

Reconceptualising Assessment for Learning using
an Action Research framework: Implications for
Policy and Practice in an English Setting

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Abstract:

This PhD project is about using an Action Research framework to develop the understanding of the pedagogy and practice relating to the implementation of the National Strategies in Assessment for Learning. The theme of the research on Assessment for Learning was inspired in the first instance by the work by Black and Wiliam on Formative Assessment. This thesis developed by examining the strategies in a real world context using an Action Research framework as a basis for the synthesised methodology. The work on this thesis has incorporated the “improve” paradigm of research and this concept has been central to developing my own and others’ practice.

This thesis summarises the findings concerning the reconceptualization of the ideas contained within Black and Wiliam’s work. The work for this thesis has taken place in a time frame constrained by the implementation of the strategy to the removal of the support for the strategy via the removal of the National Strategies website, an action taken by the coalition government. The thesis has examined the pedagogical theories behind the concept of Assessment for Learning and the National Strategies. It has also considered how these ideas have been implemented in schools and the impact this has had on a variety of stakeholders. The work by Black and Wiliam suggests a rolling programme of action research type activities in order to develop the ideas they are postulating. This thesis has taken this concept and applied the idea creating a synthesised methodology which has resulted in my own grounded theory.

As a result of this study there are a number of original contributions to knowledge. These findings are centred on the fact that each school is a unique culture and that as such the implementation of a generic strategy will prove difficult. Another significant contribution to knowledge is based on the terminology of assessment and how it is interpreted by practitioners, the different paradigms are discussed and conclusions drawn. Linked to this the conclusions from this thesis have addressed the issue of the development of Continued Professional Development (CPD) programmes for teachers.

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Chapter 1:

In this introduction the research will be placed in context and will establish the issues raised in this thesis as well as outline my personal motivations in engaging in this project and the problematical issues faced when examining a National Strategy in a local context. The chapter will also establish the aims of the research and will place the study in its social and educational context. It will introduce the issues faced in the Action Research journey and summarise the findings. This chapter will begin by establishing my background and as a consequence will include a brief biography detailing the way in which the research originated and how it links to my previous experience.

1.1: Introduction:

This thesis is the outcome of an Action Research project and consequently my own background and professional development is central to the research paradigm and also to the results. This will result in the thesis being written in the first person, as “I”: will often be used. The use of the first person reflects the ideas in McNiff’s writing which states (McNiff, 2011: 47)

“What distinguishes a living theory form of action research is that it is grounded in the ontological “I” of the researcher.”

I will set the aims of the thesis within the framework of this chapter in section 1.1.2. The examination of my professional background will appear in section 1.2. The links between my own previous historical research and the current study will be considered in section 1.2.1. This section is relevant to this study as the field experiences of an historical researcher can be said to reflect the way in which an Action Research project is conducted. The rationale for the choice of topic will be examined in section 1.3 with the background to the methodology appearing in 1.4. As part of the introductory chapter there will also be a consideration of the significant terminology, which will be used throughout the project in section 1.5. The relevance of the research will be looked at in section 1.6.

The thesis will include an examination of the key research which established the concept of Assessment for Learning (AfL) as devised by Black and Wiliam. I will

also examine the introduction of AfL as part of Government policy. This will be based on the role of the Key Stage 3 Strategy and will consider the nature of the pedagogy attached to this. Commensurate with this will be an examination of the findings relating to the role of the original researchers in the development of the Key Stage 3 Strategy and the implementation of the policy. A key aspect which will be investigated will be the problems of putting national policy into practice in a local context. This will link to looking at educational establishment as unique cultures.

1.2: The aims of the research:

The purpose of this research was delineated by examining a number of aims and can be summarised as examining the reconceptualization of a key aspect of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy in England & Wales, notably Assessment for Learning (AfL). The original aims of the research can therefore be summarised by the following questions:

1. How have the original ideas of AfL been adopted and have the intentions of the original researchers been fulfilled?
2. How was AfL viewed by staff, students and other stakeholders?
3. How was AfL used within and across Faculties in schools?
4. How did AfL impact on teacher's professional practice?
5. Could an original toolkit for AfL be created in order to develop its implementation in the curriculum?
6. How has AfL been used in high stakes assessment?
7. What were the issues relating to AfL in practice?
8. How could new strategies for educational change can be adapted and applied to a variety of situations?

As an emergent researcher I originally intended to simply examine the current practice relating to Assessment for Learning in secondary schools; however, other aspects relating to the political implications have become increasingly central to this study. The implications of the political significance of AfL developed as an emergent theme over the period the research was undertaken, which can be linked to the cyclical nature of the Action Research framework.

The original aim of the research can be subdivided into a number of different themes. The most notable theme considers whether the theoretical framework proposed by the originators of the theory was in fact what was being applied in practice and how AfL is viewed by staff, students and other stakeholders. Closely linked to this is an examination of how AfL is being utilised by different Faculties and Departments within and across the study schools. Moving on from this I also aim to critically analyse the issues arising in relation to AfL and how the theory impacts on teachers' professional practice and development. I wish to examine the possibilities for creating an original toolkit for the dissemination of Assessment for Learning, and when it is in place, to evaluate its effectiveness. This aspect is highly significant and the implementation and results will be considered in more depth later. Linked to these previous ideas was the fact that I intend to critically analyse the practices relating to the implementation of AfL. I also aim to examine whether new strategies for actions and change can be applied to a variety of situations including employment training; that is to say, whether the educational theory behind Assessment for Learning is transferable from the secondary education sector to other areas.

Another aim of the research was to place these ideas within an institutional, local and national context (particularly relating to the political context of UK government policy) and links to relevant theoretical frameworks.

These aims are all placed within a school situation and this is linked to reviewing current pedagogy, policy and practice in relation to AfL. The original aims were reviewed over a period of time in line with an Action Research approach. This modification to the original research aims will be reconsidered later in this study.

1.3: Background to the research and previous research undertaken:

1.3.1: Background:

This research project is grounded in personal and professional background; this included aspects of historical research combined with wide experience in schools as well as an educational management role. My own experiences as a school student have been included in the reflections on this research, as I was

educated within a selective grammar school framework, which was also part of the Catholic education system in Liverpool. This experience as a student was very different to my teaching experience owing to the fact that, as a student, I experienced a very traditional education with the methods of the day being rooted in the old framework of 'O' levels with terminal assessment, relying mostly on memory, as summative feedback. This form of assessment had very little reliance on formative feedback and could be described (Richardson, 1997: 3) as based on the:

"traditional approach to teaching the transmission model ...the information acquired from traditional teaching, if acquired at all, is not usually well integrated with other knowledge held by the students. Thus, new knowledge is often only brought forth for school-like activities, such as exams, and ignored at all other times."

This quote accurately summarises my own formative educational experience which impacted on my understanding of pedagogy at the start of my career.

My teaching experience, however, has been in contrast to this starting point, as during my career I have held a variety of roles within schools from purely classroom practitioner to Assistant Principal which has developed my understanding of pedagogy. As well as having teaching experience in England of all Key Stages from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 5 I have also taught across a number of different education authorities from Humberside and Hampshire to Essex via Wiltshire and the London Borough of Sutton. As a consequence of this variety of experience I have been able to examine and utilise up-to-date research and new teaching methods to inform my practice. I have developed as a reflective practitioner as a result of engaging with Continuing Professional Development (CPD), an issue which will be examined in depth throughout this thesis. It is this engagement which has led me to a greater understanding of social justice and has informed my final conclusions.

My motivation to undertake this research was triggered by my attendance at the initial training on Assessment for Learning from the UK government's

Educational policy for England; namely the Key Stage 3 Strategy, (The Assessment for Learning strategy DCSF-00341-2008). This led to me doing some preliminary work on my own understanding of AfL. From this point onwards I began to examine the concept of assessment and completed four units of the Masters programme at Bath Spa University in order to proceed to the work on this thesis.

I pursued these ideas further by examining the strategies suggested by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam in a real context. In the first instance I was struck by the comment (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam, 2003: 2) that:

“an assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback by teachers and their students 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 used to adapt the teaching work to meet the learning needs.”

When I began to unpick this statement with a number of colleagues the concepts contained within it stuck a particular chord as it described quite closely the processes my team and I were trying to achieve in the faculty I was managing at that particular time. As well as looking at the idea of positive feedback to students, which was linked to the ideas of AfL as it could be described as “feedback for learning” the faculty was also working on developing the role of self-assessment by students, these ideas represent a higher order learning activity, these ideas which again was seen as a key feature in Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 14) who stated:

“the core of the activity of formative assessment lies in the sequence of two actions. The first is the perception of the learner of a gap between the desired goal and his or her present state (of knowledge and /or understanding and/or skill). The second is the action taken by the learner to close that gap to attain the desired goal. The learner first has to understand the evidence about this gap and then take action on the basis of that

evidence. Although the teacher can stimulate and guide this process the learning has to be done by the student.”

As a result of this particular statement I was inspired to begin a small-scale research project with one teaching group. From this beginning as a small-scale project within one classroom over a period of time I was able to move on to work across one Faculty of the school. This was as a result of my role as the Head of Faculty; it enabled me as the person in charge of the management of the Faculty to establish the role of AfL in the five different subjects covered by my post of responsibility. This dual role will be examined later in this study as there was potential conflict of interest. With the support of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) of the school at the time these ideas were then taken and disseminated across the whole school. This dissemination was completed in a variety of different ways, the findings from which will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5. Again, with the support of the head teacher and the SLT of the school I was also able to work with the Local Authority Consultant/ Advisor responsible for delivering the training on Assessment for Learning for the work across the school, which gave the work added credibility. In the years since the research commenced I have moved into a senior management role at a school in a different area, which has allowed the research to be comparative and has also enabled the scope of the research to broaden out.

1.3.2: Previous research undertaken:

Although this thesis is grounded in education it is important to reflect on the fact that my previous research experience had been based on the use of historical methodology. This research is based upon my experiences and builds on the fact that I graduated from the University of Leicester with a history degree. This previous research is significant for the current research as there are a number of similarities between the basic methodological approaches of historical study and that of Action Research. Previous studies I have completed have adopted a case study type of approach which is also utilised in the current research. This is because an historian gathers evidence from both primary and secondary sources, evaluates it for a range of bias, usefulness and reliability, synthesizes the information and then extrapolates from the particular to the general and vice versa. This historical

methodology can be seen as a personal research narrative similar to that of Action Research. This study is an Action Research project and embodies my living educational theory, a concept expressed by Whitehead and McNiff (2006). It can also be described as being situated within the ethnographic tradition. This combined methodology reflects most closely my own personal research tradition which is integral to this current study.

The work of the historian can therefore be compared to the idea highlighted by Hopkins et al. (1989: 64):

“In the first stage the researcher begins by collecting “broad spectrum” data relevant to the research question. By doing this the researcher can be said to be immersing him or herself in the data.”

This particular quote is particularly relevant as it links together the approach, from historical methodology previously used by me for research with the start of this research project into Assessment for Learning (AfL).

The historiography of a subject can be defined as the writing of history, this clearly links to the concept of living Action Research theory as this uses authentic biographical evidence which is created by the researcher. This type of historical research makes the researcher call into question the validity of such evidence, validity being a key component of the current study, and so the previous historical research has underpinned some of my current methodology. This utilisation of historical methodology was not simply considered at a simplistic level as I have taken into consideration the ideas relating to the study of history from Richard J. Evans as quoted by Mortimer (2010: 12) in “Medieval Intrigue; Decoding Royal Conspiracies.” This source states that:

“Historians simply cannot escape their own cultural values, education, prejudices, language and temperament in order to view and express something with complete impartiality or total objectivity.”

It is important to take account of the fact that the current study is grounded in the Action Research model; as a result I have had to ensure that I place both the

research and myself clearly in context and do not simply reflect my own cultural values, education and most particularly prejudices, through unconscious assumptions. This will require me to examine in depth my own experiences both as a student, teacher and researcher in order to ensure that the findings are as robust as possible.

Another aspect of historical research, which I needed to constantly bear in mind and re-iterate throughout the current project, relates to the nature of the evidence, which is again summed up by Mortimer (2010: 12):

“it is essential to understand that it is not the evidence we need to verify- all evidence is “true” in the sense it proceeds from the past- it is the veracity of the information contained within that evidence.”

It is clear from this statement that the nature of evidence relating to educational research can therefore be categorised in a similar way to that of historical research, as the researcher will be able to prove that their data and findings are “true” but that it is the veracity of the interpretation of the data which is crucial.

It is significant to note that I took the ideas from this background as a historical researcher, and I am still actively interested in the development of historical research methodology. This has allowed me to move on to consider the topic of the current research in the light of my own experiences. It is important to take into account that in this research I have crossed fields and professional boundaries, in order to gain a greater insight into the educational research methodology adopted in this study.

1.4: Background to the methodology:

The methodology will be examined in detail in Chapter 4. Once I began with the idea for the research and the theory behind it being postulated, I had to then consider the question of how best to approach the project. The Action Research methodology that I utilised builds on the seminal work of McNiff (1988), but at the start of the project I was also keen on employing aspects of the case study approach postulated by Nisbet and Watt (1984: 72) as:

“A case study approach is particularly appropriate for an individual researcher, because it gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in depth within a limited timescale.”

As a result of researching and then examining a number of research methodologies and after consultation with my doctoral supervisor I decided that the preferred research framework predominantly related best to the Action Research model, as it is cyclical, can be applied to real life on going contexts and thereby allows the researcher to critique and amend their practice on a regular basis. This is reflected in the statement from Whitehead and McNiff (2006: 30):

“Living educational action researchers believe that their theories constantly need revisiting and reforming as the circumstances of their lives change, so their theories are always in a state of live modification”

This model emerged as a result of discussions between myself and my supervisor, as well as peer discussions held with my line manager at the time, who was also undertaking PhD research on an unrelated educational field. These discussions also resulted in my linking the topic to the “improve” paradigm of applied educational research.

This had moved on from my initial thoughts as I had originally intended to simply use the case study methodology, which Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 447) explains as:

“The teaching case study. It is used to illustrate a point, a condition, a category, something important for instruction (Kennedy, 1979)”

This appeared at the time to summarise the approach I would need to take for this particular piece of research. This approach proved to be rather too simplistic; as the research developed it became apparent that this simpler type of research methodology would not necessarily allow an outcome to enable me to examine my findings and extrapolate from them so it needed to be developed into a more sophisticated form of methodology, which is considered in Chapter 4. The more complex type of methodology enables the research to impact upon school

improvement, and it can also be described as being centred on the “improve” rather than the “prove” paradigm of research postulated in Gardner and Coombs (2010).

From the beginning the research could best be described as being based in the interpretivist tradition as it was always based on studying the qualitative analysis of socially derived data, an approach which builds upon the “grounded theory” approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) (also cited in McNiff (1988)). These theories will be examined in more detail in the main thesis chapter on methodology. The grounded theory approach was examined because the main research question intended to examine the impact of AfL at a variety of educational levels across a wide curriculum as well as attempting to develop the reconceptualisation of practice from the data collected. The way Glaser and Strauss develop grounded theory is through using a series of steps. As I looked at building up the data set, I was attempting to utilise this theory as I also wanted to ensure I was moving the underpinning educational theory upon which Assessment for Learning is based forward.

The theories on which AfL was based, those of formative assessment, will also be examined in depth in later chapters, as will the intentions of the original researchers; particularly the seminal work on the subject produced by Black and Wiliam (1998).

1.5: Background to the terminology:

One of the important findings from this study is related to terminology. Terminology as a theme recurs throughout and the theory of AfL is based on the ideas related to formative assessment which will be discussed in the Literature Review. In examining the seminal text one of the important points to consider is the background to the terminology, as “Assessment for Learning” was the term used by the originators of the theory to describe the work they were doing on what had previously been described as “formative assessment”. The examination of the concept of formative assessment by Black and Wiliam as part of their original research will be referred to in this study but it is not the purpose of this thesis to re-

examine the studies in detail which were used as the basis for Black and Wiliam's work. Throughout this research I have been looking at reconceptualising the subject of Black and Wiliam's research as one of the main contributions to knowledge of this doctoral thesis project.

The actual usage of terminology is a key component in this research as the word "assessment" is particularly significant and is problematic across both the education profession and in wider society. As a result of the confusion apparently generated by the terminology there will be detailed consideration given to the alternative and contested paradigms of assessment. These contested paradigms are linked to the terminology, as on first glance it appears as if the idea of summative assessment based within the behaviourist theory of learning is for most educationalists acting as the "default" setting. It can be argued that the issues behind this default setting are quite complex. This is examined in more depth in the methodology chapter as in most cases the behaviourist theory is generally applied to first order educational learning theories, for example, rote learning which favours summative measures of assessment. It is of crucial importance to realise at this point that formative assessment is very different to summative assessment. These terms will be defined at the start of the Literature Review to ensure clarity.

Summative assessment is usually a technique used by teachers at various points in a scheme of work as well as by examination boards in high stakes terminal examinations. This is reflected in the original design of the Key Stage 3 tasks where Black (1998: 60) states:

"In 1991 Kenneth Clarke, newly appointed Secretary of State, looked at the first trial tasks in the core subjects and declared them to be 'elaborate nonsense'--this condemnation coming before the planned evaluation had produced evidence (Swain, 1991) that teachers approved of the Key Stage 3 tasks. For the new design Clarke required 'written terminal examinations' and 'short written tests'; the emphasis was on manageability and the priority was clearly summative."

The work which led on from this resulted in the Key Stage 3 Strategy documents, however, the use of the word “assessment” as part of the terminology in Assessment for Learning strand has led to confusion, which will be examined in much more detail in later chapters as it has implications for both the research and for myself. Although the use of the terminology is crucial to understanding the impact of Assessment for Learning I have discovered in the course of the research that there are significant misconceptions held by a wide variety of individuals in the education profession, these include teachers, senior leaders in schools and assessment ‘experts’ and the importance of these misconceptions cannot be underestimated; consequently these emergent ‘discoveries’ will be examined in much more depth in later chapters. The word assessment is defined at the most basic level by Encarta online dictionary as *“a method of evaluating student performance and attainment.”* This use of terminology will be examined in detail and the findings on this subject will be a contribution of new knowledge produced by this thesis.

It is important to note that throughout this study I will be using the terminology and acronym most associated with the theory of Assessment for Learning, by teachers and researchers. This is usually written as AfL, although other people have described this as A4L (which might appear depending on context).

1.6: The relevance of the research:

Although this study began as a small-scale action research project it has developed and can be seen as particularly relevant in the current UK educational climate. Originally the work on Assessment for Learning was developed by the UK’s DfES (as it then was) (0443-2004). This was as part of the Key Stage 3 Strategy in an attempt to lever up standards in secondary schools across England. The context of the research is highly relevant as it was grounded in the original research article produced by Black and Wiliam in 1998; this article could be described as the seminal text on Assessment for Learning; it then generated a whole range of other publications and research. The seminal text for practitioners rather than for researchers was *Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment* by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam was published by NferNelson of London

in 1998, the importance of this work will be fully reviewed in a subsequent chapter, as it is so significant.

It is important however to note for the context of this study that the research in the original article was initiated by the Assessment Group of the British Educational Research Association in 1998 and was funded by a grant from the Nuffield Foundation, which will be examined in more detail in Chapter 2. The research was taking place at a time when the UK government policy on education was seen as a national priority; following the speech by Tony Blair:

"Ask me my three main priorities for government, and I tell you: education, education, education."

This quote was part of his speech to the Labour Party conference in October 1996. This speech expressed the soon to be Prime Minister's interest in education as it was delivered before Labour came to power in the May election of 1997. There were therefore obvious political implications for any form of educational research being conducted at this time and the work of Black and Wiliam was no exception. The detailed implications of this will be examined as part of Chapter 2 and will comprise part of the literature review, but it must be stressed that the research has relevance in a broader sense, in terms of changes in the political landscape over the period of time under study. This moves from the early implementation of the National Strategies to the recent arrival in 2010 of the UK's coalition government and their re-alignment of the political and educational landscape. The findings in relation to the implications for the implementation of future initiatives will also comprise a significant contribution to knowledge produced by this thesis.

1.7: Summary of Key Findings:

This project has been a longitudinal Action Research project, which attempts to identify the cultural changes within the teaching establishments through introducing AfL. The Action Research process has authenticated my own beliefs and understanding and has served the purpose of exploring the idea of embeddedness. My contribution to knowledge comes from my unique standpoint which is an

outcome of my use of Action Research. The use of Action Research methodology generated my findings which although in many cases can be seen as similar to others they are in fact different because of the unique perspective I have brought to this study. My key purpose is to articulate the thinking and the epistemology of AfL, and the extrapolation of the results from the macro to the micro level in order to develop improved practice, this means examining the results from individual student to classroom level and then beyond into the wider learning community.

As it is centred in the improve to practice paradigm this study develops a fuller understanding of the links between improving professional practice utilising Continued Professional Development (CPD) and the impact of National Strategies on secondary school teachers. This provides insights for future policy developments for both individual schools and the National Government. As a result of this study came the realisation that the problem was greater than the implementation of one strategy. One of the key points, which will be examined is the overall lack of consistency of implementation of the National Strategy across a number of schools and Local Authority areas and the implications this has for future practice. I will also examine the attitude of the original researchers towards these ideas and the involvement of the original researchers in the Strategy implementation.

What has occurred is that the organisational and cultural change, which has been attempted has been imposed. In order to embed these systems they need to be sustainable, the actions taken by the National Strategies were not a serious attempt to change the culture. As a result of my developing understanding of the nature of change I have impacted on my own practice and this can be used to impact on the wider professional environment.

There will also be an attempt made to examine the concepts involved in the dissemination of the training and the longer term implications for the Continued Professional Development (CPD) of teachers. The underpinning pedagogical assumptions for CPD will be examined, as well as the design of coherent CPD programmes and why the impact of these sessions was not necessarily consistent. Intrinsic to these findings is that the methodology of CPD did not reflect the ideas implemented in classrooms. This can be construed as highly significant because not

only was the original CPD approach to the dissemination of the AfL Strategy inappropriate, it utilised a different approach which was at variance with the whole concept of AfL. A key postulate might be; that for every educational policy reform in real-life situations there needs to be planned a sympathetic, systematic and commensurate programme of CPD that seeks both ownership as well as leverage of the educational policy being proffered to the profession. Linked to these is an examination of the Quality Assurance (QA) processes available both for the CPD of teachers and the implementation of the National Strategies within schools. This section will also examine the impact of linking teachers CPD to the Performance Management (PM), the appraisal system of teachers, and whether this would be an interesting point to consider for future research and development.

This research offers the development of a curriculum development toolkit for AfL and examined whether it was possible to produce one or if this was an oversimplification of the problem. Linked to this is an examination as to whether it is possible to develop toolkits for different purposes; for example, the toolkit I designed for developing oral feedback. The findings from this development make a contribution to the deeper understanding of what is meant by the term AfL and also how effective these implementation attempts can be.

The research offers a new insight into the understanding of the terminology of Assessment for Learning and the impact this has had on the study of stakeholder understanding. One of the key findings of this thesis which will be reviewed in the conclusions section are the concepts linked to common usage terminology; most particularly the concept invoked by the term “assessment”, an epistemological assumption which is central to the findings of this project and the contribution to knowledge demonstrated by this thesis.

It should be stated here that as a consequence of my involvement with a living Action Research project I am now able to extrapolate ideas with more clarity and have more confidence in my own voice in relation to these final conclusions. The process has allowed me to utilise the Action Research framework to bring together a critical and literature based Action Research project, which is not only a discovery of ideas but incorporates a looping process of analysis and triangulates

my thinking. The true intellectual epiphany of this project came with the development of my own understanding of the nature of education as an instrument for social change. This idea is fundamental so the key recommendation for future practice is to carefully examine the starting points of the cultural background of the researcher and use Action Research as the process to move the concept forward. If this methodology had not been adopted I would not have achieved the results and viewpoint I currently hold. In order to develop these theories I will need to consider the literature on the subject beginning with the work on formative assessment.

1.8: Outline of Chapters:

The structure of this research has developed from a series of Action Research cycles which began with a small scale research project from which a number of issues emerged. These were then examined and analysed through the data generated from the subsequent cycles of the research as positive feedback generating new understanding and actions.

This thesis will begin by looking at the context of the research conducted by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (1999) and how this has been adapted by schools as individual institutions, through the medium of the National Strategies. It will consider how the original project was applied by the UK government of the time to the general context of education in secondary schools at the start of the 21st Century. Consideration will be given to the context I found myself in over the period of the research and how this has altered over time, both through changes within institutions, as well as politically and geographically. I will also consider this changing political situation across the period of the project and how this has impacted in the world of education, although the scope of this aspect has broadened since the original research proposal and as such warrants separate treatment.

The subsequent chapters will begin by examining the literature available on the subject and its related fields of inquiry and the literature review will be found in Chapters 2 and 3. The literature review will consider the seminal text(s) and then examine the literature on the subject of assessment in general, in order to establish

the defined position of assessment in academic terms and provide the research framework assumptions. Moving on from the literature review Chapter 4 will establish the background to the research and look at the methodological paradigms employed, whereupon Chapters 5 and 6 will examine the findings from Schools A and B. These two chapters will incorporate the data collected and how this can be interpreted within the framework of the Action Research model. Developing from this data will be a detailed examination of the concept of the AfL toolkit and whether or not the current fairly simplistic format of the toolkit is usable and transferable. This development will be examined in the context of the institution I developed it in from which conclusions will be drawn. The final part of this study will be a discussion of the findings and will examine the contributions from this thesis to the academy of “educational assessment” and the wider education profession. This can be drawn from the available data and will also look at the importance of the political implications of the study, an aspect which is central to the way this study developed over a period of dramatic change of central government and its educational policies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Academic Framework of Thesis. (Part 1)

In this chapter I will examine the characteristics of Assessment for Learning and the literature associated with it. I will review the literature related to the research pamphlet *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through classroom assessment* by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998) disseminated to practitioners and the issues raised by it. I will relate this to the starting point for the current research and examine the theories of Action Research which underpin this thesis.

2.1: Introduction:

This chapter will examine the characteristics of formative assessment which led to the seminal text on the subject. Black and Wiliam (1998). This chapter will also initially examine the literature about 'formative assessment' prior to *Inside the Black Box*. It will examine the literature associated with Assessment for Learning (AfL) including that created by the original researchers. This chapter will include an initial examination of the official publications from the Key Stage 3 Strategy; as the training on the Strategy was the starting point for this research. There will be conclusions drawn from these texts which critically examine the impact of the literature on the subject.

The concept of assessment is central to this thesis and consequently will be defined here. The commonly accepted definition of assessment is that **the term assessment is generally used to refer to all activities teachers use to help students learn and to gauge student progress**. This has been broken down into the ideas of formative and summative assessment.

In the case of Formative assessment a simplistic description is that this type of assessment is carried out throughout the teaching. Formative assessment is used to aid learning and provides feedback on the work and would not necessarily be used for providing summative grades. There are a variety of tasks involved in formative assessment and the aim is to see if the students understand the instruction before doing a summative assessment.

In contrast Summative assessment is generally carried out at the end of the teaching; the results are typically used to produce a grade. Summative assessments are evaluative and summarize what the students have learned, to examine if they have good understanding. This type of assessment can be in the form of tests, final exams, and summative projects.

In some contexts summative and formative assessment are often referred to as *assessment of learning* and *assessment for learning* respectively. Assessment of learning is generally summative in nature and intended to measure learning outcomes and report those outcomes to students, parents and administrators. Assessment of learning generally occurs at the conclusion of a taught course. Assessment for learning is generally formative in nature and is used by teachers to consider approaches to teaching and next steps for individual learners and the class.

2.2: Characteristics of Formative Assessment:

Assessment for Learning (AfL) links to and makes sense of formative assessment; the work of Natriello and Crooks formed the basis for the work on formative assessment which developed into Assessment for Learning. Natriello and Crooks summarised the work of earlier researchers and were used as the basis for the work produced by Black and Wiliam. Black and Wiliam used the previous research available, including that of Natriello and Dornbusch quoted in Crooks (1988), where they state

“No clear consensus emerges from the literature to date, but Natriello (1987) suggests that self-referenced standards may be optimal for most students. When student performance on achievement tests is the criterion, research has generally shown that higher standards lead to higher performance (e.g., Rosswork, 1977), although again a curvilinear relationship may be predicted. Most of the relevant classroom-based research derives from studies of mastery learning.”

This underpinned ideas of formative assessment to produce the work on AfL.

In this overview it is significant to point out that Black and Wiliam (1998: 3) themselves state that:

"Crooks used the term 'classroom evaluation' with the same meaning as we propose for 'formative assessment'"

There was therefore no formally agreed definition of the term "Assessment for Learning" before it was used by Black and Wiliam in their 1998 pamphlet. There was no clear definition of the term provided nor was the pedagogical theories underpinning it clearly articulated in the pamphlet disseminated to practitioners in 1998.

If the works on issues relating to formative assessment are examined roughly chronologically then the work from Block & Burns (1976) is the earliest in the studies examined. This study was based on the concept of the mastery of learning and the examination of this strategy was seen as significant as

"They found an average effect size of 0.82, which is equivalent to raising the achievement of an 'average' student to that of the top 20%, and one of the largest average effects ever reported for a teaching strategy."

This claim is very similar to that made later by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam in their book *Assessment for Learning: Putting it into Practice*.

Ramaprasad (1983) looked at the idea of: *"the action taken by the learner to close that gap in order to attain the desired goal."* which is a clear precursor to the concept of AfL. Fuchs et al (1991) took the idea of the linkage of feedback to assumptions about student learning further. Sadler (1989) proposed that feedback could be used diagnostically which was the meaning Black and Wiliam (1998) took from this study. This could be seen as the beginning of Assessment for Learning or formative assessment but this was not clearly referenced in the pamphlet. In examining the motivational aspect of formative assessment Perrenoud (1991: 92) states

"Every teacher who wants to practise formative assessment must reconstruct the teaching contracts so as to counteract the habits acquired by his pupils. Moreover, some of the children and adolescents with whom he is dealing are imprisoned in the identity of a bad pupil and an opponent."

This is a significant point in relation to the development of AfL as Wiliam is very clear about the changes teachers need to make in order to implement AfL. He suggests that it requires a change of mind-set and the assumptions they have about learning and assessment. This view is also supported by the study by Baird et al (1991) which:

“reported on work with 27 teachers and 350 students where teachers were helped to know more about their students and to learn more about how they might change the style of classroom work by a strategy based on meta-cognition and constructivism.”

This concept was used by me in School B as one of the Vice Principals had completed some work on metacognition, which will be discussed in the findings from School B. This concept is supported by the work of Zessoules & Gardner (1991). Moving on from this was the work of Pressley et al., (1992) who examined the concept of questioning which appears in the work on AfL.

“A rather different use of questioning is to explore and develop students' prior knowledge. A review of work of this type establishes that requiring learners to compose answers with explanations to explore their prior knowledge of new work does improve learning.”

The significance of questioning techniques resonates throughout the work of Black and Wiliam and proves to be one of the important components in the National Strategy training materials.

Tunstall & Gipps (1996) examined the typology of teacher feedback which harks back to the work by Sadler. Kluger & DeNisi, (1996) who call the 'gap' between actual and reference levels of some attribute 'feedback-standard discrepancy'. This does not appear in this format in the work on AfL but it can be noted that all of the above concepts are significant in what was to be adopted as AfL in the National Strategies.

The 200 studies reviewed by Black and Wiliam as part of their work for the academic article were not clearly referenced in the Black Box pamphlet, which was aimed at practitioners. The pamphlet however, proved to be inspirational as not

only did it inspire this thesis but can be seen as the basis for the development of the National Strategy.

2.3: Understanding 'Inside the Black Box':

A key assumption behind this research is that the original intentions of Assessment for Learning have been reconceptualised within the educational and political climate of England over the period 2003 to 2011. This section critically examines the research pamphlet *Inside the Black Box* in detail in order to articulate the key messages and intentions that it contains. The reason for the choice of Black and Wiliam's short pamphlet is because it is the key foundation for all work on Assessment for Learning for practitioners and helped inspire me to develop my own practitioner research leading to this thesis. This work builds on earlier work completed in the US and UK on formative assessment, discussed previously in this chapter. There are implications in this work on pedagogy and learning as well as for AfL. These ideas will be considered in line with the development of the academic framework of this thesis.

The aims and purpose of the original research by Black and Wiliam however was not originally to overtly support the government's policy relating to the National Curriculum at the time and the testing and league tables subsequently allied to it, but rather to examine (1998: 2):

"one aspect of teaching – formative assessment ... this feature is at the heart of effective teaching."

This quote comes directly from the pamphlet *Inside the Black Box* and shows Black and Wiliam's thinking and original research purpose. However, the UK government policy of the time was to be built on the use of data from summative tests which informed league tables and this policy will be examined separately and in more detail later in this chapter.

If the title of the pamphlet *Inside the Black box* is taken into account it is possible to examine some theories about the background ideas of the researchers and the way in which they were approaching the research, including their aims. This concept of the Black box will be explored in further detail as the idea needs to be

placed within the context of behaviourist psychology which was summarised by Oates (1994: 25) where:

“The classical behaviourist perspective is sometimes referred to as “black box psychology” because it ignores what goes on inside the mind. Its sole concern is the effect of the environment (input) on behaviour (output). Mental processes take place within the “black box””

This idea is one of the central concepts in developmental psychology which can be found within a number of textbooks including Oates, *The Foundation of Child Development* (which is the first in a series of four books which form part of the Open University course on child development). An idea, which was taken and developed by the cognitivist paradigm, essentially argues that the “Black box” of the mind should be opened and understood. The learner can be viewed as an information processor (like a computer). It has been stated that:

“The cognitivist revolution replaced behaviourism in 1960s as the dominant paradigm. Cognitivism focuses on the inner mental activities – opening the “black box” of the human mind is valuable and necessary for understanding how people learn. Mental processes such as thinking, memory, knowing, and problem solving need to be explored. Knowledge can be seen as schema or symbolic mental constructions. Learning is defined as change in a learner’s schemata. A response to behaviourism, people are not “programmed animals” that merely respond to environmental stimuli; people are rational beings that require active participation in order to learn, and whose actions are a consequence of thinking.”

Cognitivism (2011) *Cognitivist theories, paradigms and perspectives*. (Online) Available at: <http://www.learning-theories.com/cognitivism.html> (Accessed 30 June 2011).

This links to the ideas postulated by Bandura (1971: 201) which state:

“Skinner (1953) has discussed thought as a refinement of discrimination and generalization responses...the results indicated that social learning procedures were effective in leading children to discriminate the abstract categorizations displayed by the model, and to generalize those classifications to a new set of stimuli”

As Bandura was moving away from the behaviourist models of Skinner it is therefore possible to assume from the title of Black and Wiliam’s pamphlet (1998:

2) that the researchers undertook their work with the behaviourist and cognitivist theories very much in mind. We should note that they begin their argument with the statement that:

"We start from the self-evident proposition that teaching and learning have to be interactive."

This could correlate to the idea of the black box, as in this case the teaching can be described as the effect of the environment (input) and whatever the students' produce is the output, which is then examined by the researcher. There are a number of views relating to such educational theories, which are accurately summarised in Roblyer and Edwards (2000: 50):

"One view, which we will call directed instruction, is grounded primarily in behaviourist learning theory and the information-processing branch of cognitive learning theories. The other view, which we will refer to as constructivist, evolved from other branches of thinking in cognitive learning theory."

Constructivists believe that humans construct all knowledge in their minds by participating in certain experiences; learning happens when one constructs both mechanisms for learning and his or her own unique version of the knowledge, coloured by background, experience and aptitudes" (Willis, 1995; Sfand, 1998)"

This conclusion could be said to reflect Black and Wiliam's thinking as *"most constructivists call for instructional intervention"* (Roblyer and Evans, 2000: 62). These ideas link to the ideas of George Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory, as he uses the idea and examined the way the "Black box" works in terms of human learning. Linking these ideas to the outcomes of the work of Black and Wiliam could be said to be the conclusions of Roblyer who wrote the following in 2000 (49):

"constructivist learning environments exhibit more qualitative assessment strategies rather than quantitative ones"

This quote almost predicts the direction in which ideas linked to Assessment for Learning were to progress. However, examining the effects of these psychological learning theories was not the purpose of the research as Black and Wiliam make it clear in their research paper. This discussion is however pertinent as

they do not clearly exemplify how their research is grounded in the Black Box pamphlet.

They state that they wanted to look at the processes involved with formative assessment and as a consequence of this they set themselves three clear research questions, which can be found in section 2.4.2 of this study. These research questions link to Kelly's ideas from his work on Personal Construct theory in 1955. This does not mean to say that Black and Wiliam were solely concerned with the psychological processes, as the inference is that the processes in question relate to the experimental methodology and to the survey of the research literature. In the original pamphlet there are no overt references to the psychological learning theories and although assumptions must have been made it is very difficult to identify the researcher's standpoint in regard to this. In subsequent articles they (Black and Wiliam) suggest that the 'Black Box' in question is the classroom where these activities take place, rather than anything else, which appears to clarify their thinking. This definition is not, however, part of the dissemination of the original research and as such both this pamphlet and subsequent books by the original researchers will be examined in more detail as part of the literature review later in this chapter, as will the previous work on formative assessment seen in section 2.2. It is, however not the purpose of this study to develop a critique of the original concept of formative assessment, but rather to examine the research conducted by Black and Wiliam and place this in a real world context.

2.4.1: The purpose of the original research for 'Inside the Black Box':

The purpose of the research conducted by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam could be seen as reforming practice and policy in the English and Welsh education system with the prime focus being centred on the classroom. This stated purpose in the policy and practice section of the pamphlet summarises the results of the research and the ways it is looking to move teaching forward. It puts forward the proposition that (1998: 12):

"this can only happen relatively slowly, and through sustained programmes of professional development and support"

The statement made by the original researchers will be reviewed throughout this study and is central to informing the conclusions which I will draw. Consideration needs to be given to the link between the implementation of educational policy change and practice in relation to Continued Professional Development (CPD) and I will examine this in more detail later in this study. This recommendation about moving teaching forward had obvious political implications when it was first written. It is very clear that if the recommendations of the study were adopted this could lead the government into altering the focus of its policy, for both the professional development of teachers and the adaptation of teaching and learning. These recommendations included providing teachers with

“living examples of implementation” (1998: 16)

and with the:

“ear-marking of funding for relevant in-service programmes” (1998: 17).

A third recommendation was that there should be a:

“reduction in the content of that curriculum when it is revised for the year 2000”

and finally:

“further research was recommended.” (1998: 18)

Not all of these recommendations were adopted, although some were adopted in a limited way. There were examples provided via the KMOFAP project (This was the King’s (i.e. King’s College University of London) Medway Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project) which could be seen to be the living examples described above. There were however no reductions in the content of the National Curriculum and further research was not systematically implemented, although funding was provided for work via the National Strategy. The theory and practice will be examined in more depth in the data and conclusions sections of this study. In order to achieve the movement forward suggested by the original researchers it would require the ideas involved with AfL to be disseminated and then adopted across England and Wales, so there are broad ranging implications for the researchers, the government and teachers although it is unclear whether this was

the guiding principle of the research. This research pamphlet (Inside the Black box) was produced at this point in time in response to the political will that was driving education and the writers of this were challenging the situation they found themselves in. It was written by what became the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) and Paul Black, one of the authors was the chair of the TGAT (Task Group on Assessment and Testing). The ARG originated in 1989 as the Policy Task Group on Assessment set up by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). The Group presented a symposium at the annual BERA conference in every year throughout the 1990s up to 2004 and again in 2007 and has run seven regional BERA conferences on assessment. In 1996, when BERA ceased to support policy task groups, the Group adopted the name ARG and its meetings were funded via small grants from the Nuffield Foundation

Assessment Reform Group (2011) *Assessment Reform Group* (online) Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110809101133/assessment-reform-group.org/index.html> Oct 2012 (Accessed 30 June 2011).

This had obvious implications, as Paul Black had experience working within the political dimension with the TGAT report being presented to the then Secretary of State for Education in 1987, although the political implications of this connection were not obvious from the paper itself. The significance of the political implications will be examined later in this study as will the issue of terminology which can be raised again here. The TGAT remit Paul Black held is significant in his background as a researcher but this study will postulate that one of the issues of the work on Assessment for Learning was the confusion created by using ambiguous terminology. This terminology will be examined in greater detail and is that linked to the key concepts of “assessment” and “testing”.

This confusion is significant because there is a lack of articulation and clarity in reference to the underlying pedagogical models in the early works which disseminated the information to practitioners. This can be seen as potentially inhibiting further development of the research and it is only when close attention is paid to the underpinning ontology of the work that clarity can be achieved. In order to clarify the postulates made in this literature review it is crucial to examine the

content of the text and show the links to other authors and critical theorists as well as the relevance to this study. The issues relating to the epistemological and ontological issues of assessment will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 in relation to the development of the Key Stage 3 Strategy.

2.4.2: Research questions from Inside the Black Box text:

In order to clarify the postulates relating to the significance of the research published in the pamphlet the basis of the original research needs to be examined. The original research was looking specifically at the idea of formative assessment and according to the pamphlet the researchers; Black and Wiliam (1998: 2) set themselves three questions; notably:

“First: Is there evidence that improving formative assessment raises standards?

Second: Is there evidence that there is room for improvement?

Third: Is there evidence about how to improve formative assessment?”

These are clearly focused research questions and from the evidence the researchers themselves presented in the summary of the literature review this has yielded up an answer in the affirmative to these questions. However despite this they are still pursued as a research project. The literature review was summarised by the researchers and used as a validation for their ongoing research into the concept of Assessment for Learning.

According to Black and Wiliam the research began with examining the work of other researchers including Fuchs and Fuchs (1986) who were using quantitative evidence of learning gains. This concept of learning gains appears quite frequently in the work on formative assessment discussed elsewhere and merits further examination at this point. Black and Wiliam reviewed this particular concept in their article in Assessment in Education Principles Policy and Practice (1998: 3)

“(Fontana & Fernandes, 1994). The students of a further 20 Portuguese teachers who were taking another course in education at the time served as a control group. Both experimental and control groups were given pre- and post- tests of mathematics achievement, and both spent the same times in class on mathematics. Both groups showed significant gains over the period”

In the context of this work on AfL learning gains are measured as improvements in attainment at GCSE. This links to the question related to terminology of assessment and the apparent default setting of testing used for this term, which is integral to this study. This is a key point as the first of my research questions is looking at the concept of AfL and how it was implemented, linked to this was the question as to whether this implementation met the intentions of the original researchers.

2.4.3: Research Paradigm:

The research paradigm of Black and Wiliam (1998: 4) is not clear from the literature as it does not appear to fall within the case study remit; although they could be described as fitting somewhere within the Action Research framework as within the text they state that:

“All such work involves new ways to enhance feedback between those taught and the teacher, ways which require new modes of pedagogy.”

This suggests that they are involved in a version of Action Research, because of the cyclical nature of the study which is then reflected upon and developed further. However, there is then no further mention at this point in the research of the “improve” paradigm. It is possible to suggest that this might be left to later publications in the same series. The “improve” paradigm is explored in Coombs and Smith (2003) who underlined the social learning benefits of participatory Action Research by teachers’ operating within their own classrooms. The improve paradigm can be seen as a new interpretation of a social research paradigm and this approach plus the use of the methodologies of Case Study and Action Research will be examined in this study. Black and Wiliam again implicitly refer to these concepts but it should be noted that the Hawthorne effect has previously been used as a criticism of a ‘researcher’ operating within their own social domain relative to the research assumptions of a positivist paradigm.

In examining the second of the research questions proposed in the pamphlet the authors Black and Wiliam (1998: 6) inform us that:

“these general conclusions have all been drawn by authors in several countries, including the UK, who have collected evidence by observation, interviews and questionnaires from many schools.”

This type of conclusion appears to fit with the use of research principles of ethnography although it is not clear from the material available where the researchers fitted within the observer/participant spectrum. It is also not clear from the text whether the researchers in each case had a clear paradigm they operated within but simply have not enunciated it clearly or whether they were using a mixed method approach and failed to clarify their design. This omission could be significant in any attempt to replicate the findings and would impact on the methodology used in subsequent research. At this point it could be asserted that the supposition is that the authors of this pamphlet had a clear paradigm but have not been clear in their elucidation of it in this particular case.

The following statement by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 16) is apposite at this point in that:

“Those arguing the fact that research is always affected by values, and always has political consequences, means that researchers ought to take responsibility for their value commitments and for the effects of their work. Post-structuralism has contributed to the politicization of social research.”

Given the UK political and practical implications the research on AfL was to have over the following decade this statement is actually of considerable importance for myself as well as nationally and the AfL research needs to be examined separately in its local and national context.

In relation to the second research question Black and Wiliam (1998: 17) included the way in which formative assessment was viewed by official bodies; it seemed that these bodies paid lip service to the concept of improving standards whilst not giving it actual priority; indeed there were aspects of the educational system described by the authors as stating that they:

“actually obstruct the development of effective formative assessment.”

These features include the external tests which Black and Wiliam see as dominating the classroom teachers' work. The external tests were imposed on schools by the government of the day and although Black and Wiliam understand their importance they feel that the approach schools take as a result of these tests hinder the implementation of formative assessment; the knowledge gained from the examination of these ideas are crucial in answering the second of the research questions.

The third research question posed by Black and Wiliam (1998: .2) was:

"Is there evidence about how to improve formative assessment?"

The first set of findings the study appears to examine is related to the self-esteem of pupils. This could be described as being linked to the improve paradigm but as it is difficult to measure the impact of self-esteem so such a finding it could be considered to be questionable. This is a clear example of where the researchers are using qualitative research methods and at this point note should be taken of the fact that as Gronlund (1981) (cited in Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000: 105)) points out:

"In qualitative data the subjectivity of respondents together contributes to a degree of bias. Validity, then, should be seen as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state").

Again validity as a concept is crucial to all forms of educational research and this concept can be defined by Messick, (1989: 13) as

"Validity is an integrated evaluative judgement of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on the test scores or other modes of assessment."

Black and Wiliam have clearly reached a substantive conclusion from examining the available evidence and make a definitive statement about the outcomes of the study. As one of their conclusions they (1998: 9) state that:

“Feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils.”

Linked to this conclusion is the concept of formative assessment which is defined by Black and Wiliam (1998: 2) as:

*“the activities undertaken by teachers **and by their students in assessing themselves**. Which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they were engaged.”*

This had implications for the research as Black and Wiliam were not using the accepted norm of the meaning of the term assessment, a key learning point which is integral to the development of this study will be examined in further depth throughout; conclusions regarding this point will be drawn later in this study.

2.4.4: The conclusions drawn from “Inside the Black Box”:

Black and Wiliam do not specify a typical methodology used to establish the results in this pamphlet, although they are basing their interpretations on the data collected from a variety of different sources; including experimental data from the schools and teachers involved in the project. They have drawn a series of conclusions in their commentary which will be examined more closely in this section. Throughout the pamphlet there is no clear description of the empirical nature of the data or indeed where the data has been collected. Although Black and Wiliam (1998: 11) in their explanation do mention that:

“there are clearly recorded examples of such discussions where teachers have, quite unconsciously, responded in ways that would inhibit the future learning of a pupil.”

As a result of this statement it is possible that some basic assumptions can be made; these assumptions include the fact that the data has been collected from original sources. These assumptions are made based on the language of the pamphlet which refers to *“recorded examples”*. However the pamphlet does not clearly demonstrate a triangulation of data collection, which would allow the research to be described as Constructivist Action Research. This demonstration of data collection might appear in the scholarly article written for the academic

community but is not available to teachers who would have been the target audience for the 'Black box' pamphlets. The data sources could be seen to be useful even in this context as not all the target audience would have access to the scholarly article and as a result might question the origin or validity of the data being presented.

In the pamphlet the data collected is presented in a descriptive way; in a way which is perhaps seen as a simplification of the methodology for a general audience. There appears to have been no quantitative analysis of the majority of the data, although the first of the research questions produces results, (Black and Wiliam, 1998: 4) which state that:

*"the formative assessment experiments produced typical **effect** sizes of between 0.4 and 0.7... A gain effect size of 0.4 would improve performance of pupils in GCSE by between one and two grades."*

This quantitative measure does not have any detailed supporting evidence within this particular paper, although it does appear in the more detailed academic study. Black, P. and Wiliam, D. 1998. *Assessment and Classroom Learning Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice* **5** (1), pp.7-75. This measurement of the impact of AfL on learning gains was something which was later fixed on by a variety of different agencies to promote the idea of Assessment for Learning as a part of the National Strategy; it appears to have been given particular significance given the political situation and the development of government policy. These ideas of using AfL to drive up standards fitted into the political situation at the time and were consequently adopted in a way, which did not reflect the original researchers thinking. This will be again examined in greater depth in the conclusions section of this thesis, as it proves to be another key finding.

This statement relating to the effect size improvement, which suggests that results can be raised has been seen as a reason for schools to utilise the techniques of AfL. It could be described as having been used almost as a 'blunt instrument' by schools without the deeper pedagogical reasoning behind it being examined before use. This use of statistical information can be seen as giving a "scientific" slant to

the research, whereas in fact as Black himself (1998: 63) states in an article in the Oxford Review of Education it was conducted as part of:

“a variety of rigorous and quantitative investigations have established that formative assessment produces learning gains larger than found in almost all other educational experiment.”

This description could not be described as explaining quantitative gains as the phrase “*larger than*” is not a quantitative measure. Quantitative research can be described as a data led approach using statistical and numerical points of view to come to a conclusion whereas qualitative research has been described as primarily explorative and is seen as gaining an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations. As has been stated earlier these studies were significant as at the time the government was looking to drive up standards. The definition of standards can be seen as “*referring to the achievement of students.*” As a consequence any research which could show a statistically significant improvement, in measurable outcomes for the achievement of students would be of interest not just within the limited academic community, but in the wider political and educational sphere, which proved to be the case with AfL. This political interest is evidenced by the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in their Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) rankings:

“The approaches to standard-setting that OECD countries have pursued range from the definition of broad educational goals up to the formulation of concise performance expectations in well-defined subject areas.”

OECD.org/pisa (2013) *Viewing the United Kingdom through the prism of PISA*. (Online) Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/46624007.pdf> (Accessed 27 March 2013).

PISA is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. These tests have claimed to be unique as they do not test aspects directly linked to the school curriculum and it was this concern with the position of the UK in these ‘international league tables’ which impacted on the teaching and learning strategies

and on government policies; this in turn led to the utilisation of the research as part of the Key Stage 3 National Strategies.

2.5: AfL characteristics from National Strategy:

The following slide (figure 1) gives the definitions of Assessment for Learning taken from the work of the Assessment Reform Group and presented to school staff.

Assessment for learning – definitions

- 'In this paper... the term assessment refers to all those activities undertaken by teachers, *and by their students in assessing themselves*, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.'
Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998)
- 'Assessment for learning is... the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.'
Assessment Reform Group (2002)

Slide 1.2
Key Stage 3 National Strategy
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Figure 1: Definition of AfL from KS3 National Strategy Training Materials

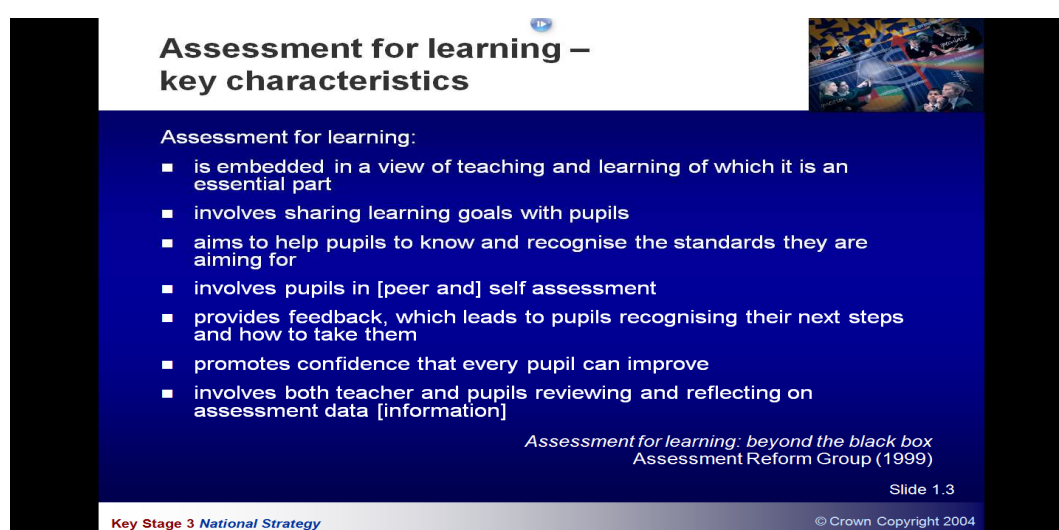
The key characteristics of Assessment for Learning were then defined, again as part of the training materials, in order to ensure that all schools were provided with the same opportunities for understanding these ideas, as exemplified by the slide in figure 2.

These key characteristics are taken from the research paper by Black and Wiliam (1999: inside front cover) *Assessment for Learning; Beyond the Black Box* whose stated aim was to

“follow up the work of Black and Wiliam and take it further”.

The summary of the characteristics in the slide come from Page 7 of the research pamphlet with the only deviation being in the sixth bullet point, as exemplified in Figure 2, which in the research paper states *“is underpinned by*

confidence that every student can improve". It might bear investigating the putative reasons behind the subtle alteration of the wording as the ARG point out that these key characteristics are stated in order to make clear the differences between assessments that promotes learning as opposed to other current interpretations of classroom assessment. This again raises the issue of the assumptions linked to terminology, in this case the difference between formative and summative assessment which will be examined throughout this study.



Assessment for learning – key characteristics

Assessment for learning:

- is embedded in a view of teaching and learning of which it is an essential part
- involves sharing learning goals with pupils
- aims to help pupils to know and recognise the standards they are aiming for
- involves pupils in [peer and] self assessment
- provides feedback, which leads to pupils recognising their next steps and how to take them
- promotes confidence that every pupil can improve
- involves both teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on assessment data [information]

Assessment for learning: beyond the black box
Assessment Reform Group (1999)

Slide 1.3

Key Stage 3 National Strategy

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Figure 2: Key Characteristics of AfL

For the original researchers AfL was more than a tick list; it could best be described as something which would lead to improvement in all classrooms for all pupils at all times (ARG, 2002a: 2-3):

“Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there”

On the face of it this seems to be a very straightforward and simple definition, which would allow both teachers and pupils to work together to develop understanding and allow the pupils to progress. How this concept could be put into practice would appear to lie at the heart of the AfL strand of the National Strategy, the training materials for which were disseminated to schools. It must be made clear at this point that the training materials, which all Local Authorities (LAs) had

in common, were then utilised by the LAs and disseminated to schools in different ways; in some cases the materials were used with the support of LA consultants. The schools themselves then took on the training materials and utilised them in a variety of ad hoc ways depending on the interest and enthusiasm of the member of staff who had to disseminate the materials and put the policy into practice. This ad hoc nature was as a result of the implementation of the National Strategies which will be examined in more detail later in this thesis.

2.6: Conclusions:

There are a number of issues raised by the research pamphlet “Inside the Black Box” in connection with the fact it is seen as a seminal text for practitioners on AfL, these will be examined in the next section of this thesis, as will the concept of how the original intentions of AfL have been changed by government policy.

2.6.1: Problems posed by the text:

The way in which the research was written up by Black and Wiliam posed a number of problems in relation to the academic nature of the study, including “Why did the researchers not develop the detailed examination of the data available for general readers/ researchers?” and “What types of quantitative and qualitative data has been used?” The fact that it is possible to produce a pamphlet which proved to be a seminal text for practitioners on a subject without providing the reader with empirical evidence could be seen as a weakness and is visible in this particular piece of research.

2.6.2: Problems posed by the issue of reforming policy:

For most casual observers the purpose of Black and Wiliam’s research has been seen as reforming policy with the prime focus being the improvement of teaching and learning in all classrooms. This stated purpose in the policy and practice section of the pamphlet summarises the results of the research and the ways it is looking to move teaching forward. Black and Wiliam (1998: 15) put forward the proposition that:

“this can only happen relatively slowly, and through sustained programmes of professional development and support.”

This recommendation has obvious political implications and it is very clear that this could lead the government into altering the focus of its policy if it was to be adopted in practice but the sustained programme of professional development and support was not developed any further by the original researchers. This subsuming of ideas by the national government could create problems; when reading the text this point in particular resonated with me. If this was followed up it would impinge directly on my own professional practice as well as that of my colleagues. As a result of my own pursuit of knowledge and my utilisation of these ideas I have been examining ways to reconceptualise the ideas expressed by the original researchers. I examined this concept of the application of AfL which was developed by the government of the time as part of the National Strategy, in conjunction with the ideas postulated by the original researchers, which resulted in this thesis.

It is quite difficult to decide, even with the benefit of hindsight, if the original researchers' intentions were clearly summarised in the policy section and whether the government were simply reflecting this or if the government found this particular piece of research to be reflecting their thinking at the time. Swaffield (2009: 1) in her article on the Misrepresentation of Assessment for Learning suggests that:

"Three factors influenced the decision to make this investment in AfL. Firstly...the moral and political imperatives of "raising standards". Secondly the fact that approaches to raising standards such as prescribed lesson formats, "booster classes" and revision suggestions appear to have run their course, as witnessed by the plateauing of results. Thirdly, the widely accepted and much quoted research on formative assessment by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998a) which concluded "that formative assessment does improve learning " and "that significant learning gains lie within our grasp."

This links to the issues raised above as the original researchers did not have a clearly expressed vision for the adoption of their work. Swaffield has linked the reasons for the government's adoption of the ideas as being based on the need to

improve measurable outcomes, which Black and Wiliam also refer to in the research paper.

Another problem which occurs as a result of a suggestion made in the conclusions of the pamphlet *Inside the Black Box* is that further research is to be initiated and that it is to be carried out by a variety of different teachers and that schools are to be involved in this. If the statement is considered it is really suggesting a rolling programme of Action Research projects co-ordinated by the researchers (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam) in order to develop the ideas they are postulating. There is the potential for further research, which is suggested by Black and Wiliam themselves and indeed they did comment on the fact that there are gaps in the research, which suggest further questions. These further questions to be postulated are seen by Black and Wiliam (1998: 19) as those which:

“could be a study of the ways in which teachers understand and deal with the relationship between their formative and summative roles, or a comparative study of the predictive validity of teachers’ summative assessments compared to external test results. Many more examples could be formulated, and it would be important for future development that some of the many problems should be tackled by basic research. At the same time, experienced researchers would also have a vital role to play in the evaluation of the development programmes proposed above.”

It was at this point that my current research could be seen to fit into the potential development of the original research.

There are, however, still further problems to be encountered in the interpretations of these views as the subsequent researchers would have to look at concepts, which had not been tackled in the original text. One of these concepts, was the idea relating to how the evidence would be validated. However, in order to postulate one idea of how the study could have developed validity is suggestion that the triangulation required could be provided by external evaluators and their work could in this instance include the use of video evidence, as one method. This use of evidence could also be described as evaluation as maintained by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 6);

“by “evaluation” we mean the systematic study of a particular programme or set of events over a period of time in order to assess effectiveness.”

This concept of evaluation might be described as typical of qualitative research; Hopkins Bollington and Hewett (1989: 62) comment:

“Yet qualitative methods are especially suited to research and evaluation in education, particularly where the raison d’etre of the enquiry is understanding rather than proof. This is not to imply however that qualitative methods are unable to provide proof but rather to emphasise that often educational research is more concerned to generate hypotheses about complex social situations than test them.”

There are a number of problems in the pamphlet in relation to methodology, which is not clarified; issues relating to the wider issues of methodology will be considered later in this thesis.

Chapter 3 Literature Review and Academic Framework of Thesis. (Part 2)

The previous chapter has examined in detail the research, assumptions and intentions for the seminal work 'Inside the Black Box' (Black and Wiliam, 1998). This chapter examines to impact of this work, placing it within a broader political and professional context.

3.1: Understanding Assessment for Learning: The wider political setting:

It is not possible to undertake an authentic study like this one in social and political isolation, as education has been on the political agenda throughout the duration of the study. This study was undertaken as a result of the training on the AfL strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy which was in 2006 and the research phase which concluded following the closure of the National Strategy website in 2010. Throughout this time, and since, education has been an important component of government policy, with wide ranging reforms including academisation taking place. This study reflects the concept in Whitehead and McNiff (2006: 18) where they state that:

"Shifts in the epistemological base of professional education Policy makers are assumed to make policy and arrange for its implementation by practitioners. These policies are based on the most important findings of educational research, which are created by identified educational researchers, usually in the higher education settings."

This is significant because of the significant political involvement in education since the 1988 Education Act. It also reflects the ideas quoted in Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 13) regarding the work of Rom Harre where they state that:

"Critical realists agree with the positivists that there is a world of events out there that is observable and independent of human consciousness. They hold that knowledge is personally constructed."

This concept of critical realism validates the ideas, which authenticate my own real life experiences of social research.

I began the study in relation to the Key Stage 3 Strategy which in itself was brought in as a result of a political decision and as the study progressed the political landscape changed, which was also reflected in the changing nature of the study. The detail of the changes to the political landscape and the effect this has had on education in general and this study in particular will be reflected subsequently, but more importantly will also inform the conclusions. The political landscape moved from the central tenet of Labour policy at the opening of the study to the realignment of certain institutions under the coalition government; notably the changes made to QCDA and the Department for Education, a department which has moved through a variety of names reflecting the different political interpretations placed on its work by different governments and their ministerial priorities.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCDA's predecessor) was formed on 1 October 1997 through a merger of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA). The QCA had had additional powers and duties granted to it by the Education Act 1997, which established the role of the QCA. Under Section 24 of this Act, QCA was granted the right to regulate all external qualifications in England. In April 2004, the QCA launched the National Assessment Agency to take over its role in the delivery and administration of National Curriculum assessments. However, on the recommendation of The Sutherland Enquiry the National Assessment Agency was disbanded and its functions subsumed within the management structure of the QCA. On 26 September 2007, DCSF announced that the regulatory functions of the QCA were to become statutorily independent with the creation of a new body, Ofqual. On 8 April 2008, Ofqual began work as the independent regulator of exams and tests in England, accountable to Parliament rather than to government ministers. The remaining work of the QCA was transferred to the QCDA. The QCA was formally dissolved on 1 April 2010 when the QCDA and Ofqual gained their statutory statuses. The QCA was not 'dissolved'; the QCDA was the same body corporate, just with a new name.

The Assessment for Learning training was one strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy and consequently needs to be examined within this political context.

3.2: Political context of the research pamphlet: Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment:

It is crucial at this point to set the context of this research in the educational landscape in which it was produced as this is part of the lived experience of the research. The original concept, which I had for the project, was based on this text, the original research pamphlet, which I had accessed as an emerging researcher.

In 2002 the Assessment Reform Group (2-3) defined the concept of AfL as:

“the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there”,

This definition which proved to be the enduring one was a later articulation of the concept contained in the pamphlet on Assessment for Learning, which was my inspiration for this research. This particular pamphlet, can be described as the seminal text due to the fact it was responsible for generating a whole range of other publications and research.

The pamphlet *Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment* was produced by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam. The primary purpose of this paper, which was produced with teachers in mind and was published by NferNelson of London in 1998, was to disseminate the findings of a more scholarly work in an accessible manner. According to the authors it was not the purpose of this pamphlet to examine the 200 studies which featured in the academic paper.

It is significant in the political context of the time to note that the research in this pamphlet was initiated by the Assessment Group (later renamed the Assessment Reform Group) of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) in 1998 and was funded by a grant from the Nuffield Foundation. The research was taking place at a time when the UK government policy on education was seen as a national priority and there were, therefore, obvious political implications for any form of educational research being conducted at this time, the work of Black and Wiliam being no exception.

Suggestions have been made by Apple (2001: 302) (in Halsey A.H. et al, 2006), which considers the political implications of education; he suggested that the

“movement at national and state levels throughout the country to raise standards”

In the United States was part of a Right wing agenda. This politicisation of education could be seen as being replicated in the UK, as the British educational system took the research from the US and applied it to their own system. The work of Black and Wiliam, therefore, which was to examine how standards could be raised within the classroom, would in time come to contribute to this political agenda, although this was not stated as an aim of the original research.

The Assessment Reform Group who published the follow-up to the research started work as the Policy Task Group on Assessment and was funded by the British Educational Research Association. Membership of the group was described as changing slightly over the years, but the major focus of the group did not: they worked on policy issues in relation to assessment and have had a dialogue with policy makers. The website for AAIA which archives the ARG information including the following from 2010 states

“The Assessment Reform Group (ARG) has been at the forefront of challenging thinking and practice in relation to all aspects of assessment, including assessment for learning. Its aim has been to ensure that assessment policy and practice at all levels takes account of relevant research evidence. In pursuit of this aim the main targets for the Group’s activity have been policy-makers in government and its agencies.”

AAiA.org.uk (2010) *Assessment Reform Group* (Online) Available at:

<http://www.aaia.org.uk/afl/assessment-reform-group/> (Accessed April 2014).

This point could be considered to be significant as the ARG commissioned the research which ultimately led to AfL being a strand of the KS3 National Strategy.

The award of funding from the Nuffield Foundation however could be seen to minimise the political aspect as the foundation claims political independence

owing to the fact they gain income from investments, which are outside the sphere of government or other political bodies. The Nuffield Foundation state that:

“We aim to influence education policy and practice, ensuring all young people develop the understanding and skills required to play an informed role in society.”

Nuffieldfoundation.org/education (2010) *Education* (Online) Available at:
<http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/education> (Accessed May 2012).

This describes their beliefs as being underpinned by independent and rigorous research evidence, which has the power to bring about change. The research conducted by Black and Wiliam can be described as fitting this criteria. The following Nuffield Foundation policy statement shows this:

“The Nuffield Foundation is a charitable trust established in 1943 ...Today, we work to improve social well-being by funding research and innovation in education and social policy. We are also increasing the proliferation and quality of research and professional skills – both in science and social sciences – through our capacity building programmes. Underpinning all our work is a belief in the importance of independent and rigorous research evidence and its power to bring about change. We do not fundraise or receive funding from the Government. We are financially and politically independent.”

Nuffieldfoundation.org/education (2010) *Education* (Online) Available at:
<http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/education> (Accessed May 2012).

At the time this research by Black and Wiliam was being conducted in the UK the Labour government had come to power in a landslide election victory in 1997 and then passed the 1998 Education Act, which had brought together various aspects of educational change and rationalised them. Embodied in the 1998 Act were the requirements for the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA), (established in this format in 1992). The functions of this body included:

- a) To keep under review all aspects of the curriculum and all aspects of school examinations and assessment.

- b) To advise the Secretary of State on, and if so requested by him, ...to carry out, programmes of research and development for purposes connected with the curriculum for schools or with school examinations and assessment;

educationengland.org.uk (2010) *1996 Education Act* (Online) Available at:

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/pdfs/1996-education-act.pdf> (Accessed May 2012).

The fact that SCAA was reviewed at this point, and this was embodied in the legislation, has implications for the later political adoption of the work of Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam. This was due to the fact that it was through SCAA and its successor QCA that assessment was regulated. Again the conflict of understanding relating to the term assessment is raised here, as in this instance once again there was no clarification of term.

The agencies for change included the Department responsible for Education as well as QCA and their role included that referred to by Black and Wiliam (1998: 1) when they maintain that:

“Raising the standards of learning that are achieved through schooling is an important national priority. In recent years, governments throughout the world have been more and more vigorous in making changes in pursuit of this aim”.

When the context is examined the fact that Ball (2006: 15) suggests in his work *Education Policy and Social Class* that:

“A quick skim through the papers presented at the British Educational Research Association conference indicates the extent to which education policy research is caught up in the agendas and purposes of the state and the governance of education.”

This must be considered as significant. This suggests that the research conducted by Black and Wiliam, which to the uninitiated might appear to be purely based on esoteric concerns, in effect had a political dimension and resulted in skewing the agenda and control of project funding.

3.3: Introduction to the Key Stage 3 Strategy:

The Key Stage 3 Strategy was developed in response to political concerns at the time and as part of this there was a series of cross curricular developments. These included the Assessment for Learning Strand which was targeted at all maintained secondary schools in England and Wales.

3.3.1: The development of the Key Stage 3 Strategy from the original research:

The original research which was published in 1998 in the research pamphlet *Inside the Black Box*, was something that proved to be significant, but happened from a fairly small-scale beginning. Black and Wiliam state that (2003: 6):

“For other academics, we produced a 30,000-word journal article (Black & Wiliam, 1998a), which, together with short responses from invited commentators from around the world, formed the whole of a special issue of the journal Assessment in Education. As well as detailing our findings, we tried to lay out as clearly as possible how we had constructed the review so that, while we would not necessarily expect different authors to reach identical conclusions, we hoped that the process which we followed was verifiable and could be repeated. To make the findings accessible to practitioners and policy makers, we produced a twenty-one page booklet in A5 format entitled “Inside the black box”.”

Subsequently there was then a series of research pamphlets produced relating to the role of Assessment for Learning in a number of different subjects, including Science, Mathematics, English, Geography and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). There are others including one on Design Technology and another on Modern Foreign Languages. From these apparently small beginnings, which originally seemed to be aimed at a limited range of educational researchers as well as a limited number of teaching professionals the research was then taken on and apparently adopted by the UK government in the early years of the 21st century as part of their National Strategies. (The Assessment for Learning Strategy DCSF-00341-2008).

This document from the DCSF introduced the strategy to a wider group of stakeholders. The foreword to the training materials in setting the scene gave the purpose of the strategy as allowing:

“all schools to have access to high quality training and support so that assessment for learning can be embedded in all classrooms”

It should be noted at this point that the phraseology of the previous sentence has been carefully chosen and the “apparent” adoption idea will be examined in much more depth.

These publications proved to be crucial to this project as the pamphlet and the Key Stage 3 Strategy inspired this project and began my work as an emergent researcher. The UK government policy of educational assessment was essentially seen throughout the life of the National Strategies by practitioners and other stakeholders as one of “summative testing” with all the implications that involves, however originally in the early days of the National Curriculum assessment was seen according to Daugherty, (1997: 201) as:

“...a complex matter requiring sophisticated procedures and careful use of data for several purposes. Officially at least, the government was embarked on the development of an assessment system as envisaged by TGAT, with formative purposes, directly in support of student learning at its centre.”

This statement suggests that at the start of the National Curriculum journey the government was prepared to accept the report of the eminent TGAT group chaired by Paul Black, but as time went on this changed. According to Daugherty (1997) this was due to the fact that both teachers and the designers of the tests used for the National Curriculum Assessments were more used to norm referencing models rather than the criteria referenced models proposed by TGAT. The move away from the TGAT model and towards summative testing was made in the early 1990's with the appointment of Kenneth Clarke as the Secretary of State for Education.

Paul Black states in his work in the Oxford Review of Education (1998: 57) that:

"Thus the four principles on which a system should be based--criterion referencing, progression, formative and moderated--were distilled."

The mid 1990's following the UK governments Dearing Review removed almost all of the last vestiges of the TGAT model with externally set and marked tests for the end of KS2 and KS3 in the "core subjects" of English Maths and Science. It would appear that the government naturally favoured summative assessment processes over formative ones. This would seem to be a reversion to lower order approaches and avoids anything that might appear to be more "complex" or sophisticated.

This raises the issue of the terminology where the meaning of assessment is equated with the idea of testing, a point which will be examined throughout this thesis and which informs the conclusions. The reasons behind this confusion of terminology are obscure but could be said to be related to the following idea from Taras, (2005: 246):

"Explicit parameters go some way towards creating a shared forum for assessment and therefore allowing transparency of process, although within any given context, meanings can and do vary between individuals (for a discussion of 'fuzzy criteria' see Sadler, 1989)"

In 1996 the effects of the testing at KS3 were described as:

"schools essentially perceive the national tests as examinations without certification" Radnor quoted in Daugherty (Education Administration Quarterly: 212).

Dylan Wiliam pointed out:

"claims that National Curriculum Assessments will be both reliable and valid cannot be taken seriously ...At the moment they are used as high status labels that make a product seem attractive." Wiliam quoted in Daugherty 1997 (Education Administration Quarterly: 214).

These statements came from journal articles produced before the dissemination of the Key Stage 3 Strategies; however, the concepts they reflect are important in the development of the ideas relating to the National Strategies. The National Curriculum itself had been described by Hughes (1997: 188) as:

“the end product...whose structure and content had been generated by an essentially political process in which the views of education professionals were either marginalised or ignored.”

This comment can be seen as particularly apposite in the context of this study as practitioners in the form of school teaching staff apparently had very little input into the National Curriculum which subsequently shaped the National Strategies.

The next developments were significant as they were the beginning of the National Strategies prompted originally by the Secretary of State Gillian Shepherd who was alarmed by the poor performance of pupils in the Key Stage tests. This concern led to the beginnings of the development of the National Strategies in Literacy and Numeracy, which began as a support project but were then developed subsequently by the next government. These Strategies developed to include the Assessment for Learning Strategy, the one under consideration in this research project. At the same time there were also revisions to the National Curriculum itself, with another review of secondary provision in 2005, which became statutory in 2008, when Key Stage 3 tests for English and Maths were discontinued with Teacher Assessment (TA) remaining in place.

As far as the UK government was concerned the National Strategies as a whole were introduced originally in 2000, with the research on AfL being introduced as part of the 2003 cross-curricular approach. The Key Stage 3 National Strategy booklet *Key messages: Pedagogy and practice* (Ref: DfES 1025/2003) provides guidance on the relationship between pedagogic approaches (teaching models), teaching strategies, techniques and methods of creating the conditions for learning in order to inform lesson design.

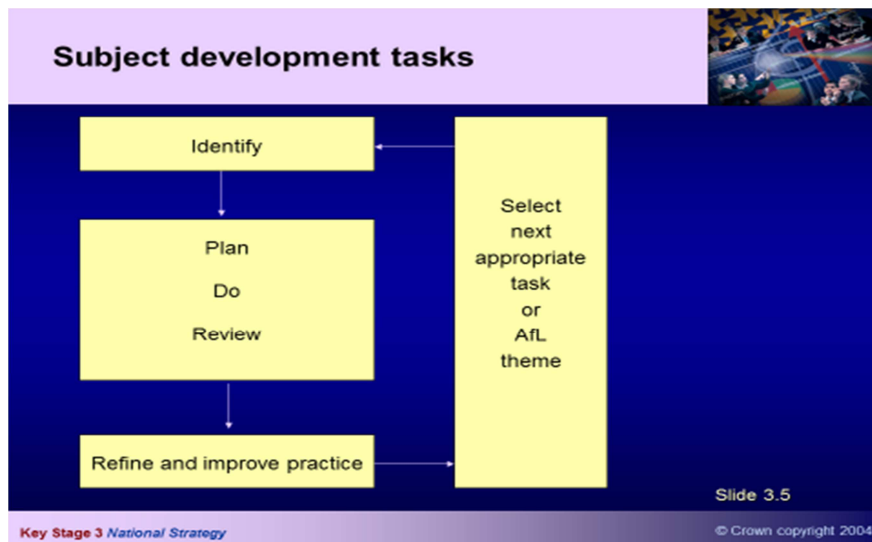


Figure 3: Action Research type CPD Slide from Training materials on AfL.

When examining the training materials it could be extrapolated from them that the government in fact was suggesting that schools follow an implicit action research type framework in order to implement the Assessment for Learning training materials. The ideas relating to the Action Research type of CPD delivery can be clearly exemplified by the following slide from the training materials.

This slide could possibly reflect the ideas postulated in the original work by Black and Wiliam where they suggest that further research is conducted, if it was to be applied consistently by a range of schools. It also accurately reflects my own experience throughout the duration of this research and is linked to the methods and processes of Action Research which was adopted for this PhD thesis.

If the suggested methodology exemplified by the slide were to be followed, the developments could easily be used in a cyclical manner in order to ensure that the strategies impacted on the standards within the school by assessing their impact before moving on to the next cycle. This is only implicit however, it was not explicitly stated. This reflects the cyclical nature of Action Research, which can be seen in Chapter 3 and the Action Research process adopted for this PhD project. These ideas are similar to those exemplified by the quote from McNiff and Whitehead (2011: 35), which states:

“Action enquiries do not aim for closure, nor do practitioners expect to find certain answers. The process itself is the methodology (Mellor, 1998) and is frequently

untidy, haphazard and experimental. One step leads to another and one cycle of action-reflection leads to another."

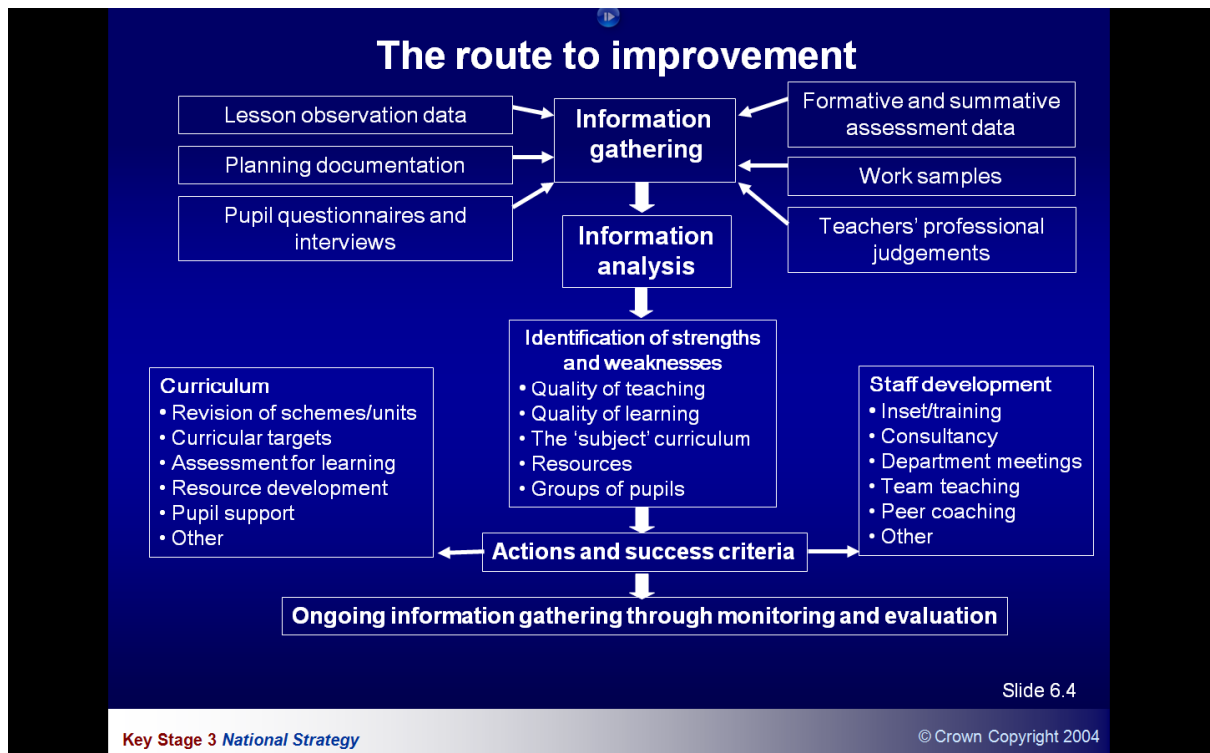
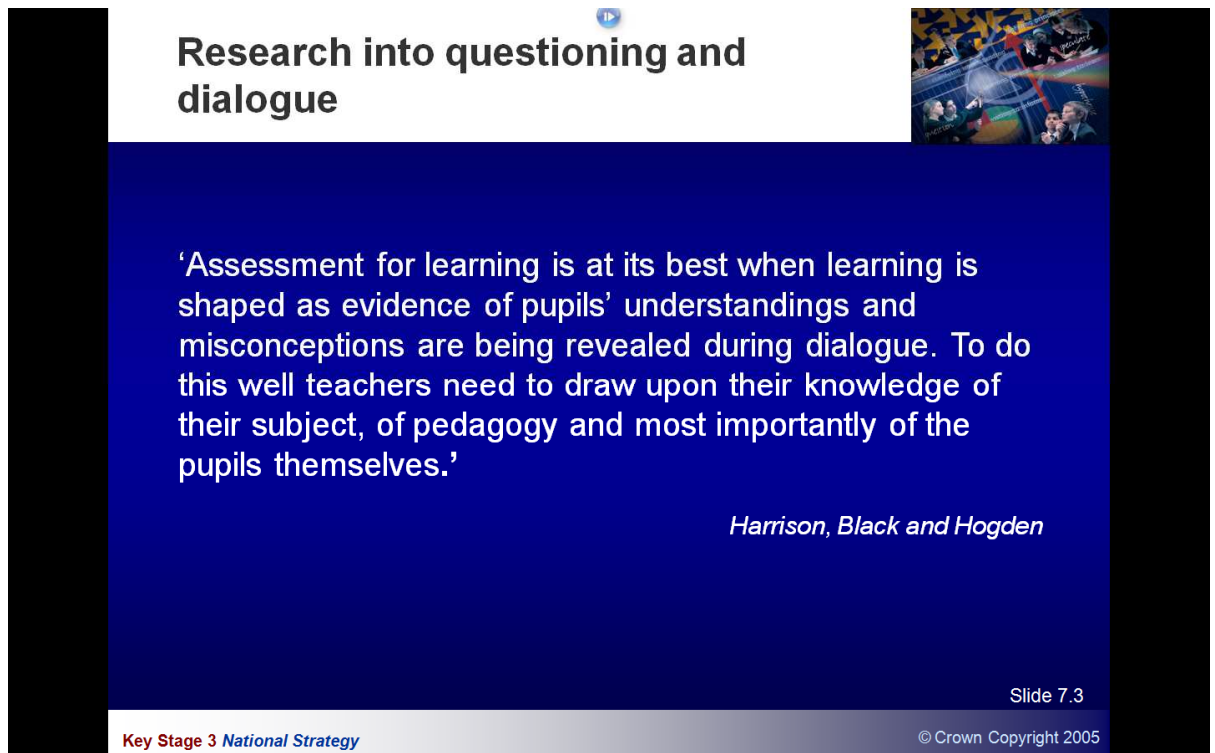


Figure 4: Route for improvement from KS3 National Strategy Training Materials.

All of the PowerPoint slides utilised here were directly inserted into this study from the CD-ROM of "Assessment for Learning Whole School Training Materials", which was issued 01-2004 by the then DfES. This CD-ROM was part of the original training materials disseminated to all maintained schools in England and Wales. These materials were swiftly followed up in 2005 with a 2nd edition. In doing a comparison between the two editions it is possible to see that the 2nd edition contains the same materials as the previous edition, but also includes a new section, which includes the results of further research.

This further research by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam was written up as a book entitled *Assessment for Learning; Putting it into Practice* and this subsequent research will be examined in more detail both later in this chapter and in the section on methodology; in order to explain how it influenced changes in the Strategy and my own practice examined in this study.

These results in the training materials refer to different aspects of Assessment for Learning, one of which is demonstrated in Figure 5. from one of the slides from the 2nd edition of the Training Materials. It is important to note here that two of the authors who are credited with this particular piece of research were part of the group working with Dylan Wiliam.



Research into questioning and dialogue

‘Assessment for learning is at its best when learning is shaped as evidence of pupils’ understandings and misconceptions are being revealed during dialogue. To do this well teachers need to draw upon their knowledge of their subject, of pedagogy and most importantly of the pupils themselves.’

Harrison, Black and Hogden

Slide 7.3

Key Stage 3 National Strategy

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Figure 5: Research into questioning and dialogue Key Stage 3 Training Materials

It was this group comprising of Black and Wiliam who developed the original research into Assessment for Learning and whose work was then followed up by working with Christine Harrison, Clare Lee and Bethan Marshall, it is interesting to note that some but not all of this group were involved in the dissemination of materials approved by the government of the day. Christine Harrison began working on the AfL project and is currently Senior Science Lecturer at King’s College London; Clare Lee was the research fellow on the project and is still involved with CPD as a teacher advisor, while Bethan Marshall is a senior lecturer also at King’s College. At least some of the original researchers were therefore not antipathetic to the use of their material in a political context, although not all the original researchers feature on the training materials. Interestingly the researcher who is not mentioned on the results of the research slide is Professor Dylan Wiliam who

from 1996 to 2001 was the Dean and Head of the School of Education, at the Institute of Education (part of the University of London) and from 2001 to 2003, was Assistant Principal of the College. Given that he was involved in the original research on Assessment for Learning, and that he co-authored the seminal texts on this subject it is significant to note that he was not explicitly involved in the official research relating to the implementation of the National Strategies. He has been highly critical of the National Strategies subsequently and as a result his views will be examined in more detail throughout this research investigation. They will also be examined in the conclusions section in order to determine if they are consistent across the period and will be identified as a key finding from this study.

It is also significant to note that the report in 2008 for the House of Commons Select Committee comments that (ev47: paragraph 6):

“Despite the Departments claims that steps have been taken to streamline the National Strategies guidance, the amount of that guidance remains considerable, all of it, according to the Department, crucial to empowering teachers and raising standards.”

Publicationsparliament.uk (2009) *National Curriculum Fourth Report of Session 2008 to 2009* (Online) Available at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmchilsch/344/344i.pdf>
(Accessed May 2012).

The implications of this statement are that the Department for Education was out of tune with teachers who saw the guidance as more of a requirement and the members of the committee who felt differently to the civil servants. It should be pointed out that the same report mentions the perception of the de-skilling of teachers, who follow the National Strategies and so are becoming *deliverers* rather than curriculum developers. It also points out that (ev47: paragraph 6):

“We regret that the National Curriculum and related accountability arrangements have inhibited some schools from taking forward curriculum and pedagogical innovation.”

The point made here is that the politicians in this case are more aware of the problems caused by the National Strategies than the Department for Education, a point which should be considered highly significant in relation to the findings of this study. However, throughout the whole of the report, there is no mention of the concepts relating to assessment be it formative or summative despite the fact that this was central to the development of the National Curriculum and the National Strategies. There is a dichotomy between the ontological and epistemological assumptions relating to assessment in the political sphere. Kidd sums it up by saying (2009: 1):

“Nowhere is this uneasy partnership between the epistemological and the ontological more apparent than in the assessment system and in the competing rhetoric between attainment and development. A standards driven agenda requires an empirical collation of data and yet the ethos underpinning the new assessment models lend itself to a more multi modal approach...there is a lack of professional confidence in implementing new assessment guidance because the signs emitted from government are inconsistent.”

This is in comparison to the following statement which gives the context of the original Key Stage 3 National Strategy, which was described in the leaflet to parents as (DFES 0072, 2004).:

“The Key Stage 3 Strategy is a government-funded strategy to make the most of this time between primary school and GCSEs. It provides training for teachers, materials for pupils and advice for everyone involved in making the classroom experience the best it can be”

This is making the point that AfL is part of the Strategy to improve the experiences of the students not just to improve the outcomes of summative assessment. The next statement gives it in the format in which was issued to all Local Authorities:

“The Secondary National Strategy builds on and has grown out of the success of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. The Key Stage 3 Strategy began in 2000 with a subject focus, initially English and Mathematics. In the third year of the strategy, this was broadened through a cross-curricular approach using whole-school initiatives and

the behaviour and attendance strand. The work of the Key Stage 3 Strategy has been extended across the 11 to 16 age range.”

Teachernet.gov.uk (2010) *Teaching and learning: Secondary* (Online) Available at: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/secondary/ks3/> (Accessed August 2010).

In comparison to the concepts of assessment in place in the political sphere we must examine the alternative assumptions underpinning formative assessment, which was incorporated into the National Strategies as the Assessment for Learning strand.

3.3.2: DFES guidance: Assessment for Learning Whole School training materials:

The whole school materials which will be reviewed here were delivered to schools in a variety of formats and were produced as two editions. The introduction in the guidance from the DfES (0443-2004: 5) to senior leaders stresses the importance of the materials as it says:

“AfL is also central to the DfES core principles for teaching and learning. These principles underpin all the strands of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy.”

These materials from the DfES (0443-2004: 6) make it explicit that they are focused on leveraging up standards:

“Guided by these principles the AfL training materials provide practical strategies to help teachers develop their planning and teaching skills.”

To help make explicit good AfL practice and help teachers recognise how this relates to good teaching and learning, the training units focus upon the ‘key characteristics of assessment for learning’ (DfES, 0443-2004). The key characteristics of AfL has already been explored previously but there needs to be a re-iteration of the conflict between the original research and its implementation in this form. The research evidence to support the definition of AfL is given in the Appendix for Unit 1 of the training materials. The authors (DfES, 0443-2004: 21) summarise this as:

*"The key message is that Assessment for Learning is about **using** the information gained to improve learning."*

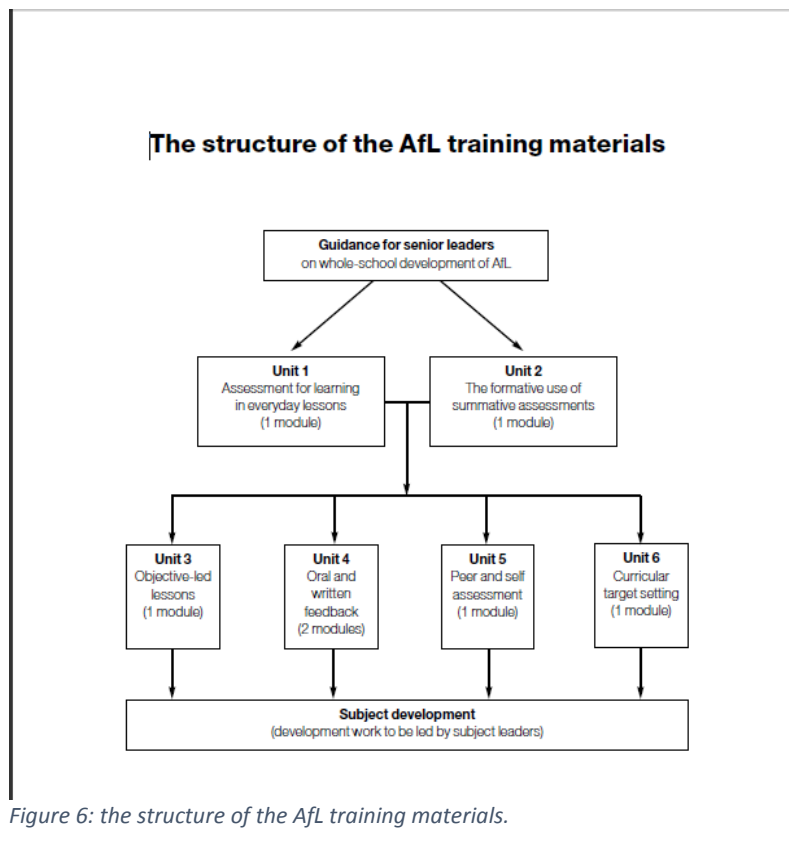
The Department then goes on to very briefly summarise the research which they are basing their work on and this is '*Inside the Black Box*', '*Assessment for Learning: beyond the black box*' and '*Working inside the back box*' as well as a brief reference to Sadler. The influence of Sadler is clear as Hargreaves (2005: 3) points out:

"Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, seemed to be drawing on Sadler's (1989) writing about formative assessment when he defined Assessment for Learning as ...about teacher and student having:

- 1) A clear understanding of the desired standard that the student is seeking to reach*
- 2) A recognition of the gap between the students' current performance and the desired standard*
- 3) A readiness of either or both of them to adjust what they do to help the student to close the gap between current performance and the desired standard"*

These clearly come from Sadler's article "*Formative Assessment and the design of instructional systems*", which appeared in *Instructional Science* 18:119-144 (1989)

Having given a brief rationale using the research evidence the materials go on to explain the structure of the training materials as shown in Figure 6 below:



The DfES guidance states that:

“As the units are designed to be used by schools selectively, according to need and context, the following notes are intended to help senior leaders map their way through long-term training and development programmes. The links between units are also identified within the training units themselves.”

There is however no rationale provided at this point by the DFES for the method of adoption of the training or indeed what type of pedagogical paradigm is underpinning this. There is also no further discussion of the implications for CPD of this type of approach. (DfES, 0443-2004: 15).

“Developing AfL is about improving critical areas of pedagogy such as questioning, explaining and feedback. Whoever leads on the development of AfL will need to ensure that this informs other initiatives focused on improving teaching and learning.”

This comment reveals that there is an implication here regarding CPD, as the assumption made in this statement is that AfL wasn’t going to be implemented in

isolation. This quote clearly states that if AfL was to be implemented in its entirety it would have had a significant impact on the raising of standards. In comparison to these assumptions the PowerPoint provided by the DfES as part of the training materials poses the following question, which can be seen in Figure 7 below:

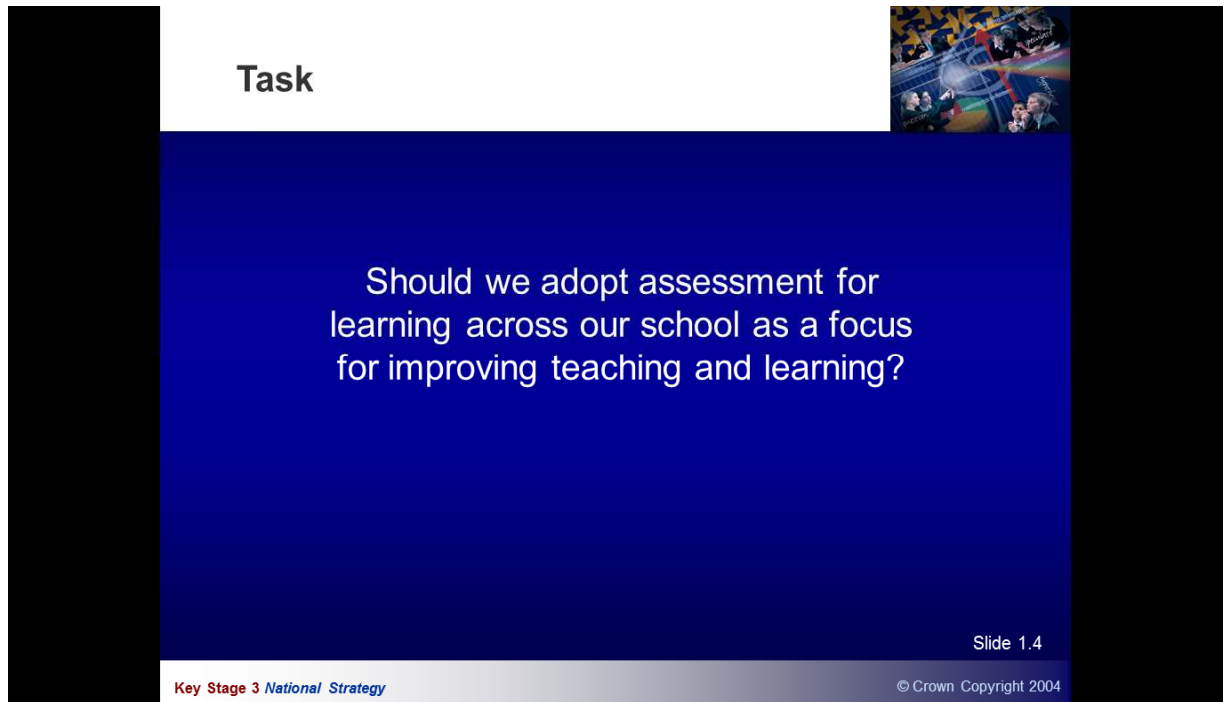


Figure 7: Slide posing question regarding adoption of AfL strategy.

This question is posed despite the fact that AfL is part of the National Strategy, where the assumption would be that all schools were required to implement this. This slide seems to reveal the fact that schools were to be given options about the implementation of the Strategy. These options appear to be not only about the nature of the implementation, but about whether to implement it at all. This is a highly significant point, if this was truly to be a National Strategy why were options apparently being given to individual schools?

The second edition of the guidance was published in the same formats of hard copy and CD-ROM just over a year later in April 2005 and comprised of a number of additions with minor changes to the guidance for senior leaders, which included a self-review tool, which appeared as a set of prompts. There are also a number of additional units with Unit 6 now comprising of 2 modules and Unit 7 on Questioning and Dialogue being added. Both of these two additional units are described as being designed to support advanced AfL practice. This suggests that

the DfES believed that in a sufficient number of schools AfL had been implemented in a way, which would require this support. Again there is no empirical research evidence in the training materials made available to support this notion. In this particular edition there are also two further additions 'Working together Coaching and AfL' and 'TAs and AfL' which are described as study guides.

The first of these Units from the DfES (0565-2003 G) on coaching is described as helping:

"you learn to be a coach for Assessment for learning (AfL). It draws on academic research, training materials within the 'Sustaining improvement' folder..."and the experiences of teachers and schools that have successfully used coaching to develop AfL." (DfES, 1100-2005)

The caveats are those which have been used throughout this section, that although research is referred to there is no explicit references or detail from whence this research has been taken and there is a lack of cross referencing with the underpinning pedagogy. The references relating to research on coaching again appears as an Appendix and only references one set of works (those of Joyce and Showers). This work then refers back to *"Creating the conditions for teaching and learning"* by David Hopkins and Alma Harris (et al), David Fulton Publishers, 2000. The original book by Hopkins and Harris was a handbook for staff development activities, which is where the aspect of coaching was drawn from, but no further details are available regarding the methodology or the outcomes of the research in this case.

The materials on the second edition make similar assumptions to the first and there is no clear delineation of the types of pedagogical reasoning behind the implementation of these strategies.

3.3.3: Assessment for Learning Subject development materials:

This CD-ROM followed on from the previous second edition of the training materials and was sent to schools in 2005. It contained training materials relating to the units in the whole school training materials but in this case they were specifically tailored to each subject. These subjects ranged from Art and Design to

Science, taking in twelve subjects in all. The benefits of reviewing the development materials is that they are all slightly different, which will be examined below. They were based on the units which had specific reference to aspects of AfL notably Units 3 to 7 and provided a self-evaluation tool for subject leaders to utilise in order to make the training as relevant as possible see Figure 8 below:

Having completed this review you should read 'making effective use of the subject development material' on the next page.

	Focusing	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing
Teachers	<p>The subject leader has identified where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> planning is mainly task rather than learning objectives focused learning objectives and learning outcomes are not routinely shared with pupils before beginning tasks feedback does not relate directly to learning objectives and learning outcomes. <p>There is no agreed whole-school or departmental approach to sharing objectives in lessons.</p>	<p>Some departmental planning focuses on learning objectives. There is limited exemplification of the learning outcomes. Sometimes there is a lack of distinction between the task and learning objective.</p> <p>Teachers are beginning to share learning objectives and learning outcomes with pupils prior to carrying out the task. Some teachers are explaining the longer-term purposes of the learning. Teacher feedback sometimes relates to learning objectives, though this is not consistent across the department or school.</p>	<p>Departmental planning usually focuses on learning objectives and intended learning outcomes linked to standards in each subject. This approach is becoming consistent across the school.</p> <p>The sharing of learning objectives, intended learning outcomes and the bigger picture with pupils is becoming routine practice within departments and across the school. Teachers' feedback typically relates directly to the learning objectives.</p>	<p>Learning objectives and outcomes are an integral feature of all departmental planning across the school. All teachers respond to the impact these are having on standards in each subject. Objectives and intended outcomes are routinely shared, discussed and understood by pupils in all lessons.</p> <p>Review of learning in relation to objectives is a routine part of lessons and its outcomes inform future planning.</p> <p>Teachers regularly involve pupils in establishing success criteria and actively involve them in determining their progress, through peer and self assessment.</p>
Pupils	<p>The subject leader has identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the lessons in which pupils are not able to explain what they are trying to learn and the purpose of the task. 	<p>Most pupils, in most lessons, understand what they are trying to learn and can explain this with limited use of subject-specific language. Some pupils understand how they can show success, but others are unclear about what is expected of them. Some pupils understand the longer-term purpose (big picture) of what they are learning.</p>	<p>With some prompting, all pupils are able to explain clearly what they are trying to learn, how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Pupils are increasingly confident in discussing the progress they are making against the learning objectives with each other and with their teacher. Pupils, when supported, are able to recognise and improve their achievements against predetermined criteria and some are beginning to contribute to determining the criteria.</p>	<p>All pupils understand what they are trying to achieve and why, and routinely review their progress against the learning objectives for the lesson. Pupils are aware of a range of possible learning outcomes and are able to determine and improve their achievements in relation to success criteria. Pupils are able to identify independently their achievements against criteria they have collaboratively agreed.</p>
	Start with Task 3A	Start with Task 3A	Start with Task 3B	Start with Task 3C

Figure 8: Self-evaluation tool.

This tool was later used interactively on the CIEA website and from Graham Herbert in private communication it has been established that:

"The original quality standards tool had been developed by the NS as part of their remit to roll out the quality standards tool nationally. I suggested that an interactive version would be more useful for the end user."

There again is no way of verifying what research the self-evaluation tool was based on or ascertaining how the pedagogy underpinning these standards was

arrived at. The Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA) was set up to improve standards in educational assessment from 2004 when work was begun on the then Institutes' programme. The first members were accepted in 2006 and Chartered Status was granted in April 2008.

The units in this training material follow a similar format to the previous ones from the DFES; with the introduction followed by the self-evaluation tool. This is to be used and once decisions have been made about where the department feels its practice already is, there is then a suggestion of the type of activity to follow in order to develop the understanding and practice further. These suggestions are given as a series of tasks, which the department chooses from in order to improve their understanding. The suggestion is then that the department takes part in a limited action, which is planned, implemented and evaluated. For individual departments this idea of limited action links to the implementation of education policy and practice. This is because of the nature of the rolling programme used in implementing the National Strategies. This could be said to reflect the ideas of the original researchers when they suggested that further research should be undertaken. If the National Strategy had been consistently applied and this format followed in every department in every secondary school, this could be said to be following a limited Action Research framework then the outcomes of this might have had a significant impact on practice across the country. The actual results of implementing this in two schools will be considered later in this study but even with someone involved who had a detailed interest in AfL schools still did not adopt these training materials in the way they were designed.

Significantly the DfES (1110-2005) makes the statement:

"Practice across a department will need to be consolidated before focusing on a new area of assessment for learning."

This statement is important for the implementation of AfL because unless each aspect is embedded then the value of AfL as a whole is in jeopardy, however, in the majority of cases this did not happen.

There are no other materials on the CD-ROM so once a department had worked through the available materials there are no pointers for a department if they believe they have achieved enhanced status in all aspects of AfL. However, as most schools appear to have only used these materials in a superficial way there is no demonstrable evidence that anyone achieved this. Having said this, however, the interest in AfL continued and there have been a number of further publications relating to Assessment for Learning since 2005 and these will be considered in the following sections.

3.4: Wider reading on Assessment for Learning:

The research on Assessment for Learning was published firstly as an academic article and then as a research pamphlet which has been examined in detail above. Following on from the research pamphlet there were a number of subsequent pamphlets in the same series which follow up the original research. The wider reading on AfL will be examined in broadly chronological order, which will mean examining a number of the pamphlets in the series interspersed with books on the subject by the same authors. These will be benchmarked against each other and other educational assessment literature used to develop the critical theory and this thesis' AfL academic framework.

3.4.1: Assessment for Learning: Beyond the black box:

The research pamphlet which followed up the original work was called *Assessment for Learning: Beyond the black box*. This was published in 1999 by the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) but this time was made available by the University of Cambridge School of Education rather than through a commercial publisher. When approached in some Internet search engines it appears under the heading of reports from the ARG rather than as a book or research pamphlet, the reasons for which are unclear. This research pamphlet sets out the aims of the work: (1999: front cover)

“describes the key factors needed to put assessment for learning into practice...it critiques elements of current national policy and concludes with proposals for future action.”

This particular research pamphlet is therefore of crucial importance in this study as it is through using these original hypotheses that I was able to critique and then reconceptualise the ideas and apply them to the situation in which my research was conducted. The work in this research pamphlet looked at evidence relating to the problem faced by the educational community in England and Wales. This concerned the implementation of initiatives aimed at helping teachers to improve standards by using assessment. This again raises the issue of terminology and the apparent default setting in regard to the word “assessment”. One of the points made by the Assessment Reform Group (1995: 5) is that:

“the reforms have encouraged teachers to develop their understanding of, and skills in, assessment. However, the very high stakes attached to test results, especially at Key Stage 2, are now encouraging teachers to focus on practicing test-taking rather than on using assessment to support learning.”

This is a salient point as it refers to the concept of “test” being the default mode for “assessment” an idea which permeates through the studies. The discussion of these key terms is integral to this study and the concepts which are developed throughout and appear in detail in the conclusions. The research pamphlet (Beyond the Black Box) itself is clear in its aim to distinguish AfL from other forms of assessment, which can be considered highly significant in this context.

One of the aims of the research pamphlet is to examine the role of the government and its agencies and it (ARG, 1999: 9) offer some

“pragmatic suggestions for changes in emphasis in national policies on assessment.” The recommendations postulated involved the inclusion of AfL in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and also as part of teachers Continuing Professional Development (CPD). This point is important given what happened subsequently with the AfL Strategy; the group suggested that in 1998/99: (ARG, 1999: 10)

“future Standards fund circulars should specifically encourage LEAs to bid for funds to support assessment for learning as a powerful lever to raise achievement in schools.”

In fact instead of this AfL was adopted by the government as a National Strategy, this led to the final section of the research pamphlet was dedicated to the group’s proposals (ARG, 1999: 12) which included:

“1. Assessment for learning should be a central focus of the Government’s programme for raising standards...

3. Classroom assessments and their role in teaching and learning should be given greater prominence in initial teacher training and continuing professional development

4. Development by schools and local authorities of assessment for learning as a means of raising standards should be supported by Government-led funding such as the DFEE’s Standards Fund.”

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)

This research pamphlet built on the work from the original research and again with the benefit of hindsight had an impact on the implementation of government policies on Assessment for Learning. It could be said that the recommendations in the final section had been adopted by the Labour government who had come to power in 1997 and who won a subsequent general election in 2001. It was this government who implemented the AfL strand of the National Strategies in 2004 via the Department for Education and Science (DfES).

3.4.2: Working inside the black box; Assessment for learning in the classroom:

The next research pamphlet in the series was published in 2002, again before the implementation of the National Strategies AfL Strand. It was also published by nferNelson and was written by Black and Wiliam but had other contributors, notably Christine Harrison, Clare Lee and Bethan Marshall. As well as being supported by the Nuffield Foundation in the UK this work was also supported in the USA by the US National Science Foundation who is:

"an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1950 "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defence..." With an annual budget of about \$6.9 billion (FY, 2010), we are the funding source for approximately 20 percent of all federally supported basic research conducted by America's colleges and universities."

Nsf.gov (2008) *About the National Science Foundation* (Online) Available at: <http://www.nsf.gov/about/> (Accessed Dec 2012).

The detailed information for this research pamphlet was produced as part of a project in conjunction with Stanford University in the USA where Paul Black was a visiting professor at the time. This suggests that the interest in AfL was not solely limited to the UK but was still dependent on the input of the original researchers to disseminate practice.

The research pamphlet is described as the successor to *Inside the black box* and as such it summarises the research questions from the original text. This research pamphlet then goes on to look at the new findings and explains that these findings come from working with teachers, although the KMOFAP project which was supported by the DfES, QCA and TTA; TTA was the training body for schools at the time (called the Teacher Training Agency) which was subsequently renamed the Training and Development Agency (TDA). The research pamphlet explains the political situation at the time but does not clarify at any point the pedagogical paradigms behind the research. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2002: 3) state that:

"these links have ensured that Assessment for Learning is one of the central themes of the Government's Key Stage 3 initiative."

In the research pamphlet there is no in-depth explanation of why this particular initiative was chosen to be implemented as part of the Strategies and the reasoning behind this remains obscure as the Strategy itself is not clear on its pedagogical motivation.

There are certain assumptions made by this research pamphlet. Following immediately on from the section on National Policies it launches straight into

examining the concept of learning gains; by implication this gives an implied motivation for the adoption of AfL as part of the National Strategy. It could almost be looked on as conveying a subliminal message linking the two ideas. Unlike in the first research pamphlet there is no adverse data presented in this section with the conclusion to this section written by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2002: 4) reading as follows:

“far from having to choose between teaching well and getting good national curriculum test and examination results, teachers can actually improve their pupils’ results by working with the ideas we present here.”

Once again the issue relating to terminology is apparent with assumptions being made in regard to the concepts of assessment and tests, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis. The section, which makes up the majority of the research pamphlet contains the main findings and looks in turn at the different aspects, which make up what is now seen, with the benefit of hindsight, as traditional AfL strategies.

These strategies are developed further in other literature which will be considered later in this chapter, most notably the book by the same authors called *Assessment for Learning: Putting it into practice* which was first published in 2003 and which followed a very similar format to this research pamphlet.

To return to *Working inside the black box* (2002: 16) there is a section which considers the underlying issues relating to teaching and learning. There was consideration given to learning theory which given the amount of space available meant it was by necessity brief, but did suggest the truism that

“learning cannot be done for the pupil; it has to be done by the pupil.” Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2002: 15).

More interesting to note given the fact that the research was utilised as part of the Key Stage 3 Strategy and implemented across schools, the researchers came to the conclusion that:

“although the general principles of formative assessment apply across all subjects, the ways in which they manifest themselves in different subjects may differ. We

have encountered such differences in making comparisons between teachers of mathematics, science and English."

This conclusion by the original researchers should be considered highly significant as the research has been used as something of a blunt instrument in the attempts to lever up standards in schools. It can be argued that all subjects in the secondary phase have been given the same treatment and the nuances of these findings have not been recognised, least of all applied consistently. The changes the researchers found tended to come slowly and steadily, yet the government in implementing the Strategy appeared to want to see quick results and as Dylan Wiliam later pointed out in a training session, held in Essex and which I attended,

"changing teaching and learning was like turning a super tanker, not achieved in an instant!"

These concepts relating to teaching and learning will be investigated in more detail when examining the data gathered for this study as well as in the section which draws the conclusions from this research.

The final section of the research pamphlet was an important one as it gave advice regarding the next steps and what could be done as individuals, in collaboration with others and across the whole school. The key point here made by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2002: 24) is one which is significant to my own position as it says:

"to realise the promise of formative assessment by leaving a few keen individuals to get on with would be unfair to them, whilst to do it by a policy requiring all staff to change their personal roles and styles in their classrooms would be absurd. What is needed is a plan, extending over at least three years."

As a commentary about what actually happened in schools, the researchers were in fact reasonably accurate, with the above description, for what could be seen as all the wrong reasons. The implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy occurred over a number of years but indeed it was more or less left to a few keen individuals in a number of cases. There was no overarching monitoring of the implementation apart from the work completed by the LA Consultant/Advisors,

who had a view of the schools in the local authority. This meant that it was reliant on an unstructured Quality Assurance (QA) system and there was also no incentive given to schools to develop the Action Research concept. The Strategy also expected staff to change the habits of a lifetime without, in many cases, providing them with the rationale or structure in the form of coherent CPD to aid them to do so, these conceptual failings will be discussed later in this thesis. This is in direct comparison to the ideas from Cordingley Bell and Rundell's BERA paper where they comment on the fact: (2003: 6)

"that participation in the collaborative CPD programmes was linked to enhanced teacher confidence."

The key term in this quote being 'collaborative', as the Strategy needed teachers to 'buy in' in order to be successful. These ideas are considered in more depth in the chapter on methodology and in the conclusions chapter.

3.4.3: Assessment for Learning: Putting it into Practice:

This book has distinct similarities between it and the previous research pamphlet. It is coming under consideration at this point as in the broadly chronological review of the literature it is the correct place for it. There is however a caveat to this, as along with the original research pamphlet it was in fact the content of this book which inspired me to undertake this study.

It is significant to note that in the introduction to the book the writers consider, and then summarily dismiss, the different types of assessment which Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 1) state is *"not a simple or innocent term."* This statement is central to informing the findings discussed later in this study but the book was also crucial to the implementation of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy.

The book is divided by the authors into 3 sections with the overarching concepts of "overview, implementation and practice." This format is very similar to the research pamphlet discussed above but develops the detail further. The book is aimed at a number of different audiences, those concerned with practical application, those who wish to disseminate the practice and those who wish to

examine the fundamental and theoretical perspectives. For a number of the readers all of these aspects coalesced and the book needs to be viewed in its entirety with all the chapters being relevant to the current study.

The book contains a brief history of the research which appeared in the previous research pamphlets but then moves on to expand on the development of the KMOFAP project mentioned above. The examination of the data collection and analysis is significant as there is a brief synopsis of the qualitative data and the book then moves on to the significance of the quantitative data which the authors Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 26) state:

“Although the collection and analysis of quantitative data is not the most important outcome of our project, it is nevertheless an important component. This is because the positive evidence of learning gains that it has produced can serve to reassure those who might be reluctant to take on new methods. In particular, they show that, far from putting at risk the test performances of their students and of their schools, they can improve these performances by better teaching.”

The significance of these statements is self-evident as a justification for the implementation of AfL by the original researchers, as it suggests key indicators for school league tables will be positively affected by the implementation of AfL. However, even though this is apparently powerful evidence the full details of the data and the analysis was not published in this text, the reader was referred to another publication which at the time was in press. This other publication was the article by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam which appeared in *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policies and Practice*. The claim for the impact of this intervention was that: (2003: 29)

“It is likely that improvements equivalent to between one-quarter and one-half of a GCSE grade per student per subject are achievable.”

This claim will be discussed in more detail when considering the statistical analysis in the following section. There was however an impact of this claim as School Leaders took this at face value and as a result were eager to incorporate a limited version of AfL into schools. This claim could almost be said to be

counterproductive as rather than implement the detail of AfL and use the suggested Action Research framework to embed the culture most schools paid lip service to the concept in an attempt to rapidly lever up standards.

The book then moves on to look at putting the ideas into practice and it was this section which was instrumental in developing my interest in the ideas relating to AfL which developed subsequently into the subject of this thesis. The section builds on the ideas first described in *Inside the black box* which this book *Assessment for Learning: Putting it into practice* makes clear in its introduction to this section, but the authors Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 31) were also developing the research further with the addition of the idea that

“the formative use of summative tests had an important part to play.”

The researchers were persuaded to incorporate these ideas as part of the collaboration with the teachers who were part of the project. This is a significant point to note as it shows that the researchers were not working in a purely “academic” framework; they were prepared to amend their experimental approach in light of the input from practitioners.

The authors did not believe that the activities they investigated were the complete package, but they were prepared to examine ideas relating to teaching and learning more deeply. These findings came about as a result of working with practitioners and this work was further developed throughout the course of this study. This is important as the National Strategies promoted AfL as a whole, which could be seen as a complete solution to teaching and learning although there were other initiatives at the same time which teachers were expected to adopt. The researchers did come to some conclusions, which included the statement: (2003: 79)

“What is new is that formative assessment provides ways for teachers to create classrooms that are more consistent with the research on learning.”

A second comment (2003: 80)

“assessment for learning is ‘a way of thinking, almost a philosophy.’”

Is the one which most strongly inspired me and links to my own ideas following the development of my understanding over the period of time I have been involved in my own Action Research project.

There are two more key points from this piece of literature which will be examined more closely in the conclusions to this study which are noted below. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 113) state that:

“One size fits all’ cannot apply at this level – each teacher has to fashion their own way of implementing these changes – no bureaucratic imposition can secure their implementation.”

“Sustainability has in the past been the Achilles heel of many innovations, not least because, after (say) a year, another idea comes along and the temptation to adopt it seems too strong to resist.”

Both of these statements have huge significance as the National Strategy had the force of the DfES bureaucracy behind it, and when we consider the responses of Dylan Wiliam there will be an important commentary on its implementation where teachers were given what appeared to be initiative after initiative to follow.

This book when taken with the original research pamphlet can be said to have influenced the direction in which AfL progressed and as such can, in itself, be seen as a seminal text in the context of this study.

3.4.4: Teachers developing assessment for learning: impact on student achievement:

This article was published in Assessment in Education in 2004 and was referred to in the section above as it summarises the results of the KMOFAP project and gives some of the statistical analysis, which does not appear in the book.

This article begins in the same way as the other literature so far reviewed with the history of the background of the research described. There is a significant addition to the information given, however, as the authors (Black, Harrison, Lee and

Wiliam) (who in this case did not include Bethan Marshall) in *Assessment in Education* (2004: 51) stated:

"In order to draw clear policy implications regarding the utility of formative assessment, we therefore decided that it was necessary to undertake a more direct experiment, in which the confounding of variable, whilst not being entirely removed, was reduced, by asking teachers to incorporate formative assessment (or assessment for learning as it is sometimes called) into their classroom practice and comparing the performance of their students with those of other classes at the same school."

This is the first point in time that this claim has been made for the experiment, in that here Wiliam is claiming that the intention of it was to draw policy implications for the experiment. The article appeared in March 2004, and the National Strategy followed in September of the same year, so it could be speculated that the pedagogic justification for the strategy was being put in this particular article, for a specific purpose. This is described by Wiliam (2004: 49) in the introduction to the article in *Assessment in Education*:

"While it is generally acknowledged that increased use of formative assessment (or assessment for learning) leads to higher quality learning, it is often claimed that the pressure in schools to improve the results achieved by students in externally-set tests and examinations precludes its use. This paper reports on the achievement of secondary school students who worked in classrooms where teachers made time to develop formative assessment strategies."

There was also the justification of the research strategy, which varied slightly from previous accounts produced by Dylan Wiliam in *Assessment in Education* (2003: 2). The previous accounts did not mention the fact that:

"Because our understanding of the theoretical principles underlying successful classroom action is weak, research can never tell teachers what to do. Indeed, given the complexity of classrooms, it seems likely that the positivist dream of an effective theory of teacher action – which would spell out the 'best' course of action given certain conditions – is not just difficult and a long way off, but impossible in principle."

This does not appear to consider the fact that the model the researchers were undertaking was more closely linked to the theories of Action Research although this article with its analysis of statistics seems to tend to a more positivist model than an Action Research one. However the researchers themselves particularly Dylan Wiliam points out in the article in *Assessment in Education* (2004: 57) that:

"Drawing more on interpretivist than positivist paradigms, we sought to make use of whatever assessment instruments would have been administered by the school in the normal course of events"

There is again a lack of clarity here over the use of the term "assessment" as there is no clear definition of how it is being used. It is also clear from this that there was apparently a confusion of the research paradigm and the different rules they impose on the notion of "experiment". It would seem that this article (2004: 3) clarifies some more of the rationale behind the experimental approach adopted as it states that:

"In our original proposal to the Nuffield Foundation, we had proposed to work only with mathematics and science teachers, partly because of our greater expertise in these subjects, but also because we believed that the implications for Assessment for Learning were clearer in these areas."

Although this sentence is not given great significance in the actual article it is something which needs to be examined in greater detail here. This statement is of crucial importance when reflected on, as there are certain assumptions made here which do not appear to have been taken into account when the research was adopted as part of the National Strategies. The first assumption is that the researchers were focussed on curriculum subjects in secondary schools. These could be considered to be approached in a different way to other subjects at Key Stage 3. Both Mathematics and Science teachers reflect on their practice in a way that at this point in time was seen as fundamentally different to English and Humanities subjects for example. The nature of the subjects is very different and as a result changes to the pedagogy required needed to be tailored to each subject. In relation to Mathematics there had been reflections on practice and the types of

learning tasks undertaken in Mathematics classrooms, for example Pepin (1998: 5) stated that:

“The recommendations of the Cockcroft report (1982) are, arguably, backed by constructivist ideas of Piaget and Vygotsky, for example, with their emphasis on problem solving and investigational activities which are expected to be integrated into the teaching and learning experiences.”

As a consequence of the researchers efforts the work on AfL was applied without differentiation to all subjects in secondary schools. If consideration had been given to the paradigms examined above then the implementation could have proceeded along different lines which might have been more appropriate.

The next issue which needs to be considered in detail, as it is central to thinking which influenced the National Strategies, is that of the research design and reporting of results, including the use of data, and the consequences of the conclusions drawn from these. This is a crucial point as in the paper there is the use of statistical surveys a part of the positivist paradigm, although it is not unusual for researchers to use both the positivist and behaviourist paradigms in their work. It is at this point that the research provided a more detailed discussion of the research design, which does begin to aid the understanding of the results section, which follows. It is this results section, which requires the closest examination as it poses a number of problems. Most people accepted without question the summary of the results where the researchers (2004: 55) stated that:

“Improvements equivalent to approximately one-half a GCSE grade per student per subject are achievable. While these improvements might sound small, if replicated across a whole school, they would raise the performance of a school at the 25th percentile of achievement nationally into the upper half.”

These claims have been seen before in this study and it proved to be an attractive proposition to senior leaders in school, however what has not been closely examined is the data from which these results have been extrapolated. This point is critical as the results are contained in a summary which appears to include tables of data, most of which would apparently be used to clarify these points, but

this does not seem to be the case. The data presented in Table 1 on page 58 of the text could at best be described as obscure and lacking clarity. In order to clarify the points made in the table the reader needs to use the table in conjunction with information to be found in *Assessment for Learning putting it into practice* page 27 and *Working inside the black box* page 4 plus information on statistical analysis from the internet, for example, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effect_size. As a non-mathematician I also required some peer discussion to explain the terminology as the key provided was not complete or detailed enough for understanding.

The basic data sets from which the table has been extrapolated is also no longer available to peruse, as they do not appear either as an appendix in any of the literature or indeed as a link to an electronic version. The use of statistics can be used to support the conclusions but in this case there needs to be greater explanation of the table and its relevance in the research. Linked to this point is the fact that the results are then further refined into a stem-and leaf-diagram, which appears to simplify the way in which the effect size is presented to the readers.

However during peer discussions with a number of mathematicians the suggestion was made that in fact there should be two diagrams, one showing positive effects and the other showing negative effects as combining the two effect sizes led to confusion. Statistically the mean effect size which is summarised in this paper as being 0.3 can be described a small but, for the purposes of this research and for the impact educationally it is seen as, highly significant. It appears that the types of statistical analysis appearing in this paper, although highly technical are not appropriate for the purpose for which they had been used. For the majority of researchers using this paper the use of higher level statistical methodology tends to obscure rather than clarify the point being made. Castellan (2010: 2) points out that:

"Siegle (2002) notes that each approach functions with different assumptions and "It is unfair to judge qualitative research by a quantitative research paradigm, just as it is unfair to judge quantitative research from the qualitative research paradigm." Each approach should be judged by its own standards. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) suggest that at an epistemological level it is not clear that one approach

has a greater claim to truth than the other, rather it should be noted that both approaches have helped educational researchers make important discoveries.”

This clearly can be used to critique the work carried out by the original researchers as there is a lack of clarity of articulation in the approach they have used, which can affect the understanding of the practitioners, at whom the research pamphlet was targeted.

The final conclusions in this paper are again significant in light of further events with the authors including Wiliam (2004: 63) stating

“more research needs to be done” and

“it remains to be seen to what extent this work can be scaled up to an LEA or a country.”

This sentence proved to be prophetic as the ‘scaling up’ occurred as the National Strategy although more research was indeed required.

3.4.5: ...inside the black box:

In this section a number of the research pamphlets relating to the subject guidance on Assessment for Learning will be considered together, these were those on Science, Mathematics, English, Geography as well as Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This list of research pamphlets is not comprehensive as there are others including one on Design Technology (DT) and another on Modern Foreign Languages, but using these can be considered a representative sample. The authors of the research pamphlets reviewed here were Black and Harrison on Science, Hodgson and Wiliam on Mathematics, Marshall and Wiliam on English, Weedon and Lambert on Geography and Webb and Cox on ICT (although the editorship of Black, Harrison. Marshall and Wiliam appear on the covers of both the latter two). The pamphlets follow a familiar pattern with an introduction looking at what the research pamphlet offers and a brief history. This is because they each have a different target audience of specialist teachers in secondary schools. The teachers were unlikely to teach a number of other subjects, they tended to specialise in one or possibly, at most, two subjects so would only

refer to one or two of the pamphlets. It would be rare for a secondary teacher to teach across the spectrum of subjects reviewed here.

From the opening about the brief history of the project the research pamphlets then move on to the aims and principles of learning in the subject, ideas which have already been examined elsewhere in this study. The major differences between them is in the subject specific context which is examined separately in each of the research pamphlets and which could be applied within individual classrooms, or indeed across a department in a school. These aspects are the most significant to this study as it was through using guidance such as this I was able to work with departments across the school and these ideas were utilised as part of the training materials linked to the AfL subject development materials from the DFE, which will also be considered separately.

The conclusions section of the research pamphlets are all markedly similar although it is interesting to note that the one which demonstrates the most difference is the research pamphlet on English. It is acknowledged here that the ideas are not new to English teachers but Marshall and Wiliam (2006: 21) state:

“What is new is the evidence that attention to these processes, for so long at the heart of shared definitions of what constitutes good practice in the teaching of English, is one of the ways, possibly the most powerful way of raising student achievement.”

The difference to other subjects is apparent and is made obvious that this is due to the nature of the subject. This concept is not however replicated in the original Strategy materials and only proves to be a later development, a fact which can be considered significant in the attempts at implementation.

These ideas were reflected in previous examples of the literature where the original research was extended as in Assessment for Learning Putting it into Practice Black. Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 84) point out:

“Katrina joined the project as part of the English extension to the project in Autumn 2000. Although many of the techniques of formative assessment were well

established in her classroom, she nevertheless found that there were things that a systematic focus on formative assessment could contribute to her practice.”

This confirms the differing nature of implementation between subjects but again this was not overtly pursued in the strategy’s original implementation.

These research pamphlets provided a useful resource for individual subjects, which was their intended purpose but do not add greatly to the body of knowledge regarding the theoretical framework of Assessment for Learning.

3.4.6: The role of teachers in Assessment for Learning:

This research pamphlet was produced by the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) and was published in 2006 (although it does not state this anywhere in the publication itself) and again states that its work was supported by the Nuffield foundation whose political views are explained earlier in this study. It is important to note at this point that the study puts others into context and so is relevant to this study.

This research pamphlet summarises the work of the ARG and its purpose is to summarise the results of a study on summative rather than formative assessment. This is very different to the previous works studied here. It is useful as a comparison to the work being produced on formative assessment at a broadly similar point in time. The authors (2006: 4) point out that there are similar qualities between summative assessment and other forms including the:

“Impact it should not only measure performance but have desirable consequences for teaching, learning and motivation for learning. Assessment generally has a strong impact on the curriculum and on pedagogy, so it is vital that any adverse effects are minimised.”

There is again the issue of terminology being raised here, a point which informs the conclusions of this study.

This research pamphlet explains they have used available research evidence to reach their conclusions, including information from a study commissioned by the DfES (which is now unavailable due to the archiving of materials) but again there is

no empirical evidence to support these statements included either in the text or as an appendix, although there are pointers to the ARG website (AAiA.org.uk (2010) *Assessment Reform Group* (Online) Available at: <http://www.aaia.org.uk/afl/assessment-reform-group/> (Accessed December 2012).) where some of the research findings are available. In their discussion of AfL in this paper (2006: 9) the researchers' state:

"Many schools give the impression of having implemented AfL, when in reality the change in pedagogy that it requires has not taken place. This may happen, for example, when teachers feel constrained by external tests over which they have no control. As a result they are unlikely to give pupils a greater role in directing their learning, as is required in AfL, in order to develop the capacity to continue learning throughout life. The nature of classroom assessment is dictated by the test."

This provides a key point as it demonstrates that there is the assumption that assessment means **test**, a conceptual problem which will be examined in detail throughout this study and in the conclusions.

This statement from the research is supported by data on motivation from the Progress Achieve and Continue in Education (PACE) project, which was a longitudinal study over eight years. It is also supported by my own experiences in secondary schools at the time. It could be said that my learning experiences over the period of this study reflect the ideas that the term 'assessment' has created problems; this has been related to the fact that testing systems have been seen as a driving force in schools, as discussed above. In most cases students' progress has been measured in terms of levels at Key Stage 3, which were never intended as a measure of progress, rather levels were developed as a summative judgement. For schools the outcomes of the GCSE exams at Key Stage 4 have most significance in terms of league tables.

The quote points out that the constraints of external tests are significant and in my roles as Head of Faculty and as a member of the Senior Leadership team this point as well as the limiting factors of the misconceptions relating to the terminology of assessment has loomed large. It could be said that the testing systems, implemented in secondary schools, have been designed without a

thorough understanding or examination of the underpinning pedagogy. For most teachers these deficiencies have not been clearly articulated but have created frustrations, reflected in the literature throughout this section. It is my understanding and the articulation of these implications which create a significant contribution to academic understanding as previously there was a lack of articulation on this point.

The conclusions reached in this pamphlet are similar to those of other research pamphlets previously examined in this review, but again these can be compared with my own experiences as the researchers (2006: 12) state that:

“The consequence is to constrain the curriculum and teaching methods and impair the implementation of Assessment for Learning.”

A contribution to the academy is made here as it is significant to point out that, for many teachers, what seemed to be the reality of the situation being described here is not a summary of AfL, but rather the pedagogical problems of summative assessment as the dominant force in educational delivery systems. This could be seen as a major issue in educational systems around the world, as there are assumptions made about what the words ‘test’ and ‘assessment’ actually mean. These assumptions will be challenged in more detail throughout the study and in the conclusions section relating to the concepts linked to terminology.

This confusion between summative and formative assessment learning approaches can be construed as a major epistemological deficit and a blind spot of policy makers. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam challenged these ideas as the conclusions for this work again move into a section of implications for a variety of stakeholders, from government to teachers and professional development course providers. Some of these implications were quite radical such as the suggestion made to government by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2006: 13):

“Allow at least two years for the trial and evaluation of any new summative assessment system based on teachers’ judgement and a further similar period for dissemination to users and training of teachers.”

The recommendations to school management could be looked on as equally controversial as the authors (2006: 13) suggest:

“Establish a school policy for assessment that supports Assessment for Learning at all times and requires summative assessment only when necessary for checking and reporting progress.”

These recommendations are aiming towards an ideal, which did not happen over a period of more than six years and a change of government having taken place.

If teachers were to be asked about these ideas presented above they would probably have seen them as an ideal which would be unlikely to be achieved. Given the political climate; despite the efforts of the ARG and other advisory groups these recommendations were not implemented in detail. These ideas could have been developed into a ‘new’ concept, which enabled and evaluated higher order thinking. This would have been a paradigm shift from the assumptions rooted in the **‘summative testing’** approach towards something which redefines assessment systems in a new type of **‘formative testing’** system. This could link to the ideas of adaptive testing tools, which Pearson assessments (2010: 4) describe as:

“this targeting is essential to provide accurate diagnostic information on individual students.”

These ideas are supported by ideas from Sitthisak, Gilbert and Davis (2007: 1) where they state:

“In the context of an adaptive assessment system, assessment is part of the process of diagnosing the learner’s proficiency. The learner’s estimated proficiency can then be used to guide the adaptation of the system.”

This could have been developed as a rationale for linking the philosophy of a new type of system which could be described as **‘Adaptive Assessment for Learning or AAfL.’**

The conclusions which can be drawn from this are that despite the intentions of the original researchers there are a number of missed opportunities to develop the concepts.

3.4.7: Assessment for learning: why what and how?

The final research pamphlet in this chronological review is that which was published by the University of London's Institute of Education in 2009 and was an inaugural professorial lecture by Dylan Wiliam. Consequently, it was different to other research pamphlets and indeed was introduced as taking *"the form of an argument"* (Wiliam, 2009: 1) There are statements within the research pamphlet which reflect previous work, given the subject matter and the occasion this is not surprising and one of the early points made re-iterates the ideas of the learning gains made by students who find themselves taught in the "most effective classrooms", a term which was not clearly defined in the literature.

Another point made early in the lecture by Wiliam (2009: 5) which partially answers the previous criticism of the use of statistics which states that:

"For too long education research has been dominated by a paradigm where if the results of a study were statistically significant they would be published and it could be asserted that a particular intervention had a statistically significant impact... in the United States, that effect sizes, rather than statistical significance, should be reported."

This could be said to tackle the problem posed by the data analysis previously examined. It could, however, be argued that in this case the issue is not resolved but rather only partially tackled.

In this lecture Wiliam then goes on to examine the terminology used by the researchers. There have been assumptions made about the terms used by a variety of stakeholders and Wiliam (2009: 8) states:

"Paul Black and I have wondered whether the same thing is happening to the idea of AfL, now firmly established as part of the government's National Strategy for education. While many authors use the terms 'assessment for learning' and 'formative assessment' interchangeably, Paul Black and I believe there are

distinctions to be drawn... in other words, the term 'assessment for learning' speaks about the purpose of the assessment, while the term 'formative assessment' speaks about the function it actually serves."

This clarification of thinking is useful, but at this point there is no clear articulation of the underpinning epistemology for this distinction. These ideas relating to AfL and formative assessment will form part of the conclusions of this study, but it should be noted that Dylan Wiliam himself only really raises this very pertinent point about terminology in 2009, more than ten years after the original research was undertaken.

This thesis intends to attempt to clarify this point by providing a postulate to clarify what is really meant by 'assessment' and 'testing' and how they are best defined. This postulate will be linked to more appropriate forms of pedagogy more suited to the needs of the 21st Century, based on transferable skills and knowledge production and will be an addition to the academy.

In this lecture Wiliam also reflects on another salient point that will be examined in greater depth later in this study; why this particular piece of educational research (2009: 14) *"has so little impact on the classroom practice of teachers."*

This statement has obvious implications for CPD an issue which will be examined in greater depth in this study. The problems are summed up slightly later in the lecture when Wiliam says (2009: 17)

"Telling teachers what to do does not work. Teaching is just too complex."

This statement appears very much to contradict the notion of the National Strategies, as a training exercise one of which was to develop the use of AfL and once again Wiliam does not develop the explanation of exactly what research underpins this particular statement. This issue could however explain why he did not contribute to the second edition of the National Strategies in the way that some of his colleagues did, unfortunately this is supposition as once again, there is no empirical evidence to support this view.

The lecture then moves on to consider the issue of CPD and how teachers are supported in their application of the results of the research. In relation to this issue of CPD the rest of the research pamphlet is used to describe rather than analyse the teacher learning communities established to assist in the dissemination of best practice. Teacher learning communities were groups of teachers who joined together within and across schools to develop their practice and review the impact of their work. This links to the idea of teamwork and group learning benefits and in itself can be seen as a type of pedagogical strategy. Dylan Wiliam produced guidance on these teacher learning communities and disseminated it via information from the Specialist Schools Trust. In the lecture the section on conclusions and future direction is quite limited and focusses on the development of teacher learning communities. Wiliam (2009: 34) does however give a positive outlook and suggests that:

“the focus on AfL does provide a kind of ‘Trojan Horse’ into wider issues of pedagogy, psychology and the curriculum.”

This point can be directly related to my own perceptions and experience; as at the beginning of this study where the thinking behind my original limited experiment was somewhat simplistic in its outlook. Over the period of this study there has been a development in my own understanding of the pedagogy behind AfL and ideas relating to assessment in general. The critical thinking developments have been significant in examining both my own current practice and those of colleagues, by producing a more analytical approach which could be said to reflect Wiliam’s concept of a “Trojan horse”.

3.4.8: Embedded formative assessment:

This book was published in 2011 in Bloomington Indiana a fact which could be considered to be significant, as it is an American rather than British (or an English) publication. It is also published after the election of 2010 when the British government changed; which could also be seen as significant. This book has a variety of purposes and covers some of the material previously reviewed in this literature review. This book re-iterates ideas relating to the importance of education in general terms, as well as the fact that Wiliam (2011: 13) states:

“the greatest impact on learning is the daily lived experiences of students in classrooms, and that is determined much more by how teachers teach than by what they teach”

This statement is not new and indeed Wiliam has already made this point in previous works. In the second chapter of the book he again goes over ground, which has been previously examined relating to the case for formative assessment. Wiliam (2011: 29) does however make a point, which will strike a chord with secondary school teachers in England and Wales:

“One year it’s language across the curriculum, the next year, its differentiated instruction. Because teachers are bombarded with innovations, none of these innovations has time to take root, so nothing really changes. And worse, not only is there little or no real improvement in what happens in classrooms, but teachers get justifiably cynical about the constant barrage of innovations to which they are subjected,”

The reason for the emphasis is that this conclusion is comparable to one of the observations made from the Action Research cycles I have completed and relates to my own real world experiences. Chapter 2 demonstrates that apparently nothing new can be said on the assumptions relating to formative assessment, as the subject has been examined in detail previously. However, within the chapter there are still a number of points of note with a variety of definitions for the term ‘formative assessment’ being provided. In comparison to Wiliam’s points the conclusion made by Bennett (2009: 8) is significant here as he points out that:

“just replacing the term formative assessment with the term Assessment for Learning merely clouds the definitional issue.”

Bennett makes counter claims about the impact of the research on AfL, which will be examined in more detail. Bennett notably states: (2009: 7)

“the research does not appear to be as unequivocally supportive of formative assessment practice as it is sometimes made to sound.”

This point is not challenged by Wiliam and the book then moves on to the practical strategies relating to the implementation of AfL, once again there is not a

great deal which is new in these chapters; if the reader is already familiar with the previous works of the author. There is no detailed section on conclusions, a fact which is quite surprising, given the nature and title of the book and it merely concludes with an epilogue. This epilogue takes the form of a short commentary on the nature of employment and the difficulties faced by students in the 21st Century mostly based on the American experience. The concluding statements by Wiliam (2011: 162) reflect on the fact that:

“If all teachers accept the need to improve practice, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better, and focus on the things that make the biggest difference to their students, according to the research, we will be able to prepare our students to thrive in the impossibly complex, unpredictable world of the 21st century.”

This conclusion draws together the facts that formative assessment is an important component of teachers practice and that everyone is living in a changing world. It is however, not necessarily the conclusion which could have been predicted from the introduction, which states the purposes of the book is to provide practical ideas for developing practice and provide evidence for improved learner outcomes, so at first glance the conclusion does not reflect this.

3.5: Other works on Assessment for Learning:

This short section will examine works by authors other than the original researchers which are related to the concept of AfL.

3.5.1: Perfect Assessment for Learning Claire Gadsby edited by Jackie Beere:

This section will begin with the book by Claire Gadsby entitled Perfect Assessment for Learning. The illustration below (Figure 9) of the cover of Gadsby's book reveals an important fact, that the author of the book or possibly the editors has already made a decision about the position of Assessment for Learning as a concept.

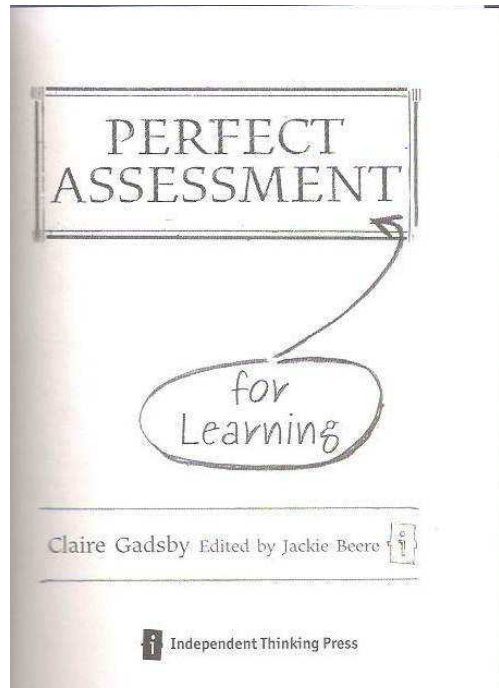


Figure 9: Front cover of *Perfect Assessment for Learning*; book by Claire Gadsby.

They have made their position in regard to where AfL fits clear from the outset with the point it is Perfect Assessment the 'for learning' being an addition. This already raises a question as to where the author stands in relation to AfL as well as how closely this book links to the original concepts postulated by Black and Wiliam. The book opens with a truism pointed out by Gadsby, which needs to be examined; in that: (2012: 1)

"many teachers are grazing at the buffet of AfL, without necessarily perceiving how the various morsels come together to form a well-balanced and satisfying educational philosophy."

Gadsby suggests that teachers are not putting together the complete AfL package but only choosing to use some aspects which they feel is most appropriate.

There is then an expression of intent in which Gadsby (2012: 14) states that the purpose of the book is to:

“offer a range of practical strategies to help schools develop their existing practice and to ensure that assessment is really contributing to learning.”

The problematic use of the term ‘assessment’ again looms large at this point. The implication this is formative assessment in the form of AfL but this is not explicit and indeed the statement could equally be read to mean summative assessment.

From this ambiguous opening chapter the book then moves onto the practical strategies; these include re-iterations of those seen originally in the National Strategy training with the addition of work from Dylan Wiliam on activating learners as resources for each other and as owners of their own learning. This section written by Gadsby (2012: 65) begins with a reference from Vygotsky:

“What the child can do in collaboration today, he can do alone tomorrow.”

This is almost a spurious reference as there is no triangulation of the ideas expressed here and once again the reader has to make the connections for themselves, it would have been more useful if examples such as Seely Brown, Collins and Duguid were referenced as they point out that Vygotsky’s ideas are (1989: 34),:

“the foundation of all work on the understanding of learning and cognition being based on this work”.

The next two chapters of Perfect Assessment for Learning refer to the Ofsted framework and working with parents and again refer back to the training materials. Ofsted was created in 1992 as a national inspectorate to replace the Local Authority inspectors and the HMI service (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate). Ofsted’s role is to inspect and regulate services which care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. It is significant to note that this book is focussed on ensuring the compliance with

external forms of validation rather than purely on improving the outcomes for students.

Finally, there is a chapter on the key messages and how to move forward in these; there appears to be no new thinking and again we are being given a recipe which suggest more of the same, without any new thinking being evidenced. This book appears to offer a summary of thinking current in 2010 but if schools have embedded AfL they will not learn anything new from this. If AfL is not embedded then being offered the same diet cannot be the way forward. It is difficult to see where this book sits, as a handbook of strategies it is a good summary, however, it is not is an academic examination of the nature, purpose and theories of AfL. The target audience for this book is teachers who had an interest in AfL but it does not appear to have an academic audience. It is again significant to note that this book was published following the election of the coalition government in the UK and the subsequent closing (post 2010) of the National Strategies website.

3.5.2: Formative assessment models and their impact on Initial Teacher Training by Debra Kidd:

This article appeared in Learning and Teaching in Action from the Centre for Learning and Teaching at Manchester Metropolitan University and is part of this literature review as it addresses some of the key issues relating to the impact of formative assessment on ITT. The use of ITT represents Initial Teacher Training undertaken by students as either a Post Graduate Certificate in Education or a Graduate Training Programme (P.G.C.E. or GTP).

In this paper Kidd raises the important point that: (2009: 21)

“our systems of measuring progress, both for pupils and for professionals, remain within a positivist model which focuses on auditing technical capacities and which assumes that the qualities required for phenomenological reflection – i.e. the capacity for teachers to see the child anew in their observations - are measurable.”

The description of phenomenology by Lester as being: (1999: 1)

“concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual, ‘bracketing’ taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving.

Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasise the importance of personal perspective and interpretation.”

He states that this could be seen as counter-intuitive. The paper by Kidd goes on to state that: (2009: 22)

“nowhere is this uneasy partnership between the epistemological and ontological more apparent than in the assessment system and in the competing rhetoric between attainment and development.”

These ideas summarise the thinking exhibited by the original researchers on AfL when they were questioned on the impact AfL had had. It is significant that this thinking does not appear in the publications available to all users of AfL. These responses from the private correspondence will be examined in more detail in the conclusions to this thesis.

Having positioned herself regarding the theories of assessment and the requirements of the authorities Kidd then moves on to explore the ideas of different assessment models relating to assessing creativity such as the Creativity Wheel and Collegiate Learning Assessment but there is no further attempt to broaden out any conclusions or to examine the implications of any aspects of AfL for ITT in general.

In comparison to this limited evaluation relating to AfL for ITT in the UK the final article, which will be examined, looks at the International Context.

3.5.3: The Assessment for Learning in International Contexts (ALIC) Research Project Shaw, Johnson and Warwick:

This brief article appears in Research Intelligence news from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) issue 119 Autumn/ Winter 2012 which again followed the changes in government in the UK.

It begins with an introduction conceptualising Assessment for Learning and echoes the findings of this thesis when it states the ideas of Black and Wiliam and Sebba (Shaw, Johnson & Warwick, 2012: 14-15) in that:

“the seemingly ubiquitous nature of the language of formative assessment within international educational discourse masks a poor shared understanding of the underlying meanings around such phraseology. It is already clear that AfL practices vary across the Western educational contexts. With differing policies, politics and cultures impacting on classroom practices.”

There is a summary of the research and the underpinning pedagogy behind it with a survey constructed and a critical review of the literature undertaken. As this is a very brief article unfortunately it is not possible for the authors to develop any of their points in any great detail. This article is brief due to the fact it appears in the BERA magazine as a short research article. This would be a useful addition to the work on AfL had it appeared in a research journal in a more detailed format.

The conclusions drawn by Shaw Johnson and Warwick in Research Intelligence provides information, which cannot be said to deviate from what is to be expected (2012: 15)

“given the global prominence given to AfL...it is perhaps unsurprising to find that...teachers appear to value practices linked positively to formative assessment principles and strategies... the survey data reflect the views of professional who are engaged reflective and responsible.”

This could be said to conclude this section of the literature review in a most appropriate way, reflecting on the current position both in the concept of AfL in England revealing despite the fact that there has been a focus on embedding the ideas that it has only been adopted by a minority of professionals who have an interest in the subject. These conclusions will be examined in detail later in this study.

3.6: Conclusions relating to the literature review:

There are a number of findings, which can be established from the review of the literature. The literature review of the work on Assessment for Learning apparently clearly shows that Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, as the original researchers on the formative assessment series entitled “...the black box”, were involved in the development of the National Strategies. This thesis has examined

this idea and in time it proved to be at least an exaggeration of the situation with the comments from Dylan Wiliam about his concerns which will be referenced in the conclusions to this thesis. Paul Black also subsequently expressed reservations about the implementation of the strategy in England and compared it to the developmental work done in Scotland, which again will be examined later in this thesis.

Another concept is the idea presented in the literature of the terminology related to the subject and the difficulties this created for everyone involved. These issues have been referred to within this chapter and will be considered in more depth later in this thesis. The key assumptions which can be gained from the literature review is that concerning the terminology and the use to which the word 'assessment' is put in the phrase Assessment for Learning. The original researchers have used the term 'formative assessment' at certain points but even this does not clarify their thinking enough and the judgements they make about this forms part of the key findings of this thesis.

The other key finding relating to this, and is a significant contribution to knowledge, is the fact that the political adoption of the theory of AfL resulted in the original concept being utilised in an ad hoc manner, which clearly was not the intention of the original researchers. Linked to this is the point established from the material provided by the DFES, that there was no detailed pedagogical framework underlying the adoption of the original research. These findings will also be discussed later and will form the basis of the conclusions concerning the implementation of future strategies.

Key to the work on AfL was the work which preceded it on the subject of formative assessment which now appears earlier in this chapter. This work was reviewed in detail by Black and Wiliam in their academic paper but only briefly referred to in the texts which were aimed at education professionals i.e. the "black box" series. This understanding of formative assessment was implied rather than clearly articulated. There was also a similar issue with the development of the use of CPD in relation to the implementation of the National Strategy. As previously explained the most effective type of CPD would be those which professionals

engaged in as agents of change. This can be seen as requiring the use of an Action Research framework and links to the ideas postulated by Michael Fullan's work as (2007: 25) he states:

“there are few intensive ongoing learning opportunities for teachers individually or in concert to deeply acquire new learning concepts or skills.”

Fullan also points out (2007; 26) teachers:

“do not struggle directly with existing cultures within which new values and practices may be required. As I have said elsewhere (Fullan, 1993, 1999), restructuring (which can be done by fiat) occurs time and time again, whereas reculturing (how teachers come to question and change their beliefs and habits) is what is needed.”

It is significant to note that Peter Senge's who focusses on Learning Organisations states in conversation with John O'Neill (1995) that:

“Most teachers feel oppressed trying to conform to all kinds of rules, goals and objectives, many of which they don't believe in. Teachers don't work together; there's very little sense of collective learning going on in most schools.”

This comment was made before the work on the National Strategies began but could still be described as relevant following all the work I have completed on this thesis.

The following table describes the key concepts and the findings from this study of the literature which will be linked to the research questions posed at the start of this study. The key postulate which arises from this Literature review is the new way of reconceptualising the terminology relating to **assessment** and **test**.

Key concepts	Findings
Understanding of previous work of formative assessment	Understanding of the previous work impacted on the original researchers and they made some pedagogical assumptions which were never clarified in the literature.
Involvement of the original researchers in the development of the National Strategies	<p>From examining the National Strategy documentation it is clear to see that there was some involvement of the original researchers in formative assessment in the materials produced.</p> <p>Dylan Wiliam was however not cited directly but was only involved owing to his authorship of the work <i>Inside the Black Box</i>.</p> <p>The other researchers including Paul Black, Christine Harrison, Clare Lee and Bethan Marshall were involved in the design of the National Strategy materials despite later reservations.</p>
Issues of terminology	This finding is highly significant as it is the understanding of the term assessment which has had the most effect on the implementation of the National Strategies and the understanding of everyone involved.
Use of Action Research framework	My own understanding of the Action Research framework has developed as a consequence of the literature review. The work has significance in relation to the implementation of the National strategies which if the original researcher had been able to develop using an Action Research framework would have produced more significant and enduring results.

The key objective of this research project is to consider whether the theoretical framework proposed by the originators of the theory was being applied in practice and how Assessment for Learning was viewed by staff, students and other stakeholders. This question was clearly addressed in the Literature review as seen in the key findings above. The next set of aims are examined in the methodology and findings section of this thesis: an examination of how Assessment for Learning was being utilised by different Faculties and Departments within and across the study schools. I also aim to critically analyse the issues arising in relation to Assessment for Learning and how the theory will impact on teachers' professional practice and development.

An outcome of the findings is the creation an original toolkit for the dissemination of Assessment for Learning, and when it is in place, to evaluate its effectiveness.

Another aim of the research is to place these ideas within an institutional, local and national context (particularly relating to the political context of UK government policy) and links to relevant theoretical frameworks. This is examined as part of the Action Research framework in the Literature Review and is returned to throughout this study.

These aims were to be considered in relation to the literature already available on Assessment for Learning and the underlying pedagogical framework articulated by the original researchers is summarised. The reconceptualising of the concept of **assessment** and **test** could be described as a rethinking of terminology in which **assessment** should be described instead as a new learning methodology for practitioners.

In the next chapter I will outline the methodology that has been chosen to conduct this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology:

This chapter provides a justification for the research design and describes the methodological background to the study. The reasons for taking this approach are stated. The methods used to gather and analyse the data are explained and the ethical issues involved in undertaking this research are outlined. Finally there are claims for the quality of the research and the proposed theoretical outcomes with suggestions regarding the potential contribution to knowledge.

4.1: Introduction, the context of the research:

4.1.1: The nature and purpose of the research:

This study was designed as a piece of educational research, based on my own practice and then expanded to examine the impact on my own practice and that of others. It was based on the work I undertook in two schools and consequently over time there were a number of methodologies which suggested themselves as being most appropriate relative to the revised research questions.

The purpose of the research was originally to establish the impact of the work of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy on Assessment for Learning (AfL) which subsequently developed to examine the nature and impact of AfL and whether the intentions of the original researchers were being met. I also examined the impact that AfL had on my own and others practice and the perceptions of those involved.

4.1.2: Aims of the study:

There were a number of aims at the start of this research project being advanced which are expressed in the research question below (4.1.3); specifically my aim in this study was to examine how the principles of Assessment for Learning (AfL) in schools were being applied and how this differed from the intentions of Black and Wiliam. The study also aimed to establish whether the use of the AfL strategies impacted on student outcomes. A significant aim of the study was to examine the pedagogical implications of AfL for teachers and a key decision was to design an appropriate methodology.

The data which will be presented later in the study falls into the qualitative rather than the quantitative category of research, although as Jones and Tanner

(2006: 101) point out the outcomes of “*high stakes summative assessment (the measure by which schools are judged)*” can be seen to be influenced by AfL techniques and the results of these high stakes assessments can be quantified. The methodology chosen was not one which solely involved quantitative methods, this was a conscious choice as this study was partially designed as an Action Research project, as it was concerned with improving my own practice.

As previously stated the original aims of the research were to consider how other stakeholders viewed AfL. Another aim was to examine in detail how AfL strategies were being utilised by different faculties within and across schools and to distinguish their varied approaches. These conclusions would then be cross-referenced with the aims of the original researchers wherever possible, in order to triangulate the evidence. This will be expanded on in the claims for quality later in this chapter. This could be seen as an empirical enquiry, an idea which was established at the start of the process. As a consequence of this type of research methodology the findings will not necessarily result in an outcome which supports generalisations but will provide specific contextualised examples that could have an impact on individual teachers, student outcomes and school improvement.

4.1.3: Research questions:

The questions which drove this research are:

1. How have the original ideas of Black and Wiliam been adopted and were the intentions of the original researchers fulfilled?
2. How was AfL viewed by staff, students and other stakeholders?
3. How was AfL used within and across Faculties in schools?
4. How did AfL impact on teacher’s professional practice?
5. Could an original toolkit for AfL be created in order to develop its implementation in the curriculum?
6. How has AfL been used in high stakes assessment?
7. What were the practice issues relating to AfL? A critical analysis.
8. How could new strategies for change can be adapted and applied to a variety of situations?

These questions generated the need for utilising certain types of methodologies and methods and impacted on the nature of this study. This impact relates to the central strand in the study which involves examining the nature of Action Research, both as a methodological choice and its impact on the progress of this study.

4.1.4: Philosophical position and assumptions:

The premise behind this thesis is informed by my philosophical position and assumptions. This, in turn, will inform the methodology which was chosen as it clearly links to the research questions established at the start of this study.

In terms of my philosophical position there are a number of points which underlie this.

The first being was that I wished to research an area which was of professional interest to me. The knowledge which was then generated would be used to impact on my professional judgement. Although I was undertaking the work to change my own practice and that of others the study was also positioned within a context of local and national change. The issue I was studying had a political dimension as it was intended to impact on practice in classrooms and therefore improve pupil outcomes.

The second aim is clearly linked to the use of the methodology and this was to use an Action Research framework in a school situation linked to reviewing current pedagogy, policy and practice in relation to AfL, as I was intending to improve my own and others' practice. Action Research was also used to develop my own understanding of the significance of the findings and enhance my understanding as a reflective practitioner. I was an active participant in relation to the real world experience but at various points I had to step outside this role and view the outcomes as a researcher. This aim was clarified after peer discussions, with other educational researchers and my supervisor.

The context of the research was important to my philosophical position as this research aimed to place these ideas within an institutional, local and national context (particularly relating to the political context of government policy) and relevant theoretical frameworks; as well as to critically analyse the issues in relation

to AfL. My position as a researcher is that schools should be viewed as unique cultures and there is therefore a difference to be noted between my philosophical position and that of the government who viewed the AfL Strategy from the position of universal implementation. This can be seen as an attempt to construct my own reality by understanding what we do. This is as a result of using the Action Research framework as a method of social constructionism as Young (2008: 63) points out

“Knowledge is socially and historically constructed, but it cannot be subsumed into the processes of historical and social construction; in other words, we make knowledge out of knowledge.”

This process was part of establishing my philosophical position. The knowledge generated by this study included the importance I placed on the idea of social justice. This knowledge is self-generated but could be seen as part of the feminist theory. It can be argued that ideas generated by women are different and important so my philosophical position is informed by the issue of gender. As a woman I see the world in a different way and this warrants and supports the inclusion of feminist theories.

One question raised by this research in response to my own developing thinking is “Am I a feminist researcher or a researcher who happens to be female?” This question can be in part answered by looking at Hammersley quoted in Robson (3rd edn. 2001: 225) that:

“research is founded upon presuppositions reflecting the values of the researcher, which may derive, for example, from their gender or ethnicity.”

Significantly for this thesis there is a quote from Reinharz which answers my question posed at the opening of this paragraph. Reinharz (1992: 7) points out that:

“a person does not have to identify her research methods as “feminist research methods” but rather had to identify herself as a feminist doing research. This later criterion is more appropriate since researchers defining their methods as feminist are likely to do so only when the method is unusual.”

Linked to these points in relation to this study is the fact that Clark, Flewitt, Hammersley and Robb (2014:3) point out that:

“feminist approaches insisted that research cannot but be political: that it is unavoidably implicated in the operation of the wider society”.

This can be said to be true of this study and is also linked to the point made by Ramazanoglu and Holland (1999: 382) who state:

“feminisms’ contested knowledge of the diverse social lives has pushed feminists into developing a language of power that did not exist before, and has brought about political change as people make sense of their experience through naming and challenging power relations.”

This can be linked to the methodology of this thesis as I have taken a political issue in the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy and made sense of it using my own experiences. All of these points link to the concept of feminist ethics as Ramazanoglu and Holland points out (1999: 106) that:

“feminist researchers have consistently highlighted the need to recognise that researchers and their subjects invariably stand in some type of social relationships that are never balanced or understood in the same way for all concerned.” This notion of an ethical relationship has impinged on this study and I have had to develop my understanding of ethics in order to develop as a researcher.

Concurrent with this is the idea whether new strategies for action and change can be applied to a variety of situation including employment training, that is to say whether the theory behind AfL is transferrable from the secondary education sector to other areas.

The research also aimed to examine the possibilities for creating an original toolkit for the dissemination of AfL; this was linked to the examination of the types of toolkits already available and once the toolkit was in place to evaluate its effectiveness. All of these ideas impacted on the types of methodology used. Consideration was also given as to whether AfL can be or has been used by examination boards in the design of their syllabi.

This research fits within the interpretivist paradigm which is:

“characterised by a concern for the individual”... “Interpretivist researchers begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations from the world around

them. Theory is emergent and must arise from particular situations; it should be 'grounded' on data generated by the research act (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Theory should not precede research but follow it." Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000: 23)

The ideas of Grounded theory which is part of my synthesised research paradigm linked to the methodology will also be examined later in this thesis.

This research design was adapted as part of the synthesis and framework as my work was grounded in the political situation at the time. The methodology could also be said to reflect this idea as the theory developed over a period of time and reflected a growth in my own understanding of the concept that knowledge exists as part of the reality generation; consequently the methodology had to be utilise an Action Research framework.

4.2: Theory of Action Research methodology:

On the basis of the research questions and my own philosophical position I am now going to examine and justify the choices of the methodology used in this study. I have examined a number of different methodologies and as they overlap the result has been a synthesised methodology incorporating aspect of a number of methodologies. Hence in the next sections of this chapter I will examine how I have used Action Research; Case Study and Ethnography in order to generate my own Grounded theory.

4.2.1: An examination of Action Research Theory:

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of Action Research where the research is value laden, morally committed and oneself in relation to others is an integral part of this study and as such is central to this thesis. Action Research fits the nature of the research inquiry required by the research objectives, as I was looking to improve my own practice as well as that of others and consequently will be examined in detail as part of this chapter.

This study is based on the concepts expressed by Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff in their work on Action Research (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 12) where they state that:

“Research however is purposeful investigation, which involves gathering data and generating evidence in relation to articulated standards of judgment, in order to test an emergent theory”

As an Action Research theory is generated from real life and emergent data this influences the work of the individual and generates further questions that can then be tested and influence practice. The theory of Action Research is absolutely fundamental to the ontology and epistemology expressed in this thesis. The influence on the methodology of actions for data collection and analysis from previous research needs to be understood. This is part of the critical reflexivity undertaken in this study, as knowledge produced through social research can be described as being imbued with aspects of a researcher’s previous experience.

4.2.2: Action Research implementation and implications:

In examining Action Research theories it has to be acknowledged here that the works of Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff (2011) have been integral to developing both the theory and the practice evidenced in this study as well as the methodology.

McNiff (1988: 24) acknowledges the work of Laurence Stenhouse as a key influence:

“His central message for teachers was that they should regard themselves as researchers, as the best judges of their own practice, and then the natural corollary would be an improvement in education.”

This statement was particularly significant in the context of this study which is designed to examine the way AfL was affecting my own practice. As a corollary to this the idea of ‘improvement of education’ was the original aim of the government in developing AfL as part of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. The examination of the impact of this was to be an integral part of this study and consequently this study reflects the concept articulated by McNiff.

The cyclical concept of Action Research articulated by McNiff is based on the seminal work of Kurt Lewin (1946), who is described by McNiff (1988: 22) as:

“A social psychologist was keen to study social issues himself, and also to provide people with an instrument to study their own relationships...Lewin described action

research as a spiral of steps. Each step has four stages, planning, acting, observing, and reflecting."

The cyclical nature of this study, which originally was only intended as one cycle developed over time to look at number of Action Research cycles in a variety of situations.

The original research design for this study began as an examination of the strategies suggested by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 2) in a real context. As explained previously I was struck by the comment that:

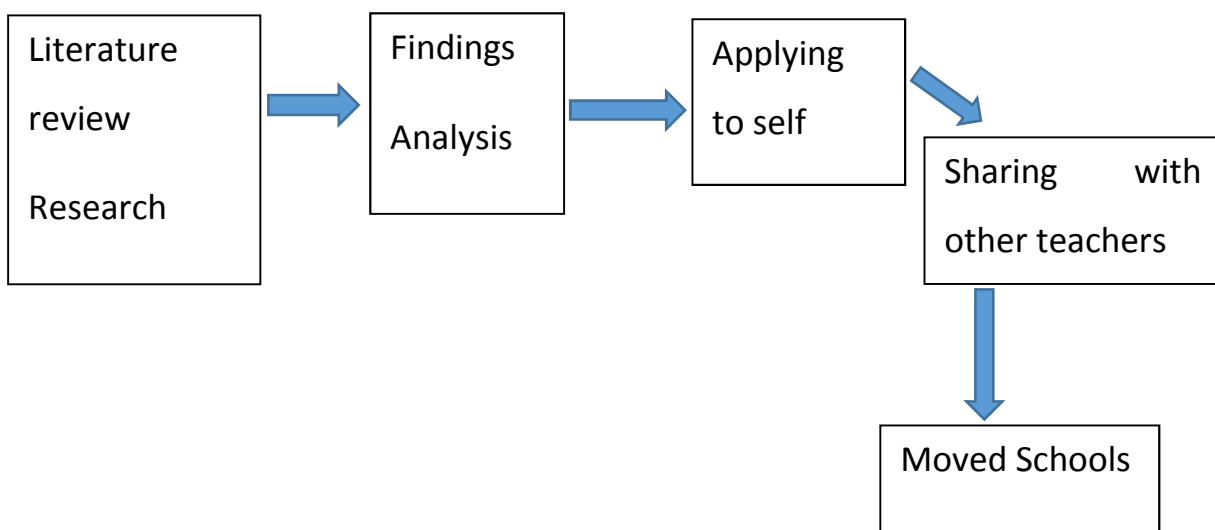
"an assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback by teachers and their students in assessing themselves and each other, to, modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged."

This statement describes the processes my team and I were trying to achieve in the faculty I was managing at that particular time. There are clear links between the actions taken by me and the idea of Action Research, where I began with an idea, applied it and examined a key feature in Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 14) who stated that:

"the core of the activity of formative assessment lies in the sequence of two actions. The first is the perception of the learner of a gap between the desired goal; and his or her present state (of knowledge and/or understanding and /or skill). The second is the action taken by the learner to close that gap to attain the desired goal. The learner first has to understand the evidence about this gap and then take action on the basis of that evidence. Although the teacher can stimulate and guide this process the learning has to be done by the student."

As a result of this particular statement I was inspired to begin a small-scale research project with one teaching group; thus beginning the Action Research cycles. From this beginning as a small-scale project within one classroom the Action Research cycles have developed over a period of time, culminating in this study. This is exemplified in the drawing below which shows the links between various stages of this study.

Phase 1: School A



Phase 2: School B

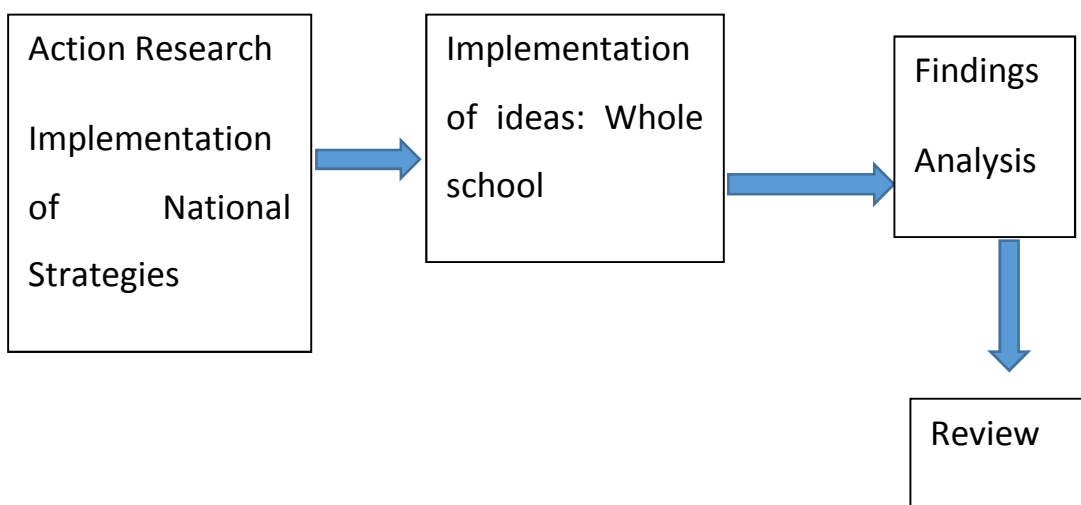


Figure 10: Drawing showing the links between phases of this project

The developments which took place in relation to my conceptualisation of Action Research are also important to this study. McNiff (1988: 34-36) states:

“The systems of Kemmis, Elliott and Ebbutt simply do not accommodate spontaneous creative episodes... Their use does not encourage teachers to account for their own personal development, that is, to offer explanations of how and why they have been prompted to change their practices and to demonstrate publically that this change has led to an improvement... In this sense they may be accused of

prescriptivism and possibly even of being no further advanced in educational democracy than an interpretive tradition..."

This was significant as the systems of Kemmis, Elliott and Ebbutt were asking for application, whereas I wished to move further along the Action Research route. The purpose of this research was to position myself as a teacher researcher at the centre of the enquiry into AfL drawing on Whitehead's notion of a living educational theory (McNiff 1988:36) who states:

(Whitehead) is keen to keep the teacher-practitioner at the centre of the enquiry. Unless we keep the living 'I' in our educational discussions, he maintains, action research loses touch with reality and becomes an academic exercise."

If I examine the philosophy of my own work, which at the beginning of the study I struggled to articulate, it chimes more with the nature of educational research expressed in the second quote by McNiff. My thinking is now more clearly aligned with the articulated thinking of McNiff than the interpretivist tradition.

If we consider the statement from Whitehead & McNiff (2011: 241) that:

"the overall significance of Action Research as methodology is in relation to the capacity to generate and test living theory to improve learning in order to improve practice. In other words, it is possible through Action Research to offer explanation for processes of improving learning."

The development of the Action Research model has been significant; it could even be described as central, to this research as it also validates the nature of the desired "improve" paradigm (Gardner & Coombs, 2009) argued earlier, relating to the process of the improvement of learning.

It is clear as McNiff (1988: 45) states:

"Generative action research enables a teacher-researcher to address many different problems at one time without losing sight of the main issues."

This point clearly reflects the way I was able to develop this research over a period of time. The main issue for this study being the implementation of AfL but

linked to this were aspect of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the political reality at the time. It is important also to note (McNiff, 1988: 45) that:

“the inquiry can deviate from its original path as these aspects are explored.”

This methodology underpinned my own thinking but was used in conjunction with others in order to produce my own synthesised methodology. This methodology in turn draws on the work of Whitehead who reminds us about the messiness of Action Research, showing a process that becomes spirals on spirals, as exemplified in Figure 11; this concept of the messiness of research was significant in the methodology choices made as an integral part of this study:

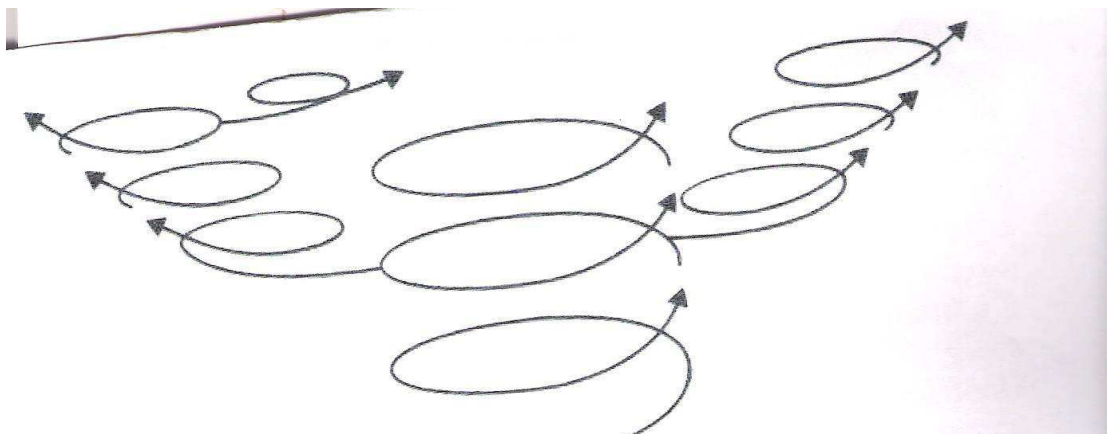


Figure 11: A diagram showing the 'messiness' of action research.

This study however is not simply the classic spiral upon spiral but also includes linear developmental elements, which is exemplified by the diagram above (Figure 11). McNiff and Whitehead (2011: 1) also state that:

“As a practitioner-researcher, you are aiming to generate theories about learning and practice, your own and other peoples.

Most of the action research literature talks about improving practice, but talks less about improving learning as the basis for improved practice and even less about how this should be seen as new theory and an important contribution to the world of idea. The literature tends to reinforce the portrayal of practitioners as doers, those who are competent to be involved in debates about knowledge, or who have good ideas about what is important in life and how we should live. Consequently, in

wider debates, including policy debates practitioners tend to be excluded, on the assumption that they are good at practice, but perhaps they should leave it to official theorists to explain, what, why and how people should learn and how they should use their knowledge.”

This paragraph is highly significant in the choice of methodology utilised in this study, because it accurately reflects my own experiences in conducting this study and it mirrors my own understanding. It is not just the literature that reflects this thinking, as the experiences I have had in schools is that practitioners themselves continue to maintain a similar outlook. These conclusions will also include a diagram which will attempt to explain the methodology of this study. There is also a degree of significance in the statement about policy, which can be seen as accurate; the examination of the implementation of the National Strategies later in this study will demonstrate this concept more clearly.

Importantly in relation to this study the task of researching Action Research methodology and its links to curriculum design in the UK can prove to be something of a challenge. The scholarly articles, available for the area of Action Research and curriculum design are mostly focussed on international development; such as those Canada and New Zealand, notably from Lambert (2002). It is significant that there is no link made in UK scholarly articles between research methodology and curriculum design relevant to this study, a conclusion which will be examined in more depth later in this study.

Combined with the Action Research methodology it was vital I synthesised this with the ideas relating to reflective practice.

“Drawing on Schon’s (1983) notion of reflective practice and Lewin (1946), Argyris et al. (1985) systemised the thinking and behaviour of reflective practice with the notion of ‘action science’. Action Science together with Lewin’s earlier term ‘action research’ has subsequently blossomed as a leading methodology linking the professions and the academy.” (Nehring et al., 2010: 401):

This quote accurately summarises the position I was in, with the methodology for the research being chosen as it was most relevant to apply to the study. Strauss points out in Hopkins, Bollington & Hewett (1989: 78) that:

“It is not only a question of the researcher designing a methodical, logical and structured methodology capable of handling the data and generating conclusions; it is also a matter of attention by the researcher to his or her internal dialogue. (Strauss 1987)”

The Action Research methodology was the most apposite for this study as a result of these considerations. It was, however, part of a synthesised methodology and consequently I wish to consider another important component in the synthesised methodology of this study; the relevance of Case Study methodology in relation to the research design. This research has emerged from my day to day activities and the reflections on my own and my teams’ practice.

4.3: Case study methodology

4.3.1: Case Study methodology an introduction:

The Case Study approach is also a significant in this study, as it can be effectively combined with Action Research in order to produce a synthesised methodology.

The use of the Case Study is described by Nisbet and Watt (1980: 72) as being:

“particularly appropriate for an individual researcher, because it gives the opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in depth within a limited timescale.”

This description can be seen to relate to the selection of the methodology for this study as the study was examining Assessment for Learning (AfL), which is larger than one aspect but can be seen as one ‘problem’ to be studied, and the timescale for the study was defined in some ways by the political change which occurred over time. The political changes from the inception of the National Strategy to the change in government in 2010 really solved the issue raised by Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 306) where:

“The case study researcher faces a strategic choice in deciding how much and how long the complexities of the case study should be studied.”

This was done by setting a timeframe for the study as previously described, with the study beginning with the implementation of the National Strategy and

concluding with the removal of their importance as a result of changes made by the coalition government, although the review of the impact took place after these later events. This was an empirical enquiry where the use of Case study can be said to summarise the original intent of this piece of work.

4.3.2: A consideration of Case Study methodology:

There are a number of considerations to be examined when looking at the Case Study methodology as Bell (1984: 97) points out:

“because case studies are often ‘close up’ accounts, it may be necessary to readjust the balance of power between the research community and those studies.”

This concept of adjustment in the balance of power is examined in more detail in relation to the ethics of feminist methodology as well as in the conclusions of this thesis. The study could potentially have been postulated purely as an exercise in Action Research because I was looking at changing practice but the Case Study methodology was incorporated as Nisbet and Watt (1980: 74) note:

“in case study, evidence is gathered by a variety of techniques. These include observation, interviews, examining documents or records or pupils work.”

All of these methods as well as others were utilised in this particular study and will be examined in the subsequent section on methods.

Bell (1984: 94) points out that:

“the techniques for collecting information for a case study are held in common with a wider tradition of sociological and anthropological fieldwork.”

It is also important to note the criticisms of this particular methodology as Nisbet and Watt (1980: 76) state:

“results are not easily generalizable”

This factor would need to be taken into account in another type of study. However, for the Action Research project on AfL, which was a small scale project originally the results would be unique to this particular study but the impact could

be potentially be generalizable. This fact is not problematical as Denzin and Lincoln (1996: 306) point out:

"The purpose of the case study is not to represent the world but to represent the case."

The possibility of taking the results and comparing them to other studies and to the political changes over time is still available to the researcher, even though there might have been restrictions on the study had it only used the Case Study methodology; however because of the fact the Action Research framework and the improve paradigm underpinned the methodology this was not as significant.

This study began as an attempt to reconceptualise AfL and there is a contribution to make as Bell (1984: 101) describes it:

"The best case studies are capable of offering some support to alternative interpretations. Case studies considered as problems, may form an archive of descriptive material sufficiently rich to admit subsequent re-interpretation."

Another aspect of this is that, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000: 115) state:

"Triangulation can be a very useful technique when a researcher is engaged in a case study."

This too is an aspect of the methods used, which are important to this study and will be described in the methods section and examined in greater depth in the conclusions section.

In support of the utilisation of these forms of methodology McNiff states:

"Case study appeals to the 'grounded theory' of Glaser and Strauss (1967) in that the knowledge and interpretation of educational phenomenon must be grounded in the reality of class practice."

The concept of grounded theory is one which will be examined in more detail later in this chapter, as it has been described as an *"inductive methodology."* this means it is more open ended and exploratory and is another foundation underpinning the methodology of this study.

One criticism of the Case Study methodology has been described by McNiff (1988: 17); describing it as *“being woolly with little scientific rigour”*. However, owing to the nature of this study the idea of a ‘scientific’ or ‘positivist’ methodology was not considered to be appropriate. I developed an awareness of the methodology and an understanding that there were a number of issues relating to the Case Study methodology as Bell (1994: 99) points out:

“Having begun to collect information, the case study worker will find that the data raises further problems familiar to experimental research as questions of reliability and threats to internal and external validity.”

These issues impinged on my understanding and the issue of validity will be dealt with in relation to the paradigms concerning the terminology relating to assessment.

This study can best be described as being part of the tradition described by Kennedy in the book by Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 32) as stated previously and is used to:

“illustrate a point, a condition, a category, something important for instruction (Kennedy, 1979)”

4.4: Ethnography and Critical Theory:

It can also be argued that this study can also fit within the ideas relating to ethnography as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 2) point out:

“All social research is founded on the human capacity for participant observation.”

As this study was looking at my own and others practice in action and was attempting to examine whether AfL made a difference in ordinary classrooms, this could be described as reflecting on the world of education in order to make sense of the events, the study was also taking place over a period of time.

These synthesised methodologies can be seen as being part of the tradition linked to ethnographical research as Hammersley and Atkinson (1992: 2) describe:

“Ethnography bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life.”

This quote is significant because it epitomises what I was attempting to achieve through my engagement with Action Research.

A statement made about ethnographical research is true about most types of methodologies; in that, depending on the type of research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992: 112):

“outsiders and insiders are likely to have immediate access to different sorts of information. And they are also exposed to different kind of methodological dangers.”

This link between the Action Research cycle and ethnographical research is demonstrated in the following quotation from Woods (1986: 110), which accurately reflects the methodology originally underpinning the experiments in this study:

“Analysis in ethnography it goes on simultaneously with data collection. As one observes interviews, makes up field notes and the research diary, one does not simply ‘record’. There is also reflection, which in turn informs subsequent data collection.”

This quote accurately reflects the methodological approach taken by me, with the observations of the initial small-scale experiment informing subsequent ideas. I developed my reflexivity and my understanding of feminist ethics in line with my developing understanding of the data. The aspect of reflection was the most powerful tool in informing the design of subsequent data collection strategies, with the Action Research cycles moving on at each point of reflection.

As McNiff (1988: 15) states this demonstrates a clear:

“debt in this tradition to anthropology and ethnography.”

Cohen Manion and Morrison (2000: 30) define this process as:

“As ideology is not mere theory but impacts directly on practice (Eagleton, 1991) there is a strongly practical methodology implied by critical theory, which articulates with Action Research (Callewaert, 1999). Action Research as its name suggests, is about research that impacts on and focusses on practice.”

This explanation was one which closely mirrored my own thinking and the way in which the project developed over the period of time of the study. I needed to continually consider the methods I was using in the study and re-assess them in relation to the proposed methodologies, as a consequence I took into account the statement made in Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 537) where they saw the:

“mix of qualitative and quantitative methods at the methodological level”

They also pointed out (1994: 537):

“Guba and Lincoln strongly contest the mixing of inquiry approaches at the paradigm level. They argue for example, that one cannot simultaneously adhere to the objectivist detachment of conventional science and the subjectivist involvement of interpretivism.”

As a result of these points I began re-examining the type of research paradigm and hence the methodologies I could use and was made aware that as qualitative research would be used there was no legitimate reason to use a purely quantitative paradigm. It was stimulating to note according to Hitchcock and Hughes (1994: 10) that the:

“qualitative research tradition...provide an important alternative to the quantitative statistical experimental paradigm which has been the major influence in informing UK educational policy.”

The qualitative research paradigm had already been postulated in relation to the education sector, although it did not seem to inform the implementation of the National Strategy, a point which will be examined in more depth elsewhere in this thesis.

Soltis (1989) quoted in Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 55) reflects on the idea of critical ethnography which impacts critically on the current research:

*“He identifies **descriptive qualitative research, qualitative educational evaluation research, and intervention qualitative research** and finally **critique (critical ethnography)**.”*

These points could all be described as being relevant to the current study as it fits with the area of qualitative educational evaluation. It could be argued, however, that this research more accurately fits into the participant researcher style of ethnographic methodology.

Participant research has been described by Woods (1986: 33) that:

"Participant observation, which in practice tends to be a combination of methods, or rather a style of research."

This quote somewhat contradicts the idea that the participant observer is part of the ethnographical research tradition; however, the links between ethnographical research and this study are clear. There is a point made by Woods (1986: 46) which again accurately reflects my experience as an emergent researcher in that:

"It is customary for ethnographers to 'flounder around' in the data for a while and there are frequent references to 'muddling through'."

This statement is something I can clearly identify with, due to the amount and type of data which was generated by this study.

As a consequence of evaluating these theories the ethnographical research methodology can be seen to inform the way this study was constructed, in part. There have been suggestions made by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 22) that:

"There is little justification for the view, associated with naturalism, that ethnography represents a superior, alternative paradigm to quantitative research."

This is a statement I can clearly endorse. The methodology chosen for this study incorporated aspects of ethnographical research but these were chosen as being the most appropriate for the study, not simply because they were part of the ethnographical tradition. The links between Action Research and Ethnography are clear with the interpretative tradition being described by McNiff (1988: 15) as:

"essentially sociological."

There is a clear debt in this tradition to anthropology and ethnography."

The interpretivist tradition focuses on comparing and attempting to resolve the discrepancies between the etic and the emic, the observers and the actors."

This can be seen as clearly reflecting the ideas from the Action Research framework seen in section 4.3 and links these ideas very closely together in respect of this study. These connections between Action Research, Case Study and Grounded Theory also all link to the idea of Critical Theory. This is because Whitehead and McNiff (2011: 47) state:

"Some researchers, however, still link to locate action research within a broad framework of critical theory, emphasizing its participatory nature to combat relations of power."

This was not a consideration I felt was apposite for this study as although my role meant it appears as if I was in a position of power, in relation to the implementation of the National Strategy this was not a consideration. It can be argued as Cohen Manion and Morrison (2000: 28) do that:

"critical theory seeks to uncover the interests at work in particular situations and to interrogate the legitimacy of those intents."

"Its intention is transformative; to transform society and individuals to social democracy."

This study was not intentionally seeking transformation of society at the beginning of the research but could be said to be examining the **transformation of practice** both of myself and of my immediate colleagues, which could in time lead to a transformation of an aspect of society. This is significant in terms of the outcomes of this study.

Others like Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 302) might argue that the importance of critical theory is related to:

"The work of ethnographers, critical theorists, institutional demographers, and many others has conceptual and stylistic patterns that not only amplify the taxonomy but extend the foundation for case study research in the social sciences and social services."

This is suggesting the work of critical theorists cannot be judged in isolation but is related to a number of other theorists who ultimately contribute to the Case Study type of methodology. These ideas can also be linked to the ideas postulated by Soltis in relation to critical ethnography and the ethics of qualitative research.

Hammersley (1992: 197) pointed out:

“Researchers necessarily claim some intellectual authority by publishing their findings also carry some important implications for the organisation of research. The other side of the claim to intellectual authority is an obligation on the part of researchers to ensure that, as far as possible, the information is reliable, and this responsibility cannot be shifted onto the people studied.”

These suggestions are supported in Hammersley and Atkinson’s later book (3rd edition, 2007: 21) where they state:

“It is emphasised that the production of knowledge by researchers has consequences. At the very least, the publication of research findings can shape the climate in which political and practical decisions are made, and it may even directly stimulate particular sorts of action. In fact, it may change the character of the situations that were studied.”

This in fact reflects one of the aims of this study as I was looking to stimulate particular types of actions within the schools where I conducted the research. I was interested in attempting to influence the implementation of political ideas of the time and also to examine whether the political changes had significant impact on the practice of teachers. All of these considerations were part of the synthesised methodological framework I developed as part of this study. The considerations of Action Research, Case study and the grounding in ethnography all related to me developing understanding as a researcher and were linked to the fact that I was a female researcher, a concept I have previously examined as part of my philosophical position.

4.5: Methods used to collect the data:

The methods used to collect the data were varied and some have already been touched upon. The original small scale study used a combination of methods

including the use of a reflective journal and observations. Other methods which were then developed included the use of observations, interviews both structured and semi-structured, surveys and peer questioning. The method used to analyse this data was grounded in the qualitative rather than a quantitative framework. Each of these methods will be examined in order to justify their use and to explain how they contributed to the generation of a grounded theory.

4.5.1: Reflective journal:

The journal was the basis on which I built my development as a researcher with the original small scale project being recorded as a naive attempt to summarise my findings as a starting point. Robson (3rd Edition 2011: 270) suggests that the reflective journal can be *“viewed as an unstructured variant of a diary.”* I would contend that this is an over simplification as the journal was used more systematically in order to support observations and in an attempt to triangulate material. This was then coded to find the common themes and link these to the original and subsequent research questions.

4.5.2: Observations:

Observations were used to gather data so as part of the initial Action Research cycles working together, the L.A. Consultant/Adviser and I began the initial review of implementation in School A by doing some observations and work sampling on objective led lessons.

As part of this cycle of Action Research I was looking to impact on the practice of others; as a result I wished to conduct an audit of the position School A was in, the aims and methods for this can be seen in Chapter 5.2 Findings from School A. (Appendix 1) Linked to this audit there were a number of lesson observations undertaken. These lesson observations were focussed on the AfL concepts I launched with the staff. From this review of the baseline for School A the results were shared with staff, in a fairly simplistic way, as part of a training day. This audit was collected as part of my work with the staff in School A and focussed on the written information to be found in Schemes of Work produced by the different faculties. As can be seen from the information above I was using a mixed

methods approach in order to identify the issues within the school and also to generate data as part of this study.

In the second round of Action Research cycles there was a CPD package delivered to all the teaching staff in School B. The methods used to examine the impact of the work included lesson observations as well as the work scrutinies and student voice questionnaires.

The information was shared with the governors of the school via the Curriculum and Students Committee which comprised of teacher governors, lay governors and Local Authority appointed governors along with representatives of the student body. In this forum I presented a PowerPoint explaining the basic ideas relating to AfL; I also explained where the school was in relation to the implementation of the AfL strategy. The information available for this had been established by the use of learning walks around the school. These Learning Walks were designed as observations of parts of lessons and focussed on AfL strategies. The Learning Walk observation analysis gives a sample of this information and in this particular research cycle this activity took place on 3 occasions.

These learning walks were based again on a very simple proforma which can be filled in relatively quickly and can be used to establish a baseline; the findings can then be used to revisit the teacher again later. An example of the proforma, which can be described as a simple data collection tool can be seen below. This proforma developed out of the work from the reflective journal where I coded the original lesson observations and is an attempt to examine key aspects of the AfL strategy. It was created to allow both myself and others to quickly record whether the basic concepts of AfL were visible within a lesson and to make any additional comments if necessary.

Teacher..... Observer.....

	Yes	No	Comment
Evidence of skills based, effective learning objectives			
Evidence students are making progress			

Evidence of high quality questioning			
Evidence of self/ peer assessment/feedback			
Evidence of high quality feedback			

This proforma was then amended after the first occasion of its use by removing the NO column as it was superfluous to requirements and a final refinement was the addition of a line at the bottom of the form which examined the use of additional adults.

Observations were a key method of data collection as they informed my understanding of how the research questions were being addressed but they could only work in conjunction with other methods which included work sampling,

4.5.3: Work sampling:

The request below in Figure 12 was generated in conjunction with the Deputy Head teacher responsible for curriculum in School A as a result of reviewing the first Action Research cycle as a next step in this Action Research project.

To all staff

Could you please pass a photocopy of the milestone assessment from Term 1 for the following pupils to your head of faculty by the end of Tuesday 16th January?

This will need to include the assessment itself and any written feedback provided to the pupil.

Year 7

A C 7X2: G K 7Z2: J W 7Z2: P C 7X3: C M 7X2: D K 7Z1

Year 8

M V8Z3: D T 8X2: A O 8Z1: K P 8X3: D P 8Z2: N F 8X1

Year 9

A C 9Z1: T G 9X1: H K 9Z2: D R9X2: T W 9Z1: J McD 9Z1

Figure 12: Request for milestone assessment pieces from School A.

I selected these students in order to ensure a representative sample of abilities found within the school was represented. The students work also came from as many different teaching groups as possible; this was a conscious decision I

made in order to sample the feedback from as many of the teaching staff across the school in as efficient a way as possible. It was not possible to sample each individual member of staff as when work was sampled it was not always representative of what was actually happening in the department. By sampling the same students across the school this meant I received a view of the actual experience the students underwent and what they were experiencing in reality. This was an attempt on my part to develop my sampling techniques as my research experience developed and involved sampling approximately 4% of the Key Stage 3 students in the school. This was chosen as it represented a sample from each tutor group in Key Stage 3 and meant that all areas of the curriculum would be sampled.

Linked to this sampling of student work was the fact that the “milestone assessment” task had previously been requested from the faculties. These assessments had been examined by me to see if they met any of the formative criteria previously discussed. This time the work focused on students from Key Stage 3, although the requirements for “milestone assessments” were also present in the school at Key Stage 4.

Within the school environment at School B a work scrutiny proforma was applied to a random sample of students across the school. This work sample proforma collected data in a very simplistic way in order to establish another baseline. The students selected were from Key Stage 3 (Year 7 to 9) in order to get an overview of the position the school was in. From this exercise I then took the results and these were then summarised for use with the subject leaders in order to establish what the practice was across the school.

In School B there were similar processes undertaken in relation to the implementation of AfL as all members of the teaching staff included at least one aspect of AfL in their teaching on a regular basis. The school leadership decided to include an AfL target for all in the Performance Management (PM) process. During the PM process staff were asked to complete a simple audit. These audits and work samples allowed me to collect a wide variety of data in order to compare it to the information gathered from observations.

4.5.4: Semi structured interviews:

The findings from the work summarised below in Chapter 5.3 begins with the semi-structured interviews conducted with students by the LA Consultant/Adviser. These results were gathered as a result of a process, which could be seen as part of the Case Study nature of this study, using ideas generated by Nisbet and Watt 1984 in Cohen et al., 2000:

“they catch unique features that might hold the key to understanding the situation and they provide insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases”

The semi-structured interviews moved on to examine the way in which students knew how well they were doing. The use of the Local Authority Consultant/Adviser was a conscious choice in School A as I believed if I was asking the questions I would elicit a different response. The use of the LA Consultant/Adviser also validated the work in the eyes of members of staff.

4.5.5: Questionnaires:

In School B a number of questionnaires were developed as a method of capturing larger amounts of data in a relatively short space of time. One example of this was that ideas concerning oral feedback were reviewed; combined with ideas related to written feedback at the end of the term by means of a questionnaire applied to all year 7 teaching groups. In order to minimise the effect of different interpretations of the questionnaire I ensured that I was the only person involved in their distribution. The students were asked to fill in a series of questions based on the basic ideas to be found in the work of Black and Wiliam. (See Figure 13)

My teacher always shares the learning objectives	When my teacher marks my work they give it a level	When my teacher marks my work they give it a comment	I get chance to improve my work using the comments I am given	I know what working at level I am	I know what my target level for the future is	I know what to do to improve
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Figure 13: Questionnaire applied to year 7 pupils at School B.

Each student was asked the same questions relating to each subject they studied and the results tabulated by myself.

The same questionnaire was applied to another year group this time Year 12 in Key Stage 5. The information to Curriculum and Students Committee utilised the results of the questionnaires in order to build up a picture of how well the AfL strategy was being implemented.

4.5.6: Methods; a conclusion:

The methods selected were utilised to ensure the data was triangulated using observations, work samples and semi structured interviews involving the same students wherever possible in order that the impact could be examined. This was due to the fact that this was a project which was designed to improve my own and others' practice. The use of each method of data collection was examined to assess its impact in the first cycle of Action Research and then reviewed throughout the cycles with only the most appropriate being retained.

4.6: Grounded Theory:

4.6.1: Grounded theory and research design

Grounded theory as a significant concept provided a number of aspects which needs to be considered in relation to the methodology adopted in this study as these ideas clearly link to the ideas postulated in Action Research and the Case Study methodologies.

The intention behind my research design was to generate a grounded theory and the table below by Creswell (2005) in Ellis and Levy (2009) accurately summarises the ideas I had previously considered in relation to this study:

<i>Type of grounded theory design</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Systematic design</i>	<i>"emphasises the use of data analysis steps of open, axial and selective coding, and the development of a logic paradigm or visual</i>

	<i>picture of the theory generated” (Cresswell, 2005: 397)</i>
<i>Emerging design</i>	<i>“letting the theory emerge from the data rather than using specific pre-set categories (Cresswell, 2005: .401)</i>
<i>Constructivist design</i>	<i>“focus on the meanings ascribed by participants in a study...more interested in the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies of individuals than in gathering facts and describing acts” (Cresswell, 2005: 402)</i>

Figure 14: My considerations from Creswell and Ellis and Levy.

This table summarises the concepts relating to the design of this research study as, if a ‘best fit’ type of design methodology were to be articulated by myself, it could be described as a cross between emerging design and constructivist design. This is due to the fact that as the time taken for this study progressed; the theories about the concept of AfL and its impact on the schools studied emerged. These theories were triangulated in a number of ways, as seen in the methods section above. This links to constructivist design, as this study can be seen as examining the views of a variety of individuals, but there was an element of reconceptualization emerging from the findings. It could be argued that, at the start of the study there were no pre-formulated ideas about how the concept of AfL would be viewed. This is true both of myself and the different stakeholders and the understanding of the concepts only developed as the study progressed. The theories about the change and development in understanding of these ideas are grounded in my own experiences and it can be said, to quote directly from Glaser and Strauss (1976: 6 (2009 printing)) that:

“Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research.”

This quote is highly significant as it can be said to accurately describe the process I went through over the period of this study. The generation of my own grounded theory was not originally a conscious methodological decision but developed as a result of peer discussion as time progressed. These developments reflect the ideas postulated in Hopkins, Bollinger and Hewett (1989: 75), which states that:

“The way the methodological framework accommodates the necessary self-conscious role of the researcher and/or provides a basis for reconciling the individual working practices of team members.

The way in which this process leads to the generation of grounded theory.”

Once again this is a clear and accurate reflection of the growth and development I underwent during the course of this study.

McNiff (1988: 15) links the idea of Grounded Theory to the use of Case Study, which again can be seen as significant in the context of this study. As time progressed, as an emergent researcher, I was utilising these ideas in a more conscious way during the later stages of this research. This study is grounded in various constructs including the wider context of the political situation, of which class in all its many forms plays an important part.

4.7: Ethics:

As this study is based on personal experience and uses an Action Research framework it is important that ethical guidelines are followed and early in the study I considered the importance of ethics as part of the research project. The design of this research subscribes to the principles of research ethics outlined in the Bath Spa University Graduate handbook (Bath Spa University, 2009).

As Schaenen, Kohnen, Flinn, Saul, and Zeni (2012:80) state:

“the researcher is an “I” whose stakeholder perspective is an ethical stance... Action research is driven by stakeholders whose knowing engagement and decision making are essential.

The ethical need for multiple perspectives is central to what we mean by good teacher research."

There is a link between the social ethics used in this study as I have based my work on the ethical guidelines laid down by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 1992: 4) which states that:

"all educational research should be conducted within the ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values, and respect for the quality of educational research," a statement I wholeheartedly subscribe to.

It is important to note that the research should be collected in as transparent a way as possible and should allow access to the results for any interested parties. The researcher has to ensure that the participants are aware of what is happening and should where possible give permission for their involvement to be documented. The researcher has also to ensure (BERA, 1992: 10) that it is important to:

"report research conceptions, procedures, results and analyses accurately and in sufficient detail to allow other researchers to understand and interpret them"

The anonymity of the participants should also be maintained. It is also important to explain that according to the BERA (1992: 10) guidelines:

"Educational researchers should communicate their findings and the practical significance of their research in clear, straightforward and appropriate language to relevant research populations, institutional representatives and other stakeholders"

This statement is a central tenet of my belief as a researcher and is one to which this study will wholeheartedly subscribe. As a result of this the study will describe events and results in a way which wherever possible anonymises the participants. This impacted on the study as I ensured that I was able to obtain the consent of the participants where possible and in designing some of the data capture techniques I needed to ensure I was following the required ethical guidelines. In practice the social ethics of the study were all integral to the research paradigm used and did not restrict the methods used.

This study was a situation which required the use of engaged ethics as I followed the principle expressed by Schaenen, Kohnen, Flinn, Saul, and Zeni (2012:82) which:

“include taking action when justice issues arise in day to day practice and respecting the professional dignity of others in the setting.”

My ideas of ethics was also influenced by the fact that I am a female researcher and according to Carol Gilligan (1982) quoted in Hammersley and Trianou (2012: 29):

“women tend to differ from men in the character of their ethical judgements. Emphasising interpersonal relationships rather than abstract notions.”

Most significantly in regard to this study is the fact that as Hammersley and Trianou (2012: 55) state:

“the primary obligation of any occupational practitioner is to try to pursue the occupational goal effectively.”

I was thus attempting to pursue my objective of impacting on my own and others practice whilst acting ethically.

4.8: Conclusions and claims for quality:

The research contained within this study could best be described as being based on the interpretivist tradition as it is studying the qualitative analysis of data. The methodology used is a combination of Action Research framework discussed above combined with Case Study methodology in order to generate a Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Throughout the study use is made of the ethnographical research techniques with the added influence of Critical Theory. The triangulation of data is important in the study and throughout I was aware of the importance of the types of both method and methodology used. This understanding developed throughout the extended period of time over which this study was conducted. The next chapter will examine the findings from the research undertaken in Schools A and B.

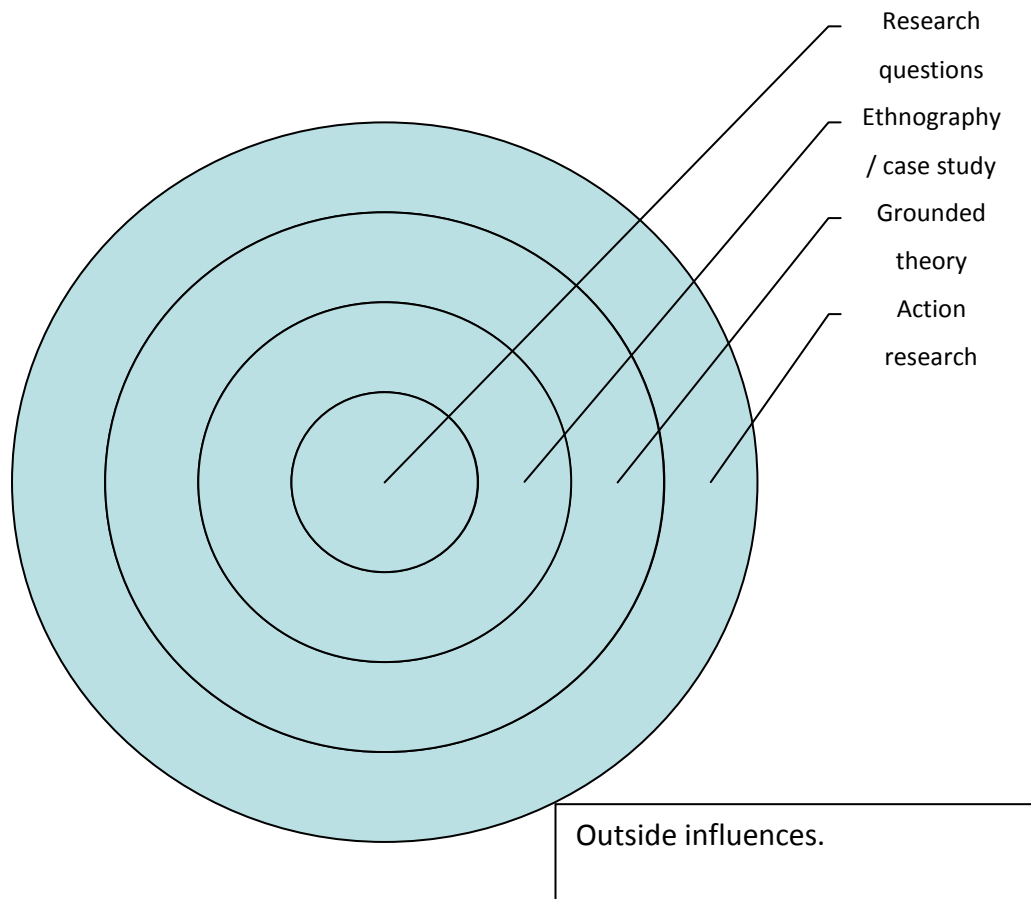


Figure 15: A model of the methodology used in relation to research question.

The methodology is based on the Action Research framework as exemplified in the unique figure in Chapter 7.3.2. This demonstrates the use of the Action Research framework and the figure below shows the model of the methodology used and its links to the research questions which are the centre of the model. This model can be said to describe the nature of applied research for creating change, in this case AfL but can be transferred to other research scenarios.

Claims for quality can be viewed as being located within the methodology. This encompasses the authenticity and relevance of the research and how the research process operated. The findings were triangulated using methodological coherence and this was based in the critical analysis used. There were peer checks in place at relevant points and a deliberate use of the first person to ensure clarity. Included in the methodology was detailed descriptions of the context, methods and findings, all of which were referenced to the Literature. The next two chapters will demonstrate the use of the methodology and exemplify the findings from the

Action Research cycles in two different environments. This will exemplify my intended contribution to knowledge as they seek to establish the unique nature of culture in schools and how this Action Research project developed my understanding of the theories of social justice, as well as findings relating to CPD provision in schools.

Chapter 5: Findings School A

This chapter provides an introduction to the research project; the research design as it was applied in School A and subsequently describes the findings generated by the project in School A. The findings from first set of Action Research cycles are examined and linked to the improve paradigm. These are then reflected on in order to generate the next set of Action Research cycles.

5.1: Introduction:

The interest in Assessment for Learning (AfL) as an Action Research project was triggered by the initial training on Assessment for Learning from the Key Stage 3 Strategy in England's Secondary Schools, which I then pursued further by examining the strategies in a real world context.

The key idea which triggered my interest, as previously described, was that stated by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 2):

“an assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback... becomes formative assessment when the evidence is used to adapt the teaching work to meet the learning needs”

This statement was particularly significant as it inspired the original Action Research project that enabled me to ground the work in a theoretical framework. My aim for the original very small-scale project was to assess for myself the usefulness of the supplied National Strategy AfL materials. I was inspired to attempt this limited experiment by the accessibility of the original research and designed some new approaches mirroring these ideas. At the start of this enquiry I did not articulate the concept of embarking on an Action Research project as I was an emergent researcher and as such I was not in the position to clearly articulate my thinking.

5.2: Findings from School A:

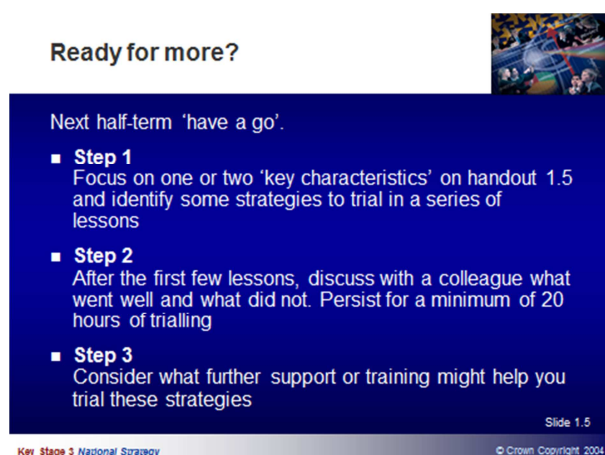
5.2.1: Initial findings from School A:

As an emergent researcher I used a very simplistic method to conduct the initial small scale experiment, having followed the ideas postulated in Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 26) where the:

“teacher was free to choose which class would be the focus for their action plan...there was no possibility of conducting a standard research experiment.”

Having conducted this small scale experiment I then attended the second day of training on the “Effective Management of the Foundation Strand” where an action plan for the whole school training was formulated. Working with my line manager, the Deputy Head responsible for curriculum, I had already identified the need to focus whole school training on certain aspects of AfL and had made some decisions relating to who should be involved in more intensive work. As a result of discussions with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in the school, it was felt that to begin with there was a need to produce a school wide system for the dissemination of the key messages and to identify which departments could take a lead on the development of the AfL strand of the National Strategies. This was the first significant moment in the Action Research Cycle as I was reflecting on the information gathered and attempting to improve the practice of others to impact on the outcomes for students.

In order to disseminate this information the decisions was taken to utilise the provided AfL training resources; as exemplified below in Figure 16. These were used with staff in School A to explain the concept of AfL and how it should be adopted.



Ready for more?

Next half-term 'have a go'.

- **Step 1**
Focus on one or two 'key characteristics' on handout 1.5 and identify some strategies to trial in a series of lessons
- **Step 2**
After the first few lessons, discuss with a colleague what went well and what did not. Persist for a minimum of 20 hours of trialling
- **Step 3**
Consider what further support or training might help you trial these strategies

Slide 1.5
Key Stage 3 National Strategy © Crown Copyright 2004

Figure 16: Slide from the DfES training materials.

Having begun by working with my own practice I then introduced the concept of Assessment for Learning to the whole staff, from that point I then worked with selected Heads of Department in order to examine good practice across the school and used these as exemplars for other staff. The outcomes from this work constitute the research findings from School A.

Following on from the small scale study; the dissemination of the AfL training materials and discussions with my line manager one of the early findings from this work was that the SLT identified that the school assessment and marking policy needed to be amended in light of the work on AfL which was to follow. We also identified a need for the identification of AfL opportunities across all the key stages (3, 4 and 5); as the school leadership agreed with me on the premise that if the work on AfL could significantly raise achievement at KS3, as argued by the fact that the Government was willing to implement the work as part of the Key Stage 3 Strategy, then it could have similar positive results at Key Stages 4 and 5. This follows on from the fact that Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003: 29) stated that:

“it is likely that improvements equivalent to between one quarter and one half a GCSE grade per student per subject are achievable.”

Following the initial dissemination of the Strategy materials to the whole staff I then continued on the premise that staff at School A were familiar with the principles for Assessment for Learning, as the government’s key messages had been shared on a training day and I had presented the ideas to teachers new to the school as part of a CPD event. This showed a naivety in understanding as the subsequent work demonstrated a lack of familiarity and understanding amongst the staff.

According to the Key Stage 3 Strategy training materials the self-evaluation tools meant it was possible to establish where the school was in relation to government guidelines. In order to further establish clarity of thinking about these ideas I worked with a Local Authority (L.A.) Consultant/Adviser which gave the

implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy added status, in the eyes of some members of staff.

Working together, the L.A. Consultant/Adviser and I began the initial review of implementation by doing some work sampling on objective led lessons. In the Appendices as Audit of Provision in School A there is a basic rationale and schedule for the work on objective led lessons and other components of AfL (which has been anonymised in line with the ethical guidelines). This shows the support of the schools' leadership team to the work being undertaken and the fact that it was being reported to governors on a regular basis gave the work added impetus. This work became part of the Action Research cycles as at this point I had moved my thinking on from the original position of being an unwitting researcher. I was now beginning to work within the improve paradigm and I was not only looking to simply amend my own practice. As part of this cycle of Action Research I was looking to impact on the practice of others, notably teachers; as a result I wished to conduct an audit of the position School A was in which can be seen in the Appendices as Appendix 1: Audit of provision of AfL School A.

This audit was collected as part of my work with the staff in School A and the findings are focussed on the written information to be found in Schemes of Work produced by the different faculties. The main findings from this exercise are summarised below in Figure 17 and have been anonymised in line with the ethical guidelines.

	Learning objectives	Learning outcomes	Independent learning
Department A: Subject 1 KS4 Subject 1 KS5	Clear and unambiguous Clear	Linked to objectives and successful	No evidence
Department B: Subject 1 KS4 Subject 1 KS5	No evidence Content not skills driven	No marking available Linked to success criteria	No evidence No evidence
Department C: Subject 1 KS4 Subject 2 KS4 Subject 2 KS5 Subject 3 KS4	Available Clear Clear Clear	Limited progress Expected outcomes successful Expected outcomes successful Expected outcomes successful	No evidence Supported independent learning Supported independent learning Supported independent learning
Department D: Subject 1 KS4 Subject 1 KS5	Clear Good links to teaching strategies	Successful Good	No evidence No evidence
Department E: Subject 1 KS4 Subject 1 KS5	Aims not learning objectives Clear	Outcomes linked to activities Clear	Little evidence Some evidence
Department F: Subject 1 KS5 Subject 2 KS4 Subject 3 KS4 Subject 3 KS5 Subject 4 KS5 Subject 5 KS5	Not available Not available Not clear Not clear Task based Clear and well defined	Not evident Some evidence Not clear Not clear Not clear Expected outcomes successful	No evidence No evidence Not evident No evidence No evidence No evidence

Figure 17: Work sample results table.

The data collected was summarised at the time using the qualitative language used above. This was a conscious choice owing to the nature of the material. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006: 475) maintain that research questions are vitally important in multi-strategy design research involving both quantitative and qualitative aspects, where the research questions:

“in large part, dictate the type of research design used, the sample size and sampling scheme employed, and the type of instruments administered as well as the data analysis techniques (i.e. statistical or qualitative) used”.

I had chosen to examine the research questions linked to the implementation of the different AfL strands so consequently in the summary of the findings it is clear that there was variety in the experience the students received across the subjects in the school; with some subjects in some departments being further advanced in their use of AfL strategies, including those of sharing objectives with pupils, than others. These findings mirrored the comments made by Jones and Tanner (2nd Ed, 2006: 111).

“Stating learning objectives at the start of the lesson is coming to be regarded as good practice.”

Linked to this audit there were a number of lesson observations undertaken which focussed on the AfL concepts I launched with the staff. From this review of the baseline for School A the results were then shared with staff, in a fairly simplistic way, as part of a training day. The feedback used the following information produced as a PowerPoint presentation; there are exemplifications of the slides below as Figure 18.

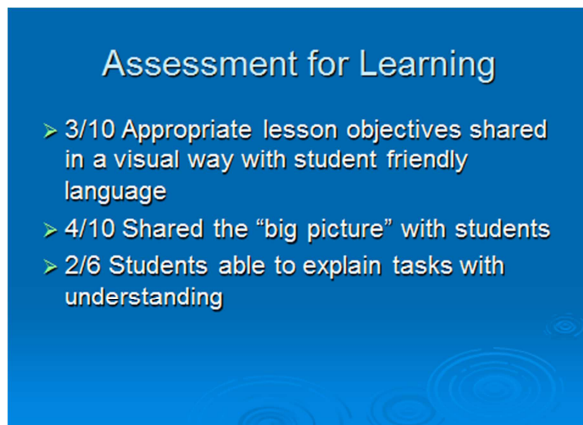


Figure 18: PowerPoint slide from the presentation to staff in School A.

The rationale for sharing this information was that it was part of the Action Research cycles although it does exemplify my conceptual naivety at the time, as I was initially convinced that the concept of sharing good practice would result in other staff changing their practice. As can be seen from the summary of results that despite having shared these ideas initially less than 50% of the lessons observed showed the use of key AfL strategies. This lack of progress and my own assumptions about what progress I thought I would see reinforces my conceptual naivety at this point. This key finding is related to my development as a researcher but can also be linked to the fact that making assumptions in regard to the implementation of a Strategy is also conceptually naive.

5.2.2: Initial conclusions from findings:

From an examination of this data it can be seen that there are some initial conclusions to be drawn from these findings, which show a lack of development of AfL strategies across the school. This can be seen as significant as it reinforces the idea that each school is a culturally unique institution. This concept was also significant in the development of the Action Research cycles; although it is clear that my understanding of the ideas were still conceptually raw at this point. These conclusions resulted in a number of actions.

As a consequence of these findings and following this sharing with staff an action plan was instituted in order to move the school forward in relation to the findings encompassed above. I was involved in generating the plan generated in

conjunction with the SLT which can be seen as the next phase in the Action Research cycle.

As an integral part of the action plan the training needs of the various departments were discussed with them. The plans were then further clarified and produced in detail with an expectation that the departments would engage with them. Once again this demonstrates a naivety on my part as there was no reason to suppose these methods would be any more successful than the original cycle. A training day was also organised to address the findings of the initial action research cycle.

During the training day, the following requirements were made explicit; that there was to be a subsequent response required from faculties. The faculties were asked to respond to the following task.

- How are you going to share learning objectives with students visually?
- What will your milestone tasks with clear success criteria for Years 7 and 9 for term 4 be? To be given to XX by 23rd March
- Completed tasks to be marked and samples provided to XX from all staff by 5th May.
- Faculties to set targets by 23rd March using work from milestone assessments to help with this
- SMART targets to be provided to students for Pupil Development Planning (PDP) day on 30th March.

Figure 19: Response required from faculties as part of the Action Plan in School A.

It was felt, following discussion with SLT that if relatively short deadlines were set then staff would be able to deliver within the timeframe and consequently these targets were considered to be SMART. In conjunction with the SLT, I was looking at developing this school wide initiative and was clear in my own mind about the impact that this could have on the students; however, there was to be an issue regarding the engagement of the “hearts and minds” of the staff which would affect the development of the Strategy within the school. This idea relating to winning over “hearts and minds” had been discussed on day 2 of the “Effective

Management of the Foundation Subject Strand Strategy” by the L.A. Consultant/Adviser who suggested starting with a limited group, as it was felt this would spread the information more effectively as more people “championed” the cause. This again reflected the thinking of one of the writers on AfL; Shirley Clarke (2005: 157):

“it needs a “champion” in a school for the first few years to keep it high profile”

The next stages of developing the strategy involved me, the LA Consultant/Adviser plus the SLT working together to move things forward and it was at this point I was looking at the use of formative assessment within classes. This was another step on my Action Research journey, which allowed me to reflect on what had been achieved to this point and the steps which were going to be needed in order to move the implementation of AfL as well as my own understanding forward. The reflections on the Action Research cycle at this point allowed me to develop my understanding of my own position and reflect on my previous naivety in making assumptions about the engagement of others, which was to prove increasingly significant throughout the project. This reflection occurred following peer discussion and the involvement of my line manager in discussions about the outcomes of the AfL implementation. There was also peer discussions linked to the concept of the improve paradigm with my line manager who was conducting a separate research project at the time and was able to engage with my reflection on the progress of my Action Research journey.

One of the key development areas for the school was to improve what were described at this point “milestone” assessments; which is where departments built in the opportunity for students to receive formative feedback on significant pieces of work. This feedback was to be put in place in order to allow the students to identify areas to improve in order to make progress. This was in line with the thinking expressed in Shalveson in conjunction with Black, Wiliam and Coffey in Education, Evaluation and Policy Analysis (2003: 11) when he states:

“It becomes imperative, then, to align formative and summative assessment.”

As a result of this work on the next steps of this Action Research project, the request seen in the Appendices as Appendix 2: Request for milestone assessment pieces in School A was generated by me in conjunction with the Deputy Head teacher responsible for curriculum.

As previously stated I made a conscious choice in regard to work sampling in order to ensure a representative sample of abilities were represented. The feedback sample was from as many of the teaching staff across the school as possible. This resulted in receiving a view of the actual experience of the students and was an attempt on my part to develop my sampling techniques as my research experience developed.

Linked to this sampling of student work was the fact that the “milestone assessment” task had previously been requested from the faculties. These assessments had been examined in order to see if they met any of the formative criteria previously discussed. This time the work focused on students from Key Stage 3, although the requirements for “milestone assessments” were also present in the school at Key Stage 4.

The findings from departments of the sample of tasks are seen in the Appendices as appendix 3: Review of milestone assessments from School A. these findings were sent to each Head of Faculty separately. This meant that only I and the SLT working with the LA Consultant/Adviser were aware of the position across the school.

The findings from this review can be seen as significant in the understanding of assessment which forms part of the new findings of this thesis. The clear fact which emerges from these findings is that for many of the subjects in the school the default setting when asked to provide an assessment was to assume that it meant test; a finding which is a significant contribution to the academy and which will be discussed in more detail in the conclusions to this thesis.

This review of the “milestone assessment” pieces had followed some work which had been done in the Heads of Faculty meetings held over the previous term. This had resulted in guidance being offered relating to Schemes of Work, for some

faculties this was superfluous but was again an attempt to ensure consistency across the school. This work was presented as a series of questions, seen in the appendices as Appendix 4: Questions relating to Schemes of work from School A; in an attempt to engage the heads of subject more closely in the work. This was an intentional development on my part as I was aware of the fact that I needed to involve more people in the work in order to develop it further, as I reflected on the impact my work was having in relation to the improve paradigm.

My research then moved on to look at the impact of these requirements on the student experience across the school using the information gathered. As previously stated, at the start of the process I had believed that there would be a high level of engagement from Heads of Faculty and teachers as I had been able to demonstrate an impact in my own practice and was developing this within the faculty I was managing at the time. The work of the LA Consultant/ Adviser was used to validate the work that was being done within the school and she was supportive of the programme. However, the data, which was gathered, did not show significant changes or alteration to the previous results, which provided the baseline.

The results of the work being summarised below begin with the semi-structured interviews conducted with students by the LA Consultant/Adviser. The semi-structured interview process could be seen as part of the Case Study nature of the work and refers to ideas generated by Nisbet and Watt 1984:78 in Cohen, Manion and Morrison. (2000:189):

“they catch unique features that might hold the key to understanding the situation and they provide insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases” ,

5.3: Analysis of findings from School A: Semi- Structured interviews:

The findings from the semi-structured interviews will be analysed in detail as it is highly significant for the next stage of the work as it progressed. The first aspect of work on AfL considered was the use of learning objectives which had been on the agenda as a priority within the school for a considerable period of time. As a

part of the review students were questioned about their experiences across the school and their responses proved there was still a varied experience. The following quote from the students exemplify this:

"In some lessons the learning objectives are put on the board and the teacher ticks them off as we go along."

This work on learning objectives was part of the early work I had done on AfL and reflected the previous comments from Jones and Tanner 2006 which was contemporary with the work I was doing in School A. Students gave examples from the following lessons of how teachers help them to understand what they are trying to learn: they talked about how this was done through showing and explaining the learning objectives. The questions then led to the following responses:

"Behaviour is better in the lessons where we know what we are learning"

"When they are presented visually it helps you to focus"

"It kick starts the lesson and gets you ready"

"It takes the pressure off if we know what we are learning"

The students talked about lessons where the sharing of objectives was done less often:

"This is frustrating and makes me angry"; "We are not taught new things"

"There is loads of doing but it is not linked to learning"

"We go straight in to the work, there are no clear objectives"

These examples of quotes from students are important as they not only summarise what was happening in one school at one particular point in time they also give examples of students higher level thinking and metacognitive understanding. Although this study as an example of an Action Research study is about improving rather than proving a point, the evidence collected by Ofsted (2008) reflected this experience:

"Where assessment for learning had had less impact, the teachers had not understood how the approaches were supposed to improve pupils' achievement. In

particular, they used key aspects of assessment for learning, such as identifying and explaining objectives, questioning, reviewing pupils' progress and providing feedback without enough precision and skill." DFES 070244 2008

This comment reflected the position I was in as teachers at School A had adopted some of the approaches but on reflection I had a clear view of the importance of AfL in relation to impacting on practice which was related to my developing understanding as a researcher.

The semi-structured interviews moved on to examine the way in which students knew how well they were doing and students were able to articulate how, in some subjects, they were given a sheet to check their progress with coursework

"This made it clear how much progress I was making"

In other subject this was not necessarily the case as:

"In H and P we are given an exam question and it is marked with a GCSE grade and a comment on what to do next, then we do it in the next question set"

Students then gave examples of how they are made aware of how well they are doing in B, H and S. There were also examples of students being less aware of progress as a student in D was less sure how he/she was doing.

"It is all ...ing and I am not sure if I am doing it right"

In B *"The content is huge. I would like it chunked up"*

In E *"Feedback in Year Ten was good but in Year Eleven we have little marked work. Coursework was given in in October and we have not had it back yet. I want to know what I need to do to make it better"*

This again exemplifies the idea of the metacognitive development of the students, although it was not identified as such by the LA Consultant/Adviser and myself in discussions following the interviews as this was not part of the study at the time.

From this point the semi-structured interviews moved on to examine how the students knew what standards to aim for and to establish their understanding where their learning fitted in. The students were able to exemplify

where they had been shown exemplar materials produce by other students with grades attached and discuss how they achieved them in T, E and P, (KS4) C, H, B and D:

"This is useful and it would be helpful to see other work in more subjects"

"It can be motivating or it can be daunting".

"It gives me an idea of the quality and quantity needed"

"It is useful to have the mark scheme but it is better if it is in a way that students can understand"

There were also examples of where students understood standards and these were given as: H, D, M (coursework) and P. In contrast there was one example of where the students did not understand the standards they were given: E. There was also evidence of understanding where the learning fits in to the overall Scheme of Work and good examples of this were mentioned in E, C:

"Helps us to know our deadline",

P "The work is broken down in to sections",

S (some lessons) and H, B, L, D, and M

"It helps us to understand where we are going. I would like other teachers to do it"

"It prepares us for future lessons, makes us more independent and means we can read ahead"

Some students have concerns about S where:

"lessons jump around and we are not sure how they link together"

The work of the LA Consultant/ Adviser demonstrated an analysis of the findings as she recorded in Figure 20 that:

"Student voice reveals that when teachers share learning objectives, it supports learning e.g. kick starts the learning, improves behaviour, removes frustration and anger that some have with learning, know what is needed, feeling that they can achieve, keep focus, takes some of the pressure off learning and helps trust in the teacher"

“Lesson observations show that sharing learning objectives is not embedded”

“Student voice reveals that it supports effective learning and progression when teachers share success criteria, use mark schemes, allow students to engage with other students’ work.”

“Lesson observations show that there is some evidence of this in A and B although further development is required to make explicit the standards expected.”

“Student voice reveals that the use of a plenary to review learning is not embedded. A small number of teachers use a question and answer session at the end of lessons and some teachers sum up the learning for students.”

“Student voice in year 11 reveals that peer and self-assessment is an unpopular strategy because they do not trust the accuracy of their or a peer’s marking, find mark schemes difficult to use and they do not understand the standard required.”

“The 6th form students value peer and self-assessment because they can learn from each other and engage fully with the criteria.”

“Peer and self-assessment was not observed. In G the students were marking work, but they did not have any criteria.”

“The evidence gathered shows that a number of teachers are using a range of AfL strategies effectively to support learning and progression and to raise standards. The gap between the best and weakest practice is wide and strategies must be put in place to support and monitor AfL in these identified weak areas.”

Figure 20: Feedback from the LA Consultant/Adviser on AfL work in School A.

This summary of findings which was shared with the SLT showed that despite the work previously completed on establishing the AfL Strategy there was no consistency in approach being demonstrated across the school. This was despite my review of the impact of AfL and my own emerging theories relating to the improve paradigm. I was able to attest for the accuracy of the information from my own work and the information gathered as part of this Action Research cycle was fed back to the Heads of Faculty and Subject Leaders by means of the table seen in the appendices as Appendix 5: Table showing results of AfL Review at School A; this

is only one example of the set completed by me and shared with each Head of Faculty separately.

The research at this point was evaluated as part of the first series of Action Research cycles, in order to draw them to a conclusion as I was moving to a new position. The Deputy Head responsible for curriculum, who was also my line manager and I evaluated the impact the work had made in School A. He stated that the impact made had been significant particularly in the faculty based systems I had implemented; these conclusions will be examined in greater depth in the conclusions chapter of this study.

During this research cycle I had utilised a reflective journal where I had developed a set of concepts which I wished to examine when looking at observations and work sampling. These concepts which I had extracted from the initial coding of my journal included what are now seen as traditional AfL concepts including learning objectives, questioning, wait time and hinge questions. This is linked to the point made in Robson (2011: 490) where he states in relation to data analysis in grounded theory studies that:

“Open coding is essentially interpreting rather than summarizing. It is about teasing out the theoretical possibilities in the data.”

5.4: Summary of key findings from School A:

5.4.1: Findings about AfL:

There are a number of findings relating to the implementation of the AfL strategy which were evident from School A. It was clear that despite the apparent benefits of AfL which I had demonstrated to staff the application of these ideas was inconsistent across the school. The areas who had adopted the ideas in the school were ones I had worked closely with or who I line managed. The faculty based systems had shown the greatest impact on the outcomes of students and there had been developments in these areas which had led to enhanced outcomes for students. Staff across the school however demonstrated a lack of understanding of AfL with less than 50% of lessons showing the use of key AfL strategies. The use of the self-evaluation tool revealed where the school was in relation to government

guidelines and allowed the work to be accurately targeted. These resulted in an action plan being implemented and the training needs of departments were identified. Following on from this a training day was organised and deadlines for the completion of work by departments were set.

There were other outcomes including the fact that the school Assessment and Marking policy was amended in line with this work on AfL. Within faculties there was work produced on Schemes of Work, linked to this improvements were made to “milestone assessments”. A key point to note was that for the majority of subjects in the school the default setting when asked to provide assessments was to assume this meant test.

Overall the impact this work had was variable and the experiences the students received across the school varied.

5.4.2: Findings about myself as a researcher:

There was a development in my understanding as a researcher over the time of the project at School A. I began as an unwitting researcher and I was conceptually naive in my approach at the start of the project. As time progressed I used some of the research techniques, linked the use of a research journal and coding to clarify my thinking and establish clearer research questions. I was able to develop my conceptual understanding and also to articulate more clearly my understanding of the Action Research cycles I was undertaking.

These concepts would again be examined as I moved onto the next set of research cycles in School B. From this point, I then moved onto the second stage of the Action Research study that took place in School B.

Chapter 6: Improving professional practice: Findings from School B.

This chapter reports on how the findings from School A were applied to School B and the actions that results from this. The previous learning stimulated a more sophisticated response which is described in this chapter. The purpose of Action Research is to improve professional practice so consequently the findings from second set of Action Research cycles are examined and linked to the improve paradigm. These are then reflected to in order to generate the conclusions.

6.1: Introduction:

The context for the findings had changed from the previous chapter as I had moved schools, Local Authority areas and changed role. I had moved from being in charge of a number of subjects as a Head of Faculty to being one of the senior leaders in a school. The impact of this change of role will be examined in more depth in later in this thesis but the change in role could be said to reflect the fact that the government of the day had expressed in the TES of June 2008 had stated their intention to have;

“a senior teacher trained in “assessment for learning” ...to make it a central part of classroom practice to improve pupil achievement.”

The change in context is important to note here as schools can be described as unique cultures as mentioned earlier and the way they implement ideas are different.

Despite the change in context the conclusions which can be drawn from the analysis of the data from School B is that there was still a lack of consistency across the school despite the implementation of a number of initiatives. This overall conclusion is drawn from the series of findings which are outlined below and which will be examined in detail throughout this chapter.

Finding one	The learning objectives were being shared in a format most students understood in the majority of subjects.
Finding two	The use of comment based marking be utilised was less widely followed across the range of subjects.
Finding three	There were few opportunities being given to improve the work in light of the comments.
Finding four	Students were more confident in knowing what level they were at, what level they were aiming for and how they could improve.

6.2: Findings from School B

6.2.1: Initial findings from School B

My ideas at the start of the research cycles in School B were best described by Whitehead and McNiff (2011: 85) as:

“It is always a temporary position, your present best thinking that will probably change in light of further reflection, evaluation and feedback”

This concept of reflection and evaluation was indeed the case; as when I approached the second set of research cycles I held a clearer understanding of what the outcomes were likely to be.

This second set of Action Research cycles began in a more structured manner than the first set of cycles. There had been significant developments in my understanding of methods and methodology as I reviewed what had already been put in place in School B. as a starting point, using the reflections on the findings from School A to inform this. This review was approached in conjunction with other members of the Senior Leadership team as part of my new role.

As part of the context it should be made clear that School B had previously presented the ideas encompassing the AfL Strategy to staff as part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme in the previous academic year and had produced a handbook, which examined the ideas I had been attempting to disseminate in School A. The school had also already produced a

monitoring form which was to be used in lesson observations in order to establish the evidence for individual staff's use of AfL and which also allowed feedback to heads of subject in advance of my arrival. As School B already had some systems in place when I arrived I was able to gather information in a variety of ways; these included working with the members of staff who had management responsibilities within the school in the School Improvement Group (SIG) forum. This forum mirrored that of the Heads of Subject in School A but in School B this comprised of anyone who held a substantive teaching and learning responsibility post. The SIG group shared good practice and at the beginning of this particular research cycle I was able to establish how one subject tracked the implementation of AfL using feedback from this group; this meeting was held shortly after I arrived in the school.

As a follow up to this meeting, in order to begin establishing a baseline I sent the subject leaders a copy of the following information in Figure 21 and I requested a response.

Assessment for Learning

I have photocopied a set of the grids for faculty and subject leaders to assess where their faculty is and these will be in trays by Monday

The URL for the information on subjects is

http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/all/respub/afl_ws

If you scroll down to each of the aspects i.e. oral feedback; target setting etc. and open the zip folder link this then takes you to the subject specific sections

Hope this is accessible

If anyone has any questions please come and ask

Figure 21: Information for Subject Leaders from School B.

These tools for reviewing existing practice were used with the subject leaders at this point in order to establish a clear baseline. The tools included the tables on objective led lessons, questioning, progression, written feedback, oral feedback, target setting, peer, and self-assessment, which had been identified as parts of the AfL strategy requiring examination as a result of my coding of my reflective journal at School A. These tools were provided as hard copies printed off from the Assessment for Learning units from the National Strategy information and had been developed as part of the work of the Chartered Institute of Educational

Assessors (CIEA) whose contribution will be assessed later in this study. The subject leaders were encouraged to use these tools with their teams in order to develop their understanding of where their subject was in relation to nationally applied standards. They were then able to set appropriate targets in order to move the subject on. This reflected the fact that different subjects were at different points concerning the development of AfL (this process could be seen as AfL for subjects) a concept I was keen to develop and which is a discussion point that will be examined in the conclusions of this thesis.

As part of my management role and in order to develop a more corporate approach to AfL there were a number of publications provided. This could be seen as conflicting with my researcher role but in this case the two aspects overlapped as these publications included suggestions for starters and plenaries; in order to support learning. The starters and plenaries could be used to judge student progress and what students needed to do in order to make further progress, which is an important facet of AfL; also produced at the time were a series of posters using key AfL phrases. These publications and posters all used a common logo so that members of staff were made visually aware of the connection to AfL. The logo can be seen in Figure 22. The logo itself had been chosen by me following peer discussion to show the ideas integral to AfL; that is the idea of taking the next steps in the progression of learning.



Figure 22: AfL logo used in School B.

The posters, which were produced, were themselves quite simplistic as they merely highlighted the key ideas relating to AfL using key terms current at the time. These key ideas about AfL can be seen in Figure 23 below:

“We Are Learning to ... WALT”
“What I’m Looking For ... WILF”
“This Is Because ... TIB”
“What A Good One Looks Like WAGOLL”
“What’s In It For Me WIIFM”

Figure 23: Posters produced at School B.

All of the above were terms which were current at the time of the original research in the language of learning and were clearly related to AfL. It is interesting to point out that some of these terms have kept their currency in the longer term but others have fallen into abeyance. The posters produced from these ideas were put up in all classrooms in the school in order to be used by staff and students as an aide memoire in using the language of learning. This concept links to some research used by one of the Vice Principals of the school on metacognitive learning and the impact this had on student progress. The findings that using a visual strategy aided the use of the AfL strategy was not one which was examined in any great depth at the time and the impact of the posters as a dissemination method was not fully evaluated. This was subsequently taken as a learning point although it was not possible for every aspect of the implementation of the strategy to be evaluated in detail.

As a consequence of the importance placed on the development of AfL strategies across the school there was also time given over to staff training via the CPD programme. This training took place in order to develop more consistent use of AfL across the school and included twilight sessions; the agenda for a CPD twilight session, which happened early in the second set of Action Research cycles, can be seen in the appendices as Appendix 6: Agenda for CPD twilight session at School B. There was a deliberate link made between AfL, the training sessions and the Performance Management process for teaching staff. It is this link between a variety of improvement strategies which have been credited by the schools’ SLT for

creating the improvement in teaching and learning, and the subsequent improvement in the outcome of the Ofsted inspection.

The activity which began the whole staff session of the twilight was not led by me but by a Graduate Training Programme (GTP) student who produced an activity which required staff to act as pupils and perform a task which was then marked. The task was a simple one, which was to draw a house, but there were no criteria given for what a good one looked like. The work was then “marked” and it was only at this point that the objectives and the mark scheme shared. This led to a great deal of discussion as some staff felt aggrieved that they were unable to be successful as they didn’t know what was expected of them. This discussion in effect reflected the student voice from School A, which explained that they worked better when they knew what was expected of them. The staff who had been involved in the training felt that the ideas in the starter activity were epitomised below:

“Illustrated key ideas about sharing objectives, criteria awareness, exemplar material, and feedback to learners”

This summed up the impact of the CPD session had made on the practice of others. I had made a deliberate decision not to lead this activity myself as I felt that there had been a close identification with AfL and me in School A.

“It’s XX so it must be AfL”

This was a quote overheard during a training session at School A which I didn’t want repeated as the messages needed to be seen to be coming from a range of stakeholders, in order to maximise the impact. As a consequence I wanted to use a diverse range of staff in order to develop AfL strategies in School B. This change was as a direct consequence of the reflections on the first set of Action Research cycles, reflecting on what had occurred and the impact that it had.

The staff who were present at the twilight in School B completed a feedback sheet in order to evaluate the session. This can be seen in the Appendices as Appendix 7: Feedback 1. Subject staff also felt that the time provided to work in faculties and groups was beneficial and that they were able to achieve a considerable amount linked to the development of formative mark schemes.

However one key point was made which will be examined in more depth and also compared to the findings of the original researchers. This was that staff felt that they;

“Need more time to get used to one initiative first – although the whole system is integrated and makes a lot of sense to...?”

Once this introductory work was completed the next phase of this work began with informing parents via a school bulletin about the basic ideas behind AfL. The impact of this information was not evaluated as it was not possible to gather effective feedback in order to evaluate this aspect of the implementation of the strategy.

Within the school environment at School B a work scrutiny proforma was applied to a random sample of students across the school. This proforma collected data in a very simplistic way in order to establish another baseline. The students selected were from Key Stage 3 (Year 7 to 9) and the table seen in the appendices as Appendix 8: Work scrutiny proforma from School B was filled in for each subject to see if there were any patterns evident.

From this exercise I then took the results and these were then summarised. This was developed for use with the subject leaders in order to establish what the practice was across the school. I then looked at developing practice across the school, as it was acknowledged that there was a lack of consistency within and across subjects and faculties. The data produced from this exercise has been summarised in Figure 24 below:

Department	Year	Strength	Areas for development
E	7	Green amber smiley faces stamp for Learning Objectives met	
	8	Good targets set, clear easy to understand	Time to respond
T	8	Good self-assessment sheet	Fill in sheets
M	8	Target sheet	Fill in sheets
	9	Assessment grid Homework	
G	9	Good targets set Class and homework guide	
F	9	Good targets set Target stickers	Learning objectives Targets to be acted on Review of learning
H	7	Self-review linked to Learning Objectives	
S	7	Pupil checklist next step targets	

Figure 24: Summary of findings from work scrutiny at School B.

These first of these reviews were significant as they provided the baseline for beginning the work on AfL in School B and from these initial reviews there were a number of conclusions drawn and recommendations made which looked at the positives. The initial conclusions which were drawn were that many students were writing in Learning Objectives and that there were some good examples of review sheets and stickers. However, there was not enough marking towards the objectives that had been set, some staff were setting presentation only targets, there was little opportunity for students to respond to feedback where it was given and there was not enough evidence of peer assessment available.

In order to address these issues and move the staff on suggestions were given such as; a sheet that said, "In this lesson I did well at... I need to be better

at...” and also stickers which say “I can... My next steps are...” the analysis of the impact of these reviews and actions will take place later in this thesis.

6.2.2: Training Input on AfL in School B:

An issue that was related to the findings from the baseline data and was consequently examined as part of the Action Research cycle, was that there was a need for training identified and once this training had been put in place the outcomes were examined. This was linked to the ideas previously expressed in a paper by Cordingley, Bell and Rundell presented at the BERA conference of 2003 which stated:

“Evidence from observations, interviews, questionnaires or teacher diaries indicated that participation in the collaborative CPD programmes was linked to enhanced teacher confidence.”

As a result of this identified need for training one of the Local Authority’s Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) working with me put together a staff development session to develop the use of AfL in lessons. The PowerPoint presentation on the subject of videoing lessons to examine the AfL component is in the Appendices as Appendix 9: PowerPoint on videoing lessons.

The presentation included information on the nature of models of assessment. This looked at summative assessment including the Working At Grade (WAG) as exemplified in Figure 25 below:

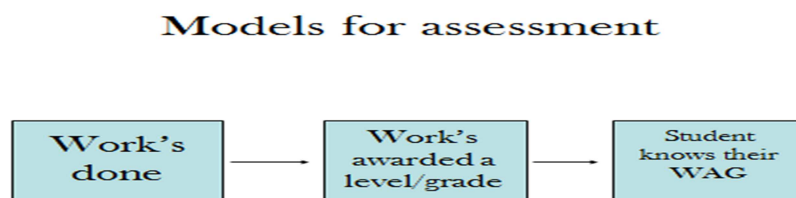


Figure 25: Slide 1 model showing original understanding of the nature of assessment from School B.

The presenter then went on to show what a more complex model would look like. This was then developed using the model of AfL to establish a more complex set of procedures culminating in the link to summative assessment, which is exemplified in Figure 26: Slide 2 below:

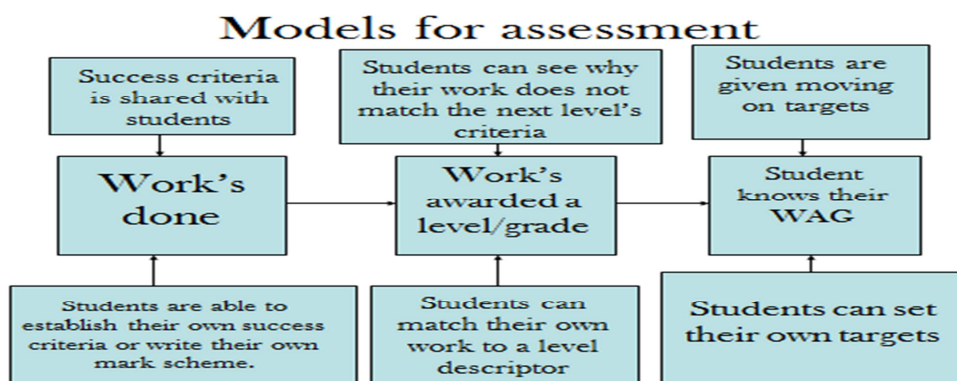


Figure 26: Slide 2 model showing more complex understanding of the nature of assessment in School B.

These slides are significant and appear in the findings section as they are another example of the attempts made by school staff to interpret the AfL Strategy in a school setting. In order to develop this further the elements of a lesson were also considered by the presenter, see Figure 27 Slides 3 and 4 below and show how the work I was attempting to develop had an impact on the thinking of others. There were still issues however, as this CPD package was once again undifferentiated, in that it was delivered to all the teaching staff in School B in one session, regardless of where they were in their use of AfL.

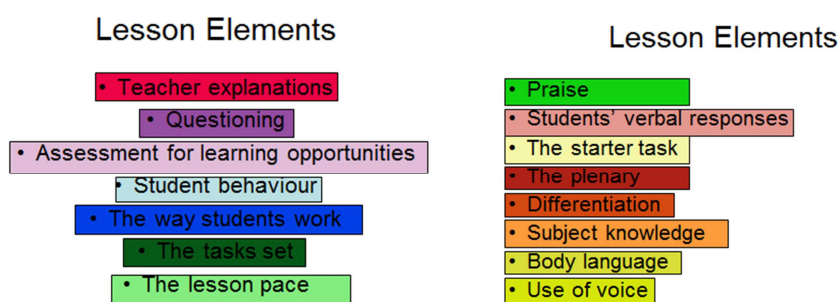


Figure 27: Slides 3 and 4 showing lesson elements including the use of AfL strategies in School B.

These slides were part of the training suggestions and as such were part of a CPD package which aimed to revisit AfL on a regular basis, for all teaching staff in School B. The impact of this was then examined using a number of different methods including lesson observations as well as the work scrutinies and student voice questionnaires. At this point the grids developed by the CIEA for use with the National Strategies were again used with staff. This could be described as reflecting the Action Research nature of this study as it was another example of the cycle undertaken. I had taken the grids, amended them and broken them down into individual statements as exemplified below in Figure 28 in order to allow Subject leaders to work with their staff on a faculty level.

Exemplification to support use of the AfL quality standards (Secondary)				
Quality standard	Red = Needs significant development	Amber = Needs further development	Light green = Good and improving	Green = Very strong and secure
1.3 The impact of developing AfL with APP on teaching and learning, motivation and pupil progress is systematically monitored and evaluated. This ongoing process directly informs CPD for all staff.	The designated senior leader is beginning to build the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of developing AfL with APP into the school improvement plan. Some subject leaders, working with core subject experts where appropriate, are beginning to build the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of developing AfL with APP into their subject improvement plans.	The monitoring and evaluation of the impact of developing AfL with APP is built into the school improvement plan and all core subject improvement plans. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders, middle leaders and all teaching staff in relation to monitoring and evaluating impact is made clear in all improvement plans. Plans make clear how monitoring and evaluation will be used to inform CPD.	A systematic programme of monitoring and evaluating the impact of AfL with APP is in place in all core subjects. The distinction between monitoring teacher behaviours and implementation of processes, and evaluating impact on quality of planning and teaching and on pupils' learning and progress, is understood by all senior and middle leaders. Monitoring and evaluation informs the CPD of all teachers.	A systematic and systemic programme of monitoring and evaluation of the impact of developing AfL with APP is established throughout the school. A wide range of tools are used to gather and triangulate evidence including progression data analysis, peer lesson observations, and pupil and parent voice. Monitoring and evaluation is founded on self-evaluation at all levels and informs CPD of all teaching staff (including TAs).
Possible actions				
Implications				

Figure 28: Exemplification of use of AfL Quality Standards used at School B.

These grids were originally extracted from the National Strategy support material (00734-2009PDF-EN-03). My adaptation of this material again allowed Heads of Faculty to work with the teachers in order to respond to each of the quality standards. This was an attempt on my part to ensure that all the faculty was delivering AfL (in conjunction with Assessing Pupil Progress(APP)) in a consistent way. This followed on from my findings in School A where there was a lack of consistency of implementation.

In order to ensure the fact that all members of the teaching staff included at least one aspect of AfL in their teaching on a regular basis the School Principal had decided, following discussions with myself and the Progress and Standards team, to

include an AfL target for all in the Performance Management (PM) process. During the initial PM process following this decision staff were asked to complete a simple audit to see which aspects of AfL in their teaching would benefit from a PM target. This audit which I created using the reflections from the baseline and the Action Research cycle outcomes from School A is evidenced in the appendices as Appendix 10: AfL audit used by staff at School B.

Following the application of this audit I devised the targets for the PM process and they have continued to be used throughout the duration of this research. The draft versions plus the version currently in use are to be found in the Appendices as Appendix 11: Performance Management Draft 1, Draft 2 and Final. The draft version of the targets had extra information incorporated in order to support the staff through the process, this advice, shown below in Figure 29, said that the staff should:

“Demonstrate that they genuinely believe that all learners can learn and improve against their own previous performance, not that of others and then went on to explain:

Assessment for Learning; the process

Share the learning objectives and encourage learners to contribute to feedback opportunities

Check learners understanding of learning objectives

Brief learners on what they have to do and what they have to hand in, or the task they have to perform. Introduce the success or assessment criteria to learners and check their understanding

Provide learners with opportunities to apply the criteria to examples of work produced, possibly by a previous cohort, to illustrate standards required and the application of the criteria

Provide the necessary guidance and support to learners on an individual basis and provide oral feedback

Provide peer assessment opportunities

Provide self-assessment opportunities

Undertake the practitioner led assessment of learners work

Provide timely written or oral feedback to learners

Create opportunities to personalise the learning so that learners can undertake remedial action and/or consolidation activities or activities that provide challenge and stretch.”

Figure 29: Performance management advice from School B.

The findings from the discussions with other members of SLT meant that in order to move the process on the second draft of the targets seen in Figure 30 needed to explain that:

“To assist further the targets have been broken down using the most recent research on the subject and as part of the performance management process staff will be asked to provide evidence.”

Figure 30: Performance management target second draft from School B.

The implementation of these targets were followed up by another set of teacher CPD sessions, although there was something of a conflict of interest at this point as the training was still being “done to” the staff rather than them being able to choose the most appropriate training for them, which contradicted my philosophy of using AfL for all. However, this use of CPD developed over a period of time and changes were made, which will be discussed in the conclusion and next steps sections of this thesis.

The next steps in the training for staff was based on my development in understanding of the following points:

- Why raising achievement is important
- Why investing in teachers is the answer
- Why formative assessment should be the focus
- Practical strategies to be shared

This training was linked to the ideas of formative assessment for staff, as I had identified this as a particular area for development following the work I had already completed. Different training groups followed slightly different strands, with Heads of Faculty being given different training in order to lead the work on AfL with their departments. This was based on the findings from the previous part cycle that:

“The influence has shifted from what am I going to teach and what are the pupils going to do?” towards “How am I going to teach this and what are the pupils going to learn?”

These changes were then examined again by the reviews of pupil perceptions which can be found in the Appendices as Appendix 12.

The CPD training was further followed up by a review using de Bono’s thinking hats technique, in order to establish what needed to be further developed. This training allowed each department in the school to review their own work using the different hats (see appendices: Appendix 13: Subject specific De Bono’s thinking hats prompts to generate oral feedback used at School B). This was as a result of my belief that in order to change people’s practice they needed to take ownership of the change. In order to further develop the understanding of staff this training focussed on the attempt to develop oral feedback to students and to examine how it was used as part of AfL; the review was needed as oral feedback was used in different ways by different departments. This attempt at developing understanding of this particular aspect was owing to the fact that oral feedback is often perceived as the most difficult type of data to capture. Each of the departments reflected on their own use of oral feedback using the prompts (designed by me and another AST). These can be found in the appendices as Appendix 14: De Bono’s thinking hat prompts for oral feedback from School B. The results were then used to develop the specific prompts which could then be adapted according to individual subject needs in order to capture oral feedback.

As a result of this collaborative work the faculties or subjects put together the ideas to use with students found in the appendices as Appendix 15: Subject responses to De Bono’s thinking hat prompts for oral feedback from School B. These were recorded on large sheets of paper by the members of the faculties

present at the after school training session and then fed back to each Subject Leader by me. The results of these ideas can be seen in their entirety in the appendices. These ideas were then incorporated into the lesson observations conducted by the Subject Leader over a period of time during the following term.

I have included the complete version of the responses in the appendices as I feel this is an important aspect generated by my work on AfL. The statements generated by this work provide a good summary of the types of ideas which could be used as a subject specific toolkit for oral feedback. This idea concerning the generation of a toolkit or toolkits will be examined in further detail in the conclusions section of this thesis.

This development can be seen as a significant finding in relation to the use of a Strategy which was applied in a specific way. The contribution to new knowledge is reflected in the fact that, as previously stated, schools are unique institutions with individual cultures and by adapting individual responses to the implementation of a generic strategy each one will produce a unique set of findings. These findings can then be examined for similarities and differences and the new knowledge applied to that particular institution.

6.2.3: Further findings from School B:

The ideas produced by faculties concerning oral feedback were reviewed and this was combined with ideas related to written feedback at the end of the term by means of a questionnaire applied to all year 7 teaching groups. The reason for sampling a whole year group was to eliminate the possibility of not reaching as wide a spread of staff as possible, as School B was a larger and more complex institution than School A. A questionnaire was chosen to represent as great a number of responses as possible and in order to minimise the effect of different interpretations of the questionnaire I ensured that I was the only person involved in their distribution. The students were asked to fill in a series of questions based on the basic ideas to be found in the work of Black and Wiliam which can be seen in Figure 31 below.

My teacher always shares the learning objectives	When my teacher marks my work they give it a level	When my teacher marks my work they give it a comment	I get chance to improve my work using the comments I am given	I know what working at level I am	I know what my target level for the future is	I know what to do to improve
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Figure 31: Questionnaire applied to year 7 pupils at School B.

Each student was asked the same questions relating to each subject they studied and the results tabulated by myself. These results can be seen in the appendices as Year progress in Appendix 16.

The findings which come from summarising these results can be described as follows.

Finding one:

The learning objectives were being shared in a format most students understood in the majority of subjects. However despite the fact that this had been a basic expectation of AfL in the school for some time, not all staff in all subjects were doing this; there were a number of the practical subjects where the learning objectives were not being shared. This conclusion is however not as simple as that, as some subjects which rely on written feedback were not informing students of where the student were starting from and going to. This lack of basic understanding of the principles of AfL again will be examined in more depth in the conclusions section of this thesis.

Finding two:

The next expectation of the school that of the use of comment based marking be utilised was less widely followed across the range of subjects. This meant rather than use marks or grades subject teachers were expected to use formative comments only on the work. What was found in practice was that teachers were often using comments and grades, or grades only which meant that students focused on the grade rather than the comment.

Finding three:

There were also few opportunities apparently being given to improve the work in light of the comments, an aspect of AfL which is crucial to the concept of progress.

Finding four:

As part of the summary it would appear that students were more confident in knowing what level they were at, what level they were aiming for and how they could improve. This was linked to the fact that the school had a school based system in place, which had a target setting element. This system recorded the levels students were working at, plus their target levels; this information appeared in the personal organiser on a termly basis. Linked to this were target stickers which were available to all faculties in a variety of formats, so students could refer to them on a regular basis.

The same questionnaire was applied to another year group this time Year 12 in Key Stage 5 and the results are in the Appendices as Appendix 17. The results in general were similar to Year 7 although in some cases the grades the students were working at were not as clearly understood, as a slightly different system of recording and reporting worked at Post 16. These results are significant and will be discussed later in this thesis.

Again the results of this analysis was shared with the subject leaders as a part of School Improvement Group (SIG) meetings and the PowerPoint describing this is part of the Appendices as Appendix 18: School Improvement Group PowerPoint. At each stage the impact of these developments was examined by me and the subject leaders were made accountable for further developing the ideas in their faculties. The subject leaders were asked to develop an action plan and share this with their line manager in their regular meetings. If there were any specific issues raised in these meeting then they were shared with myself and other members of the Progress and Standards team on SLT. However, it is not possible to confirm if this information was forthcoming or if it was shared accurately and so the findings from this are less reliable.

The same information was shared with the governors of the school via the Curriculum and Students Committee which comprised of teacher governors, lay governors and Local Authority appointed governors along with representatives of the student body. In this forum I presented a PowerPoint explaining the basic ideas relating to AfL; I also explained where the school was in relation to the implementation of the AfL strategy. The information available for this had been established by the use of learning walks around the school. These learning walks were observations of parts of lessons and focussed on AfL strategies previously identified from the coding of the reflective journal from School A's Action Research cycle and the initial reviews which formed the baseline for the work in School B.

The information to Curriculum and Students Committee also utilised the results of the questionnaires in order to build up a picture of how well the AfL strategy was being implemented. The Learning Walk observation analysis gives a sample of this information and in this particular research cycle this activity took place on 3 occasions. The findings from the learning walks can be seen in the appendices as Appendix 19: Learning Walk analysis from School B.

The findings from the learning walks were based on a very simple proforma. This proforma was filled in relatively quickly and used to establish a baseline and then be used to revisit the teacher again later.

These findings were significant as they proved that there were similar issues of lack of consistency in School B as had been seen in School A, despite all the work that had been done. The work completed included an attempt to provide prompts for staff in a variety of ways and could be said to be an attempt at designing an AfL toolkit. This idea will be discussed in the next section of this thesis.

6.3: AfL Toolkit:

It will be useful at this point to define the concept in relation to the understanding of what a toolkit actually is. There are a number of models relating to the concept of toolkits but for teachers the most common design of AfL toolkits are a series of prompts which address the issues raised by the original researchers.

One aspect of this work on AfL was the attempt to generate and use an AfL “toolkit”. In an attempt to produce a toolkit for teachers at School B I examined all the concepts relating to AfL and gathered them into a lesson observation proforma which was used in conjunction with the Ofsted criteria current at the time for all lesson observations. The actual proforma is to be seen in its entirety in the appendices as Appendix 20: AfL lesson observation proforma/ toolkit used in School B: the impact of this will be discussed in detail later.

Within School B as well as the data collection devices, there were also reminders given to teaching staff on a regular basis about teaching and learning using an AfL focus; these reminders went into the weekly school bulletin. Two examples of the reminders are shown below as Figure 32.

Check that you are using your skills based objectives using the display in the staffroom. Try to make sure that your objectives are differentiated.
Be efficient with your marking. Use peer and self-assessment within the classroom. It helps pupils to become familiar with the assessment process and criteria.

Figure 32: Examples of AfL teaching reminders from the bulletin in School B.

It is difficult to assess the impact these reminders had it is possible that not all members of staff read the weekly bulletin and there was no device available to capture the impact. There were also examples in School B of different subjects adapting AfL ideas in different ways; this very much depended on where they were in the development stages of implementing AfL. Some subjects, for example, used the summative statements from their Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) grids in a formative way in line with previous thinking on AfL; as seen in this exemplar from one department in the appendices as Appendix 21: AfL target setting sheet from School B

Other subjects used the work on AfL in a different way; with the day to day look of lessons being changed to reflect the ideas involved. This is possibly closer to what was envisaged by the original researchers, given the impact which will be examined later in the conclusions of this thesis. This utilisation of the work on AfL is

shown below with the use of the PowerPoint slides from one lesson from one department as Figure 33; this is one example demonstrating the continuous use of skills based learning, self and peer marking using criteria and students being reminded what they are learning (not doing). The impact of this was assessed by the head of subject and it was seen to produce more targeted learning opportunities and greater consistency across the department. This review was conducted through the medium of shared observations and structured student voice.

Writing about War 01.03.2010

Learning objectives:

- To **explore** how we use emotive language effectively (WAF7)
- To independently produce an **imaginative** and thoughtful text (WAF1)

Underline the SKILLS words in your learning objectives. Do you know what they mean?

Choose one and explain it to your partner.

"To explore means to..."
"I have be... when I write imaginatively"

Where are these writing foci on our APP grids?
 Have you used these before?

Key word check: emotive language...

...words designed to create an emotional response in a reader

You can use the skills ladder in the room to help you.

Starter

Remember your P.A.L.

What makes a successful diary entry?

Refer to the word bank that you created to help you demonstrate your varied vocabulary.

You are now going to prepare to write the first paragraph of your diary...

Spend the first two minutes discussing your ideas with your partner

- Imagine/Explore/Entertain
- Purpose - Writing to (why am I writing?)
- Audience - Yourself (who am I writing to)
- Language - _____ ?

Let's create our class criteria:

- ✓ Voice?
- ✓ Language?
- ✓ Tone?
- ✓ Description of setting and action
- ✓ Spelling
- ✓ Variety of sentences
- ✓ Punctuation?

Peer assessment

Remember, marking each others work helps to develop your own skills... we can self correct and learn from positive peer examples!

What colour do we peer assess in?

- ✓ Refer to our marking code when marking the paragraph.
- ✓ Remember one WWW comment.
- ✓ Set one CONSTRUCTIVE target.

Let's remind ourselves of our class criteria:

- ✓ Voice - first person
- ✓ Language - emotive
- ✓ Tone - informal
- ✓ Description of setting and action
- ✓ Spelling
- ✓ Variety of sentences
- ✓ Punctuation (at least 1 semi colon)

Plenary

- Plenary Cube → pairs
- Complete the plenary sentence
- Return to your objectives, have YOU met them?
- How did you work as a pair?

Figure 33: PowerPoint slides from one lesson in School B.

In another department the subject leader was constantly refining the way in which AfL was used in lessons and designed a common lesson plan using a series of PowerPoint slides which all staff were expected to follow. This was not a “one off” as over the period of years it has been further refined and developed, examples of which can be found in the Appendices as Appendix 18: School Improvement Group PowerPoint. This variation in implementation and outcomes is the most significant finding from School B and links to the fact that schools are unique institutions with different results from the same training being visible. These findings will be analysed in more depth later in this thesis.

6.4: Other findings:

Linked to the development of AfL and PM School B then developed a teacher improvement CPD programme, where staff were required to opt into different training sessions depending on need. These needs had been identified via a skills grid which was filled out by the member of staff and verified by their subject leader, linked to AfL aspects, a copy of this grid can be found in the Appendices as Appendix 22. As part of this CPD training programme different members of staff delivered sessions called Learning Hubs and early in the cycle of hubs one of these was linked to the self and peer assessment strand of AfL. I was not involved in the design or delivery of this session but I have been given permission to use the training PowerPoint to demonstrate the impact the work I had already completed on AfL had had on other staff.

Slide 1 of this presentation demonstrates how the understanding of AfL had developed with a simplified definition provided by members of staff who were not intimately involved in this Action Research project.

Slide 2 gives exemplars of how the work had developed in one faculty over a period of time. These slides can be seen below as Figure 34 and the entire presentation is in the Appendices as AfL presentation KC as Appendix 23.

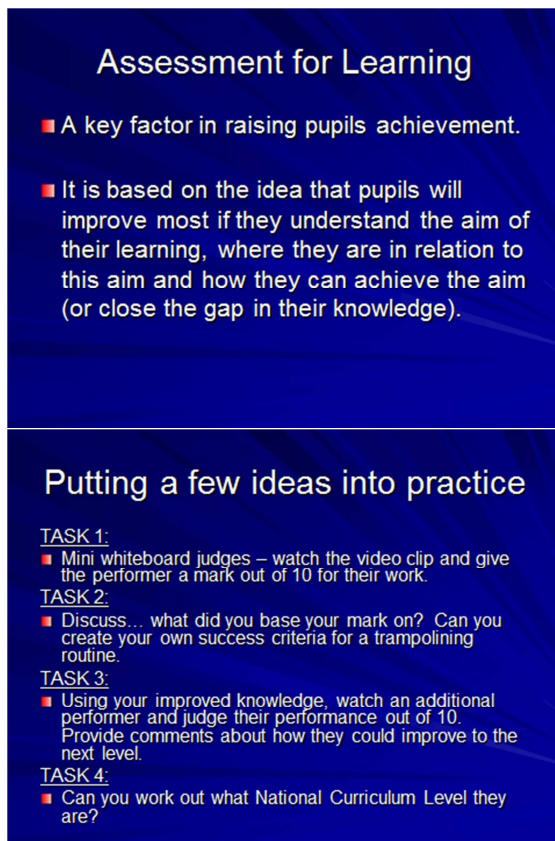


Figure 34: Slide 1 and slide 2 AfL presentation in School B.

The Learning Hubs where this presentation was delivered used an 'opt in' system where staff looked at their own training needs and had to find relevant sessions to attend. There was a requirement for each staff member to attend a certain number of sessions. From this there the CPD of School B has moved on and will be discussed as part of the conclusions of this thesis.

Further developments were also made to the teaching and learning methods and consistency across School B with a skills triangle being introduced to the PowerPoint presentations students were learning from. The use of this skills triangle again varied depending on the staff but the reasoning behind it is explained in the slide below Figure 35.

This training was again introduced to all staff in School B as a further refinement to the ideas relating to AfL and the student voice was evidenced as follows in Figure 36.

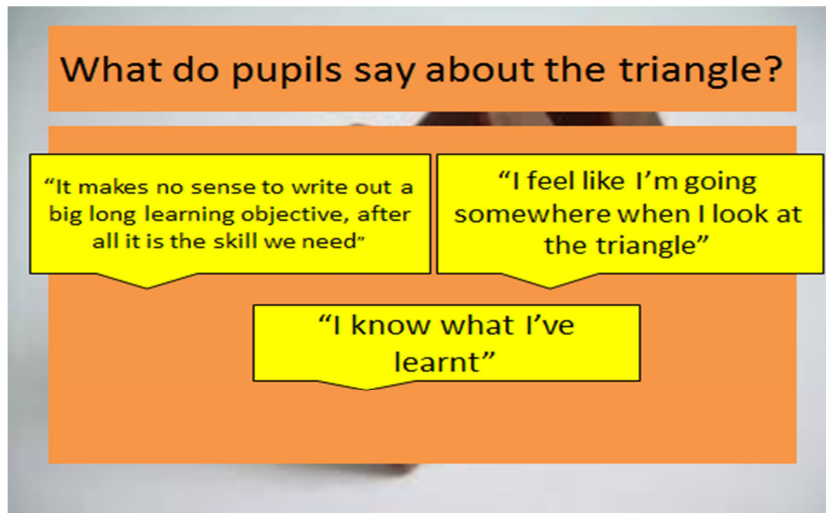


Figure 35: Student responses to the use of the skills triangle in School B.

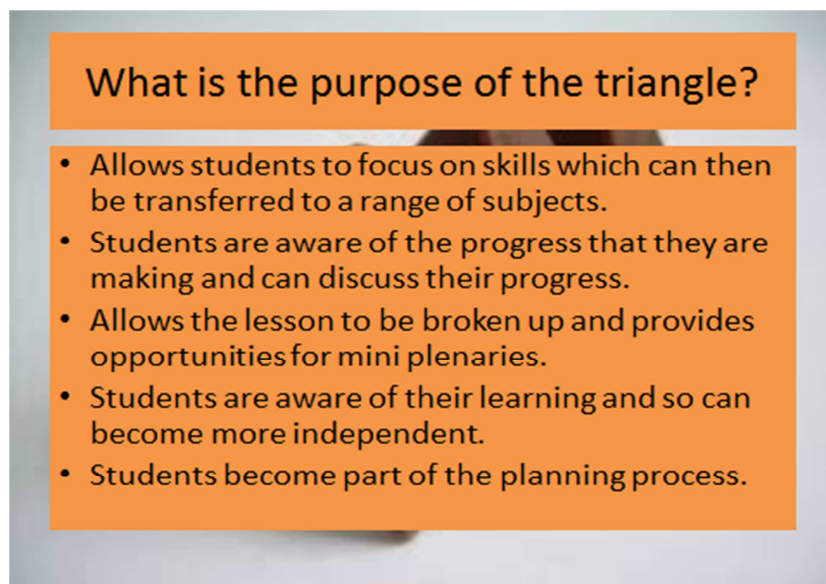


Figure 36: Rationale for skills triangle.

This triangle has proved to be more consistently applied as part of the school's planning requirements and the linking of skills to tasks and outcomes has shown to improve the quality of lessons delivered.

The percentage of lessons which have been moved on the Ofsted framework from Satisfactory (as it was; it is now "Requiring improvement") to Good or Outstanding has been significant as over a two and a half year period the school moved from the overall judgment of Satisfactory to one of Outstanding. This move in the grading of teaching and learning will be examined as part of the conclusions. This review of learning is crucial to the concept of AfL and the conclusions drawn from the work in both School A and School B, along with all the other data will be summarised in the following chapter and will inform the final conclusions in this thesis.

6.5: Wider impact of findings from Action Research project:

Across the period of this Action Research project the data which had been collected has been used to inform and amend the practice of different groups of staff across individual schools; it has also been used by groups of schools across a number of different areas.

As part of my role in School B there were opportunities for work with other schools within the area and the sharing of information and data with those schools at a series of meetings which was facilitated by the Local Authority. These meetings demonstrated schools in the area were at a variety of stages in the implementation of AfL. In these meetings there were links made with Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) data tracking.

The staff in School C were using what their representative described as:

"AfL 'tracking sheets' which were Excel spreadsheets using Red Amber Green to track progress; these were used over 3 lessons to gather student outcomes. This led to positive feedback from students and staff"

School D shared their point of view which was that:

“3 years ago they had Christine Harrison as a guest speaker which led to AfL becoming school policy. The observation structure linked to this was different to management observations and the triangles of staff were non-judgmental.

These observations were deliberately cross department and had lots of spin offs but required investment in time. As a result of this, they have moved the focus on to questioning. Measures indicate the quality of teaching and learning is improving but there is a raft of Teaching and Learning initiatives that inhibit progress. The new system had caused people to talk informally about things with peers.”

Again, these findings mirror those that had been established by me during my time at School A.

This group facilitated by the Local Authority met again later in the process. Subsequent to these meeting there was a change in policy in the Local Authority and the advisor changed, with the focus shifting to work in individual schools rather than facilitating the meetings between groups of schools, where good practice was shared. The new LA Consultant /Adviser provided some information on the changes. This is evidenced in the Appendices as Appendix 24: Meeting with the LA Consultant/Adviser in School B.

Most of these suggestions were not taken up as the Local Authority then withdrew its support, due to changes in statutory requirements and as a result schools once more were reliant on their own in-house expertise.

6.5: Findings about AfL:

There were a number of findings from School B in regard to AfL, some of these mirrored the findings from School A including the fact that there was a lack of consistency in applying AfL across the school. There has, however, been a link made between the various improvement strategies by the school which created the overall improvement in teaching and learning. My role involved looking at developing practice across the school in relation to AfL.

The findings showed many students were writing in Learning Objectives and subjects had adopted ideas such as review sheets and stickers. There were however training needs which were identified and links were made to Performance

Management targets to facilitate this. The ideas from training sessions were also incorporated into lesson observations and findings were shared from learning walks.

The student experience was examined and this showed learning objectives were shared in a way students understood in the majority of subjects. Comment based marking was less clearly adopted and students were not being given the opportunity to improve their work. Students were more confident in knowing their levels. This shows a greater degree of impact on student outcomes.

6.6: Conclusions from findings at School B:

The conclusions from School B continue to reflect the issue described earlier at the start of the methodology section, in that schools are unique institutions and the application of a generic initiative does not necessarily succeed or will result in different outcomes for different subjects or individual staff.

The individuals and departments who adopted the work on AfL and adapted it to their particular circumstances showed a greater degree of impact on student outcomes. This was evidenced by the use of observations, questionnaires and work scrutiny. It is significant to note that there were changes made to whole school practices as a result of the work on AfL, most notably in the adoption of the triangle as a lesson planning tool, which became standard practice. This improved practice, as student voice and lesson observations exemplified how the use of the triangle gave a more consistent experience. This change in practice is an example of the importance of Action Research as it shows how the focus of the project can affect practice.

It is however more difficult to evaluate if the work on AfL was solely responsible for the changes as there were major changes made to the PM requirements and the CPD provision. These changes were used in combination with the work on AfL and as a result the school as a whole moved from an Ofsted grading of 3 (satisfactory) to 1 (outstanding) over a two and a half year period.

There were additional findings which came out from this study which were directly related to it but were not part of the original research design and these will

be considered here. There proved to be a need to examine the importance of Continued Professional Development (CPD) in relation to the findings from the Action Research methodology and cycles. The importance of this link came about as a result of peer discussion and followed discussion with my supervisor in relation to the improve paradigm. This discussion led to my re-examining the original dissemination materials and as a result the starting point for the examination of CPD relating to the ideas involved in this study can be found in a statement in the Key Stage 3 Strategy documentation. The DfES in Pedagogy and Practice; Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools Leadership guide (DfES, 0444-2004 G.) stated that:

“the Key Stage 3 National Strategies plays a key role in helping teachers to realise the government’s vision of providing high quality continued professional development (CPD) to teachers. It provides well-researched, extensively trialled material, as well as ‘on-the-job’ support from consultants, advanced skills teachers (ASTs) and other leading professional including leading teachers and subject leaders.”

At the start of the process the Strategy document on Pedagogy and Practice (DfES, 0444-2004 G.) also stated:

“the way in which the study units are used in a school will depend on the culture of the school, current and competing priorities, resources and strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning. It will depend on the maturity and robustness of schools’ CPD provision.”

This appears to be something of a statement of the obvious; however, it is important to examine the rationale behind this, in relation to the methodology the Key Stage 3 Strategy was based on in order to understand why the government of the day decided to take what on first glance seems to be a laissez-faire attitude to the implementation of the National Strategy. These statements are to be considered in relation to the Action Research and Case Study methodologies postulated by this thesis. In comparison to my own relatively small scale project an examination of actual practice was conducted by Ofsted and this report from Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) followed up the comments from the National Strategy

with evidence from a number of schools. This summary of CPD in practice was published in 2006 (HMI, 2639 2006: 12):

“Although senior managers identified their school’s needs systematically and accurately, the identification of the individual teachers’ needs was not always so rigorous. As a result, planning for the professional development of individuals was often weak. Few schools evaluated the impact of CPD on teaching and learning successfully, largely because they failed to identify, at the planning stage, its intended outcomes and suitable evaluation methods... Although well designed coaching and mentoring arrangements were highly effective in developing staff’s competences, there was wide variation in the way schools used these two types of professional development and consequently, in the extent to which staff benefitted from them.”

Reviewing this position meant that the ideas of Action Research as a methodology was examined as it potentially provided an answer to the problem posed by the type of CPD available. The available CPD, however, was apparently only taken on by a limited number of staff, including myself, apparently in isolation.

The original researchers (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam) had suggested as part of their recommendations that there should be a rolling programme of in-service development and further work being conducted on the subject of AfL. The utilisation of an Action Research framework as part of my methodology was crucial to my implementation of the Strategy but this was not replicated by the vast majority of my colleagues.

The findings from School B show that when individuals and departments took on the CPD linked to AfL and applied it themselves then the improvements I was attempting to generate as part of the Action Research cycles were more successful. This key finding came about as a result of reviewing the work at School B in light of my understanding and development as a researcher. It was only towards the end of my implementation of the Action Research cycles, where I reflected in detail on the outcomes did this postulate arise.

Chapter 7: Discussion

In this chapter I will present the discussion of my findings from the Action Research cycles in both Schools A and B. This discussion will focus on the key aspects of the findings and will include both findings from the data and the development of my own understanding in relation to Action Research. This chapter will also discuss the findings relating to other issues including those concerning Continued Professional Development. The key findings about the issues surrounding terminology will be examined in depth as will the epistemology of Assessment for Learning. Linked to this will be a discussion of the improve paradigm. The development and viability of an Assessment for Learning toolkit will be discussed and a series of recommendations will be produced. The overall conclusions from this thesis will be examined in depth with recommendations for future research.

7.1: Introduction:

This chapter aims to draw together my findings synthesising those in previous chapters and the new ideas postulated as a result of this work. This reflects the ideas described by McNiff and Whitehead (2011: 13) where:

“Epistemology is to do with how we understand knowledge, and how we come to acquire and create knowledge”

My key purpose is to articulate the thinking and the epistemology of AfL, and the extrapolation of the results from the macro to the micro level in order to develop improved practice, this means examining the results from individual student to classroom level and then beyond into the wider learning community. One of the key aspects here is the examination of the concept of an AfL “toolkit” and whether it was possible to produce one or whether this was an oversimplification of the problem. Linked to this is an examination as to whether it is possible to develop toolkits for different purposes; for example, the toolkit I designed for developing oral feedback.

This chapter will also focus on the improve paradigm, examined in the Literature Review. There will be an examination of the utilisation of the Action

Research framework and the underpinning theories; including those which were examined and discarded to produce a synthesised research methodology. This chapter will explain how the detailed examination of AfL developed from a small scale experiment in one classroom into this thesis. This section will examine the impact I had over the course of this research for my own and others professional practice.

One of the key points, which will be examined is the overall lack of consistency of implementation of the National Strategy across a number of schools and Local Authority areas and the implications this has for future practice.

As part of these conclusions I will also examine the role of organisations including Ofsted and the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA) in the development of the National Strategies and of AfL in particular. I will also examine the attitude of the original researchers towards these bodies and the involvement of the original researchers in the Strategy implementation.

One of the key findings of this thesis which will be reviewed in the conclusions section are the concepts linked to common usage terminology; most particularly the concept invoked by the term “assessment”, an epistemological assumption which is central to the findings of this project and the contribution to knowledge demonstrated by this thesis.

There will also be an attempt made to examine the concepts involved in the dissemination of the training and the longer term implications for the Continued Professional Development (CPD) of teachers. This section will examine the underpinning pedagogical assumptions for CPD, as well as the design of coherent CPD programmes and why the impact of these sessions was not necessarily consistent. Intrinsic to these findings is that the methodology of CPD did not reflect the ideas implemented in classrooms. This can be construed as highly significant because not only was the original CPD approach to the dissemination of the AfL Strategy inappropriate, it utilised a different approach which was at variance with the whole concept of AfL. A key postulate might be; that for every educational policy reform in real-life situations there needs to be planned a sympathetic,

systematic and commensurate programme of CPD that seeks both ownership as well as leverage of the educational policy being proffered to the profession. Linked to these is an examination of the Quality Assurance (QA) processes available both for the CPD of teachers and the implementation of the National Strategies within schools. This section will also examine the impact of linking teachers CPD to the Performance Management (PM), the appraisal system of teachers, and whether this would be an interesting point to consider for future research and development. All of these issues are significant findings and they will be examined in detail in the subsequent sections of this chapter and will inform the suggestions for future research. The conclusions section of this chapter will begin by summarising at the findings from the Action Research cycles epitomised by the work undertaken in Schools A and B.

Throughout the work for this thesis I have developed my understanding of the nature of research and the way in which Action Research has impacted on my own practice and that of others. These conclusions will examine my findings from the Action Research cycles and will also position this research in the local and national context.

7.2: Findings from School A:

The original research which has ultimately resulted in this thesis began as a result of the work on the UK Key Stage 3 National Strategies training in England, which I undertook as a consequence of my expressed interest in assessment at School A. It is significant that the reason this work started was because of the understanding of the term 'assessment' by the senior managers at School A. Their understanding at the start of this process could almost be seen as the default setting of the behaviourist idea of teaching, learning and assessment. This can be described by the statement from Black and Wiliam (1998) where the idea of assessment is "*stressing measurement against objectives.*"

Tam in Educational Technology and Society (2000: 1) summarised the ideas relating to the constructivist approach, which links to the ideas inherent in AfL:

“As Chung (1991) described, a constructivist learning environment is characterized by (1) shared knowledge among teachers and students; (2) shared authority and responsibility among teachers and students; (3) the teacher’s new role as guide in instruction; and (4) heterogeneous and small groupings of students. Resonant with the idea that the teacher is a guide instead of an expert, constructivism instruction has always been likened to an apprenticeship (e.g. Collins et al., 1991; Rogoff, 1990)”

This was clearly underpinning the theories of AfL as the idea of a teacher as a guide who shared the learning journey with the student is fundamental to the concept. At the commencement of the work on this thesis I was sent as a representative of School A to the Local Authority training in order to develop the ideas linked to assessment; at that point the work on the National Strategies assumed the idea of assessment was that of testing, this could be seen as making an unwitting assumption that testing was a summative model. This paradigm of assessment has been reviewed throughout this thesis and the conclusions clarified later in this chapter. There was no link made at this point in either my mind or that of the SLT link who sent me on the original training to the concept of ‘formative assessment’ which was to provide the basis for the development of this thesis. It should be pointed out that this idea of a behaviourist ‘default’ towards teaching and learning systems and approaches will be examined in more detail later in this chapter, as this section will focus on the findings obtained from the Action Research cycles.

At the beginning of this process there was an attempt made to put in place a small-scale experiment which was described in Chapter 4.5, and that this small scale experiment resulted in the students taking responsibility for their own development in other learning. This reflects the ideas expressed by Nehring, Laboy and Catarius in the journal *Professional Development in Education* (2010: 401):

“Reflective dialogue, which traces its origin to educational philosopher John Dewey, has re-emerged within the field of education... (Senge, 2000; Hord, 1997)”

The responses; which were mostly oral; were noteworthy at the end of this limited experiment as one particular pupil requested that his coursework be returned in order to apply what he had learned from the exam feedback. The development of reflective dialogue with students was significant; as has previously been stated this was a significant local development and it was as a result of these conversations that my interest in developing this examination of practice further was piqued. I was convinced by the responses to this limited experiment of the usefulness of the developments and consequently it was this limited experiment, which inspired me to continue the research, which eventually developed into this thesis. I was not only conducting a reflective dialogue with the students but also was involved in peer to peer discussions, as my line manager was undertaking an educational research thesis in an unrelated field. This process echoes the comment made by Ritchie (1995: 306) in his work from the University of Bath where he states that:

“This research was based on a constructivist view of learning. I analysed my learning during action research cycles and used this analysis in a formative way to plan subsequent sessions.”

My own learning was being developed throughout this process and consequently I began to develop my own epistemological and ontological thinking relating to this living experience. Such educational discoveries reflect the thinking of Whitehead and McNiff (2006: 44) where they maintain that:

“at the heart of the living educational theories that practitioners generate as they study their practice and engage with questions of the kind “How do I improve what I am doing?” they identify the values that inform their work and find ways of realizing them. Their ontological and epistemological values are to do with the freedom of all to come to know their own ways and exercise their choices responsibly; their methodological values are to discipline their enquiries to show the systematic and rigorous research processes involved in making their claims that they have realized their values and their social purposes are to do with developing ethical educational cultures.”

This quote is key to my development as a researcher as it accurately describes how I approached my engagement with this project. The development of my understanding of the improve paradigm was key to the processes involved in this project. As a result of this engagement with the ideas relating to Action Research the 'living' cycles were developed as described in Chapter 4.2.2 which allowed the next set of data collection strategies to be developed. In this conclusions section it is crucial to note that the Action Research cycles are central to the design of this research approach, and broached in the methodology section 4.2.2 and that the findings from the work at School A was significant in informing the research which took place subsequently in School B. The living theory action research was at the heart of this approach adopted for this thesis and the findings from this examination of practice are described in Chapter 6.2.1 with the developments which took place and the rationale behind them is grounded in Action Research thinking. There are a number of conclusions, which can be drawn from these cycles beginning with those from School A.

From School A the major finding from the application of the first research cycle was that there was no consistency in the application of the work that I was involved with across the Faculties within the school. I had become involved with the development of this work and as a teacher and Head of Faculty had made certain assumptions at the start of the process, which came from my own professional practice. This demonstrated my initial naivety as a researcher and educationalist and as part of the Action Research framework my understanding developed during the cycles.

I had believed in the idea of championing (described by Shirley Clarke previously quoted) the work on AfL by Black and Wiliam in School A and made the assumption that this would have a major impact on the work across the school, which in turn would improve the outcomes for the students, consequently this would result in this being an instrument for social change. This idea of championing is referred to in Chapter 5.2 and suggests that if the idea is taken on by one or more person or persons in the school it has a positive impact on others, which can be disseminated. As part of this Action Research cycle this idea was reflected on after

the work had been shared in a variety of ways and forums across the school. The first conclusion, which could be drawn, was that despite all the efforts made the impact was not consistent across the school.

The department I was leading at the time had embraced the ideas, owing to the impact I had as a leader but even here the impact was not consistent over all the subjects. There were significant differences in the uptake of the ideas between different departments and faculties as demonstrated in the summary relating to the schemes of work provided, with some subjects having clear and unambiguous learning objectives, whilst other subjects either failed to provide evidence or there were no learning objectives available. It could be argued that this was a very early point in the development of the work and therefore was not an unexpected result, given that not everyone would embrace the ideas with the same enthusiasm as I exhibited. I was aware that I wished to make a change but as an emergent researcher this was not clearly articulated in relation to the impact on the practice of others.

As a result of this reflection on the first attempts at intervention plus my reflection on the concept of Action Research as described in Carr and Kemmis (1986: 185) where they state that:

“they (the researchers) are inclined to see the development of theory or understanding as a by-product of the improvement of real situation rather than applications as a by-product of advances in ‘pure’ theory”

This quote is quite accurate in terms of my early findings and it is only as my understanding of the nature of research developed was I able to reflect more critically on my actions.

I then put together a more structured approach to the work in School A, as my findings were that if I continued with a broad approach which could be looked at as a “scatter gun” policy in nature then I would continue to see similar inconsistent results. At this point I had begun to reflect on my own naivety and consequently amended the process I undertook for the next phase of research.

This development in my approach led to an identification of training needs within subjects and departments and also led to the feedback being targeted in a Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant and Time bound way (SMART). This idea, of SMART targets, was first mooted by George Doran in 1981 in Management Review and adopted by educationalists. The structured approach was put in place so that responses were required in a limited timeframe, which ensured that I could have feedback relatively quickly in order to measure the impact and move the work on again, which was more consistent with my developing understanding of research methodology. Robson (2011: 41) points out that:

“Carter and Little (2007) suggest that:

If Anna better understands the theoretical and disciplinary bases for her methodology, she is likely to use it in a more nuanced and flexible way and to feel personally confident in her practice rather than blindly following a recipe. This would enable Anna to become reflexive and creative practitioner, capable of reinvention and evolution of her craft (p.1324).”

This development of understanding allowed me to work in a more confident way as I was beginning to underpin the actions with a theoretical justification and as a consequence of reviewing the scope of the project with senior managers and the Local Authority (LA) Consultant/ Adviser it was decided to focus on milestone assessment pieces to begin with. This was due to the fact that focussing on the milestone assessment pieces gave concrete results drawn over a relatively short timeframe, which then allowed faculties to develop at their own rate. Although this approach linked well to the concept enshrined in AfL and could be seen as AfL for departments the results it generated had similar problems to previously.

This concept of AfL for all is another significant finding from this work, as by applying the idea of AfL as establishing a starting point on a learning journey and moving on from this a wide variety of issues can be addressed.

The fact that the results did not show a significant improvement from previous ones was due to my assumption that all departments would adopt the

ideas and develop them, which shows that I although I had made progress in my understanding I was still in the process of being an emergent researcher.

The use of milestone assessment pieces linked the concepts of formative and summative assessment and the use of the same students as a sample was one of the results of my developing understanding from the previous research cycle where there had been a broad range of classes and students examined. This reflects the experience of Ritchie (1995: 317) who states that:

"I began, with the help of colleagues, to clarify my existing understanding of my practice"

The conclusions, which I came to at this point, in conjunction with the schools SLT and the LA Consultant/Adviser, were shared in a variety of ways, initially the Head of Subject or Head of Faculty, was provided with the information relevant to their area of responsibility. I, the senior leadership of the school and the LA Consultant/Adviser had the overview of the whole school; once again the most noticeable conclusion which could be drawn, both at the time and subsequently, was that there was still no consistency across the different faculties and departments.

The data, which was gathered in this cycle, did not show significant changes from previously although there was a conscious decision made at this point to include semi-structured interviews as a technique in order to ensure that the observational data was triangulated. Denzin (1988b) distinguished four types of triangulation and in this case I was most concerned with the first type:

"Data triangulation. The use of more than one method of data collection"

The semi structured interviews were to establish the opinions of the students in order to ascertain their experiences following the implementation of the original work on AfL. This is reflected in the approach recommended by Cohen Manion and Morrison (2000: 269) where they state:

"The research interview has been defined as "a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining researcher

relevant information, and focused by him (sic) on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation” (cited from Cannell and Kahn, 1968; 527).”

Linked to this is the description of the interviews in Cohen Manion and Morrison (2000: 270) as they point out that:

“Lincoln and Guba (1985: 269) suggest that the structured interview is useful when the researcher is aware of what she does not know and therefore is in a position to frame questions that will supply the knowledge required.”

It was as a result of considered reflection on these points that the semi-structured interviews conducted by the LA Consultant/Adviser was decided upon as the research tool in this particular instance. I had decided as a conscious decision not to conduct the interviews myself as I believed that given my status in the school and the fact that I had taught all the students it could influence what they had to say. This could be seen to be in direct conflict with the work of Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 18) who state:

“Rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher completely, we should set about understanding them”

The choice of the LA Consultant/ Adviser was, however, also a conscious one as she had experience of conducting these types of interviews across a variety of schools and was able to use a standardised set of questions which we devised in advance to elicit the information we required. As part of the interviews there were also enough open-ended questions to elicit the information we didn’t know that we needed to know, which again reflected the academic framework as Lincoln and Guba again point out in Cohen Manion and Morrison (2000: 270):

“the unstructured interview is useful when the researcher is not aware of what she does not know and therefore relies on the respondents tell her.”

Following discussions between the LA Consultant/ Adviser, myself and the SLT we made the decision that we knew some of the information we wished to elicit and that there might be information which emerged as a result of these

interviews so we continued with the semi-structured approach. The conclusions from these interviews supported the view that there was still a varied range of experiences for students within the school and there was even a range of experiences within subjects in relation to the implementation of the AfL Strategy.

To re-iterate the findings were described by the LA Consultant/ Adviser in her feedback; as follows:

“The evidence gathered shows that a number of teachers are using a range of AfL strategies effectively to support learning and progression and to raise standards. The gap between the best and weakest practice is wide and strategies must be put in place to support and monitor AfL in these identified weak areas.”

There are a number of conclusions, which can be drawn from this, the first of which is that despite all the work I had undertaken, the impact was still not consistent either across subjects or across School A. Once this was established the reasons for the lack of consistency was examined.

As a result of peer discussion and following discussions with my supervisor the idea that lack of consistency could be related to a poor Quality Assurance (QA) process was postulated. This was a significant learning point and one of the key findings from this study is that there is a requirement for good QA processes to be embedded in a school's practice in order to ensure consistency and rigour.

Linked to this was the need to develop a high quality Continued Professional Development (CPD) programme, the impact of which will subsequently be discussed. These two processes of QA and CPD need to work hand in hand in order to ensure correct identification and tackling of the needs for training exhibited by teachers. This concept of developing QA and CPD is highly significant in terms of this study and will be examined in more depth later in this chapter as a result of the Action Research cycles conducted in School B and the conclusions, which can be drawn from them.

In School A despite all the efforts at improving the quality of student outcomes the impact of the work I had initiated on AfL was variable, as has previously been stated. It could be argued the work I did with the Faculty I was leading at the time had probably the greatest impact on the experience the students received which was evidenced in the interviews, as well as from the reviews of lesson observations and the Schemes of Work provided. This links to my own developing understanding of the concept of social justice as I was aiming to improve my own and others practice.

As part of the review of the work I had undertaken the deputy head responsible for Key Stage 3 at School A summarised the impact that I had had. His description of the various types of impact stated that I was responsible for establishing the work on self and peer assessment and moving students on within the Faculty I was leading at the time. This work was viewed by the SLT as developing an area of good practice, which was then transferred to other Faculties. One aspect of developing the use of AfL techniques was focussed on quality feedback to students which also saw an impact on students as they had a better idea of learning targets at the end of the cycle. There was also a noticeable increase within the faculty in the number of lessons where teachers shared learning objectives when this was reviewed by myself and the subject leaders. This was significant as the understanding of the reasons for learning also links to the concept of social justice and provides evidence of the type of impact on teaching and learning I was looking to achieve as part of this work.

This notion of focussing the learning was complemented by the learning objectives being skills rather than content based and the notion of formative assessment was beginning to be built into schemes of work as a result of the work I undertook. This work was fundamental to the development of the notion of a learning journey for students in School A.

Students were not the only stakeholders and although there were key messages leaflets provided with the Key Stage 3 Strategy there was also an attempt at dissemination of these ideas to parents. Although the parents were not familiar with the terminology the information provided by me to parents had clarified the

experiences of the students. In School A the Governors were also far better informed in relation to the ideas related to teaching and learning as a result of the work on AfL. The governors being an important group to work with in relation to the concept of social change.

The work on AfL although originally targeted at Key Stage 3 had an impact at Key Stage 4 although it had taken longer to embed than at Key Stage 3. The work was considered, to be less developed at Key Stage 5, as can be seen in the review in Figure 5.3, although there were a variety of other issues relating to teaching and learning in Key Stage 5, which affected the implementation of AfL. This review of the impact of my first phases of Action Research was collected via a video of a semi-structured interview conducted by myself with the deputy head responsible for the Key Stage 3 curriculum at the end of the Action Research cycles in School A.

There was some more investment into the ideas relating to AfL postulated in the National Strategies as the DfES in 2007 produced a report on the Eight Schools project. (DFES 05 2007 Ref no. 00067-2007BKT-EN.) This report was badged as the results of an Action Research project built on the practice to be found in eight schools across a variety of Local Authorities. My small scale research project has come to similar conclusions to those which can be drawn from the DFES Eight Schools project (DFES 05 2007 00067-2007BKYEN). The project report stated that:

“The initial audit of AfL completed at the start of the project in all schools identified more issues relating to teaching than learning. All eight schools decided to maintain a focus on the development of objective led lessons with seven of the eight schools also working on additional aspects of AfL which included peer and self-assessment, and formative written and oral feedback.”

This very much reflected what I was hoping to achieve in School A at the beginning of the research project and validated my approach.

“However, it quickly emerged, through pupil interviews and lesson reviews (lesson observations followed by discussions with teachers), that nearly all the schools had: over-estimated the security of objective led lessons across

the whole school, believing that the pockets of good practice were representative of the whole; not recognised the need for objective led lessons as the basis for developing other aspects of AfL, for example written feedback and peer assessment.”

Once again this was an accurate reflection of how I was attempting to develop the work at School A and the issues I faced, although my research had been conducted independently as an emergent researcher.

The overall conclusions, which were drawn here are mostly referring to a lack of consistency in the impact of the work on AfL. This resulted from a naivety in my original thinking consequently these findings were then reflected on in the next cycle of Action Research, which I began, in a new role, as a member of the Senior Leadership Team in School B. There is an issue here due to the nature of the role as I had to distinguish between my role as a manager and as a researcher. The impact of this change in role will be examined separately later in the chapter.

One of the conclusions which can be drawn from the implementation of the Action Research Cycle was that the organisation and structure of the work undertaken at School B was more systematic as a result of the work previously concluded in School A.

7.3: Findings from School B:

7.3.1: Findings from data:

Before I arrived School B had already implemented some of the ideas I had developed as part of the AfL Strategy in School A, so it could be suggested that in this sense the National Strategy was being implemented in similar ways across a number of schools. This should not be seen as surprising as the UK government had disseminated training materials in the same format to all schools; although there had been no coherent development of the CPD strategy for implementing these, the reasons for which will be examined later in this chapter.

The first point in the second cycle was to audit the departments and subjects in School B by using the grids produced by the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA) on behalf of the government. The grids were

developed as an assessment tool by Graham Herbert and the CIEA who when I questioned him as part of this thesis responded as follows:

“As Deputy Head of the CIEA I sit on the development board of the AfL programme alongside representatives from DfE, the National Strategies (NS), and QCDA. The original quality standards tool had been developed by the NS as part of their remit to roll out the quality standards tool nationally. I suggested that an interactive version would be more useful for the end user. Any interactive facility would have to go on the CIEA website since QCDA, DfE and NS do not have interactive facilities on their website.” (Private Communication)

These grids will form part of the discussions about the CIEA later in this chapter but at this point it should be noted that they were used as a tool to differentiate what was required in terms of CPD training for Faculties in School B. This significant decision had been reached as a result of the work in School A and could be described as allowing for AfL for departments, which can be seen as a key postulate arising from this research. What is meant by this term is that by using the self-assessment tool departments could look at where they were in relation to AfL, what they needed to do to improve and the steps they needed to take to get there. This approach, which mirrors the AfL journey of students, moves away from the ‘one size fits all’ concept and looks at individualised CPD, an issue which will be considered in more depth later in this chapter. This linking of AfL CPD and the implementation of QA systems is one of the additions to knowledge demonstrated by my findings for this thesis.

Following on from this as a part of this Action Research cycle, a number of different ideas were also developed and implemented; these included the employment of various publications in School B, which were given a corporate badged identity. The use of these badged identities was as a result of utilising the research by management companies, which suggested that a corporate image enhances the understanding of the product and improves perceptions. These ideas were adopted with the use of a visual logo in order to link the concept of AfL in the minds of both teachers and students. This idea of sharing the vision is something,

which has been adopted very successfully before my arrival by School B. This concept related to sharing the vision could provide the data for further research, as there is mileage in the idea that someone could look at the impact this has had in relation to improving performance. The conclusions that can be drawn from this aspect thus far are tenuous but the idea of badging the work on AfL did provide a visual coherence at least for stakeholders, although the impact of this was not assessed separately. These can be seen in the appendix as Appendix 25.

There were a number of different publications produced including a series of posters, which contained various key terms from the AfL repertoire. These key terms can be found in a variety of places including from Leahy, Lyon, Thompson and Wiliam (2005: 8) in *Educational Leadership* where they include the ideas below:

“Learning Intentions

- *Share Rubrics*
- *WALT and WILF*
- *Thirty Second Share And many more.”*

The mnemonics are a useful tool and the research by Higbee (1977: 1) on memory and how it works shows that the use of mnemonics raised student awareness, although again its importance is difficult to assess in isolation.

The developments relating to the CPD programmes and the links to Performance Management (PM) at School B will also be examined separately. However, a further conclusion which can be drawn at this point was that when staff experienced the same frustrations as students; the context for which is described in section 6.2.1; they were more likely to implement the ideas shared with them, this is supported by McNiff and Whitehead (2011: 37) as they point out:

“knowledge creation is a collaborative process.”

This can be seen in the responses to the work in Figure 6.4, where the concepts of AfL were shared by a GTP student in the whole staff training session and it was clear that when knowledge was shared new knowledge was created. This

was a significant learning point for me and my reflections on the Action Research process was important for my development as a researcher.

Reflecting on the Action Research cycles another conclusion which was drawn from the work in School A and implemented in School B was that it was important that the ideas relating to AfL were disseminated by a wide variety of staff. I ensured that I engaged fully with this idea as although I had championed the ideas in School A further research would have been needed to see if my involvement in all the CPD was a limiting factor. I therefore took a conscious decision in School B as part of my leadership role to utilise as many different people from as many different faculties as possible in order to disseminate these key messages. This reflects the point made by Senge in (1990: 9) that:

“it’s the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future we seek to create”

It is significant to note that the findings from the initial sampling of students at School B showed a similar pattern to those of School A when I left. That is to say that there was a lack of consistency within and across subjects and faculties in relation to the implementation of AfL. This did not come as a great surprise as there had been discussion around the fact that at that point in time teachers were inundated with initiatives nationally, locally and school based and these considerations will be examined in the section relating to the political situation; they will also be reviewed in conjunction with the conclusions reached by the original researchers when interviewed as part of this study.

There is also evidence to support the fact that there was a lack of consistency across a number of schools from the network meetings held on the subject of AfL facilitated by the Local Authority. The quote, from the meeting, made by the representative of School C again show the willingness of some staff to engage with the process, but again the lack of consistency was apparent:

“Measures indicate the quality of teaching and learning is improving but there is a raft of Teaching and Learning initiatives that inhibit progress. The new system had caused people to talk informally about things with peers.”

One of the conclusions to be drawn from all of this evidence as part of this Action Research cycle was that there was a need to ensure consistency of application in order for the work to develop further. In order to do this School B took the step of incorporating the work on AfL into the Performance Management (PM) system for teachers, this was linked to my role in the school and will be reviewed subsequently. This linking of PM and AfL took the format that every member of the teaching staff had to include at least one AfL target into their PM each year. In order to ensure quality targets were being set, in my role as Assistant Principal I wrote a set of targets, which were then issued as part of the PM paperwork each year. Although this was part of my school role there was an overlap between this and my involvement with this Action Research project. The PM system includes at least 2 lesson observations in each academic year, which gave line managers the ability to check on the teachers' progress towards their targets at regular intervals. One significant point is that this raising of the status of the work on AfL has contributed to its development in School B although as part of the improve paradigm there was no control system to check the progress against. Further discussion of the conclusions reached as a result of the link between PM and other teaching and learning initiatives will be examined later in this chapter.

Throughout the period of this research concurrent to the developmental work on AfL other initiatives were being undertaken as part of the CPD process; with faculties taking ownership of the ideas generated; this was a deliberate policy supported by Cordingley, Bell and Rundell (2003: 6) referred to previously who maintained that:

"Evidence from observations, interviews, questionnaires or teacher diaries indicated that participation in the collaborative CPD programmes was linked to enhanced teacher confidence."

Significantly the review conducted as part of the Action Research cycle produced the following conclusions;

- the learning objectives were being shared in a format most students understood in the majority of subjects.

- However, despite the fact that this had been a basic expectation of AfL at this point not all staff in all subjects were doing this; there were a number of the practical subjects where the learning objectives were not being shared at all.
- Some subjects which rely on written feedback were not informing students of where they were starting from and going to. All this feedback shows there was still a lack of basic understanding of the key principles of AfL, by the staff, despite all the work that had already been undertaken.
- The AfL suggestions relating to comment based marking were less widely followed across the range of subjects, than those relating to the sharing lesson objectives
- There were few opportunities apparently being given to students in order improve their work in the light of the comments fed back, an aspect of AfL which is crucial to the concept of progress.
- Students were more confident in knowing what level they were at, what level they were aiming for and how they could improve, School B compared favourably to School A at this point. This understanding was apparently linked to the school based systems; School B had a target setting system which recorded the levels students were working at, plus target levels which were put into the students' personal organiser on a termly basis. Linked to this policy were a set of target stickers which were available to all faculties in a variety of formats, in most cases these stickers were put on the front of exercise books, so students could refer to them on a regular basis. This meant that levels were available to all students, however Dylan Wiliam has a very clear view on this point which will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

In reviewing the position the SLT and I were all disappointed to discover there was still a lack of consistency on the application of AfL despite the time and effort which had been invested in training, CPD and work with various subjects and

departments. It should be clarified that some members of staff had taken the ideas on and they were able to use the ideas as part of later training for all members of staff, this was exemplified by the fact that there were sessions on AfL practice which were run by staff not directly involved in the original dissemination of the work. This training took place over an extended period of time. The conclusions which can be drawn from this are partially reflected in the comment that throughout the period of the research staff at School B felt that they needed more time to get used to each initiative and that teaching at that point could be described as suffering from initiative overload. Mulford (2003: 7) points out:

“as the OECD (2001b: 1) itself points out, “... the intersection of ... three demands for change by schools – to update their content, to become learning organisations and to deliver measurable outcomes - ... creates ... intense and potentially conflicting pressures.”

The conclusions which can be drawn from these cycles of Action Research could be said to be deeply personal.

7.3.2: Findings from the Action Research cycle in School B:

I believe that although all staff have the innate capacity for improvement the use of the initiatives such as those using AfL are viewed with suspicion in some quarters; this is because the strategies have been imposed on professionals rather than scaffolding their ownership of them. As a consequence of this although I was determined to use the impact of the change in my own practice to model that for others; as not everyone could see the value of working in this particular way.

As a reflective practitioner one of the conclusions I have to draw from this second cycle is that the role I am in has had an impact not only on my own individual practice but that of others. It could be argued that this is linked to the role I held in both schools. In School B I was a member of the Senior Leadership Team, as such I was able to implement the ideas relating to AfL in a way which was not possible in School A. In School A my role was as a head of faculty and as such I was able to implement the ideas relating to AfL most effectively across the subjects

within my own faculty in the way previously described by the Deputy Head in School A.

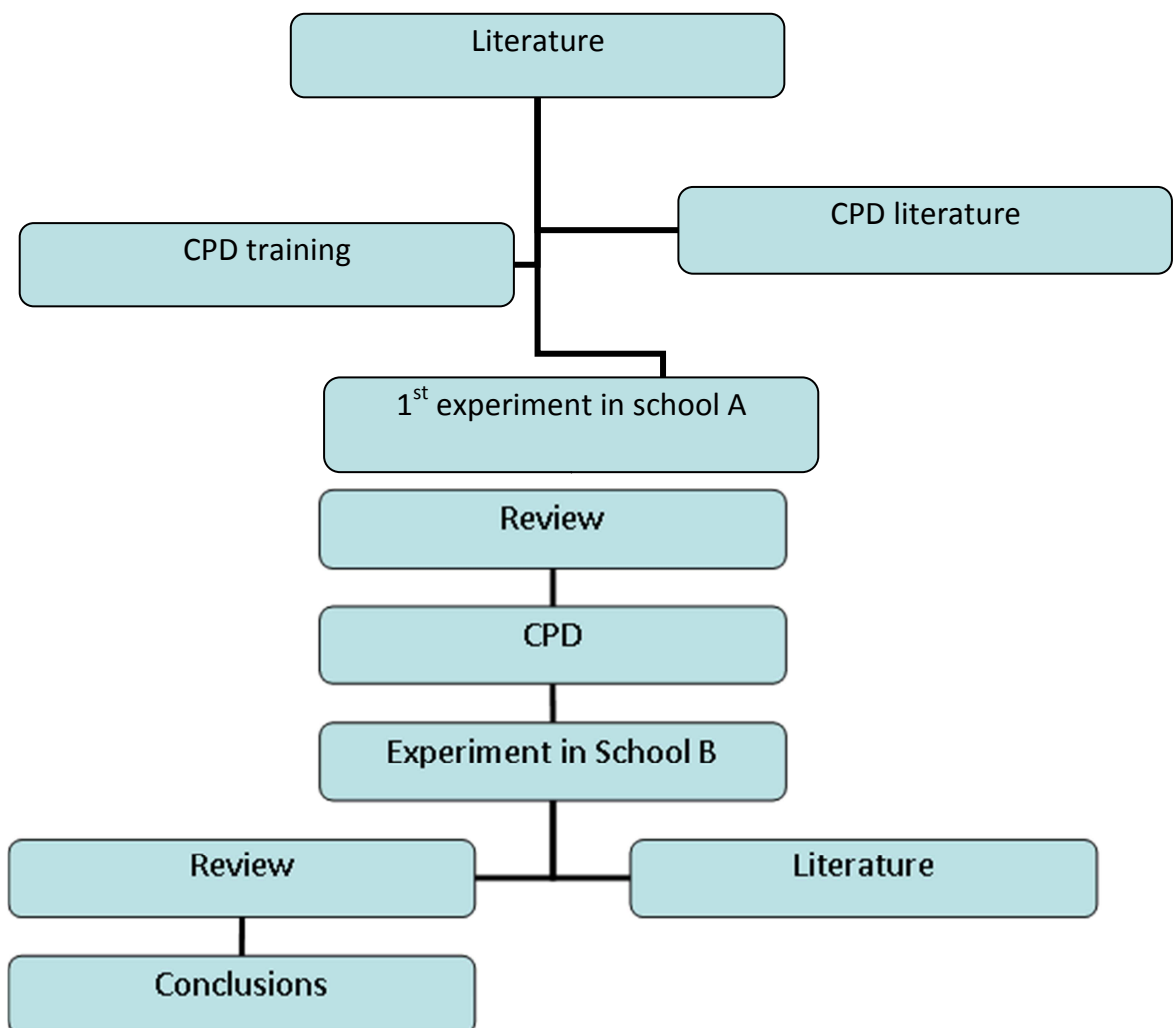


Figure 37: Unique figure outlining the 'messiness' of action research.

Figure 37 demonstrates the messiness of the Action Research cycles in this PhD project. It would be inaccurate to describe this as cycles in their purest form. Each of the stages proved to be one of a series of reflections which then allowed the project to progress. The examination of the work I have conducted throughout this Action Research project has clarified my own ontological and epistemological thinking; as Whitehead and McNiff (2006: 44) exemplify when they state that:

“Their ontological and epistemological values are to do with the freedom of all to come to know their own ways and exercise their choices responsibly”

This argument covers one of the most significant findings in relation to my own practice, which has been a result of the journey through this research. My thinking has been clarified and reflecting on the above quote I have exercised my freedom of choice in the methodology used and developed my own practice accordingly. In contrast to this, however, is the fact that this research did not take place in a vacuum and consequently the impact of the changing political situation in which the research was taking place needs to be considered next, as it was highly significant.

7.4: Findings relating to other issues:

7.4.1: Conclusions relating to national political changes:

The conclusions from this particular piece of research has to be considered in the light of numerous political changes at the time, but the impact can also be said to have implications for the way in which policy is turned into practice in an English setting in the future. It is very difficult to extrapolate from small scale research and generalise about the situation in a country and I am not attempting to do this. However, the reflections on the research do highlight significant findings which could inform policy makers and practitioners if they are taken into consideration the fact schools are unique cultural institutions which respond differently to generic input.

The political context in which this research took place is significant. The political context when the AfL research was reported was that there was a new Labour government; who had made education a central plank of their election promises. The Key Stage 3 Strategy from which the research in this thesis grew was a part of this policy. The concern of the previous Secretary of State led to the beginnings of the development of the National Strategies in Literacy and Numeracy, which began as a support project, but were then developed subsequently by the Labour government. These National Strategies developments also included the Assessment for Learning strand, which is the focus of this study. In a private communication with Dylan Wiliam, conducted as part of this thesis, I asked him if the National Strategy policy makers understood the concept of Assessment for Learning, he was categorical in stating that they did not. He felt that the concept

was misunderstood and that when asked, head teachers felt they had embedded AfL, but that for many schools it was difficult to find one teacher doing good AfL. This comment can be seen as highly critical and has been made with the benefit of hindsight; however these comments from the original researchers are crucial in the understanding of the implementation of the AfL Strategy which was reflected in my own Action Research findings.

Paul Black in private communication was equally condemnatory of the Strategy and in a reply to whether the National Strategy reflected the original research, he maintained that:

“No it did not. Those responsible did not consult us formally about the programme. It leaves out one key element – comment-only marking. The London government seems to have the view that a one day course and a ring-binder of recommendations are all that is required. Our own development project, as described in the publications took two and a half years during which the teachers had additional support and INSET time: the Scottish project was similar – two years of phased development.”

I then asked him:

“Do you believe policy makers understood the concept of AfL?”

Once again the response was quite categorical:

“The understanding is shallow – the failure to grasp that it requires a difficult and quite radical change for teachers in their classroom practices, and the omission of serious consideration of the need to give comments and not marks on regular homework, shows this failing.”

This is a highly significant finding of this project in that both the key originators of the concept are clear that they did not have any detailed input into the development of the National Strategy which was apparently based on their original research and which signposted interested parties, such as myself, to their research. This contradicts their ideas articulated about CPD and its implementation suggested in the Literature Review in Chapter 2.4.3. As a result of the

implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategies various training materials were prepared which, as Black pointed out, simply utilised one day of training and a ring binder with a CD-ROM. However, if the tools provided had been utilised consistently and the format been followed by every department in every secondary school then the outcomes of this might have had a significant impact. The significance of these comments are that originators of the idea of AfL believe this impact would still not have been achieved, as Dylan Wiliam, in a training session at School D described changing teachers practice is like turning a super tanker. The techniques described by Paul Black regarding their work on AfL in Scotland appeared to have more of an impact, but in order to replicate this what would have been required was a more detailed approach with accountability built in.

Related to the research from the Eight School Project was the fact that subsequently there was an examination of the implementation of the National Strategies by Ofsted (2008, Reference no: 070244) quoted in Chapter 5.3 which said that:

“The impact of Assessment for Learning was good or outstanding in 16 of the 43 schools visited. It was inadequate in seven, including four of the 16 secondary schools visited. It was better developed and more effective in the primary than the secondary schools. Although teachers and senior leaders valued the training and support they had received from the National Strategies, this did not necessarily lead to effective Assessment for Learning in their schools”

These conclusions evidenced by the Ofsted report supported the conclusions seen in both School A and School B and both Ofsted and this research chimed with the information gathered in the Eight School project. These two official reports came about between 2007 and 2008 when the political landscape had seen a change with the UK Prime Minister in 2007 replacing Tony Blair with Gordon Brown. It is important for subsequent developments that the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) was launched on 16 May 2008. Its head, Kathleen Tattersall, promised to investigate the 'reliability' of exams (The Guardian 16 May 2008).

This particular development was significant in relation to AfL as the development of high stakes testing generally did not incorporate the ideas postulated by Black and Wiliam in the first instance. The problems faced by teachers at this point in time are exemplified by the following quote:

“Schools in England had been besieged by 79 policy consultations and at least 300 announcements from the DCSF in 2008 and expected an even greater number in 2009 (The Guardian 13 March 2009).”

This again reflects the comments made by members of staff at School B in response to the attempts by me to implement the work on AfL when I arrived. It is clear from these comments how the situation in both Schools A and B, despite the differences in their circumstances and geographical locations, reflected the national picture of policy weariness very accurately. This again is an opportunity for further research to examine the impact if there is the introduction of numerous policy changes in a short period of time.

The next move in the political change during the course of this research, which was conducted from the implementation of the National Strategies to the point of the time when the website was closed in 2011, was the arrival of the UK’s Coalition government elected in 2010. This brought yet another change of name for the DCSF back to the Department for Education (DfE) and the arrival of a new secretary of state; Michael Gove. His review of the provision resulted in the following development which closed down the National Strategies website.

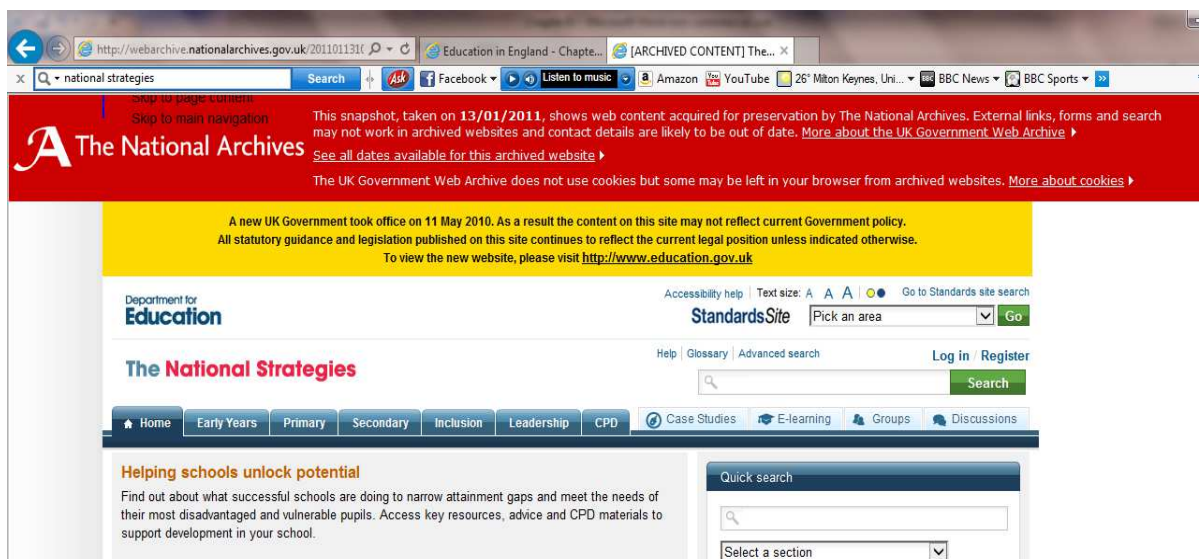


Figure 38: Screenshot of the National Strategies website after May 2010.

Despite the work which had been developed throughout the years of the National Strategies there was no consultation on how effective the Strategies had been before the new government simply closed the website down and de facto closed the policies down too. School leaders were not officially informed of the closure by the department (DfE), rather they found out in an ad-hoc way depending on how frequently they utilised the support from the National Strategies website. The lack of consultation regarding the closure of the National Strategy website was symptomatic of the treatment of school staff throughout the period of this research. There had been a lack of consultation even with the original researchers into AfL and as a result of this lack of consultation school staff felt that initiatives were done “to them” rather than done “by them”.

For the purpose of this thesis the closure of the website was apposite as it gave me an end point for my research, which began with the implementation of the AfL strand of the National Strategies and ended with the coalition governments’ closure of the Strategy website.

2013	Final write up
2012	Review
2008-2010	national strategy collection school
2008	e review 2
2007	collection school
2006	Literature review small scale
2004	CPD

Figure 39: Timeline showing processes of action research.

7.4.2: The conclusions relating to the local situation:

It is not always feasible to expand the conclusions drawn from the local situation to a macro level in most cases. This thesis began as a small scale Action Research project; as such it was originally designed to examine my own practice and that of others with whom I came into close contact. As has been explained previously it was designed to incorporate the ‘improve’ paradigm and detailed conclusions relating to this aspect will be examined later in this chapter. However, once I began to examine the findings of Ofsted and communicated with the original researchers I believe that my findings replicate a similar pattern to those of the

National bodies responsible for examining the impact of the AfL strand of the National Strategy.

The conclusions I drew from the first set of Action Research cycles in School A bore out the findings in the Eight Schools Project of 2006 which stated that:

“The initial audit of AfL completed at the start of the project in all schools identified more issues relating to teaching than learning...As a result, attention shifted more towards the learning issues and the teaching response. When the schools came to analyse how well pupils understood what they were learning in individual lessons and, even more importantly, understood what ‘good’ looks like (the intended outcomes and associated success criteria), they realised that often objectives were focusing the teaching but not driving the learning. The sharing of learning objectives in lessons, successful in terms of ‘happening’ in all lessons, was often a surface response to implementing an agreed whole school policy. The AfL principles and purpose underpinning the approach were not always understood or ‘believed in’ by teachers and, where this was the case, did not inform the teaching and learning throughout the lesson”

It could be argued that this fairly substantial extract could actually have been written about the work I had undertaken over a period in School A so in this case it is not extrapolating from the micro to the macro but rather my findings mirroring those of other researchers, who although they have a vested interest in the outcomes are somewhat less intimately involved than I was. The conclusions which were drawn from the Eight Schools Project were markedly similar to those from School A but were not published until I had changed roles and was in post at School B. This impacted on my research design for School B as I had reviewed the impact of my less structured implementation of the AfL Strategy in School A.

7.4.3: Findings relating to Continued Professional Development; its implementation and impact:

One of the most significant conclusions in this thesis which was not an original aim but can be drawn from the various Action Research cycles (see the

unique exhibit in Chapter 7.3.2) is the importance of the link between high quality CPD and the development of the implementation of AfL.

As has been seen previously the original research developed by Black and Wiliam (1998: 15) was based on the premise that there needed to be *“sustained programmes of professional development and support”*. This premise could be seen as what the National Strategy was developed for, but on reflection this did not happen owing to the poor design and implementation of the training and dissemination of the CPD provided. The reflections from Paul Black on this subject have already been noted previously in this chapter with a very clear view on the issue of the one-day training and the use of the ring binder/CD-ROM.

The original researchers Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (1999: 12) wanted to develop:

“Classroom assessments and their role in teaching and learning (which) should be given greater prominence in initial teacher training and continued professional development”

They saw the idea that following on from their original research Inside the black box (1998: 15-16) there should be developed through CPD work which was:

“relatively slowly, and through sustained programmes of professional development and support” “the programme development cannot start with an extensive programme of training for all.”

These recommendations were not taken into account when the National Strategies were developed, as in practice what happened was that the roll out was via the Local Authority Advisers who were provided with training materials and who then provided the information to each school under the Local Authority control. The development did not take into account the original researchers' point of view; the idea of moving slowly and through the sustained programme, as the Local Authority moved at the same speed for all schools despite the position the school was in relative to the National Strategy implementation.

One point which needs to be considered is that it would be interesting to speculate if the outcome would have been different if the CPD in this case had been contracted to the university sector as part of a sustained and accredited programme. This idea of utilising the Higher Education Sector would have possibly increased the status of the training but in fact might still have had a similar result due to resistance to change amongst teaching staff.

The AfL training materials provided by the DfES have been exemplified in Chapter 3.3.3 and the materials quoted the work of Black and Wiliam and indeed suggested the idea of a type of Action Research projects to develop the implementation. These ideas postulated in the training materials need to be compared to the Teacher Development Agency (TDA)'s Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) programme. The report on this provision in from CUREE in 2007 stated:

“By aligning course content and delivery to school and teacher priorities, and by tailoring assessment around these priorities, PPD can become less of an “add on” and more relevant to practitioners’ everyday needs.”

In contrast to the ideal described above the suggested Action Research projects relating to AfL were only really undertaken by interested parties (for example, this thesis) and there was no official provision made across the range of schools suggested in the original literature. There were reviews of the impact notably the eight Schools Project, which did review the provision and the Kings Medway Oxfordshire formative assessment project (KMOFAP). The KMOFAP was the engagement project led by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, which worked with 48 teachers and resulted in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. There is a plea made in the final lines of the original research by Black et al (1998: 19) which requested that:

“national policy will grasp this opportunity and give a lead in this direction.”

The plea was realised, but not in the way the original researchers intended. In response to this request for implementation I took the ideas disseminated by the National Strategy and applied them across the Faculties in School A. The results of

this have been seen in the description of the Action Research cycles in Chapter 5.2. The conclusions that were drawn were similar to those experienced by other schools and observed by Ofsted, that is to say that there was a lack of consistency in the implementation of AfL in schools.

The rest of this section will look at the Quality Assurance (QA) procedures and the use of CPD in developing the work of AfL in School B. As I stated previously the accepted paradigm, at the start of this research, of CPD in schools can be described as more of a passive one, in that CPD tended to be “done” to teachers. In this context teachers had various ideas delivered to them either on external courses or as part of Professional Development (PD) days; for most teachers the idea of teachers as Action Researchers would not have been considered. As far as I am concerned the idea of Action Research has deep underlying significance as I have taken this concept and developed my own research as part of my own CPD linked to the concept of social justice. This reflects the ideas described in Coombs and Smith (2003) where they state that:

“this pedagogical concept of personal inquiry represents the philosophical assumption and processes of how meaningful Action Research professional development projects can lead to valid professional learning impact in the workplace. This Action Research paradigm provides a work-based experimental rationale that generally seeks qualitative evidences that demonstrate an improvement in one’s own professional development and working situation, i.e. a social manifesto (Coombs, 1995) praxis objective as opposed to the more traditional positivist experimental paradigm that seeks generalisable laws via hypothesis testing”

The use of a coherent CPD policy was seen by the original researchers as crucial for the development of AfL and Dylan Wiliam was clear on this point in the private correspondence. The book ‘Assessment for Learning: Putting it into Practice’ explained that the need for coherent differentiated CPD; this was crucial as ‘One size fits all’ was not acceptable and there needed to be a sustainable strategy. This concept of sustainability can be linked to the Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff’s (2006: 33) living educational theory as they state:

“Many professional development programmes including programmes in education, aim to provide access to increased participation or influence in work concerns, so they focus on knowledge of what works and how to make it work.”

These improvements can be achieved through individual teacher led Action Research projects such as this one. This project can be seen to be part of curriculum development and change, which takes place as a result of on the job training. This point can be considered in light of the work in Gardner and Coombs (2010: 132) who point out that:

“Action researchers benefit from critical thinking scaffolds...the use of critical thinking scaffolds applied to meaningful work based CPD is the future approach for work-based research”

In respect to this we need to examine School B, as a clear link was made between CPD, PM and the training on AfL as I was able to scaffold the ideas for staff. This approach contrasted to the methodology suggested by the DfES in the National Strategies (0443-2004) as stated in Chapter 2.15 where it states that:

“As the units are designed to be used by schools selectively, according to need and context, the following notes are intended to help senior leaders map their way through long-term training and development programmes.”

This method of dissemination was more proscriptive than the opportunities I was given using the critical thinking scaffolds. In School B the developments in CPD practice began with the work I did on the PM paperwork. Leading on from this, members of the Leadership team developed the so-called ‘Learning Hubs’ model. In this model the teachers were required to undertake a number of training sessions, most of which were based on ideas relating to AfL, for example questioning to invoke feedback. The whole teaching staff, no matter their status, were required to choose four sessions which were delivered by other members of staff. One example of this training is the slide below (Figure 40) which was created for one of these sessions.

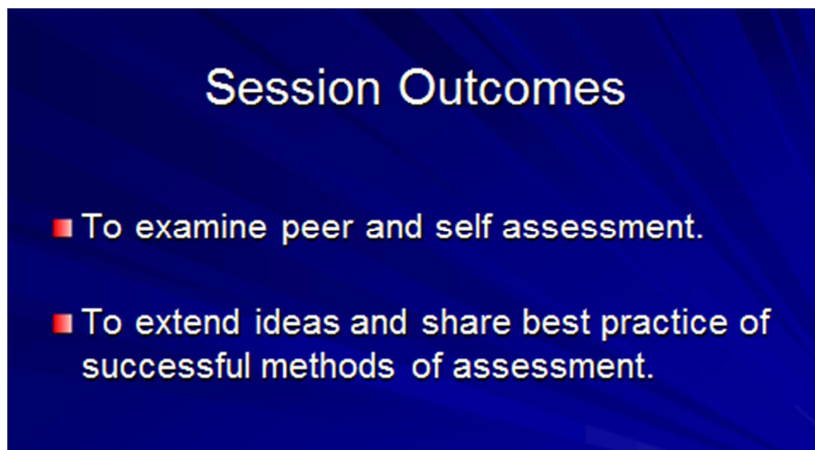


Figure 40: Example of slide from “learning hub” at School B.

This training session can be seen as the outcome of my work, but this is an example of where other staff have taken on the ideas and applied them to their own practice. This was then disseminated to a number of other staff who volunteered to take this particular session. The suggestions in Figure 41 below were made by the members of staff delivering this learning hub, which was a testament to my work on AfL.

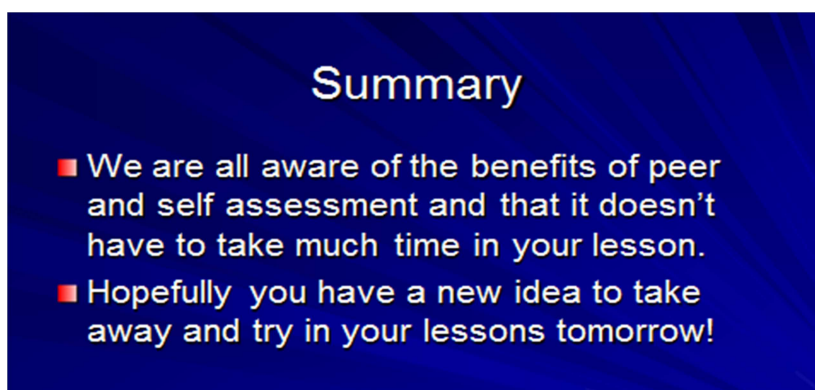


Figure 401: Second example of slide from “learning hub” at School B.

There is, however, a caveat to this model of learning hubs in that although teachers were opting in to these sessions, they were in some senses volunteering for the training. However, as everyone had to take part in a minimum number of sessions it could be questioned as to whether the sessions were genuinely changing ‘hearts and minds’. At the outset of this model there was no systematic examination of the impact of each individual session and although generalisations within the school situation are possible, care needs to be taken as the impact over time appeared to be significant, although the use of learning hubs was only one

development of many. Linked to the development of the learning hubs and the requirements of PM was an overall examination of teaching and learning across the school.

The learning hubs were also linked to a programme where teachers working at the satisfactory grade in the Ofsted framework at the time were identified and given extra support and training in order to move them to good. The satisfactory grade found in the Ofsted handbook for inspection has subsequently been amended to “Requires improvement” and now reads:

“The teaching requires improvement as it is not good”

There is a question here as to what exactly this phrase really means and moving forward there are questions as to what impact this will have for schools and for Ofsted. This is a question for future research.

During the period of this study, for most teachers being graded satisfactory, as the category was described, was felt to be unacceptable. Consequently the attempts of School B to develop the teaching, of all staff, from satisfactory to good was a priority in the School Improvement and Development Plan (SIDP). In this case the work I was doing as part of these Action Research cycles showed the local situation mirroring what was happening nationally.

The deficiencies of this model of CPD are that there were no clear Quality Assurance (QA) procedures in place linked to the motivation of professional learners. This links to the ideas postulated in Gardner and Coombs (2010: 11) for examining the key ideas and motivators associated with the learning and researching of adult professionals, whereupon they state:

“When we research our work we are usually driven by a further sense of curiosity and a desire to contribute to the knowledge base from our work experience”

Had Gardner and Coombs suggestions been adapted then in this case the research undertaken and shared would be peer reviewed and form the basis of deeper thinking and the development of a clear epistemology, whereas the training

undertaken in schools could be seen as isolated. Although good practice has been shared across School B, this is not reviewed by outside researchers and experts in the field of education. This is only rarely done by teacher researchers and although there is no empirical evidence to support this, anecdotally, my experience is not reflected across many schools. It is quite difficult to establish what QA there is in educational research as most of the writing currently available relating to QA refers to Higher Education (HE). This writing can be considered to be on a different subject to secondary education as HE is post compulsory and funded in a different way. The references from HE usually originate in universities such as Manchester who have developed their own QA policies for their courses, but this methodology has not been adopted by schools or LAs. These key constraints will mean that even if there are comparable ideas relating to QA between HE and secondary schools then it must be considered with care.

A key postulate is that it could be argued that the only external QA process available to schools is the Ofsted inspections, with the local situation in School B again mirroring the national situation. However, once more, consideration must be given to the fact that every school has a different experience of Ofsted, as there are different lengths of time between inspections, the teams are not the same from one inspection to the next and even the criteria under which schools are inspected are different as the guidance for inspections changes on a regular basis.

I believe that this project has had a valid learning impact on my own professional practice, as at the start of this project I did not fully understand the rationale behind Action Research. The “I” had to be placed at the centre of this project and it was due to this that my practice has been informed and I have enhanced my understanding of my own motivation. As a consequence of this enhanced understanding my knowledge of the impact my work has had on those around me also grew.

In extrapolating ideas from the local situation in School B a key learning point which was developed from the work in School A was the problem relating to the use of terminology which is under discussion in the next section.

7.5: Findings relating to the concepts linked to terminology:

This section must be considered as a key one in terms of findings as the confusion over the terminology is critical to the misunderstandings, which related to both the National Strategy and some of the problems relating to its implementation. The term that is most in question is the one developed by the original researchers, who described the idea as “Assessment for Learning”. This term has developed widespread currency amongst the educational establishment and indeed was adopted as a strand of the National Strategies in its own right but bears detailed examination, as well as consideration of what was intended by the original researchers.

The word ‘assessment’ can be defined in a variety of ways so in order to examine the conclusions reached as a result of this study it is imperative that I begin by looking at the individual components of the phrase, “Assessment for Learning”, beginning with the one that causes the greatest difficulty.

The ideas linked to the concept of assessment have, for most people, what could be described as a default setting. For the majority of people when they hear the word “assessment” they automatically link it to the idea of testing and for people in the educational field the concept of assessment is usually equated with high stakes summative testing, the outcomes of which can be used to judge schools and their performance. There is a school of thought which equates these ideas to behaviourist thinking, which suggests that at the start of the process linked to the National Strategies educationalists have a behaviourist default setting. Swaffield (2009: 5) suggests that:

“James (2008) adapts Chris Watkins’ (2003) three views of learning and discusses the implications for assessment of a behaviourist view, a cognitive constructivist view, and a socio-cultural view of learning”

If we consider this idea of the term ‘assessment’ having a behaviourist type default setting for the majority of the educational establishment it leads on to the question as to why the original researchers used the term “Assessment for Learning”. It could be argued that the original researchers were working from a

behaviourist perspective as the terminology they used for their original publications refer to the 'black box', which again has behaviourist connotations; as described in Chapter 2.3.

When asked to clarify their use of the word assessment as part of the terminology relating to AfL in private conversation both Dylan Wiliam and Paul Black acknowledged that it could be perceived that there were errors made. Indeed Dylan Wiliam stated that:

"This may have been the biggest mistake that Paul and I made. In a desire to 'reappropriate' the term "assessment" we made have allowed people to think that AfL is all about levels, tracking, and targets."

In comparison to this statement from Dylan Wiliam Paul Black had a slightly different view on this subject as he explained that:

"One reason for this is that the term is taken to mean end-of-course summative assessment, and a reason lying behind that is that most theories of pedagogy don't treat assessment as an intrinsic part so the process of teaching and learning. Note that in our publications, the 'formative use of summative tests' is a step in the direction of breaking down the barrier between testing and learning. Note that if assessment is defined as the elicitation of evidence about progress in learning, the terms formative and summative don't appear. It is the way in which the evidence is interpreted and used that distinguished formative from summative"

One conclusion, which can be drawn here is that there is still a difference in perception even between the original researchers about the use of the term. As this is the case, the fact that the term "Assessment for Learning" was misinterpreted either consciously or unconsciously by the politicians who wished to implement a National Strategy and practitioners in schools, who had to implement it on the ground should really not come as a surprise.

Christine Harrison in her response to the same question regarding the confusion of using the word “assessment” adopts a slightly different view as she states that:

“I think there are some who see AfL as an adjunct to summative assessment/testing and not for its position of bringing together teaching and learning.”

This particular conclusion is comparable to one I found in the information I gathered during the work undertaken for this thesis. In examining the initial findings they suggest that teachers felt this to be the case, however, it is very difficult to present any empirical evidence to support this statement. Over the period of time some members of staff have come to a deeper understanding of what is meant by the term Assessment for Learning demonstrated by a change in practice but I would question whether everyone involved in education has developed a deep understanding and an ability to implement the ideas suggested by the original research and developed by me in my own practice. This is due to the unique nature of the culture of each individual school and their ability to implement a single idea.

There are processes in schools which appear to reflect the concept of AfL but as Gadsby (2012: 1) explains:

“If we were to question 100 randomly selected teachers, all of them would at least have heard of Assessment for Learning or AfL. Furthermore I would bet that the vast majority would be happily using several to the more common AfL strategies such as traffic lighting or peer assessment...many well intentioned teachers are engaging with the letter of AfL rather than the spirit of it. Or, to put it another way, many teachers are grazing at the buffet of AfL without necessarily perceiving how the various morsels come together to form a well-balanced and satisfying educational philosophy.”

It could be postulated that this conclusion is the case because the original use of the term was flawed and allowed for a variety of interpretations, not all of which were in keeping with the original intentions of the authors. If this thinking is

then followed through to the implementation of the National Strategy this lack of clarity in terminology could be used as a reason for the failure of the Strategy to fundamentally change education in the way the originators could have hoped for. There is also the point that there is embedded cultural behaviour in the teaching profession, which sees assessment as low level summative and behaviourist throughout. The politicians also held the same assumptions, which could be described as the living culture of the profession. This point clearly links to the developments in the epistemology relating to AfL, which will be considered in the next section of this chapter.

7.6: Findings about the epistemology of AfL:

Change to the concept of 'assessment' requires a major cultural shift in any society, let alone the teaching profession. The teaching profession has utilised certain epistemological perspectives for over a century and the concept of teacher quality could be said to reflect a distorted reality, as the use of summative systems is embedded at the highest level. This includes the summaries of Student Achievement used by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in their Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is reported by the media and utilised by each government in turn to track the effectiveness of the education system.

It can be argued that this concept is clearly linked to that of Black and Wiliam in Chapter 7.5 where discussions have taken place in regard to terminology. This is due to the fact there has been initially a paradigm shift from the epistemological assumptions rooted in what is effectively 'summative testing' approaches to something new that redefines assessment systems; in my own practice this has been a move towards new types of measurement that underpins 'formative testing' systems. In peer discussions with my supervisor the idea has been postulated of adaptive assessment for learning (AAfL) strategies linked to adaptive testing tools. Thus it could be postulated there could be an argued rationale for a new educational system linked to the philosophy and epistemology of AAfL.

In order to make sense of this I have provided the following postulate ; the reconceptualising of the concept of assessment and test could be described as a rethinking of terminology in which assessment should be described instead as a new learning methodology for practitioners. This rethinking should clarify what is meant by 'assessment' and 'testing'. These show how they are best defined and linked to more appropriate forms of pedagogy suited to the needs of the 21st Century that wants transferable skills and knowledge production. This concept clearly links to the ideas in Dylan Wiliam's book on Embedded formative assessment (2011: 162) where he point out that:

"We now know that the teacher is the most powerful influence on how much a student learns and that teachers can continue to make significant improvements in their practice throughout their entire careers. If all teachers accept the need to improve practice, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better, and focus on the things that can make the biggest difference to their students, according to the research, we will be able to prepare our students to thrive in the impossibly complex, unpredictable world of the 21st century"

Adaptive testing has been described as being:

"based on a simple concept: more information can be obtained from a test item if the item is matched to the ability level of the examinee. To discriminate among low ability examinees, relatively easier items should be administered; to discriminate among high-ability examinees, relatively more difficult items should be administered"

http://www.assess.com/docs/Brief_Intro_Comp_Testing.pdf

This describes the processes in a lesson, which has the AfL component of "hinge questions" which Dylan Wiliam (2011: 101) describes as:

"The design of diagnostic questions to be used at hinge points in lessons – hinge point questions for short- is much more a craft than science, work with teachers suggests that the following two principles are useful guidelines.

First, it should take no longer than two minutes, and ideally less than one minute, for all students to respond to the question; the idea is that the hinge point question is a quick check on understanding, rather than a new piece of work in itself. Second, it must be possible for the teacher to view and interpret the responses from the class in thirty seconds (and ideally half that time)."

It can clearly be seen from this that the idea of adaptive testing already occurs within the classroom that has adopted the details of AfL, however the problems still occur because of the confusion between the terminology and the lack of clarity about the epistemology of AfL. The confusion between summative and formative assessment is a major epistemological deficit and could be described as a blind spot for both policy makers and educationalists. In order to remove this confusion the terminology needs to be clarified but this would prove difficult. This is due to the fact that even if they do not understand the concept correctly most educational professionals believe they know what AfL is. If there was to be a move away from the term incorporating the word assessment there would not really be a sufficient alteration in the epistemological understanding of the concept.

In order to change this global culture everyone with any responsibility for education would need to be involved and the difficulty would be that if anyone did not accept the cultural change then there would be a reversion to the previous default settings. This idea will be explored further in the final conclusions of this chapter.

7.7: Findings relating to the 'improve' paradigm:

This research was based upon an Action Research model and as such can be said to also incorporate the 'improve' rather than the 'prove' paradigm. At the start of this research, although I had previously produced work using historical methodology I did not clearly articulate my own research paradigms and it was not until the research was underway that I clearly set out my aims. This was due to my understanding developing as an emergent researcher, linked to my own social evolution as also understood by Whitehead's Living Educational theory, which led

to my synthesised research methodology and hence the development of my own grounded theory. These concepts were linked to personal and professional change (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) and the fact that my aims were clarified in my own mind by utilising peer discussion.

The concept of the 'improve' paradigm has been discussed previously I have already stated that the theory is examined in Coombs and Smith (2003) who underlined the social learning benefits of participatory Action Research by teachers' operating within their own classrooms and is also supported as a professional development process of change by Whitehead's Living Educational theory. The nature of this research has been such that I have operated within my own classroom but I have also fulfilled a role where the results of my research appear to have had an impact across a number of faculties and ultimately across School B, which has extended the idea of the improve paradigm from my own practice to that of others. Consideration does however need to be given to the potential conflict in my role as manager versus that of researcher.

It could be argued, however, that unless all staff undertook their own Action Research type projects the impact I had cannot be viewed as significant. It appears to be relatively easy to assess the impact my Action Research project has had in my own classroom and how my understanding of teaching and learning as well as my understanding of research paradigms has developed. What is more difficult to assess is whether my work and the improvements made to teaching and learning across the school is as a direct consequence of the Action Research project based on the 'improve' paradigm, as a range of other factors also need to be examined. Other factors could include the implementation of other initiatives; both national ones and school based ones as well as the impact I had in my SLT role, which is the role of manager versus that of researcher referred to earlier.

Another point which could be argued that the improvements in teaching and learning particularly in School B have been impacted on by the implementation of the National Strategies. In fact the implementation of the National Strategies was only one in a series of CPD initiatives, which were put into place across the period of this research in School B. The identification of staff for different types of

intervention in relation to the types of CPD and all the work related to performance management targets can all be linked to the 'improve' paradigm, as they were looking to move the standards of teaching and learning forward for teaching staff in School B. Linked to this work and involved with the 'improve' paradigm was the concept of the 'toolkit' for AfL which I was looking to develop the impact of which will be considered in the next section.

7.8: Findings about the development and impact of the AfL toolkit:

As has been previously pointed out there are a number of models relating to toolkits but for teachers the most common design are a series of prompts. This can be seen in PowerPoint presentations available to share on forums like those of the TES resources (formerly Times Educational Supplement) which were available from 2009 onwards.

<https://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Assessment-For-Learning-Toolkit-6020165/>

There is also a publication called the Assessment for Learning toolkit by Chris Quigley which was created in 2004 and accessed by me in 2008. Although the strategies in Chris Quigley's work are the same as those of the original researchers he appears to directly relate these to AfL in primary schools; which does not directly relate to the KS3 Strategy.

The conclusion which I have drawn from my own research is that although these methods are useful, making the suggestion that they comprise a comprehensive toolkit is not helpful in this context.

One aim of this research was to attempt to develop an AfL toolkit and so there is an example of the proforma I developed in School B in the Appendices as Appendix 20: AfL lesson observation proforma/ toolkit used in School B. This observation proforma was developed as a consequence of the work on AfL, which I had undertaken in School A, as in my new role in School B I was given responsibility for implementing the AfL Strategy. It was not developed in isolation but came about in response to the fact that SLT and other members of staff who did lesson observations needed a quick check to establish the extent of the use of AfL in

lessons. This proforma cannot be seen as a full AfL toolkit as it needs to be more than a simple tick list and this proforma needs to be used in conjunction with the other training techniques. This is borne out by the work by the ARG on its review into Assessment in Schools where it states that (2010: 22):

“there is evidence of a “tick-box culture”, in which assessment information can be seen as being mainly concerned with meeting a bureaucratic need to provide evidence of learning to school managers and others...The recent Assessing Pupils’ Progress initiative, in England, risks encouraging this constant monitoring of pupils’ levels and sub-levels although it claims to be promoting assessment for learning as part of pedagogy. The need to develop effective formative assessment/assessment for learning without it becoming overly bureaucratic is therefore a key, but not insurmountable, challenge.”

The use of AfL techniques in School B has been developed over a period of time and using a variety of training activities. The staff at School B would not see the Lesson Observation proforma as the toolkit; rather they would be able to explain the techniques in detail as exemplified by the training sessions run by a variety of staff. There was also use made by the staff of the Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) grids developed as part of the KS3 Strategy which was linked to the AfL proforma and the PM target template.

The review of AfL in Schools A and B demonstrate that a deeper understanding developed using CPD is needed rather than the superficial view presented by the original Strategy. This links to the concept of staff having access to a toolkit which comprises their teaching and learning strategies as well as the tick lists. The comments made in the TES article by John Bangs is apposite here:

“But he (Dylan Wiliam) said that the technique had not had the impact it should have done because of the lack of a proper strategy for teacher professional development.” Instead we had a highly bureaucratised and ossified way of turning AfL into some kind of weird amalgam of formative and summative assessment where everything had to be recorded to the nth degree,” Professor Bangs said” TES 2010

This quote is significant as it is condemning the bureaucracy of tick lists which need to be compared to the concept of a toolkit. The concept of a toolkit is one of the key developments which resulted from this research but it is not possible to view this development in isolation, nor should my attempts be seen as simply a tick list provided to staff. The significance of this finding is that once again the links between the different aspects of training and application in practice need to be stressed. If the term 'AfL toolkit' is typed into a search engine there are a number of results which occur, most of which give the description of AfL and some activities linked to each aspect. This does not give the support or necessarily deepen the understanding of the person using the toolkit, which I believe is the most important aspect of the 'toolkit' concept. It is this finding which again makes a significant contribution to the development of understanding relating both to my own practice and to the wider academic community.

There is potential for different types of aspects of the toolkit to be linked to the concepts included in the AfL framework; one of these aspect is the speaking prompts exemplified in Chapter 6.2.2. Following this concept through, schools could develop their own specific toolkits, relevant to their own specific needs following this methodology using the toolkit as an outline prompt. It would be important for schools to design their own toolkits due to the fact that they can be seen as culturally unique institutions; an issue which has proved to be significant in the findings from this thesis.

This point regarding the development of AfL for schools, departments and teachers is one of the most important points made in this thesis and providing a simple tick list type toolkit is not the answer. The application of AfL to each layer of education is one of my most significant points for further development.

In an attempt to provide something more detailed than a simple tick list the assessment tool for school leaders developed by the CIEA appears to meet this requirement more fully than the original training for the National Strategy. As a result this assessment tool will considered in more detail in the next section.

7.9: Findings about the CIEA tools and OFSTED inspections:

It can be argued that if AfL was to be successfully implemented at the start of the National Strategy, there should have been some form of self-assessment of the department as part of the process. This assessment tool on the CIEA website was developed as described below by Graham Herbert in personal communication:

“As Deputy Head of the CIEA I sit on the development board of the AfL programme alongside representatives from DfE, the National Strategies (NS), and QCDA. The original quality standards tool had been developed by the NS as part of their remit to roll out the quality standards tool nationally. I suggested that an interactive version would be more useful for the end user. Any interactive facility would have to go on the CIEA website since QCDA, DfE and NS do not have interactive facilities on their website.”

This assessment tool was an important point for the development of the implementation of the AfL strand of the National Strategy. In School A the use of these tools did not occur until at least two years into the process and as a result previous to their use I had developed an individual approach in order to review where each department was. The use of these assessment tools was one of the first actions taken in School B in order to establish a baseline and they proved to be useful because they summarised each departments' position. In order to check the impact of this particular tool across the country I asked Graham Herbert:

“As the CIEA has disseminated the quality standards review tool, what is the feedback like from schools that have used it?”

“Feedback about the tool has been very positive. Where Local Authority staff have encouraged schools to use the tool there has been a wide ranging use of the tool. The Local Authority staff that have done this have tended to be members of the CIEA and can see the benefit to them personally and to their schools generally in using the range of tools provided by the CIEA. The most enterprising of the LA officers have used the tool to help head teachers write their SEF. When this has happened it has proved to be a very useful addition to both the head teacher's armoury as well as that of the LA officers.

Feedback about the tool used in this way has been the most complimentary.”

Once again a familiar theme is developing with the point that the tool was not applied consistently across the country but was taken on by interested individuals. In this case the National Strategy developed the original tool but the dissemination of it was haphazard, the CIEA version was mainly used by people who were CIEA members which meant there was a limited uptake across the country.

The use AfL was assessed using the OFSTED framework. In the quote above Graham Herbert mentions the fact that the tool was used by a number of schools in order to create the School Evaluation Form (SEF). This was one of the required pieces of evidence used during the OFSTED inspections throughout the period of this research. Graham Herbert, again in private communication, also evaluated the impact of AfL and his evaluation echoes the conclusions that I had come to independently. I asked him:

“In your opinion how deeply embedded is AfL in English Secondary Schools?”

“The evidence on which I can base an answer to this question lies in the evidence that emanates from Ofsted and the evidence gathered from the AfL board chaired by the DfE and on which I sit. The latter form of evidence is only a reflection of case studies that have been gathered and recounted by DfE officers and consultants visiting schools and reporting back to the board, albeit in a systematic way. This evidence can be supplemented by data from the CIEA quality standards tool.

“Evidence from Ofsted suggests that AfL is embedded in only a small number of English secondary schools”.

This reflects the position I found in both School A and School B. He continued:

“Over the last four years, the evidence has shown that assessment is the one major area of concern in English schools, with over 40% classified as satisfactory or worse. Where it is good it is outstanding, but this is in less than 10% of English schools. The overwhelming evidence is that practices are

patchy at best, with inconsistencies regularly noted between schools in the same Local Authority, across individual schools and even within individual departments.”

This again reflected my own experience within a school. He again continued:

“The evidence available to the AfL board suggests similar findings. There are some pockets of excellence, but these are rare and have been written up as case studies, both by the DfE and by CIEA and disseminated. This is corroborated by the CIEA standards tool which finds that few secondary schools bother to use the tool and where they do, the results do not show significant numbers of secondary schools embedding this practice.”

This could indeed be a case study comment on my own work.

“There are probably very good reasons for this; ...the accountability culture militates against the widespread development of AfL in schools and teachers feel safer using tried and tested techniques of drilling students in how to pass external examinations without necessarily understanding the concepts that lie behind their answers. Sadly, all too often for senior pupils in schools their curriculum is narrow, mechanically taught and pupils respond mechanically to the questions they are set. This is understandable, but not desirable.”

There is a key point to note here in that Graham Herbert highlights the fact that the problem of the lack of understanding of the underpinning pedagogy is key to the issues with high stakes summative testing. His overall conclusion was:

“AfL is not embedded in many English secondary schools.”

This series of conclusions drawn by Graham Hebert reflects the conclusion I have been able to synthesise from my own experience and will be discussed in more depth in the final section of this chapter.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This chapter will summarise the thesis and explain the contribution to knowledge. It will also investigate the implications for practice and the possibilities for future research whilst also recognising the limitations of the research. This chapter will come to an overall conclusion and give my final thoughts.

8.1: Summary of thesis:

Throughout this process my thinking has developed in line with Whitehead and McNiff's ideas (2006: 2):

"The whole idea of Action Research is that the kind of theory that is most appropriate for explaining its processes is already within the practice, and emerges from the practice as the research develop."

I have developed my own living educational theory in line with this idea and my research has impacted not only on my own practice, but as a result of my role as an Assistant Principal I have also been able to impact on the practice of others. There has been the issue of my management role coming into conflict with my role as a researcher to overcome but the I within my methodology has led to a greater understanding of social justice and has informed my final conclusions.

8.2: Contribution to knowledge:

The findings which have been most significant for me is that relating to the implementation of the National Strategy on AfL and the ideas linked to the terminology, which could be described as adversely affecting this. The implementation of the National Strategy lacked coherence in the way in which the CPD was developed and this is highly significant in relation to this thesis. School B has developed a more coherent policy of CPD linked to PM and the development of lessons graded by Ofsted as good or outstanding, which could be described as contributing to the raising of standards. This methodology of implementing a coherent structured CPD strategy, was not employed by the National Strategy and its implementation could be described as ad-hoc at best and could be seen to be a weak response which was doomed to failure. The work of Black and Wiliam was

further developed in Scotland and in this case Paul Black stated in his personal communication:

“Schools in Scotland have made a great deal of progress: their Education people consulted the King’s group and used our advice to propose a development programme, AiFL (Assessment is For Learning) using my colleagues to train teachers in selected pilot schools, and teachers who had worked in our own development project. They then set up an independent evaluation of the work and as this was very favourable, asked all regional authorities to implement it for all.”

It is clear that the government in England did not replicate this model and as a result in England the implementation was left to a few interested parties, like me, to develop these ideas. There are obvious implications in relation to this point linked to the idea of what kind of CPD is needed to embed strategies in real peoples’ lives, linked to my concept of social justice, and to change national practice which has potential for further research which will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

My conclusions on the subject of the National Strategies have been reinforced by my communication with Paul Black, Dylan Wiliam and Graham Herbert amongst others, as their responses have supported my findings. The imposition of the National Strategies did not demonstrate deep understanding of the concept of AfL by the policy makers. My understanding of the subject of AfL developed over a period of time as part of this Action Research project but as Paul Black pointed out in private communication for most Local Authorities, schools and teachers:

“The understanding is shallow – the failure to grasp that it requires a difficult and quite radical change for teachers in their classroom practices, and the omission of serious consideration of the need to give comments and not marks on regular homework, shows this failing”

This can be seen as one of the key findings from this research as it can be seen that the intention of the original research, was not carried through by the

policy makers across the country, despite individuals like myself developing their own practice. I developed my own practice in relation to AfL as a result of the implementation of the KS3 Strategy but I also developed my practice as a researcher in line with the Action Research paradigm leading to developing my own Grounded Theory, which is significant for this study.

The second important conclusion from the work on this thesis, which can be linked to the implementation of the National Strategy concerns the use of terminology, notably the fact that the word 'assessment' was included in the term "Assessment for Learning". Having reviewed the literature on the subject the conclusions which can be drawn is that most educationalists appear to have had the behaviourist 'default setting' where assessment means testing. Paul Black in private communication agreed with this point as when questioned about the confusion concerning the term "Assessment for Learning" he said:

"One reason for this is that the term is taken to mean end-of-course summative assessment, and a reason lying behind that is that most theories of pedagogy don't treat assessment as an intrinsic part so the process of teaching and learning."

Dylan Wiliam was possibly even more forthright in his opinion as in personal communication he said (quoted above):

"This may have ...allowed people to think that AfL is all about levels, tracking, and targets."

This finding about the terminology is highly significant in understanding the work of this thesis; the concept of formative assessment is central to my own learning journey.

My postulate is that AfL means we need to assess the starting point of each individual and move them on from there a concept which links very closely to the Action Research learning journey that researchers undertake. The concept is applicable across a range of different situations. Had the concept of examining starting points and moving people on been applied as the original researchers

intended then the first people to have benefitted should have been the teachers who were undergoing the CPD on the KS3 Strategy. The concept of AfL for teachers would have led to the development of a personalised CPD programme which some schools have made tentative steps towards but which lacks consistency.

As has been noted previously Dylan Wiliam admits that the use of this terminology was possibly their biggest mistake. My own contention is that even if "Assessment for Learning" had been described as "Formative Assessment" then the same problems would have occurred. Paul Black in his personal communication, as quoted above, said that the word assessment led to confusion. He then continues:

"Note that in our publications, the 'formative use of summative tests' is a step in the direction of breaking down the barrier between testing and learning. Note that if assessment is defined as the elicitation of evidence about progress in learning, the terms formative and summative don't appear. It is the way in which the evidence is interpreted and used that distinguished formative from summative."

This personal comment does clarify the point but is obviously too late for the understanding linked to the implementation of AfL in most schools as this comment has not been widely disseminated. Indeed although the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses still include a section on AfL there is concern in my mind whether the trainers fully understand the ideas encompassed by AfLA key finding from this thesis makes clear that the pedagogical reasoning behind the policies and the implementation of policy should be clarified and made explicit in order to allow teachers to have clarity in thinking.

There were also conclusions relating to the use of the CIEA assessment tools discussed above, these tools were developed to allow managers in schools to develop their own practice and proved to be useful as part of my own work in schools. The tools, were seen by Graham Herbert in private communication as creating:

“a monitoring facility that allows all LAs to see the areas of strength and those areas that need developing across those areas for which they are responsible.”

This proved to be useful but again the lack of consistency of implementation was a significant feature.

A further conclusion was that the development of a toolkit for AfL proved to be more complex than it first appeared. The development of a lesson observation proforma was the basis for the toolkit but there were other elements, which could at best be described as being less tangible. The most useful developments of the toolkit was the self-assessment aspect which were linked to the CPD programme put in place as part of the PM process adopted by all members of the teaching staff at School B. Both Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam were dismissive of the idea of a ‘tick list’ and I agree with the comment made by Paul Black in personal communication where he describes AfL as *“making difficult changes in their classroom practice”*. The links of my work on proformas to the CPD programme has moved it away from being a simple tick list. As far as my own conclusions are concerned I believe there is the need for a series of different types of toolkits of the types exemplified previously in this thesis.

There are a number of other key postulates which I have signposted through the work on this thesis. In Chapter 3 I stated that the reconceptualising of the concept of **assessment** and **test** could be described as a rethinking of terminology in which **assessment** should be described instead as a new learning methodology for practitioners. In Chapter 4.8 I explained that the study could not be postulated purely as an exercise in Action Research because I was looking at changing practice. The diagram in Chapter 4.8 demonstrates the changes to this postulate. In Chapter 7.4.3 I stated the idea that lack of consistency in the implementation of the strategy could be related to a poor Quality Assurance (QA) process as a postulate. Despite the fact that there are accredited programmes available from universities, which are available in a variety of formats, the CPD available in schools does not have a robust QA process in place. Linked to this point is the fact that national CPD, such as the National Strategies, also does not have a robust quality assurance system in

place for schools to utilise. This was a significant learning point and one of the key findings from this study is that there is a requirement for good Quality Assurance processes to be embedded in a school's practice. This concept of developing QA and CPD is highly significant in terms of the findings from this study. These two processes of QA and CPD need to work hand in hand in order to ensure correct identification and tackling of the needs for training exhibited by teachers.

In order to develop a consistent CPD QA policy there needs to be detailed consideration to how this can be implemented. Schools currently have developed an ad-hoc approach to CPD with each school setting up their own methodology. Again these approaches do not have a clear research paradigm as their background and one of the key findings from this thesis reflects this fact; in order to develop a more coherent strategy it is important that schools have a more consistent research approach developed.

Overall this thesis has led to my personal understanding of my own pedagogy being developed and the impact I have had on the understanding of pedagogy for others can be seen to be significant. The development of CPD in relation to teaching and learning in School B has also been significant but here there have been a number of developments working together, so it is not possible to say which of these has been most effective. The use of Action Research is the most important aspect of this thesis as the link to the 'improve' paradigm is key to the movement forward in my own understanding.

8.3: Implications for future practice:

If there is a lack of understanding in the trainers on the subject of AfL then the next generation of teachers will not fully develop AfL in their own teaching, which would be detrimental to their students. The comment from Dylan Wiliam above, amongst others, impacts on the recommendations for future practice relating to educational policy implementation and links to my interest in relation to social justice.

8.4: Possibilities for future research:

There are a number of implications for future research so one of the aspects of this thesis which should be examined in more detail is linked to the political issues. The types of educational theories underpinning the implementation of National Strategies were not always clear. Given the current political intervention in education the research paradigms these developments are underpinned by should be examined in depth.

The difficulties in terminology relating to 'assessment' is central to this thesis and the educational paradigms behind the terminology of education need to be examined further in order to clarify the reasons behind the political developments. Another aspect which, should be examined further is the development of improved strategies relating to teaching and learning and the importance of CPD in developing this. School B has developed a set of CPD interventions which has been instrumental in improving the outcomes for students; this is another aspect which would bear serious consideration in future research using the "improve paradigm". The importance of high quality CPD linked to QA processes and a regular review process would be another aspect which would be useful to consider as a future project, this should be linked to the development of different QA models for schools relating to their CPD provision. These projects could benefit from the use of Action Research methodology in order to ground them in peoples developing practice. This link between CPD and QA processes needs to be further researched. Schools currently have developed an ad-hoc approach to CPD with each school setting up their own methodology. Again these approaches do not have a clear research paradigm as their background and one of the key findings from this thesis should reflect this fact, in order to develop a more coherent strategy it is important that schools have a more consistent research approach developed. The nature of CPD also needs to be examined further as the power of as well as the weakness of CPD is its ability to embed a culture of change. One area of potential future research links to the concept of AfL for teachers described above. Future research could build on this idea and examine the

possibility of personalisation of teacher CPD as well as examining the appropriate Quality Assurance processes.

8.5: Limitations of the research:

The overall conclusions, which have come about from the research I have conducted can be said to have implications both for individual schools and also for the implementation of future strategies. This extrapolation from the micro to the macro was not part of the original intentions of this research but came about as a result of being in communication with various members of the educational community, including the originators of the original research. This thesis has been limited in scope due to the nature of the Action Research project but provides an account of my individual journey.

8.6: Overall conclusions and final thoughts:

It should be stated here that as a consequence of my involvement with a living Action Research project I am now able to extrapolate ideas with more clarity and have more confidence in my own voice in relation to these final conclusions. The process has allowed me to utilise the Action Research framework to bring together a critical and literature based Action Research project, which is not only a discovery of ideas but incorporates a looping process of analysis and triangulates my thinking. This project has been a longitudinal Action Research project, which has sought evidence of cultural change within the establishments and can be said to have given pointers for the redefinition of the culture of teaching and learning through embedded AfL. For myself the Action Research process has authenticated my own beliefs and understanding and has served the purpose of exploring the idea of embeddedness. If this methodology had not been adopted I would not have achieved the results and viewpoint I currently hold. My contribution to knowledge comes from my unique standpoint which is an outcome of my use of Action Research. The use of Action Research methodology generated my findings which although in many cases can be seen as similar to others they are in fact different because of the unique perspective I have brought to this study.

The true intellectual epiphany of this project came with the realisation that the problem was greater than the implementation of one strategy. What has occurred is that the organisational and cultural change, which has been attempted has been imposed. In order to embed these systems they need to be sustainable, but what is currently happening is that the culture in education is fossilising and there is a lack of dynamism. The Living Action Research theory embeds its values in shifting cultural practice and cultural change but currently in education teachers are living in a summative culture. This has resulted in the formative culture being an alien concept and the observed variable performance is as a result of the actions taken by the National Strategies which were not a serious attempt to change the culture. As a result of my developing understanding of the nature of change I have impacted on my own practice and this can be used to impact on the wider professional environment. My own understanding of the nature of education as an instrument for social change is fundamental to this so the key recommendation, therefore, for future practice is to carefully examine the starting points of the cultural background and use Action Research as the process to move the concept forward. This idea then becomes the use of Action Research for cultural change but if this is to be developed there should not be an underestimation of the power of cultural inertia.

Glossary:

AfL: Assessment for Learning.

AifL: Assessment is for Learning.

AAfL: Adaptive Assessment for Learning.

APP: Assessing Pupil Progress.

ARG: Assessment Reform Group.

AST: Advanced Skills Teacher.

BERA: British Education Research Association.

CIEA: Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors.

CPD: Continued Professional Development.

DFE: Department for Education.

DFES: Department for Education and Skills.

GTP: Graduate Training Programme.

HE: Higher Education.

HMI: Her Majesty's Inspectorate.

ICT: Information and Communication Technology.

ITT: Initial Teacher Training.

KMOFAP: Kings' Medway and Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project.

LA: Local Authority.

NS: National Strategy.

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

OfQual: Office for Quality in Education.

Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education.

PACE: Progress Continue and Achieve in Education.

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment.

PDP: Professional Development Plan.

PGCE: Post Graduate Certificate in Education.

PM: Performance Management.

QA: Quality Assurance

QCA: Qualifications Curriculum Authority

QCDA: Qualification and Curriculum Development Authority.

SCAA: School Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

SEF: Self Evaluation Form.

SIDP: School improvement and Development Plan.

SIG: School improvement Group.

SLT: Senior Leadership Team.

SMART: Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Timed.

TDA: Teacher Development Agency.

TES: Times Educational Supplement.

TGAT: Task Group on Assessment and Testing.

TTA: Teacher Training Agency.

WAG: Working at Grade.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Audit of provision in School A

Audit of Assessment for Learning

Focus areas

The focus of the audit will be on these three areas:

- Objective led lessons
- Independent learning
- Peer and self assessment

Refer to the attached sheets for more detail about these areas.

We have chosen to focus the work on Years 11 to 13.

Research methods

The methods used will be:

- Lesson observations
- Work sampling
- Student interviews
- Student questionnaires
- Scheme of work scrutiny

Audit Team

- [redacted] carry out lesson observations.
 - [redacted] arrange questionnaires
 - [redacted] do student interviews
 - [redacted] do work sampling and scheme of work scrutiny.
- [redacted] is a LA consultant for Afl.

Timing of Activity

Audit to take place from December 2nd to January 18th

Report to Governors on January 21st

Please pass the following through to [redacted] by Friday 14th December

Schemes of Work

One module of work for each Year group (11-13) taught since September.

Work Sample

Three samples of work from students in Year 11 who have covered the module chosen from the scheme of work.

We are looking for evidence of learning objectives and outcomes and peer and self assessment.

If there are any difficulties with this please let me know.

Thanks

Suggested timetable for AfL day 20--

From Cathy McKenna: To LA Adviser: Cc Deputy Head, Headteacher

Period 1

Art Teacher A or Teacher B (head of department)

Drama Teacher C (NQT)

Period 2

Technology Teacher D

RE Teacher E (SMT)

Period 3

English Teacher F (AG&T Co-ordinator)

Humanities Teacher G (from middle school)

Period 4

Maths Teacher H (from middle school)

Work sampling or interviews

Period 5

Science Teacher I (Head of Faculty)

ICT Teacher J (Head of Faculty)

Period 6

PE Teacher K Teacher L (from middle school) Teacher M (Head of Faculty).

Work sample and conclusions

Audit of AfL provision in School A

Appendix 2: Request for milestone assessment pieces School A

To all staff

Could you please pass a photocopy of the milestone assessment from Term 1 for the following pupils to your head of faculty by the end of Tuesday 16th January?

This will need to include the assessment itself and any written feedback provided to the pupil.

Year 7

A C 7X2: G K 7Z2: J W 7Z2: P C 7X3: C M 7X2: D K 7Z1

Year 8

M V8Z3: D T 8X2: A O 8Z1: K P 8X3: D P 8Z2: N F 8X1

Year 9

A C 9Z1: T G 9X1: H K 9Z2: D R9X2: T W 9Z1: J McD 9Z1

Appendix 3: Review of milestone assessment pieces from School A

To Heads of Faculty

As promised here is some feedback on the milestone assessment tasks from Term 1

Dept. A

The test was clearly presented

Clear generic level descriptors

Ideas to think about

Could the test be used at the start and end of a unit to show progress?

How effective is the leveling and target setting after a test?

Dept. B

Clear layout of tasks

Clear language used

Transfer of targets between units

Student involvement in target setting

Big picture is clear

Consistency; a faculty approach

Progression

Appropriate challenge

Nothing to think about

Dept. C

Challenging

Overview and plan provided for Year 7

Generally the tasks from G were more accessible

Interesting tasks

Well presented

Ideas to think about

Check accessibility for less able

Do the students have the knowledge, skills and understanding to access the higher levels?

Dept. D

Clear language on generic levels

Very clear curriculum plans and overviews

Things to think about

Was difficult to identify key tasks

Do pupils get task sheets?

Dept. E

Subj. 1

Clearly laid out tasks
Clear descriptors
Interesting tasks
Progression evident

Subj. 2

No tasks provided

Subj3

No tasks provided

Dept. F

Clear curriculum plans
Clear tests
Things to think about
How to use tests formatively

Dept. G

Clear levels provided

Dept. H

No tasks provided

Could you collect the photocopies of the milestone assessments for Term 1 from your staff and hand to me by the end of Wednesday?

Thank you,

XX

Appendix 4: Questions relating to Schemes of Work from School A

A guide for Writing Schemes of Work

- What skill are you assessing in each unit
- How are you assessing that skill
- How are you going to assess formatively
- How are you going to give the students the Big Picture
- How are you going to ensure progression within the scheme of work, across the schemes of work, across the key stage?
- How are you presenting milestone tasks
- How are you giving the students descriptors
- How are you going to peer/self-assess
- How are you going to deliver feedback
- How are you going to monitor progression and consistency across the faculty

Factors to take into account

- Do you have mixed ability or set groups
- How frequently does the subject see pupils
- How many assessment strands do you have
- School calendar

Appendix 5: Table showing results of AfL in School A

	Observations	Work Sample	Schemes of Work	Pupil Responses
Strengths	<p>Effective use of peer and self-assessment</p> <p>Time is provided for reflection by pupils</p> <p>Success criteria secure progression and allow pupils to make progress</p>	<p>Top tips for achievement is available and teacher comments reflect this.</p> <p>Mark scheme easy to access</p> <p><i>Teacher comments on what can be improved</i></p>	<p>Clear overview</p> <p>Good learning objectives</p> <p>Well organised</p> <p><i>Clear learning objectives</i></p>	<p>Shows how they are helped to learn</p> <p>Some students understand where learning fits in</p> <p>Do review learning</p> <p>Regularly mark or comment on own work</p>
Areas for Development	<p>Students to review progress against learning objectives</p>	<p>To show links to previous and future learning</p> <p><i>Produce clear learning objectives and outcomes</i></p> <p><i>Provide feedback to</i></p>	<p>Develop learning objectives and strategies across all schemes</p> <p><i>Gaps in Schemes of Work</i></p>	<p>All task to be linked to learning</p> <p>Year 13 to receive more feedback</p> <p>Students to know what standards to aim</p>

		<i>students on draft work</i>		for Peer marking needed
<p>Conclusions</p> <p>Students feel they are helped to understand what is being learned Divisions between students views on learning objectives</p>				
<p>Action Points</p> <p>Consistency to be achieved between A and B. Clear learning objectives to be written into schemes of work across the faculty. All tasks to be linked to learning objectives in order for students to understand learning</p>				
<p>Review Needed and Dates</p>				

Appendix 6: Agenda for CPD twilight School B

Agenda for Twilight on Assessment for Learning

Objectives

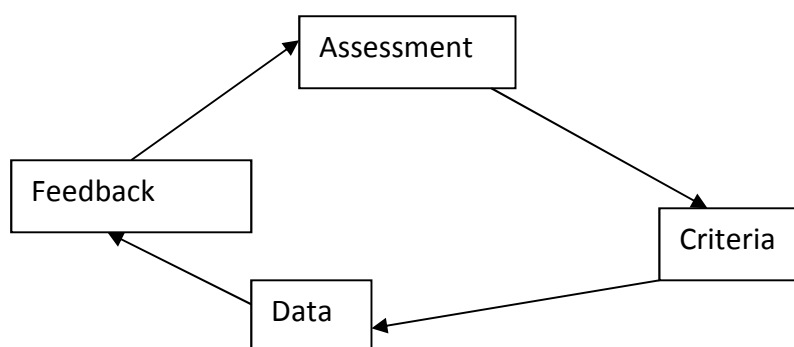
To develop strategies for staff on Assessment for Learning linked to performance management

To produce assessment criteria linked to skills progression through Key stage 3 or Key stages 4/5

3:30 Start

3:30 to 4:00 Activity in groups

4:00 to 6:00 Working in departments on producing assessments and criteria based mark schemes showing progression and feed back to student and parents



Subject/Faculty leaders to decide on outcomes and to share with XX before ... on attached reply slip

What next?

When?

Faculty/Subject.....

Faculty/Subject Leader.....

Outcomes to include

Agenda for CPD twilight session at School B

Appendix 7: Feedback 1

Feedback from Twilight

Assessment for Learning

January 20--

Starter:

What went well?

PE: Time to work together. Easy/ simple one task to look at

Geog: Interesting and thought provoking. Excellent starter. Good ideas. Clear instructions

History: Clear well presented. Reminder about all ideas for AfL

Science: Illustrated key ideas sharing objectives, criteria awareness, exemplar material, and feedback to learners.

Music: Clear presentation. Confident delivery. Demonstrated the skill well. Although seen before enjoyed the starter. The whole point was well demonstrated with confidence

Pace/citizenship: Good sharp clear intro of the importance of AfL. Good ideas given for starters and plenaries

Maths: Rachel's bit

Technology: Very good capable and competent. Made us realise that if we didn't give the right info we will not get the results

ICT: It was an interesting activity. Full involvement. Interesting feedback from staff

Business: Clear simple exercise. Point made practically. Good to see a GTP with confidence

English: Staff engaged with the activity, a positive show of support for an otherwise basic (though fundamental) lesson in AfL.

Starter: Even Better if:

PE: Follow up time given

Geog: Could hear all

Music: A slide with your mark scheme 1 on (the initial scoring process). Some people had been more focussed on listening

Pace/Citizenship: Maybe a little more depth on info relating to AfL. More examples of how specific departments are using AfL.

Maths: People at back weren't so rude. It wasn't first week back

Technology: Everyone listened (rude people at eh back). Quicker start

ICT: none (objectives achieved task of correct length)

English: Top down presentation again. Proper discussions/views about whole staff nominated issues what we can do together to... Patronising tone for an experienced audience needs to be addressed. It was a basic approach to AfL we want to hear about "new" best practice.

Feedback from Twilight

Subject Based sessions: What went well?

PE: Time to work together. Production of relevant resources.

Geog: Started on first module and got completed. We have completed work for year 7 very pleasing progress.

History: Completion of KS4 feedback sheets for essays and source work. Completion of KS5 essay planning sheets and self assessment. Discussion of KS3 assessment tasks and mark sheets

Science: Time to identify opportunities for AfL. We were able to spend a lot of time on the task and complete enough, so that our skills assessment procedures are in place for year 7 programmes of study

Music: Identification of key skills. Progress towards skills ladder. Linking national Curriculum with present assessment of Year 7. Having member of slt present helped focus and be more objective.

Pace/Citizenship: Time spent looking at the new citizenship curriculum and how to implement AfL activities. How AfL tasks can be used which does not take hours of marking.

Maths: How much we did. What quality planning we got to do. Majority of time was in faculty.

Technology: Consolidation/focussed thought. We are trialling more effective worksheets with key level descriptors.

ICT: Have managed to revamp all Key Stage 3 mark grids in line with the KS4 OCR grids. Emailed copies to all staff teaching subject (including non specialists) hard copies and electronic copies stored.

Business: Stream lined last Year 11 work tasks. Looked at feedback sheets. Looked at exemplar materials to inform grading and feedback.

English: Grid ranking session. Clear plan for improving Afl in faculty review weeks to tackle fundamental issue.

Feedback from Twilight: Even Better if:

PE: Resources were paid for.

Geog: All staff were available to make sure everyone had an input. Got all the modules done.

Science: Have only scratched the surface and further development is needed

Music: Follow up needed. Departments/faculties may have other priorities that would benefit from a focussed 2/3 hour session. An opportunity to do this would be most useful

Pace /Citizenship: Maybe more guidance from slt on what specific parts of AfL to focus on

Maths: We had more time

Technology: Need more time for it to be really productive. Everyone is in (all teachers could contribute). People knew what the PD days are so part time staff can chose wisely

ICT: More staff to help with task

English: SLT rotation through meetings to give insights/comments. Need more time to get used to one initiative first – although the whole system is integrated and makes a lot of sense to...?

Appendix 8: Work scrutiny proforma School B

Work Scrutiny Proforma

Name

Subject	Type of Evidence		Good	Satisfactory	Development needed
		Evidence of Learning Objective			
		Evidence of student or peer review of learning objective			
		Feedback linked to learning objective (student peer teacher)			
		Feedback is understood and acted on			
		Next step targets are set			
		Evidence of progress			
Comments					

Appendix 9: PowerPoint on videoing lessons from School B

Assessment for learning

Whole Staff Meeting

2nd March 2009

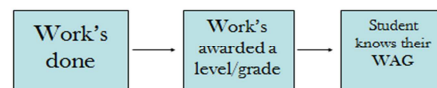
Matt Cooke



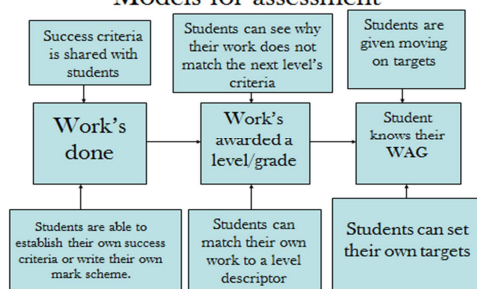
How might the people in the pictures use assessment for learning?



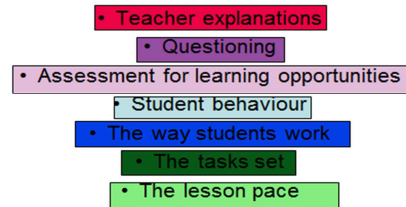
Models for assessment



Models for assessment



Lesson Elements



Lesson Elements

- Praise
- Students' verbal responses
- The starter task
- The plenary
- Differentiation
- Subject knowledge
- Body language
- Use of voice

The Post mortem

What Assessment for learning was there? What went well? Even better if...

My own moving on targets

Appendix 10: AfL audit School B

Assessment for
Learning Audit

October 2009



Staff Initials

Please complete the following as accurately as possible as this will be used to inform training sessions

1. Use of skills based learning objectives

Secure..... not secure
1 2 3 4 5 6

2. Providing opportunities for students to absorb feedback

Secure.....not secure
1 2 3 4 5 6

3. Ensuring students do not leave sessions without knowing how well they have performed against learning goals or success criteria

Secure.....not secure
1 2 3 4 5 6

4. Use of self assessment

Secure.....not secure
1 2 3 4 5 6

5. Use of peer assessment

Secure.....not secure
1 2 3 4 5 6

6. Ensuring feedback focuses on individual action points

Secure.....not secure
1 2 3 4 5 6

Optional

Your Performance Management Assessment for Learning focus

Appendix 11: Performance Management draft 1, 2 and final School B



Assessment for Learning performance management targets

As part of the performance management process staff should be including an aspect of Assessment for Learning. In order to help with this process there are a number of targets suggested below.

1. Embed the use of learning objectives and review these to enhance learning
2. Embed the use of learning objectives and review these to enhance learning
3. Focus on success criteria to facilitate learning
4. Enhance and embed the use of feedback to promote learning
5. Use or enhance reflection from the teacher and the student together to review progress and develop targets for improvement
6. Develop or enhance learners peer and self assessment skills, in order that learners recognise and reflect on which aspects of their performance they need to improve

To assist further the targets have been broken down using the most recent research on the subject and as part of the performance management process staff will be asked to provide evidence.

1. Embed the use of learning objectives and review these to enhance learning by
 - a. Sharing the structure of the lesson with learners as part of introducing the session, highlighting the opportunities for feedback
 - b. Providing opportunities within each session for learners to absorb the feedback they have received and undertake the required action if appropriate within the timeframe of the lesson
 - c. Ensuring learners do not leave any session without knowing how well they have performed against learning goals or success criteria
2. Focus on success criteria to facilitate learning by
 - a. Making learners aware of the standards they are required to achieve and help them to recognise when they have achieved that standard
 - b. Using individual or small group learning objectives
3. Embed and enhance the use of feedback to promote learning by
 - a. Ensuring feedback is prompt
 - b. Providing detailed feedback
 - c. Providing evaluative feedback
 - d. Providing constructive feedback
 - e. Ensuring feedback is tailored to meet the needs of the individual and is directly linked to observable evidence - either a learners written or practical work or performance of a given task
 - f. Ensuring feedback focuses on individual action points
 - g. Ensuring feedback is clearly written or spoken in plain English
 - h. Ensuring feedback Identifies strengths and weaknesses and provides effective guidance on how a learner can improve
 - i. Ensuring feedback is specifically linked to learning goals/task/assignment/unit success or assessment criteria (cross referenced to what practitioners have asked learners to do)

4. Use or enhance reflection from the teacher and the student together to review progress and develop targets for improvement by
 - a. Building in feedback to learners as an important element of each lesson as part of effective lesson planning, whether it is on group or individual progress
 - b. Focus on motivation for learning
 - c. Demonstrating that staff genuinely believe that all learners can learn and improve against their own previous performance, not that of others
 - d. Setting individual targets
 - e. Developing the use of curricular targets
5. Develop or enhance learners peer and self assessment skills, in order that learners recognise and reflect on which aspects of their performance they need to improve by
 - a. Encouraging learners to take notes when oral feedback is being shared
 - b. Providing opportunities within each session for learners to absorb the feedback they have received and undertake the required action if appropriate within the timeframe of the lesson
 - c. Encouraging learners to action plan using targets based on feedback
 - d. Ensuring learners recognise success criteria
 - e. Ensuring learners assess their own performance against criteria and identify areas for improvement

Learning objectives

- Share the learning objectives with learners and check their understanding before progressing
- Make learners aware of the standards they are required to achieve and help them to recognise when they have achieved that standard
- Give effective feedback on assessment decisions, so that learners know how to improve
- Demonstrate high expectations and promote learners confidence that they can improve on their past performance

- Provide regular opportunities for themselves and learners to reflect on the last performance and review learners progress
- Develop learners peer and self assessment skills, so that learners can recognise and reflect on what aspects of their own work need to improve

Effective feedback

- It is tailored to meet the needs of the individual and is directly linked to observable evidence – either a learners written or practical work or performance of a given task
- Focuses on individual action points
- Deals with one point at a time
- Allows learners to compete with the task and with themselves not in competition or comparison with others
- Is written or spoken in plain English
- Is written or spoken clearly
- Is detailed
- Is evaluative
- Is constructive
- Is positive
- Identifies strengths and weaknesses
- Provides effective guidance on how a learner can improve
- Begins by saying what the learner has done well
- Progresses to areas the learner could have done better
- Ends on a positive note
- Is specifically linked to learning goals/task/assignment/unit success or assessment criteria (cross referenced to what practitioners have asked learners to do)
- Must be prompt

Practitioners s need to:

- Build in feedback to learners as an important element of each lesson as part of effective lesson planning, whether it is on group or individual progress
- Share the structure of the lesson with learners as part of introducing the session, highlighting the opportunities for feedback
- Encourage learners to take notes when oral feedback is being shared
- Provide opportunities within each session for learners to absorb the feedback they have received and undertake the required action if appropriate within the timeframe of the lesson
- Encourage learners to action plan using targets based on feedback
- Ensure learners do not leave any session without knowing how well they have performed against learning goals or success criteria

Demonstrate that they genuinely believe that all learners can learn and improve against their own previous performance, not that of others

Assessment for Learning the process

Share the learning objectives and encourage learners to contribute to feedback opportunities

Check learners understanding of learning objectives

Brief learners on what they have to do and what they have to hand in, or on the task they have to perform

Introduce the success or assessment criteria to learners and check their understanding

Provide learners with opportunities to apply the criteria to examples of work produced, possibly by a previous cohort, to illustrate standards required and the application of the criteria

Provide the necessary guidance and support to learners on an individual basis and provide oral feedback

Provide peer assessment opportunities

Provide self assessment opportunities

Undertake the practitioner led assessment of learners work

Provide timely written or oral feedback to learners

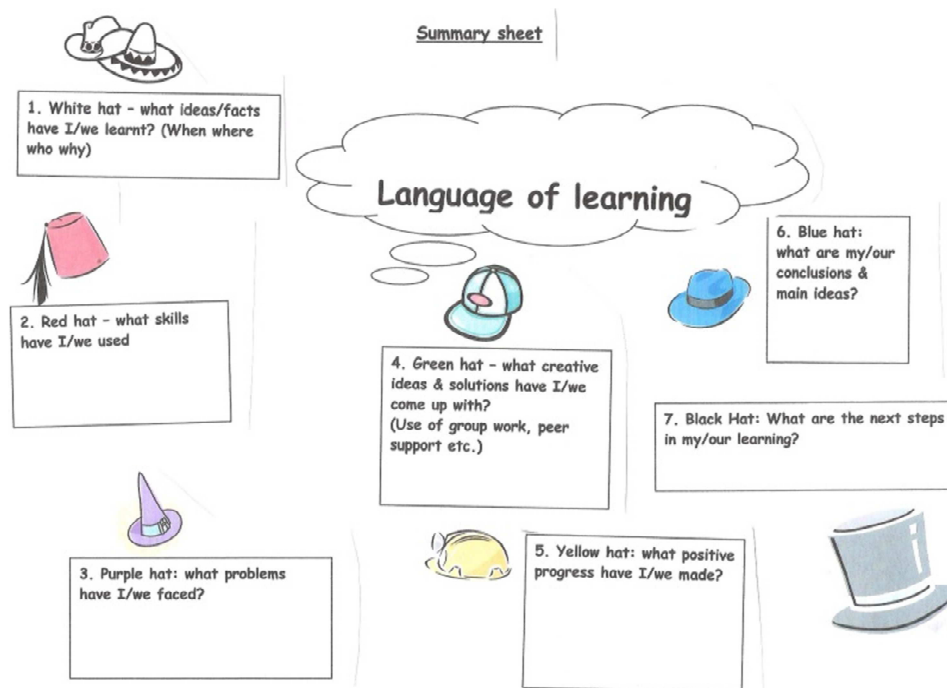
Create opportunities to personalise the learning so that learners can undertake remedial action and/or consolidation activities, or activities that provide challenge and stretch

Performance Management (PM) targets School B

Appendix 12: Review of pupil perception School B

Subject	Type of Evidence		Good	Satisfactory	Development needed
		Evidence of Learning Objective			
		Evidence of student or peer review of learning objective			
		Feedback linked to learning objective (student peer teacher)			
		Feedback is understood and acted on			
		Next step targets are set			
		Evidence of progress			
Comments					

Appendix 13: Subject specific prompts De Bono's thinking hats School B



Appendix 14: De Bono's thinking hat prompts for oral feedback School B

Subject specific prompts for Oral feedback:

White hat prompts

The ideas I have learnt are...

The facts I have learnt are...

Red hat prompts:

Looking back at the learning objectives I know how to ...

Purple hat prompts:

In this topic/lesson misconceptions are...

Green hat prompts:

In this rich task I have used the following methods...

The main problems are...

The most important problem is...

The three best solutions to this problem are...

Yellow hat prompts:

The progress I have made is...

The positive progress we have made is...

We have learnt...

The story told me...

I now understand...

It helped me...

It showed me...

I have thought about... and suggest...

I want to know more about...

Blue hat prompts:

The main learning points were...

I have concluded that...

I first thought...but then...

The 3 main ideas I am taking away are...

This makes me feel...

This makes me think...

Black hat prompts:

The next steps in our learning are...

We will show...

Appendix 15: Subject responses to De Bono's thinking hat prompts for oral feedback School B

Speaking prompts by faculty

Mu

The instruments I could identify/ recognise are...

I thought the speed of music was...

I thought the volume of music was...

The music made me feel... this was because the music (was)....

I found this difficult because...

It would be better if...

I could have made it better by...

I could have made it longer by...

The best part of my piece was...

The easiest part was...

The skills I need to develop are...

H, BS C and LS

I used listening today to...

I described... today

I explained... today

I showed understanding today by....

I evaluated... today

Today I had to deal with...

Today I had to solve...and this is how I did it...

My ideas were...

Our group's ideas were...

A different approach could be...

The thing I enjoyed most about this lesson was...

My summary of the main ideas are...

Our conclusions are...

I want to find out...

I need to know...

You could find out more by...

I want to understand...

To get to the next level/grade I need to ...

My next step target is...

M

The facts I learnt in this unit are...

Using the learning objectives I know how to...

In this topic the misconceptions are...

In this rich task I used the following methods...

The progress I have made...

The main learning points for this topic were...

My next step targets are...

I

I used... software to produce....
We use this software because...
I created impact by using...
I made it suitable for my audience by...
I corrected my work by using...
When using...I have learnt to do...
I have met the learning objective by....

E

My evidence for this is...
This suggests...
Another question I would like to ask is...
I can improve by...
Next lesson I would like to...
I would like to learn to do...
The key word for this lesson is...I know this means....
I know I have met my objective because...
I'm really proud of the way I've been able to...
I overcame that problem by...
I supported others by...
My teacher asked me...
To move up the APP grid I need to...
To improve my writing I need to
My next target is...
I am working at ...and my target (level) is...
The next steps in my learning are...
I have made progress by....
I came up with this solution.... to help me overcome....

P

The rules I use in my sport are...
The rules are important because...
The ... rule allows players to ...
I would apply this rule.... Because....
The performance is....
The performance is not...
The key techniques of the skill are...
The teaching point is...
The coaching point is...
To execute the skill the performer needs to...
To improve the player needs to...
The strength(s) of the performer is/are...
The weakness(es) of the performer is/are...
To improve the weakness(es) I would...
The strength(s) mean the performer....
The difference between an elite performer and me is...

The method of training is...
To improve the component of fitness I could use... method of training
In my Personal Education Plan I have included...
I would develop a player by...
I would develop/ progress this by...
A beginner would start by...
The role of a coach is...
The role of a captain is...
A good captain should... because...
Before competition a leader should...
A leader should always check...
I would need to...
To motivate my team I would...
To improve my team I would...

S

I have learnt that...
In order to make this a fair test I need to...
My biggest problem is...
I have learnt to...
I can use...
My main ideas on this are...
To improve my work I need to ...
I am having problems with...
What I need to do next is...
This lesson I have learnt to...
I am really proud that...
This lesson I have developed my skills in...
I have learnt to annotate my work by...
I reflected on my work...
I graded my practical work as...because...

Appendix 16: Year 7 progress School B

	I know what to do to improve	I know what my target level for the future is	I know what working at level I am	I get chance to improve my work using the comments I am given	When my teacher marks my work they give it a comment	When my teacher marks my work they give it a level	My teacher always shares the learning objectives	total	I know what to do to improve	I know what my target level for the future is	I know what working at level I am	I get chance to improve my work using the comments I am given	When my teacher marks my work they give it a comment	When my teacher marks my work they give it a level	My teacher always shares the learning objectives
7G1									7G1						
English	30	12	24	19	19	15	24	30	100	40	80	63	63	50	80
Maths	28	18	26	16	27	27	24	30	93	60	87	53	90	90	80
Science	29	12	21	11	18	17	20	30	96	40	70	37	60	57	67
ICT	2	2	5	7	4	5	15	30	7	7	17	23	13	17	50
Language (MFL)	28	21	28	10	24	26	22	30	93	70	93	33	80	87	73
History	28	16	27	15	11	13	19	30	43	53	90	50	37	43	63
Geography	13	4	18	10	6	7	17	30	43	13	60	33	20	23	57
RE	7	3	10	8	3	5	13	30	23	10	33	27	10	17	43
Drama	3	4	4	6	4	7	14	30	10	13	13	20	13	23	47
PE	4	8	6	9	12	12	15	30	13	27	20	30	40	40	50
Art	13	12	24	13	11	9	19	30	43	40	80	43	37	30	63
Music	19	4	18	8	6	7	15	30	63	13	60	27	20	23	50
Tech	21	20	20	9	14	17	21	30	70	67	67	30	47	57	70
7GA									7GA						
English	28	19	24	20	19	17	21	32	88	59	75	63	59	53	66
Maths	22	19	24	17	20	19	22	32	69	59	75	53	63	59	69
Science	23	20	23	14	23	24	21	32	72	63	72	44	72	75	66
ICT	12	14	6	9	11	2	12	32	38	44	19	28	34	6	38
Language (MFL)	27	20	24	9	18	19	15	32	84	63	75	28	56	59	47
History	22	11	20	11	4	5	12	32	69	34	63	34	13	16	78
Geography	19	9	17	7	6	6	11	32	59	28	53	22	19	19	34
RE	7	7	9	2	3	4	12	32	22	22	28	6	9	13	38
Drama	9	9	4	5	3	5	12	32	28	28	13	16	9	16	38
PE	5	15	6	3	16	9	11	32	16	47	19	9	50	28	34
Art	16	14	21	16	18	15	14	32	50	44	66	50	56	47	44
Music	8	10	7	5	8	9	11	32	25	31	22	16	25	28	34
Tech	21	17	18	15	19	14	17	32	65	53	56	47	59	44	53

Appendix 17: Year 12 progress School B

	My teacher always shares the learning objectives	When my teacher marks my work they give it a level	When my teacher marks my work they give it a comment	I get chance to improve my work using the comments I am given	I know what working at level I am	I know what my target level for the future is	I know what to do to improve	Total
English	14	9	16	11	7	13	13	19
Chemistry	2	2	3	3	1	3	3	5
Geography	0	1	2	2	1	0	2	3
Media	5	5	6	7	5	6	6	8
Drama	4	6	6	6	4	9	9	9
Photography	7	9	9	9	7	7	7	9
HSC	3	5	5	4	3	2	3	5
Sociology	3	1	2	0	2	3	1	3
History	4	3	5	2	4	3	4	6
ICT	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	6
BTEC (performing arts)	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
Textiles	2	2	2	3	1	2	2	3
Human Biology	7	6	6	5	7	7	4	8
Biology	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Maths	7	4	8	3	7	7	8	8
Physics	2	2	1	2	3	3	3	3
Art	3	1	2	3	2	3	2	3
Citizenship	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
BTEC (sport)	4	5	3	5	5	4	5	5
Graphics	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Dance	1	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Resit English	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
BTEC (*3)	35	36	33	31	37	31	33	38
College Academy								28
Sports' Academy								43

Appendix 18: School Improvement Group PowerPoint School B

Framework focus: Using and Applying/
Number/Algebra/Geometry//Calculating/Data Handling

Learning objective(s): Level/Grade:

- share learning objectives at the start and throughout lesson are they clear about the purpose of their learning?
- remember to include any cross-curricular links to ICT, sport and literacy, cultural, spiritual, social, historical, economical and enterprise opportunities
- To develop/able to...(skills)
- To know that...(knowledge)
- To understand how/why (understanding)
- To develop/be aware of (attitudes and values)
- How are they learning? E.g. "to appreciate how peer assessment can help you to improve your own work"

Key words: *share with students insist on correct spellings*

We Are Learning Today ...

These are the learning outcomes.. How to meet the learning objective(s). It shows you are differentiating the learning objective

1. Must (all students to ...)
2. Should (most students...)
3. Could (some students...)

**Review with traffic lights or smiley faces at the start and then at the end of the lesson where they feel they are.*

This Is Because...

put the lesson in context, share the bigger picture



What A Good One Looks Like...

Model examples of good work, worked solutions, diagrams, graphs etc

Scan them in for next lesson to show the standard you wish them to aspire to

Where Are You Now?

1. Put the lessons learning objectives here....
- 2.
- 3.



Have we met today's objectives?
Put the appropriate face next to each objective.

I understand completely

I sort of get it but I am a bit unsure

I don't have a clue – help!!!



Title	Pie Charts	Grade D	20/11/2013
Outcomes I can construct pie charts.			 Clip 86 Page 26
		R A G R A G R A G R A G R A G R A G	Key words Sector
Tasks 1. Warm up 2. Discussion 3. Quick Progress Check 4. Independent Learning 5. Plenary/Review Learning		A2L 1 2 3 4 5 6	Homework Task: Due in: Date here...



WAGOLL

Wagoll here...

M Misconception here...

Appendix 19: Learning Walk analysis School B

Learning Walk Analysis

This took place on 3 occasions

First occasion 15 members of staff were seen for between 5 and 10 minutes.
Faculties observed were S I E F A H M T

Of these
66% were using skills based learning objectives
33% were showing evidence of students making progress
26% showed evidence of high quality questioning
26% showed evidence of self/peer assessment/feedback
And 20% showed evidence of high quality feedback

There was outstanding practice demonstrated in a M lesson which in the short space of time covered all of the above. There were potential opportunities for a number of the staff to develop the feedback to students about where they needed to go next.

Second occasion 8 members of staff were seen for between 10 and 15 minutes
Faculties observed were S T I

Of these
62.5% were using skills based learning objectives
62.5% were showing evidence of students making progress
25% showed evidence of high quality questioning
25% showed evidence of self/peer assessment/feedback
And 12.5% showed evidence of high quality feedback

Third occasion 8 members of staff were seen for between 10 and 15 minutes
Faculties observed were E Ps G H

Of these
37.5% were using skills based learning objectives
50% were showing evidence of students making progress
50% showed evidence of high quality questioning
50% showed evidence of self/peer assessment/feedback
And 12.5% showed evidence of high quality feedback

Assessment For Learning

Observation Proforma

Teacher name	Subject	Date	Time	Observer
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Prompts:

Is the learning objective context free and focussed on the learning rather than the activity (we are learning not we are doing)?	
Is the learning objective clearly shared with the learners at an appropriate point, learners are clear about the purpose of their learning?	
Are learners clear about the criteria for success in the learning and can use these to focus their work?	
Is 'good work' modelled to help define or illustrate the success criteria?	
Does the teacher's questioning help all learners show what they know (questioning of learning)?	
Does the teacher's questioning move pupil thinking/learning forward (questioning for learning)?	
Does the teacher encourage pupil to pupil talk?	
Does the teacher provide feedback to learners as the learning progresses, linked to the success criteria and objectives?	
Are learners encouraged to reflect on and or evaluate their own work as it progresses?	
Are there opportunities for learners to make improvements based on feedback?	
Is there evidence of peer assessment or support?	
Is the current work linked to ongoing targets where and if appropriate – target setting. Are learners aware of the link?	
Does the teacher use reflective plenary opportunities to reinforce/summarise what has been learned/achieved?	
Are learners encouraged to reflect on HOW they learn not just WHAT they have learned (metacognitive thinking)?	
Where work is 'marked' does the feedback identify/scaffold how work could be improved as well as identifying/reinforcing success?	
Evidence of independent learning:	
Areas for development/additional comments:	

Appendix 21: AfL target setting sheet School B

Name _____

Which levels have you achieved? What is your target level?

Level	AF1 Thinking like a scientist	Skill 1	AF2 How science Affects us	Skill 2
7	<p>I can explain changes I have observed using a model e.g. the particle model to explain a chemical reaction. <input type="text"/></p> <p>I can explain how different bits of evidence support a scientific idea. <input type="text"/></p>		<p>I can list the moral, ethical, social arguments for and against a scientific development, e.g. genetic engineering</p>	<input type="text"/>
6	<p>I can identify the strengths and weaknesses of a model. <input type="text"/></p> <p>~~~~~</p> <p>I can use evidence to support a scientific idea, e.g. pressure increases as temperature increases supporting the particle model.</p>		<p>I can describe how the uses of science or technology may be different in different societies.</p>	<input type="text"/>
5	<p>I can use a model to explain a scientific process, e.g. the water model to explain the current in a circuit.</p> <p>~~~~~</p> <p>I can say when scientists have used creative thinking when developing their ideas.</p>		<p>I can describe an ethical issue coming from a scientific development, e.g. it is possible to choose the sex of your child, but should parents be allowed to do this?</p>	<input type="text"/>
4	<p>I can describe a scientific idea using a simple model, e.g. drawing a force as an arrow. ~~~~~~</p> <p>I can identify scientific evidence that is used to support an argument.</p>		<p>I can describe an application of a scientific idea, e.g. when things burn they need oxygen. Using a fire blanket cuts out the oxygen and the fire goes out. <input type="text"/></p>	
3	<p>I can Use a scientific idea that has been given to me to answer a question.</p> <p>I can make of suggest simple models to show how things are in the world.</p>		<p>I can explain the purposes of some scientific processes. <input type="text"/></p> <p>~~~~~</p> <p>I can say how scientific ideas affect our lives. <input type="text"/></p>	<input type="text"/>

Appendix 22: Skills Grid School B



Individual Assessment of Teaching and Learning

Outstanding
1

Quality of Learning and Progress	Quality of Teaching	Assessment	Behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The learners acquire knowledge, develop understanding and learn and practise skills exceptionally well. Learners demonstrate excellent concentration and are rarely off task even in extended periods of time. Tackle challenging activities and show resilience. Progress is at least good within groups and key stages and is exemplary in some. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching is at least good and much is outstanding; the result is learners make exceptional progress. Teaching is highly effective at inspiring learners and ensuring they learn extremely well. Excellent subject knowledge is applied consistently to challenge and inspire learners. Resources make a marked contribution to the quality of learning. Targeted support given by additional adults makes a marked contribution to quality of learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers and other adults are acutely aware of learners' capabilities and prior learning and plan very effectively to build on these. Marking and dialogue between teachers, other adults and learners are consistently of a very high quality. Learners understand in detail how to improve their work and are consistently supported in doing so. Teachers systematically and effectively check learners' understanding throughout lessons and ongoing where they may need to intervene and do so with striking impact on T & L. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners' consistently thoughtful behaviour is an outstanding factor in their successful learning. Learners are highly considerate and supportive of each other in lessons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The learners acquire knowledge and develop understanding. They learn and practise skills well. The learners are keen to do well, apply themselves diligently in lessons and work at a good pace. They seek to produce their best work and are usually interested and enthusiastic about learning. A very large majority of learners make at least good progress and some make outstanding progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teaching is consistently effective in ensuring learners are motivated and engaged. A majority of teaching is securing good progress and learning. Teachers have strong subject knowledge which enthuses and challenges most learners and contributes to good progress. Good imaginative use of resources including ICT and other adult support is focused and makes a significant contribution to progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a result of good assessment procedures, teachers and other adults plan well to meet the needs of all learners. Learners are provided with detailed feedback, both orally and through marking. They know how well they have done and can discuss what they need to do to sustain good progress. Teachers listen to, observe and question groups of learners during lessons in order to reshape tasks and explanations to improve learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners' behaviour makes a strong contribution to good learning in lessons. Their behaviour is welcoming and positive. They routinely show responsibility in responding to the expectations of staff, set consistent standards for themselves. They respond quickly and well to any additional guidance from staff about how to conduct themselves.

Satisfactory
3

Inadequate
4

Quality of Learning and Progress	Quality of Teaching	Assessment	Behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which learners acquire knowledge, develop understanding and learn and practise skills is at least satisfactory. Most learners work effectively in a range of subjects when provided with appropriate tasks and guidance but lack confidence in improving the quality of their work. Learners generally work steadily and occasionally show high levels of enthusiasm and interest. The learners make the progress expected given their starting points and some, though not the majority, may make good progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching may be good in some respects and there are no endemic inadequacies. Learners show interest in their work and are making progress broadly in line with their capabilities. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. Adequate use is made of a range of resources including new technology to support learning. Support is provided by other adults effectively deployed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular and accurate assessment informs planning, which generally meets the needs of all groups of learners. Learners are informed about their progress and how to improve through marking and dialogue with adults. Teachers monitor learners' work during lessons, pick up general misconceptions and adjust their plans accordingly to support learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners behave so that learning proceeds appropriately and time is not wasted. Learners understand what is expected when asked to work on their own or in small groups and gentle prompting is needed to maintain discipline. Pupils are polite and respond appropriately to sanctions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners acquiring knowledge, developing understanding and learning and practising skills is inadequate. Too many learners fail to work effectively unless closely directed by an adult and give up easily. Learners do not enjoy activities. Learners or groups make too little progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expectations are inappropriate. Too many lessons are barely satisfactory or are inadequate and teaching fails to promote the learners' learning, progress or enjoyment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment takes too little account of the learners' prior learning or their understanding of tasks and is not used effectively to help them improve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners' poor behaviour and rudeness inhibits progress in lessons. Time is wasted through persistent low level disruption, excessive off task chatter and a lack of attention. Pupils show a lack of respect to adults and other young people.

Limiting factors are in bold text.
A lesson is deemed as inadequate if one is highlighted on an observation.

Assessment for Learning

Peer & Self Assessment

What are the benefits of peer & self assessment?

- Motivation for learners
- Provides immediate support in the classroom
- Students often respond more positively to a peer
- It is interactive and individualised
- Allows the teacher to stand back and observe
- Allows teachers to give more beneficial feedback
- Allows achievable goals and targets to be set
- Progress is more regularly monitored
- Encourages students to take more responsibility
- The assessor gains as well as the assessed
- Improves social and communication skills
- Effective assessment can raise self esteem

Peer & Self Assessment

- Peer and self assessment is much more than children marking their own and each others work.
- To improve learning, it must be an activity that engages children with the quality of their work and helps them reflect on how to improve it.
- Peer Assessment gives an opportunity for children to talk, discuss, explain and challenge each other and to achieve beyond what they can learn unaided.
- Peer Assessment helps develop Self Assessment, which promotes independent learning, encouraging children to take increasing responsibility for their own progress.

Further ideas...

- Students create their own checklist / success criteria for a specific task/skill.
- Post-It feedback – post-it notes attached to students work for self assessment comments or peer feedback.
- Green-Amber-Red Peer Assessment – is their work better than yours, the same as yours, not as good as yours. Why?
- Peer / Self assessment worksheets

Summary

- We are all aware of the benefits of peer and self assessment and that it doesn't have to take much time in your lesson.
- Hopefully you have a new idea to take away and try in your lessons tomorrow!

Appendix 24: Meeting With Local Authority (LA) Consultant/ Adviser School B

Meeting with RF on AfL

There were some Advanced Skills Teachers for AfL and some more to be appointed.

The Local Authority will be appointing lead schools next year. We (School B) would be happy to help so long as it doesn't impinge too much on school business.

There was an update on the National Strategy website as by this time it was no longer government policy. There were suggestions made for a conference where subject leaders create a standards file for moderation e.g. level 5 from year 7, 8 and 9 and to develop one departments' understanding of AfL by linking up with another department

Appendix 25: Logo used for AfL School B



Appendix 26: Context of research

This research was undertaken primarily in two schools over a period of time although references are made to other schools in Chapter 6.

School A

School A was a small upper school situated on a council estate in a small city. At the outset of this research it comprised of students in Years 9 to 13 who were recruited from a small number of middle schools. The city had grammar school provision and as a result the intake did not cover the full range of abilities, some of the more able students going to the grammar schools. It also had a partly rural catchment with students being bussed in on a daily basis. The school roll was under 800 with less than 200 students being in the post 16 provision. This had an impact on the implementation of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy as theoretically it only affected Year 9.

Part way through this study there was a local authority re-organisation and the middle schools were closed. This meant that the school expanded with the addition of years 7 and 8, which meant an increase in staffing. These member of staff were recruited from the middle schools which were closing but the school also recruited Newly Qualified Teachers and experienced staff from elsewhere. There was however still the issue of the grammar schools taking the most able students from the city.

My role in this school was as a Head of Faculty and this comprised 6 separate subjects, each with a head of subject and in some cases with additional members of staff.

School B

School B was a large comprehensive secondary school based in a coastal town. It comprised of students from Years 7 to 13 who were recruited from a number of primary schools. The school roll was approximately 1,500 with less than 200 being in the post 16 provision. This post 16 provision included a small number of A levels and a greater preponderance of Vocational Qualifications. The school covered the full range of abilities but access to the local Sixth Form College results in the more

able students mostly leaving at the end of Key Stage 4. There is also a college which caters for hard vocational courses and a number of students also leave at the end of Key Stage 4 to attend this college. School B also has a partly rural catchment with students being bussed in on a daily basis.

This school constantly recruited new staff to all levels and developed a CPD programme in line with this.

My role in this school was as a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). I was appointed as an Assistant Principal and worked on the Progress and Standards team during the duration of this research.