustration of implementing new methods for their classes.

It still feels ‘early days’ for me with AfL. Although I have been aware of AfL for a few years it has only just become embedded in my teaching. (Science teacher)

There were times of real frustration, when I thought the students had really got it and then, during the lesson it become clear they hadn’t, or I hadn’t been clear enough… which ever it was meant we went a bit backwards before moving on again. (Science teacher)
One of the biggest things I have become more aware of is that things do not change overnight and a great deal of perseverance is needed before benefits are seen. (English teacher)

I am determined to keep going with this and see it as a long-term issue for me to build into my schemes of work and daily practice. (Drama teacher)

Black et al (2006) make reference to the risk taking aspect of change, ‘For a ‘non-trivial’ shift in practice to be seen then teachers, at least during the process of change, will take risks and inevitably take on more work’ apparent for many of the participants on P1.

It does sometimes feel risky implementing the strategies because there is a shift of ‘control’ from you as a teacher to the pupils. However, I feel more confident that I know the pupils are learning and progressing. (science teacher)

I am very keen to force myself out of my box and would like to be involved with more projects like this in the future – if possible. (media teacher)

RQ2 - How have these consequences been accommodated?

In terms of accommodating any outcomes of teacher research, Jackson and Street (2005) advise caution when disseminating ideas to colleagues. Suggesting that ‘sharing research with others that were not involved requires careful thought, others need to choose to find out about the research, they need to have a reason to want to find out about the research, they need to have faith it will be useful to them even though it may not be immediately transferable’. Some teachers are working very much by themselves to implement their research more widely to colleagues, through informal chats or voluntary network groups after school.

I have ‘rolled out’ the PCN format to my other classes, using it across all key stages (3-5), and am now in process of evaluating it across a range of departments. It is being trialled in: Media, English, History, PE, Graphics, Business Studies, MFL, Science and Humanities. I am hopeful that as a group, we can build on the ideas from the project and use them to our advantage. (media teacher).

Others have a slightly more structured approach, using departmental buddy systems to support trialling of ideas.

I intend to continue to develop AfL strategies in my lessons, as well as in the department and the school. I have identified two members of staff (one English and one Science) who I will buddy. I will also continue to work closely with my +1 teacher – who I did not really know before this project! (science teacher)

‘Slow knowing’ and learning in context demonstrates patient, less deliberate models of leadership. Fullan (2004) writes that ‘effective leaders see the bigger picture don’t panic when things go wrong in the early stage of change innovation. Its not so much that they are taking their time, its just they know things take time to gel’. So in terms of answering RQ2, this could relate significantly to how the participants and then their SLT deal with the process of AR and change and the support form leadership, including from the LA help to accommodate this change. Without a doubt, the schools that have demonstrated a move towards genuinely accommodating these consequences are those supported directly by their head teachers and SLT.

As a direct result of AfL S+1, 3 of the 5 schools have reviewed their whole school AfL practice, strongly supported by the SLT. They are moving away from a ‘we do AfL’ approach to a more strategic view of tangible, effective classroom practice. These are not easy shifts and need to be carefully negotiated and managed. Three of the 11 teachers have new responsibilities for AfL in their departments and 2 are supporting whole school initiatives.

This was an excellent showcase event. I hope this will be the start of something not the end. The excellent practice developed across the different schools could be used to set up collaborative partnerships for CPD within schools to embed good practice throughout schools. (SLT from a phase 1 school)

“Claire!, We are doing it all wrong. I am completely fired up now, we are going to completely review our AfL policy!” (SLT from phase 1 school)
The AR process was crucial to the enhanced awareness of student learning and consequent implementation of AfL conducive for learning rather than coverage. There was a unique ‘buzz’ created by the group as they progressed through the year, and the level of enquiry by the participants was outstanding. There was anecdotal evidence of a perseverance which had not been apparent in other forms of CPD and a tenacity to make a change. There is evidence for morphogenesis (Priestley & Sime, 2005), for some this is still very much at the individual classroom level, for others there is a shift at the whole school level where they now face the clash of complementarities and contradictions through the process of adaptation. These are powerful indicators of change. We aim to further support the process of morphogenesis in our schools through active involvement in teacher-research led initiatives.

The tenacity and enthusiasm for change was most apparent and a real pleasure to be part of. A decision to trial a large-scale action research project was a good one and now something that is being extended into other aspects of authority wide support programmes for schools. The process opens up opportunities for teachers to be reflective learners, possibly initiating an intrinsic desire to enhance their teaching repertoire and invites them to acknowledge the barriers and constraints within which they work. Indeed it was evident that the thinking and practice of many of the teachers had accelerated rapidly and for some their conception of their role as teachers had shifted. This was the first initiative of this kind for North Tyneside schools and as such was a test of the culture and structure of the local authority and the schools.

Since 2007 and the LA wide introduction of teachers researching their own practice, there has been some hard thinking about how best to support such action research and what consequences the project has for the LA’s other interaction with its schools. Phase 2 (P2) adopted a similar model and includes 4 new schools involved in the project. Following training from Rachel Lofthouse from Newcastle University, 3 of the P1 participants have been recruited as teacher-coaches for the new participants to support the interim coaching cycle. Although the data from phase 2 is not yet ready to collate, the group dynamics have been completely different. The launch day was run twice due to poor attendance for the first date and despite the funding provided there have been more issues relating to coming out of school for cover. The showcase event is in October 2009 and likely to be a smaller audience due to the ‘rarely cover’ agenda. On an individual level the qualitative data is still very much in line with the P1 participants, with the research aspect adding value to their role as practitioners and the compulsory coaching cycle has been well received, if a little daunting at first.

Interestingly, over the last year, BSF has become the driving force for whole school planning and as a consequence P1 participants have had variable successes with continuing with their research. One school (not a BSF school) has completely embraced the model and the science teacher involved in P1 has been instrumental in pushing this thinking forward, with substantial changes in the whole school approach. Another school has different teaching and learning groups in school with one looking at AfL as a whole school priority unfortunately the teachers involved in P1 are not working with that initiative… Others have not been so successful and have found that working alone is not as conducive as working as part of the bigger team, more comparable with morphostasis theory of change occurring due to the notorious pull of school constraints.

**Lessons learnt**

- There is a fine balance between being a well-received external support and an LA driven project.
- Senior leader involvement is crucial for sustaining the shift in practice.
- Networks work.
- Practitioner research combined with coaching is key!

With all this in mind and still convinced that real change occurs through supporting practitioner research Phase 3 will see the introduction of a formal LA teaching and learning group with consultant representaves from early years through to secondary to help reinforce the notion of teachers as researchers throughout North Tyneside Schools. There has been a lot of thought around the consistency of message for teaching and learning support from the local authority for all school phases. It is embryonic in its development but the current thinking is linked to the work of Dylan Wiliam and colleagues regarding Teaching and Learning Communities (TLCs), additional support from the academic researchers at Newcastle University and considering the involvement of student researchers as seen in Bedlingtonshire High School, Northumberland and St Thomas More Catholic School, Gateshead.
References


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