PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

by

April M. Zakresky

B.A., University of Northern British Columbia, 2005
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Abstract

This action research study researched if parental involvement in schools would increase and a shift in mindsets about assessment practices would occur through teaching the *Six Big Assessment for Learning Strategies* (Network of Performance Based Schools, 2007) to parents, teachers, and students. Parents, teachers, and students were taught two of *the Six Big Assessment for Learning Strategies* monthly in September, October, and November. The study tracked the levels of parent involvement through the numbers in attendance at the Parent Assessment for Learning launches, and extracted themes and levels of agreement regarding views about assessment practices. Data were collected using different methods including: checklists, descriptive feedback from public meetings, semi-structured and focussed group interviews, and surveys. The results of this study suggest that parent involvement in the school will continue to increase in the future and that shift in mindsets about assessment practices has occurred in parents, teachers, and students through teaching the *Six Big Assessment for Learning Strategies*.

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Chapter 1

In today's education system, there have been ongoing discussions about making shifts in the area of assessment. Many of the past assessment practices for sorting and ranking students according to abilities are continually being used today by educators and school districts. Educational leaders and researchers have found that assessment practices that focus on sorting and ranking students do not promote student ownership of learning, motivation for improvement, or critical thinking skills (Stiggins, 2007). Many students and parents today continue to see educational success and defeat in terms of a letter grade or percentage. This can be attributed to the insistence upon the use of accountability data due to a sorting mindset which focuses on grading and reporting (Kaser & Halbert, 2006). Grading and reporting has traditionally been the means through which parents and students observe academic success (Kaser & Halbert, 2006). As a result, there is little question or reflection on the learning itself. However, there is a movement occurring in the education system today that is promoting assessment *for* learning in classrooms (Stiggins, 2007). The assessment for learning movement is based on research findings about the success of student achievement with the use of assessment for learning strategies in classrooms (Stiggins, 2007). In order for assessment for learning to become effective in classrooms, it is necessary to change the mindsets of teachers, parents, students, community members, and government institutions who view standard scores, letter grades, and percentages as reflective of student learning and as necessary for accountability. We must not only educate students about the effectiveness of assessment for learning practice, but also must help to educate the parents and community members who are essential to the long-term success in our school communities (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002).

The school in which this study took place is a Kindergarten to Grade 9 school located in a Alberta community that prides itself on offering students and families a faith-based education with high academic standards. In the past few years, achievement tests have shown that the students are high achievers at all grade levels and subject areas (Sexsmith, 2009-2010). For many families, this educational setting is ideal for their children; however, even with high scores attained on achievement tests, these successes are limited for the students, staff, and parents. There still remain struggles and frustration among many students, parents, and staff at all grade levels as a result of low achievement in learning outcomes, lack of motivation and interest, and work completion.

Taking into consideration my teaching experiences in a previous community in which I taught, as well as my teaching experience this year at this school, I have noticed that lack of student success creates resentment and blame among all parties. Students complain that they do not understand the point of what they are learning and therefore, it is not worth their effort to learn. Teachers complain that students are unmotivated and fail to complete what they are required to do because of their lack of work ethic. Parents complain that their children do not understand the concepts they are supposed to learn, and parents are unable to help them. Many of these complaints can be remedied if we come together as a community of learners and use a common language of assessment for learning to ensure that students are learning for the sake of learning and not for the sake of symbolic representations of achievement.

Significance of the Project

The goal of this project is to encourage substantial involvement from parents and community members in student academic development. Parents need to recognize that they have the right to academic input in their children's schools and that their roles consist of

more than assisting teachers on field trips and school fundraisers. Due to the strong influence that they hold with their children parental support and involvement in schools are essential. There are four key roles that parents play in the lives of their children: (a) teachers/nurturers, (b) communicators/advisors, (c) supporters/learners, and (d) collaborators/decision makers) (National PTA, 2000). As teachers and nurturers, parents attempt to provide an environment that promotes learning and develops skills and values so that their children can experience success and learn to adapt to the physical and social environment around them (National PTA, 2000). As communicators and advisors, the parents' challenge is to establish effective two-way communication between home and school as well as to have open communication with their children. Effective two-way communication is necessary for parents so that they are consistently aware of the school and teacher expectations as well so they are cognizant of their children's successes and experiences throughout the school (National PTA, 2000). As supporters and learners, it is important that parents obtain the skills and knowledge needed to assist in children`s educations and social development. Parents taking roles as supporters and learners will help teachers reinforce what is being taught in the classroom (National PTA, 2000). Finally, as collaborators and decision-makers, it is necessary that parents participate with the school staff to help solve problems, make decisions, and develop school policies that make education equitable to all learners. Active participation with school staff in problem solving, decision making, and policy development will help to ensure that parents' ideas and expertise are included in the type of education they wish to see for their children (National PTA, 2000). To help ensure that parents are fulfilling these key roles, teachers need to acknowledge that these roles exist and help parents to be able to perform these roles. The

roles are the same that teachers are required to fulfill in the classroom and school setting. If teachers can play a role in helping to educate parents on ways that are more effective for student motivation and learning, and parents can commit to sharing and having input in what they see as educational value, then teachers and parents can become a united front to ensure the academic success of students at all grade levels.

The focus for this project was to introduce a common language of assessment for learning strategies among teachers, students, and parents. I believed that with a common language among all parties, there would an increase in student motivation and academic success; an increase in parent involvement in academic discussions; a shift in mindsets about letter grades and percentages as measures of student success; and, a uniting of parents and teachers as allies in ensuring student success. This project introduced students, parents, teachers, and community members to each of the *Six Big Assessment for Learning Strategies* (Network of Performance Based Schools, 2007), and offered methods to effectively use these strategies at home and in the classroom.

The first strategy in the *Six Big Assessment for Learning Strategies* is *learning intentions*. Learning intentions provide learners with clarity and understanding about what is intended to be learned in a specific lesson. Learners should be able to explain to someone else in their own words what the learning intentions in a lesson are for and how they can connect to life beyond school (Network of Performance Based Schools, 2007).

The second strategy is *developing criteria for success*. With this strategy, students are given either a clear criterion that represents the focus for an assignment or they co-develop the criteria based on appropriate expectations (Network of Performance Based Schools, 2007).

The third strategy is *thoughtful feedback.* Regular and thoughtful feedback moves individual learning forward by giving the student direction and areas for improvement. Feedback can be given by the teacher or by peers (Network of Performance Based Schools, 2007).

The fourth strategy is *designing and using thoughtful classroom questions to lead discussions*. Effective questioning ensures that students recognize that coming up with insightful questions is a regular part of learning and life (Network of Performance Based Schools, 2007).

The fifth strategy is *students working as learning and teaching resources for each other.* Students are able to take on a learning and teaching role for their peers because they have effectively learned the first four strategies (Network of Performance Based Schools, 2007).

The final strategy is *learners as owners of their learning*. Students begin to be genuinely engaged in confident learning so that they can think about what is important to them in their learning process (Network of Performance Based Schools, 2007).

As a teacher who has taught in a middle-class school, an inner-city school, and a rural school, I have noted that there is a common lack of parental involvement in all school settings, regardless of the social structure of the school. There are many justifications for why parents are not actively involved in schools and their children's educations. For instance, parents who have had previous negative encounters with educators and schools may not feel comfortable entering a school to discuss their views or concerns about their child's education. Additionally, parents who are from a minority group may not be fluent enough in the language to understand or communicate effectively with educators (Epstein, 2002).

Single parents who are working full time may not be available to come to school during school hours to converse about their child (Epstein, 2002). Finally, parents who are not well educated may not feel confident or literate enough to support their children's studies or engage in discussion about their learning (Epstein, 2002). These factors need to be taken into consideration when trying to promote parent partnerships in schools.

Fenlon (2005) asserted that when schools take the initiative to begin parent partnerships, there is a plethora of questions that need to be asked of the school and of the parents in the community. These questions include: How can we empower parents from the start to successfully collaborate with teachers and the staff in their child's education program? How can we build trust, understanding, and acceptance with families so that they will feel empowered to collaborate with school staff? What activities can we engage parents in so they feel that they are valued members of the collaborative team in their children's education? How can we prepare teachers to engage parents in participating? Reflecting on such questions as a school staff allows educators to begin to design a framework for improving relationships with parents. I believe that a vehicle for improving parent and community involvement will be the education of assessment for learning.

The central research question for this action research was: To what degree will teaching parents the *Six Big Assessment for Learning Strategies* increase parent involvement in school? In support of this research question, I also hoped to increase understanding and acceptance of assessment for learning practices in schools and decrease the constant need for a letter grade or percentage as a measure of student success. By providing inclusion and educational opportunities for parent and community members in schools, they are more apt

to become involved on a regular basis about matters that affected their children's learning, motivation, and overall success (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002).

Background of the Project

The inspiration for this research came as a result of teaching at two schools in two very different communities; one in a British Columbia community and the other in an Alberta community (in which this study took place). In 2008, I taught English as a Second Language and Grade 7 at a predominantly upper middle-class elementary school. I found that parents wanted to be involved with their children's educations only when they saw a decrease in their child's academic standing. The meetings with parents were often heated; full of frustration and blame. I felt that discussing letter grades was not a means to encourage parents to participate in their children's learning, motivation, and success. In 2008-2010, I taught at an inner-city school, where I encountered very little participation from parents in their children's educations. In order to attempt to remedy the lack of parent involvement, I and a group of staff members began a literacy and comprehension initiative that taught parents a new reading strategy to use at home with their children in the same month that the students were introduced to the same reading strategy. Parents engaged in a lesson similar to what the students were taught so that they could understand the type of learning in which their children were participating and learn methods that they could use to support their children at home. At the end of the parent session, they were required to give feedback about the session and how they felt about its relevance and effectiveness. The responses to the lessons were very satisfying. Parents were excited that they could learn a comprehension strategy to help support their children at home.

During the 2008-2010 school years, I became interested in implementing assessment for learning strategies in my classroom. I saw the benefits over the course of the two years in my classroom. My students showed increased motivation, ownership and accountability for their learning; however, I had difficulty demonstrating this new assessment approach to parents. I believe that it was difficult to promote this new type of assessment because their mindsets were programmed to see the success of their children in terms of a letter grade. I often felt that to the parents, the letter grade symbol was more significant than their child's learning.

With the success of our reading comprehension initiative in involving parents in student learning in 2009-2010, and the frustrations I was facing in regards to parent views about assessment practice, I wanted to design a similar framework that would introduce parents to assessment for learning strategies in the classroom, change the focus from letter grades and percentages to student motivation and learning, and provide them with an active opportunity to be a part of their children`s academic success.

Personal Location

Currently, I teach Grade 5 Language Arts, Math and Social Studies curriculum, Grade 7/8 French, and, Junior High Health at a superior school in Alberta. The school houses a population of 182 students from Kindergarten to Grade 10.

Teachers at this school are dedicated to student achievement and are always interested in learning new strategies to enhance their professional development. During the 2010-2011 school years, staff collaboration focussed on learning about differentiated instruction. Once a month, two staff members were responsible to present information from a chapter in the book, *Making a difference* (Pound, 2010). This book covered chapters on differentiated planning and instruction, diverse learners, diverse learning contexts and

assessment practices. During staff meetings there were some discussion and thought-provoking comments made by staff members; however, after the staff meetings were over, there was little follow up or discussion about the differentiation practices that were being used by teachers in the classroom. Teachers had difficulty finding time to collaborate throughout the course of the year to share their ideas and reflect on their practice.

The Six Big Assessment for Learning Strategies is a relatively new methodology for assessment practice among the teachers at this school. In discussions about assessment for learning with various teachers, I have found there to be a great deal of interest and a willingness to begin to learn these strategies for the benefit of their students.

At this school, there is a select group of 11 parents who demonstrate a consistent presence at the school. This presence is geared toward accompanying teachers on field trips and helping to put on school fundraisers and events. Additionally, these select parents are a part of a school council meeting that occurs once per month. At these meetings the principal reports on school updates and events and the council is encouraged to voice their suggestions and opinions about them. Also, once a year parents are asked to fill out an Accountability Pillar Survey which requires them to rate the school on a variety of measures which include safe and caring schools, student learning opportunities, Grades K- 10 student achievement, preparation for lifelong learning, world of work and citizenship, parental involvement, and continuous improvement. The data are measured and compared to other schools across the province. Our school is shown to be rated quite highly. However, those data are inconsistent because not all parents complete the accountability survey. The surveys that are completed are by the parents that already show a consistent presence in the school. There still remain frustrations present among some parents who do not play obvious roles in the school

community as represented in parent-teacher interviews or complaints by parents to administration. Some teachers also remain frustrated that these particular parents do not play an active role in their children's educations, demonstrated by discussions in staff meetings or in staffroom conversations. I would like the action research for this project to be a catalyst for developing a school-community collaborative culture that is focussed on student learning and promoting assessment for learning strategies as measures of student success.

Overview of the Project

This research project endeavoured to change parental views of letter grades and percentages as indicators of student success and to increase their involvement in student academic success. Additionally, this project assisted in supporting teachers in changing their assessment practices to advocate for student individual needs, and to increase student motivation and accountability for their learning using assessment for learning strategies. According to Bryk and Schneider (2003) and Epstein (2002), parent involvement in schools has shown to be limited for various reasons including lack of comfort entering schools, past experiences with educators, and feelings of incompetence. Providing educational strategies on assessment practices for parents and including their input on student academic success helped to demonstrate that their opinions and involvement in the school community was essential.

The limitations of this project included: lack of parent participants, ensuring staff were in support of the research and consistently teaching the required strategies, and completing the project in the required time frame. Parent involvement depended on the staff's ability to discuss and establish the reasons why parents were currently not actively participating and come up with successful methods to ensure parents were entering schools and becoming active members. Additionally, constant communication with the staff

members who were participating in the project and who were teaching the Six Big Strategies was necessary to maintain the consistent language throughout the school and community. Meetings were set on a monthly basis to help support the staff in any areas with which they were having difficulty. Finally, the research for the project was planned to begin in September of 2011 and to be completed in November of 2011. A monthly launch of two strategies for staff, parents, and students was required. Additionally, it was critical to set specific deadlines and dates to ensure that everyone was meeting the required timeline. The success of this project was measured by the changing views of parents, staff, and students through interviews, observations, checklists, questionnaires, surveys, and public meetings, rating scales, and self-evaluations.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Chapter 1 outlined the need for this research and presented the key research question. This chapter, the literature review, will focus on the (a) benefits of assessment for learning, (b) the advantages and difficulties in building parent and school collaborative relationships, (c) the strategies that can be utilized to ensure positive parent involvement in schools, and (d) the benefits of improving parent involvement in schools. The theoretical literature focuses on (a) the benefits of assessment for learning, (b) discussing the evolution of assessment practice, (c) differences between formative and summative assessment, and (d) essential skills and types of teacher preparation needed to ensure effective assessment for learning practice. The works outlining the advantages and difficulties in building parent and school collaborative relationships discuss (a) the necessity of parent involvement in schools, (b) the key roles that parents should play in their children' s educations, and (c) parental emotions and past experiences that affect feelings toward schools. The research describing leadership skills and strategies that schools and educators can use to build collaborative partnerships discusses the need for (a) establishing a vision, (b) building trust, (c) ensuring credibility, (d) providing service, and (e) generating influence among parents. Additionally, it focuses on (a) educating parents on parenting strategies, (b) providing effective home-to-school communication, (c) developing school volunteer programs, (d) teaching parents how to support their children academically, and (e) allowing parents to be active decision makers. The information focussing on enhancing the participation of parents in education also asserts the need for (a) developing action teams and (b) for parental involvement in developing educational standards and assessment practice. The review of literature for this project presented a thorough overview of the interactions and associations of assessment for

learning, parent and school relationships, and the strategies that need to be put in place to increase parent involvement in schools.

Benefits of Assessment for Learning

Assessment has been used in many different forms and has evolved to be used in a variety of contexts and settings (Earl, 2003). In its most basic form, assessment is the process of collecting information (Stiggins & Chappius, 2006). Formal and informal assessment has existed for centuries, (e.g., Chinese civil exams for public office). Before the Industrial Revolution, most people learned on the job and were assessed and promoted to a better job when they improved (Earl, 2003); however, during the Industrial Revolution there was a major shift in people moving from rural to urban settings. Additionally, there was an increase in immigration and differentiation of cultures; therefore, a large number of people required education (Earl, 2003). At this point, education became recognized for social mobility and so came the rise of the middle class and capitalism. At this time, the scientific measures of achievement began to be developed (e.g., exams), which determined access to post-secondary schooling. These measures of achievement were used to place individuals in societal roles (Earl, 2003).

This trend continued until the 1970s when educational leaders such as Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus (1971), in their handbook on formative and summative evaluation of student learning, shifted their views of assessment and stressed that assessment and evaluation were a part of student learning. It was believed that educators needed to use both assessment and evaluation to help improve student learning rather than using it to place learners on the social scale (Bloom, Hastings, & Maudus, 1971). These educational leaders had difficulty influencing shifts in assessment because of political pressure for accountability and social control. There continues to be political and societal pressure for accountability

today. The focus tends to be on raising test scores as a means to sorting students into broad groups, instead of metacognition being the central issue (Earl, 2003).

Formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning (AFL), has become the new "buzz word" in education because its importance is spreading across all faculties of education. In order to understand the true meaning of AFL, it is essential that it is distinguished from summative assessment. AFL is portrayed as being centred on learning intent, and summative assessment as being evaluative (Brookhart, 2007). McMillan (2007) also made a clear distinction between AFL and summative assessment by providing an overview of specific characteristics, (e.g., student involvement, cognitive levels and student motivation) and the impact that AFL and summative assessment each has on specified characteristics. For example, in AFL, student involvement is encouraged as opposed to summative assessment, in which student involvement is discouraged. Finally, with AFL, student motivation is intrinsic and mastery-oriented and with summative assessment, student motivation is extrinsic and performance-oriented.

Davies (2007) explained AFL by posing the question "What does learning looked like?" She stated that the use of assessment for learning strategies should provide teachers and students definitive examples of what learning should look like. For example, students should be able to articulate their learning destination and what success looks like. Students should have access to samples that show quality work. Students and teachers should be able to describe what evidence of learning looks like, such as what is considered to be meeting or exceeding on a given task. Students should work with teachers to set criteria to define the expectations of quality. Students should have time to learn. Students should receive and give descriptive feedback as they learn. Students should debrief their learning with their peers and

teachers to know where they are headed with their learning. Teachers should be using their students learning to inform their practice (Davies, 2007).

There are many benefits to utilizing and understanding assessment for learning. The basis for utilizing this methodology resides in enhancing student capabilities in critical thinking, accountability, and motivation. Earl (2003) stated that we are living in an era in which individuals must possess competence and confidence in a broad range of areas and have the tools to adapt to new knowledge as it comes. Chappuis and Chappuis (2003) supported this argument by stating that we as educators are insisting on a new knowledge base for our students. They argued that what we want and require students to know is changing. Learning the "basics" is no longer considered enough to function successfully in society today. Students must learn to think critically and live in a solution-based mindset (Chappuis and Chappuis, 2002). Brookhart (2007) argued that there are many benefits of using formative assessment including reactivating skills or knowledge prior to introducing a new topic, encouraging active learning, providing students' knowledge of results and corrective feedback, helping students monitor their own progress, developing self-assessment skills, and helping students feel a sense of accomplishment. Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) argued that AFL rests on the understanding that standards are deconstructed and put in language that is easily understood by students. When they understand their learning targets, they are able to take responsibility for them. Additionally, educators need to deliver descriptive feedback to students. This feedback must be ongoing so that they can see where they are and where they need to make changes to improve their learning. Citing Black and William, Brookhart (2007) presented an argument that the use of formative assessment increases student ownership. According to Brookhart (2007), Black and William asserted

that formative assessment allowed students to be conscious of the gap between their current performance and desired performance. Once they recognize this gap and are given the opportunity to close the gap, they will take effective action to do so.

While there are obvious benefits to using formative assessment, there are several negative effects that occur with poor assessment practices. Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) stressed that there are strategies that are effective and others that are ineffective when teachers implement and proceed with AFL. Firstly, schools and educators cannot purchase assessments in order to ensure that students attain a deeper understanding of what is being learned. They argued that educators should not be taught how to administer tests, but instead, educators need to be taught how to help students to differentiate between strong and weak work and how to find time to give students descriptive feedback and self-reflection. Additionally, Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) stated that a teacher demonstrates unsound practice when giving students zeros and lates on submitted work or administering tests when there is a lack of understanding in the material.

Wormeli (2007) supported Stiggins and Chappuis's (2006) views with his work by insisting that it is not fair to grade effort, behaviour, and attendance. He questioned how it could be possible to grade and measure these objectively while defining learning and mastery in terms of what students know and are able to do. If effort, behaviour and attendance are not the skills being taught in a lesson, then it is not appropriate to grade students in these areas (Wormeli, 2006). What teachers must do instead is to find other solutions that will help change the habits of lack of effort, poor behaviour, poor attendance, and not submitting work or submitting late work.

McMillan (2007) stated that previously it was believed that the more individuals studied, the more they would learn, and the more motivated they would be to continue learning. He argued that this is only the case for some students, as some students feel that it is safer not to try than to experience failure. McMillan also pointed out how important it is to recognize the emotional environment that can be created surrounding the experience of being evaluated. Often students feel anxiety, frustration, and disappointment due to the fear of failing. Brookhart (2007) attested to student feelings by stating that poor classroom assessment practice can lead to lack of motivation in students, lack of differentiated instruction geared toward students' needs, and the setting of criteria that is not related to or supported by particular outcomes. Instead, Earl (2003) purported that assessment needs to be the basis for student decisions about their learning in terms of feelings of accomplishment, feelings of self-worth, and willingness to learn new strategies and skills (Earl, 2003). If we want academic achievement for all students, we must create a learning process in which students believe they can experience success (McMillan, 2007).

Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) acknowledged that changing the learning process in learners is the most difficult task of educators because it takes time and practice to break such habits. They also argued that if educators are truly committed to change in assessment practice, they must be willing to rethink their own practice and beliefs in assessment and they must decide what to give up and what to transform.

Wormeli (2006) provided a general overview of what good assessment should look like. He stated that good assessment practice should (a) advance student learning not just document it (b) determine what is worth being assessed (c) provide the teacher with information to inform his or her practice. Good assessment should never be saved until the

end of a unit, as it should be ongoing. Good assessment should never be kept a secret from students. Students should know before the unit how they will be assessed. Good assessment should be a valid indicator of what students know and are able to do. Good assessment should be reliable and it should use a variety of tools and products (Wormeli, 2006).

Additionally, Wormeli (2006) offered several approaches to avoid when differentiating assessment and grading. He suggested avoiding penalizing students at multiple attempts of mastery. Students need to be given time to learn as not all students learn at the same rate. He suggested avoiding grading practice assignments or homework. He stressed that successful teachers don't give homework unless students have already mastered the required concepts. If students receive homework based on un-mastered concepts, they might learn the concepts incorrectly and spend emotional time and energy being frustrated. Additionally, he stated that if you give a grade from practice then you are not giving an accurate representation of mastery of concepts. Finally, he suggested avoiding giving group grades because this practice can create unhealthy peer pressure and negative feelings towards immature and unmotivated classmates (Wormeli, 2006). Teachers should be aware of what good assessment and unsound assessment practice looks like. It is important that teachers learn what strategies are successful and what strategies need to be avoided.

Teachers and administrators repeatedly face the difficulty of staying on top of new knowledge and advances in learning. Commitment to making changes to teaching practice or learning new professional knowledge is based upon teachers' emotional responses to their students and to educational change. Hargreaves (1998) focused on the effects that teacher emotions play in educational change. Thirty-two Grade 7 and Grade 8 teachers in four school districts close to Toronto, Ontario were interviewed regarding their commitment to

implementing common learning outcomes, integrated curriculum, and alternative forms of assessment and reporting in their classrooms (Hargreaves, 1998). The interviews were fully transcribed and references to how teachers felt about their work were coded for themes based on emotions such as anger, frustration, happiness and comfort. Subcategories of these themes were then created such as emotional responses to changes in curriculum, assessment, and reporting (Hargreaves, 1998). The analysis of the data showed that educational change was affected by teachers' emotional responses to structures, practices, traditions, and routines of their working lives (Hargreaves, 1998). It is important for teachers to acknowledge that they are emotionally tied to their students and these emotions drive them to make educational changes and improvements in their practice such as in the area of assessment.

Educating teachers on sound AFL practice is necessary and it is essential to have effective leadership to carry out any new educational movements. Leadership and leader competency in formative assessment are crucial to successful use and implementation of formative assessment in schools (McMillan, 2007). School districts need to be willing to support sound assessment practices and have expectations of student achievement that are clear and understandable to students as well as educators. School districts must ensure that teachers are competent and can deliver assessments appropriately and accurately (McMillan, 2007). Additionally, districts need to ensure that there are formal policies that will guide the use of formative assessment practices in schools. Individual educational leaders must also understand the principles of formative assessment and how to work with a staff to support them in integrating it into their instruction (McMillan, 2007).

Wormeli (2006) offered a number of tips that educational leaders could utilize to support their colleagues in creating an atmosphere that would encourage educators to

examine their grading practices and assessment ideas without creating resentment and pressure for change. Firstly, Wormeli suggested that leaders hold faculty meetings in which educators could share their experiences with assessment and grading practices. Next, he suggested department meetings in which teachers could get together to discuss aspects of new grading and assessment ideas and relate them in the subject that is being taught. All teachers working in a particular subject area could be consistent with particular grading and assessment practices. As well, he suggested inviting experts to come to the school and spend the day with teachers to support them in their growth in the areas of assessment and grading. Wormeli (2006) also suggested that there be a faculty portfolio of ideas in which teachers could post new strategies they are trying in the classroom and could themselves try new strategies that others have done. Finally, he suggested that when teachers feel more at ease trying new grading and assessment strategies, it would be beneficial to form action research groups to track the implementation and success of assessment for learning strategy use as well as publish what the school has done in the area of assessment for learning so that parents and community members could be informed of new focuses for grading and assessment practices (Wormeli, 2006).

Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) argued that AFL principles can only be effective when they are used in a competent manner by educators. They asserted that teachers must know why they are assessing. Teachers need to produce information from their assessments that involves the students as decision makers in the learning process. Additionally, educators need to have a clear vision of what outcomes need to be mastered, and ensure that the outcomes that have not been mastered are not being assessed. Proper assessment methods need to be used in order to yield accurate results, and the results need to promote effective

communication between the teacher and the student (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006). Finally, Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) argued that as much as teachers need to be educated about the appropriate delivery of assessment for learning, students need to be taught skills to be in control of their own academic success (e.g., self-assessment, goal setting, reflection and sharing). Additionally, Chappuis and Chappuis (2002) claimed that if you increase student involvement in assessment practices, then you increase student learning. They stated that students need to see their learning target. Learning becomes easier for students when they know what they are trying to achieve, the purpose for achieving it, and what success looks like (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002).

In order to support teachers in AFL strategies, educational leaders must plan and secure professional development opportunities to help teachers progress with formative assessment practices. Educational leaders also need to work together with staff to analyze data on student achievement and use the results to improve instruction (McMillan, 2007).

McMillan outlined several criteria in which every classroom teacher must engage to present effective formative assessment: giving a clear purpose for assessment, presenting clear targets, delivering accurate assessment and engaging in effective communication. In the first criterion, McMillan argued that the school and community leaders must know if students are meeting the required standards in order to establish a clear purpose for assessment. Once a clear purpose for assessment is established they can use it to inform their teaching practices. Next, McMillan stated that teachers need to establish clear targets. They must be competent in understanding the learning outcomes, so that they can create appropriate achievement expectations. Additionally, McMillan affirmed that teachers need to choose accurate assessment practices that are appropriate to the assignment and situation,

as well as related to the expected outcome. Finally, McMillan reasoned that effective two-way communication between the assessor and the learner needs to be formed, so that they can agree upon the definition of achievement expectations. These criteria need to be utilized on a regular basis in schools to promote active participation from educators in AFL.

Davies (2007) focussed on beginning with the end in mind with students in order to establish active student participation in assessment practice. She stated students need to be clear about goals and standards in relation to any course. Davies encouraged that students should be able to explain the purpose of what they are learning in relation to standards and course goals. Students should be able to talk about their learning and be given an opportunity to engage in discussion, bring in prior knowledge, and feel a sense of ownership throughout the course or unit. She also suggested that students should be able to observe and demonstrate samples of work in relation to the standards and course goals. Being able to look at samples of success gives students an opportunity to use samples to orient themselves with what success looks like and also allows students to self-monitor their work in terms of quality. Davies also suggested that teachers need to make a plan with their students about how they are going to collect evidence of their learning in order to demonstrate mastery. An active participation of students in the assessment process gives students a clear direction of where they are and where they need to be headed. This level of direction gives students the ability to be more conscious in self-reflecting about their learning.

McMillan (2007) supported the argument that formative assessment would also be better utilized by new teachers if they received more effective teacher preparation in teacher training programs. Formative assessment must be a part of the teacher training curriculum, and they must be well versed in when and how to apply this knowledge. Teacher training in

this area is necessary to see a shift toward formative assessment practices. Brookhart (2007) suggested that teacher beliefs and effective use of assessment practice are based on their current knowledge and understanding of assessment practices as well as their perception of their students.

O'Connor (2008) supported increasing teacher knowledge in the areas of assessment for learning and grading practice when he identified what grades should tell us about our students and what factors are actually included in the grades of our students according to current assessment and grading practices. He stated that grades should tell us what students know and can do, if they have improved during a marking period, what their strengths and needs are, if they can solve real world problems, what level their work is at, if they are ready to move on, how students help one another, if they have reached the required standard, and how well they can apply what they know. He further argued that the actual factors that are encompassed in current grading and assessment practice include achievement, attendance, behavior and attitude, test scores, homework, family status, ability, promptness in getting work in, and extra credit. O'Conner also described a variety of ways to make grades and marks more consistent, accurate, meaningful and supportive of learning. In the suggestions he made, he gave reasons for and against grading practice in order to educators to make informed decisions about what is appropriate in grading and assessment practice and what is not. O'Conner (2008) first discussed including effort in grading. He supported that effort should be rewarded and that it can provide reward to lower achieving students because aptitude may not be in a student's control, but effort is. However, he stated that grading effort muddies the degree to which students have attained the mastery of learning targets. Effort is difficult to define and assess and that students can manipulate teachers' perception

of effort (O'Conner, 2008). Next, O'Conner (2008) discussed the pros and cons for decreasing marks for late work. He stated that decreasing marks for late work provides a reward for student who hand their work in on time, it promotes fairness to give everyone the same amount of time to complete an assignments, and promptness is a valued trait in real life. However, he also stated that if you decrease marks for late work, you cannot see the mastered learning targets accurately, you are masking the reasons for late work, and in real life deadlines are re-negotiated (O'Conner, 2008). Finally, O'Conner (2008) discussed the advantages and disadvantages for giving points for extra credit. Points for extra credit is positive because it is a way to give students a grade that they feel is appropriate, it may motivate students to want to work harder, and doing extra work is an indicator of effort. However, even if students do extra work it may not indicate that students have mastered the content, it is difficult to decided how much credit is logical to give, and different teachers have different amounts of extra credit. The grading and assessment among teachers is not standardized (O'Conner, 2008). These suggestions could be used to support new teachers in training as well as those teachers looking to make a shift in their current assessment practices. If they are well versed in formative assessment, teachers will often provide a differentiated learning environment for their students.

A study by Rothman (1995) cited a district assessment restructuring initiative in Littleton, Colorado beginning in 1993. The schools in Littleton had high standards, the student performed well and attended universities, but the district recognized a need for change because educators believed that the rapidly changing economy and increasing complex world demanded higher levels of performance among all students (Rothman, 1995). The district reasoned that in the 21st Century, young people would have to be able to use their

knowledge to solve problems, analyze information and communicate clearly. Traditional district testing failed to provide information in these areas and instead was focused on the quick recall of facts. With this realization in mind, Littleton schools proposed a whole new system of assessment practice (Rothman, 1995). Firstly, the district wanted to focus on setting standards that called for all students to demonstrate their ability to reason, problem solve, and communicate. Next, the district wanted to develop new assessments to measure the students' abilities by having students generate questions, work in groups to discuss problems, gather information independently and collectively, and write essays or give presentations explaining their reasoning (Rothman, 1995). To district educators, the restructuring of assessment practices seemed beneficial and of value to their students, but some groups of parents and community members were unsure and felt misguided about the changes in assessment. It was believed that the new assessments were too new and untried, and too reliant on teacher's judgements. Parents and community members who voiced their concerns wanted to go back to the basics. The district recognized that in order to have buy-in from the parents and community members in this area, they needed to allow them a voice. The district opened these new reforms to the public and allowed them to have input in creating a set of assessment standards that were supported by the parents, community members, and the district (Rothman, 1995)

An additional study cited by Rothman (1995) focused on Mark Twain Elementary School in Denver, Colorado. This school began to combine conventional test scores with new criteria geared at standard based performance. It was recognized by educators in this school that teachers were no longer the only source of knowledge and that students needed to be given the opportunity to share their knowledge (Rothman, 1995). A community-wide

survey was administered in 1993, and 80 percent of parents who completed the survey believed that performance assessment would help better prepare their children for the future. With the support of the community backing the school performance assessment initiative, a new report card was also designed. The report card was based on student abilities and performance instead of letter grades (Rothman, 1995) Informing parents about performance based assessment allowed for the support of this assessment based initiative at the school.

Building Parent and School Relationships

Fullan (2007) insisted that it is impossible for educators to educate children on their own. Parents and community members are untapped resources with assets and expertise that are essential to building effective partnerships. Parents are children's first educators, so naturally they have a vested interest, and have valuable knowledge and skills that contribute to the education of their child. We should not make assumptions that parents want to leave education of children solely to teachers. Fullan (2007) also argued that parents can have a positive impact on students' progress and development if they are encouraged to participate. He pointed out that most parents do not want to run the school; they just want to participate. Educators need to let go of the fear that their authority and control would be relinquished if parents were more involved.

Along with Fullan (2007) the National PTA (2000) readily supported the idea that parents want to participate in their children's educations and want what is best for children regardless of background or social situation. The vision for the National PTA was that educators, families and communities are capable of working together to ensure success in education for all children. In its book, the National PTA (2000) introduced and described four key roles that parents play in their children`s education. These roles include: teachers/nurturers, communicators/advisors, supporters/learners and collaborators/decision

makers. This organization provided several research studies to support its claims of increased student achievement levels, and increased home support through the building of partnerships. Additionally, the National PTA (2000) addressed the need for parent involvement in developing educational standards and assessments as well as the benefits of successful partnerships to educators, schools, students and parents.

It is necessary for all members of the education system to understand and validate the roles that parents play in their children's lives and education. The National PTA (2000) presented the first role of a parent as being a teacher and a nurturer. They are needed to provide an appropriate environment that promotes learning, develops skills and builds values. The second role of a parent is that of a communicator and advisor. Effective parents establish two-way communication between home and school as well as maintain an open communication relationship with their children. The third role presented as part of being a parent is acting as a supporter and a learner. Parents must try to ensure that they are obtaining the skills and knowledge needed to assist in their child's educational and social development. The final role required to perform as a parent is acting as a collaborator and decision maker. Parents need to participate with the school staff and education system to help solve problems, make decisions and develop policies that make education more responsive and equitable to all families (National PTA, 2000). The National PTA insisted these parent roles are required to ensure success for children. Parents need to acknowledge their responsibility in ensuring quality education.

Fenlon (2005) insists that if we want to develop effective collaborative relationships with parents; we must begin to ask thoughtful and relevant questions of ourselves as educators and of our parents. These questions included: How can we empower parents from

the start to successfully collaborate with teachers and school staff in their child's education program?; How can we build trust, understanding and acceptance with families so they will feel empowered to collaborate with school staff?; What activities can we engage in to empower families to feel that they are valued members of the collaborative team in their child's education? What ongoing activities can occur to empower collaboration from families?; and How can we prepare teachers to empower parents? These questions need to be addressed before educators and schools can move forward with family collaborative practices.

Bryk and Schnieder (2003) wanted to establish how relational trust would encourage family and community collaboration in schools. They conducted a longitudinal study of 400 Chicago elementary schools focussing on the role of relational trust in building effective educational communities. They spent four years with their team of researchers in 12 different school communities observing school meetings and events, conducting interviews and focus groups with principals, teachers, parents and community members. Their purpose was to answer the following questions: What is relational trust?; What factors shape it?; and What are the benefits of relational trust? A specific focus on Holiday and Ridgeway Elementary schools provided answers to the questions listed above and showed how the dynamics of relational trust influenced reform efforts in these school communities with regards to family and community involvement. Bryk and Schnieder (2003) defined relational trust in terms of the social exchanges between teacher and student, teachers and other teachers, teachers and parents, and community groups with principals. Each party maintains a role and understanding of the roles and obligations they hold. All participants remain dependant on one another to achieve the desired outcomes. For example, principals

need faculty support to maintain a cohesive professional community that productively engages parents and students. Additionally, parents depend on teachers and principals to create an environment that keeps their children safe and helps them learn. For school communities to work well there must be an agreement in each role relationship in terms of understanding and expectation. In other words, everyone has a job to do; everyone must know both their role and the role of others (Bryk and Schnieder, 2003).

Bryk and Schnieder (2003) stated that respect, personal regard, competence in core responsibilities, and personal integrity are the main factors that shape relational trust. Relational trust is grounded in the social respect that comes from the kinds of social discourse that takes place across a school community. Social respect can be demonstrated by genuinely listening to what each person has to say and taking these views into account in subsequent actions (Bryk and Schneider, 2003). At Ridgeway Elementary School, interactions among parent leaders, and professional staff were getting in the way of needed reforms at the school. Parents and community members were pressing the school staff to implement a "respect toward students" program. This program was geared at publishing written standards and guidelines of how adults should talk to students. The program tried to encourage increased sensitivity by school professionals to ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the students. However, this initiative was controversial because school staff did not see the proposed respect initiative being demonstrated by the parents and community members proposing it. Parents and community members offered rude and personal criticisms of the staff with little recognition that their behavior was the opposite of what they desired for the students (Bryk & Schnieder, 2003). In this example, there is a breakdown in social respect, which in turn does not promote relational trust.

Personal regard is a factor considered to shape relational trust as defined by Bryk and Schneider (2003) as the willingness to participate and extend self beyond the formal requirements of a job definition or a union contract. Active personal regard was demonstrated consistently by the principal at Holiday Elementary School. Almost every parent and teacher that was interviewed by the research team commented on the principal's personal style, openness to others, and willingness to reach out to parents, teachers, and students. The principal's efforts helped to cultivate a climate whereby personal regard became the norm. The white male principal's personal regard was the most significant influence in the increased level of relational trust in 100 percent of the low income African American population (Bryk & Schnieder, 2003).

Competence in core roles and responsibilities was stated by Bryk and Schnieder (2003) as essential in improving relational trust in schools. School community members want interactions to produce desired outcomes. For example, parents depend on the professional ethics and skills of the school staff for their children's welfare and learning. Teachers want supportive work conditions and depend on the principal to be fair, effective, and efficiently manage school operations. Administration requires competence among staff to maintain good community relations to maintain trust (Bryk & Schnieder, 2003). If there is a lack of competence among any of these groups relational trust cannot be established.

The final factor stated by Bryk and Schnieder (2003) as critical to establishing effective relational trust is personal integrity. They stated that it is important to be able to trust that others will keep their word. The commitment to the education of children must remain the primary concern in all reforms and decisions made. For example, most of the parents liked the principal at Ridgeway Elementary School, but they were concerned about a

problem teacher who was not dealt with. The principal made efforts to help the teacher in the areas that were posing difficulty to him and his students. When the teacher did not improve with the principal's support and the situation remained the same, it was perceived by the parents and community members that action was not taken by the principal to serve the best interest of the students and distrust in the school community arose (Bryk & Schnieder, 2003). Once a thorough discussion of the factors that shape relational trust have been established it is important to understand the benefits of relational trust.

According to Bryk and Schnieder (2003), once relational trust has been established, it is more likely that reform initiatives will diffuse across a school community because trust lowers the sense of risk associated with change. Additionally, when school professionals trust one another and sense support from parents, it feels safer to experiment with new practice. Teachers feel more capable of talking honestly with their colleagues about what is working, what is not, and what next needs to be accomplished. Finally, the establishment of relational trust supports the moral imperative to take on the difficult task of school improvement. School communities are more apt to take risks, to deal with organizational conflict, and attempt new practices instead of saying, "Why should I?" In an analysis of Holiday Elementary School it was evident that with the establishment of relational trust, both educators and parents shared a commitment to go the extra mile for their children. There were academic improvements in reading and math, with an increase of 8 percent in reading and a 20 percent increase in math over a five year period (Bryk & Schnieder, 2003). The research conducted by Bryk and Schnieder showed that relational trust among teachers, parents and school leaders improved much of the routine work of schools and are a key in reform.

Aronson (1996) supported the idea of families as collaborators in children's educations in a Hawaiian school initiative. A research team from Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development studied nine elementary schools that implemented a version of site-based management. Site-based management was an initiative established to encourage parent participation in school reforms and decisions. Before launching this initiative, teachers and staff members were trained to facilitate leadership. They learned communication skills, shared decision making, and were provided with professional development opportunities that helped them to guide and work effectively with parents (Aronson, 1996). Instead of focussing on bringing parents immediately into the decision making process, which could be very overwhelming for parents, they began by simply encouraging them to get involved. Some schools introduced family literacy programs, and early childhood and adult basic education programs. Schools realized that once parents became actively involved in schools, they would be more likely to participate in making decisions about their children's education. Once there was an evident increase in parent participation in school activities, the creation of Parent/Community Networking Centers were established at each school. These network centers provided resources and a home base for parents in schools. Each centre was directed by a parent facilitator who was paid to be a part-time liaison between schools and parents. This facilitator contacted parents to encourage volunteering in classrooms, attending meetings, participation in educational workshops, and conducted surveys to identify parent needs and concerns (Aronson, 1996). Once parents became a part of the Networking Centers, a majority of them joined School/Community Based Management teams. Five years after the implementation of the School/Community Based Management, parent participation in school activities increased by

45 percent on average (Aronson, 1996). The nine schools studied were situated in a variety of settings including poor-inner city neighbourhoods, upper middle class suburbs and rural areas populated by poor and middle class families. Each school consisted of unique backgrounds and cultures, and at each school, policy and other school-level decisions were made by a council composed of representatives from administration, teachers, parents, community members, and students (Aronson, 1996).

The Hawaiian schools initiative took a five-step strategy approach in the creation of School/Community Based Management Teams. First, they focused on reaching a shared understanding of what form parent involvement in schools should take. Schools needed to clarify if parent participants should have an executive or advisory role in the areas of school policy, personal, budget, curriculum, and facilities. Next, schools developed strategies for involving more parents. School staff made home visits, and conducted surveys to gather useful information about parent concerns. Next, schools provided parents with information on the schools their children attended and different ways of getting involved. It was important to not assume that parents knew how to get involved and that they felt comfortable doing so. Finally, schools made a concerted effort to involve parents who were the hardest to reach because of cultural or language barriers, transportation issues, or negative past experiences with schools. To address this challenge, schools made more personal phone calls, home visits and videotaped messages. Additionally, they made sure meetings were scheduled at convenient times and provided transportation and childcare for parents. Schools made a valued attempt to make sure that they created an environment that promoted respect for everyone. Once many of these barriers were addressed, School/Community Based Management Teams were established, and there was a dramatic increase in parent

communication with teachers, and volunteering in schools. It was found that the more involved the parents were, the greater the increase in satisfaction and confidence with the school. Additionally, support for teachers and administration increased (Aronson, 1996).

Along with families and community members, governing educational institutions and organizations need to be encouraged to be actively involved with schools. Fullan (2007) mentioned that school boards and community organizations need to establish more inclusive practices and policies that will allow parents and families to have a clear sense of what the vision or focus is of a school district, and what is intended to be accomplished. Chappuis and Chappuis (2002) supported the idea of all parties including: parents, teachers, and administration, superintendent, and school boards, departments of education, citizens, and legislators having access to assessment information because it provides results to inform decisions at all levels. Chappuis and Chappuis (2002) explained this model in terms of an inner circle, middle circle, and outer circle of decision makers. Each level of decision maker must ask appropriate questions to clearly inform decisions about assessment.

The decision makers in the inner circle are considered to be the closest to the learning. The inner circle included parents, students, and teachers. Parents used the assessment information to decide what to do to support their child's learning. Teachers used the assessment information to assign report cards and grades, and to inform their teaching practice. Students used assessment information to decide if they are succeeding or improving over time. Questions that teachers may ask include: Are my students improving?; What strengths could I build on? Am I improving as a teacher? Questions that parents may ask are: Is my child learning new things? Is there a change I can recommend?; and Is the teacher doing a good job? (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002).

The decision makers in the middle circle are less directly connected to the learning process itself, but still make decisions that affect the quality of schools. The participants in the middle circle included principals, curriculum directors, and special service directors. Questions that principals may ask are: Are the teachers producing results that inform learning? Is instruction in the building producing results? How should we allocate the building resources to help the students succeed? Questions the curriculum director may ask include: Is our program of instruction working? What adjustments do we need to make in the curriculum? Questions the Special Services Educator may ask are: Who qualifies for special education services? Is the program of services helping students? What assistance do the students need to succeed? (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002).

Decision makers in the outer circle included the policy makers that must have information about student learning as they make decisions about how to implement policies, laws, and how to allocate resources. The participants in the outer circle included: superintendents, school boards, state departments of education, and citizens and legislators. The questions a superintendent may ask are: Are our programs of instruction producing results in terms of student learning? Is each building principal producing results? Which schools deserve or need more resources? Questions school boards may ask are: Are our students learning and succeeding? Is our superintendent producing results? Questions state departments of education may ask are: Are programs across the state producing results? Are individual school districts producing results? Questions the citizens and legislators may ask are: Are our students achieving in ways that prepare them to become productive citizens? (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002).

Taken together, all the participants in all circles ask questions and use assessment information to make decisions that affect the learning of each student in schools. If any of the decision makers are removed from any circle, it leads to the collection of inaccurate information and learning suffers.

Coburn and Stein (2010) also supported the importance of district school boards being a key leverage point to bringing about research and practice together for school improvement. They argued that district leaders make crucial decisions that can influence the instructional and educational approaches used in schools (Coburn & Stein, 2010). Additionally, they recognized that in any form of school governance, there are multiple interest groups inside and outside the district with different values and stakes. Therefore, discussions regarding current research and practice in education need to be inclusive of parents, schools, community organizations and supporting educational institutions (Coburn & Stein, 2010). Coburn and Stein (2010) stated that school districts are beginning to turn to partnerships with external organizations to support efforts to incorporate research and evidence into educational practice in order to allow individuals who have a stake in education to have a clear vision of where districts are headed and what is valued.

In their three-year study, Coburn, Bae, and Turner (2010) evaluated the Partnership for District Reform (PDR), a foundation-funded initiative that brought together research organizations with districts to foster the development of school districts as learning organizations. In this study, the PDR brought together members of a university research center and a mid-size urban school district to foster evidence based decision making to support changes and improvements educational instruction. The school district under study served approximately 50,000 low-income students. Of which, a quarter were English as a

Second Language at the time of the study. The purpose of the of the PDR and school district partnership was to identify problem areas and develop and implement solutions that would be informed by research and adapted to local conditions. Key areas of need identified for the district were considered to be professional development, instructional approaches in Math and Literacy, and new approaches to leadership development. An analysis of 23 decisions made throughout the course of the study showed that district leaders were more likely to engage with new research when decisions involved external partners. Although this study cannot be generalized across all school districts it promotes the idea of external involvement in district decisions. External involvement does not necessarily have to be a foundation funded initiative, but instead can involve parents, community members and educational institutions that also have a vested interest in student education.

Research studies discussed by Banks (1990), Benson (1980), and Dauber and Epstein (1993) as cited in Henderson and Berla (1994) supported the idea of external involvement of parents and community members making critical contributions to student achievement from early childhood to high school. The *Say Yes to a Youngster's Future: A Model for Home, School and Community Partnerships* program cited by Banks (1990) was based on developing a family Math and Science program to develop interest in Math and Science among students of color. The *Say Yes* program was based on the premise that students perform better when taught with an activity-based Math and Science curriculum and when instruction has active support of family and community members as opposed to lecture classes. At the time of the study, 22 elementary schools serving lower achieving African American and Hispanic students in three urban school districts of Houston, Washington D.C and New Orleans offered programs to 838 families (Banks, 1990). The four major objectives

of the program were to increase competence in math and science teachers, increase interests and skills of students in math and science, to involve parents in math and science education, and to increase the number of students of color who were prepared for advanced levels of math and science in high school. In surveys that were conducted in the three cities where the *Say Yes* program was offered, 90 percent of parents and students felt that they had a positive experience. Parents who attended the science and math interactive sessions began to attend further educational sessions. Participating students increased one-tenth of a grade level in math, one-third of a grade level in science, and one-half of a grade level in reading over the course of a year (Banks, 1990). The *Say Yes* learning program promoted external involvement of parents and showed a correlation between parent involvements in interactive learning and increased student achievement.

Benson (1980) cited a study completed at the University of California that focused on the external involvement of parents who spend time with their children in educational activities and educational settings as indicators of increased student academic achievement regardless of socio-economic status. The data gathered was from 764 sixth-grade students in Oakland, CA. Researchers concentrated on the relationship between specific child and parent interactions and school performance (Benson, 1980). The research team divided parent-child interactions into four groups. These groups included everyday interactions, cultural enrichment, parental involvement, and control over activities. Everyday interactions focused on parents and children eating dinner together, doing house or yard work together, shopping together, watching television together and spending weekend time together. Cultural enrichment focused on parents and children going to cultural activities together such as plays and musicals, playing games together, reading together and participating in outside

programs together. Parent involvement focused on the extent that parents volunteered in schools, joined parent teacher organizations, and attended school functions. Control over activities focused on parent rules about bedtime, chores, homework, freedom outside, and pressure to follow the rules. From the surveys that were conducted based on the four parent-child interaction subgroups, it was found that in all levels of socio-economic groups that parent and child everyday interactions and parent control over activities showed no strong relationship to student achievement. However, parent involvement and cultural enrichment with students showed a significant relationship to student achievement.

Dauber and Epstein (1993) as cited in Henderson and Berla (1994) reported on a survey of 2317 inner-city elementary and middle school parents that found that the level of parent involvement is directly related to the specific practices that schools and teachers use to guide parents in how to help their children at home. Researchers asked parents about their attitudes about their children's schools, their practices at home, their perceptions of how schools currently involve parents, and their preferences for actions and programs by schools (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Five elementary and three middle schools were selected at random. More than 50 percent of parents at each school responded to a questionnaire developed by Dauber and Epstein (1993). The main gauges of the questionnaire were geared at discovering parent's involvement in the frequency of parents helping in the building, the frequency of parents helping students with homework, the frequency of parent involvement in reading activities at home, and the frequency of parent's use of all types of involvement. Parents also rated schools on nine parent involvement practices from informing parents about how their children are doing in school to guiding parents in ways to help at home. Other measures included: attitude about the school, family background, and parent rating of child's

performance in school (Dauber and Epstein, 1993). The findings of this research showed that parents are more involved in elementary versus middle class grades because elementary teachers do more to involve parents at school and at home. In all cases, parents with more education were more involved with their children's education at home and at school. The strongest predictors of parent involvement at school and home were specific school programs and teacher practices that encouraged and guided parent involvement. Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that regardless of the background or grade level of children, parents were more likely to become external partners in children's education if they felt that the schools had strong practices to involve parents with homework and reading activities.

Strategies and Benefits for Parent Involvment in Schools

For educational change, specifically in the area of assessment, there must be a leader willing to guide all members involved in a common vision (Fenlon, 2005). The vision that is established must be representative of the educational leader's beliefs as well as the community and family members that are involved. Kozik (2005) insisted that the leaders must ask themselves several meaningful questions. These questions might include: How do I feel about having parents and families in the school? How comfortable am I with working with families and community members? What part of the challenge of successfully engaging families do I own? The educational leader must be comfortable to ask such questions of themselves to reflect on what they deem to be important. Kozik (2005) asserted that parents and community members also need to be asked questions so that schools are aware of the best way to communicate in order to build meaningful relationships. Such questions might include: What is the best time and day to hold conferences? How can the school better connect with your family? Can you describe and ideal connection between home and school? How does the school effectively communicate with your home? How could the school better

communicate with your home? How would you rate the quality of education your child is receiving? What changes would you like to see to better serve you and your child? These meaningful questions serve two purposes. Firstly, they provide a message to parents and communities that their feedback and opinions are important and need to be validated. Secondly, these questions also provide a direction on which a school can focus for building effective family relationships with schools.

Along with developing trust relationships, Kozik (2005) believed that educational leaders need to demonstrate and maintain credibility. Schools and leaders will be deemed credible when parents and community members witness efforts that are made on the parents' and community members' behalves. For example, educational leaders and staff might visit homes for parents who cannot make it to the school to attend parent teacher interviews. In this manner, they are showing that they are willing to meet the needs of individual families. Additionally, when educators make the effort to become aware of the issues that some families face such as poverty, ministry involvement, blended or single parent families etc., they demonstrate that they are acting on behalf of families. Educational leaders demonstrate credibility not just by what they say but by what they do.

Kozik (2005) also emphasized that we must recognize the public in public education so that we ensure that the public (e.g., family and community members) are utilized as resources that can share expertise. Both parents and community members can work with schools to enhance learning for children. We simply must provide them the opportunity to do so. Kozik (2005) suggested that educational leaders must deem all parents as important, even the ones that do not show up to meetings. They must follow up with these parents anyway. Additionally, educational leaders must ask meaningful questions of parents to

retrieve their input. Kozik (2005) suggested meaningful ways to concentrate on building trusting relationships with families. First, he mentioned the importance of valuing parents' ideas, and experiences through careful listening. Next, he addressed the importance of parent involvement in the collaborative process. Families are the most knowledgeable about their children and can offer important insights to what might be beneficial to them, their children and the community (Kozik, 2005). Leaders need to give time and empathy to all parents that enter a school setting. Parent opinions, and input on policies and practices give a realistic view of what would be relevant and beneficial to their children (Kozik, 2005). Finally, Kozik (2005) recommended specific strategies that educational leaders need to adhere to in order to make connections with families. The strategies included: looking for similarities and differences between yourself and the parent, recognizing strength in the support of social networks of parents, ensuring comfort in meetings, providing agendas to parents ahead of time, and providing refreshments, childcare and transportation. These meaningful gestures show parents that the school believes they are an invaluable asset to their children's education. These are beginning steps in building trusting relationships with families.

Kozik (2005) pointed out influence as being essential, when striving for family engagement in education. When educational leaders are able to exert their positive influence on community members they will build strong connections with community organizations such as Rotary, church or Chamber of Commerce. These organizations often will provide an allocation of resources that can also be used toward engaging families successfully. If organizations can find meaning in something, they will often provide support. Often the success of schools is predicated on the strength in influencing relationships.

Burns (1993) designed a formula for success in influencing parent relationships schools. The formula was based on three components including: committed leadership, staff and parent training, and variation in parent roles (Burns, 1993). Having committed leadership means that their needs to be written school and district policies that establish parent involvement as legitimate and desirable. The expectations of parent involvement need to be clear so that all district and school members are aware of required parent roles. Additionally, there needs to be sufficient funding and time allocated for staff to coordinate parent involvement activities. Teachers often feel there is a lack of parent involvement because there is a lack of time to plan for parent involvement in schools (Burns, 1993). Staff and parent training in methods of two-way communication ensure increased interaction among staff and parents. Additionally, it is important to provide orientation and training for parents who want to actively participate in the school. Finally, it is important for schools to provide information packets and workshops for parents so that they can develop strategies to help their children with their education (Burns, 1993). Offering variation in parent roles in schools is changing the traditional view of parent involvement from chaperoning on field trips or making cupcakes for bake sales. Instead, it is important that schools move to non-traditional roles such as valuing parents as co-learners, advocates, and decision makers. As co-learners, parents could attend workshops and conferences with staff. As advocates, parents could take part in school board meetings, booster groups, and offer ideas to district administration. As decision makers, parents could help evaluate how well school programs work, help decide on school budget expenditures, and assist with school development, district policies and district programs (Burns, 1993). It is our job as educational leaders to

ensure that parents feel that they have the right to participate in non-traditional parent roles in education.

Flemming ([year], as cited in Burns, 1993) supported the notion of changing traditional roles of parent involvement in schools. Flemming stated that parent involvement in schools first entails recognition by educators that parents are a child's first teacher and that there are elements of effective practice by educators that can help enhance parent involvement in a school community. Flemming (1993) recognized that school boards must design clearly defined policies that encourage the development of programs to include parents in the learning process. In addition, Flemming (1993) discussed the importance of committed leadership by principals to help build trust between parents and schools. Principals must lead by example and make personal efforts to invite parents into schools. Flemming (1993) also stressed the importance of enhancing teacher commitment and communication with parents. Teachers control the flow of information between home and school and important information can be delivered in a variety of effective ways such as: welcome breakfasts, regular phone calls, or open forums where parents can share their ideas and opinions. Finally, Flemming (1993) emphasised the importance of providing opportunities for staff and parents to learn together. Collaboration, leadership and communication are continuous areas of staff development, but are areas that can present opportunities for parents to work together with teachers to become more knowledgeable about supportive school programs, curriculum and instruction (Flemming, 1993). Parent and community collaboration with teachers and schools needs to be recognized as a valuable asset to the education system.

In her action handbook, Epstein (2002) argued that when partnerships are established among the school, family and community the benefits are obvious. There will be improvements in school climate, better access to family services and support, increased parental skills and leadership, and rise in the support for teachers in student learning. She also stated that with frequent interactions among these groups, there becomes a more consistent message about the importance of school, working hard, thinking critically, working together and staying in school. Epstein's research is valued because it acknowledged the difficulties that educators face in trying to involve parents. Her research outlined a framework that schools and educators could use that has been proven to be effective in creating positive partnerships. Additionally, Epstein discussed the process of forming action teams to create successful partnerships.

Epstein (2002) recognized that many teachers and administrators would like to ensure that families are more involved in schools. However, they are unsure of how to build positive and productive programs to involve families and as a result do not take any action. Taking this into consideration, she offered a framework of six types of involvement for comprehensive programs of partnerships. The first component of the framework is parenting. Schools need to establish home environment support networks for parents and children. This can be done by giving workshops on parenting skills, showing videos, giving parent education training, and offering family literacy programs (Epstein, 2002).

The second component of Epstein's framework is communicating. It is necessary for schools to design effective forms of school to home and home to school communication (Epstein, 2002). She argued that there is a variety of ways that schools can improve communication with families such as: offering language translators to assist parents who

struggle with the English language, providing weekly or monthly folders of student work which is sent for parents to review and comment on, and giving clear information on school policies and programs. These types of communication can be offered through a variety of mediums (e.g., newsletters, emails, and online school sites). The methods chosen to deliver the information need to be carefully considered based on the needs of the intended audience. Schools must discover if families have a computer at home, email or access to teacher sites.

McAffee's (1993) work as cited in Burns (1993) supported the second component of Epstein's framework of communicating. McAffee (1993) emphasized the importance of communicating the right message to parents. She stated that sometimes educators communicate the wrong message including: schools know best, it is up to parents and children to conform to a system that has already been set in schools, and that teachers are the professionals in the area and are more apt to make decisions. These types of messages can be off putting for parents and make them unwilling to enter schools settings regardless of their social backgrounds. McAffee (1993) also offered four guidelines to which schools can adhere when trying to create effective communication. The first guideline is that schools develop and publicize a regular and reliable communication process by asking how parents would like to receive information (e.g., newsletters and notices, personal and general phone messages, email or home visits). Whatever ways decided upon for communication by schools to families, the information needs to be delivered in a timely fashion, the information needs to emphasize positive strides that students have made, and the information needs to demonstrate student progress (McAffee, 1993). The second guideline recommended by McAffee (1993) was to increase the potential for two-way communication. Parents should have school information including the number and address. Parents should have a list of

important numbers from the school and have a method of getting in touch with relevant staff members. The third guideline that McAffee (1993) recommended was to employ a variety of communication strategies. For example, schools may conduct surveys, inventories and hold meetings with parents to seek ideas, suggestions, opinions and preferences of families. The fourth and final guideline that McAffee (1993) suggested was making full use of the options to enhance individual and personal communication. She suggested that face to face and voice to voice communication is the best source of information for educators and parents. These guidelines can offer support for schools in increasing effective communication with families.

The third component of Epstein's framework is volunteering. Epstein (2002) stated that invitations to parents and to organizations made up of parents to become involved are crucial to the support of schools. The activities that were suggested as methods for volunteering included: school and class volunteer programs, parent or family centers for volunteer work, meeting or resource centers for families, and parent patrols that aid in the safety of the school and its students (Epstein, 2002).

The fourth component presented as part of the framework for increasing family and community partnerships is learning at home. Epstein (2002) asserted that we cannot make assumptions about parent's knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. Instead, we must provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with their homework and other curriculum-related activities. For example, the teacher or the school might present information on the skills required for students at their grade level, provide information on the school or classroom homework policies, offer families math and literacy programs at school, and encourage families to participate in setting student goals for the year

(Epstein, 2002). These are particular methods by which parents can be encouraged to take initiative in their children's learning.

The fifth component of the framework is decision making. Epstein (2007) argued that educators and schools need to make an effort to include parents in school decisions by encouraging parent leaders and representatives to be involved. Active Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) or Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) should engage in discussions about curriculum, student safety, school reform and improvements (Epstein, 2002). These parent-led committees and organizations are essential in ensuring parent partnerships.

Collins as cited in Burns (1993) confirmed the fifth component of Epstein's framework of parents playing a role in decision making. Collins (1993) wrote about Mynderse Academy in New York. This school participated in the Mastery In Learning (MIL) Project. In 1990, there was a mandate from the New York State Board of Education, requiring districts to include teachers and community members in restructuring efforts (Collins, 1993). Steering committees composed of equal numbers of parents and teachers were required in each school district were. It was hoped that parents would have greater participation in school decision making. The meetings of the steering committee were co-chaired by parents and teachers taking turns. School action plans for the coming school year were created by parents and educators (Collins, 1993). Direct involvement from parents in school action plans allowed parents to monitor student progress more closely, allowed parents to help define student outcomes, and allowed them to influence assessment practices (Collins, 1993). The benefits to the district steering committees included: creating two-way communication between parents and staff of schools, provided parents with a sense of empowerment in their children's education, and initiated parents and teachers working in

teams (Collins, 1993). This study demonstrated the positive results of involving parents in the decision-making process as supported by Epstein (2002).

The sixth and final component that Epstein (2002) presented was the idea of collaborating with the community. Schools need to be encouraged to identify and integrate community resources and services. Epstein (2002) suggested a variety of supports that could be offered in the form of community health, culture, recreational, and, social support programs for families. Insisting on programs such as these shows the community that they are a needed resource in the education system.

Epstein (2002) recommended that creating action teams for establishing partnerships allows a variety of voices to be heard in the process of educational change. Action teams should consist of a least three teachers from a variety of grade levels, one administrator, one member from the community at large, at least two students from different grade levels, and a social worker or a counsellor. Teams that include at least six members, ensure that the leadership responsibilities can be delegated. The action team that is created is responsible for identifying the strengths of the school, needed changes in the school, expectations for the school, sense of community in the school, and goals for the school (Epstein, 2002). To ensure that action teams are successful in fulfilling their responsibilities, it is essential that the team develop a three year outline and a one year action plan that will outline specific steps that will aid the school's progress, explain how each subcommittee will work, and outline specific activities that will be implemented, improved or maintained (Epstein, 2002). The action plan should be shared with everyone in the school. They should be made aware of details, responsibilities, costs, and evaluation. No one should be "left in the dark".

Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) also supported the ideas of building teams in a process of parent/teacher involvement and making shifts in assessment practice. Learning teams are made up of ongoing, small group collaboration from a group that is committed to helping develop classroom assessment expertise. Each group member is required to attend workshops, read articles, watch videos or observe in other teacher's classrooms. They have a collective purpose of wanting to enhance student learning through assessment for learning practice (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006). Learning teams are great ways to create buy-in from staff that might be hesitant to join initiatives for fear that they will be left to their own devices to make changes (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006). In a learning team you are making changes, learning, and reflecting together. There is a feeling of community in this method.

The National PTA (2000) argued that parents should understand and be involved in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of assessment and testing programs. This work can be accomplished when educators provide parents with easy to understand information regarding how student learning can be increased.

Chappuis and Chappuis (2002) focussed on parent understanding of assessment practices and written curriculum. In their work, they offered strategies and questions for parents and community members to ask so that they can easily understand the purpose for their children's learning and ways to support them in their learning. Chappuis and Chappuis (2002) suggested that parents look at the curriculum for their child's grade level. They stated that the curriculum should be very specific and should be aligned with specific standards that students are expected to achieve. The curriculum should also be in everyday language that parents can understand. If it is not, they stressed the importance of parents asking questions of their children's teachers and administration. These questions might include: What will my

child be learning this year? How will I know if my child has learned it, and how well they have learned it? How will my child know if he or she has learned it, and how well? What can I do to help my child do well on the specific learning targets that are taught? (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002). Additionally, Chappuis and Chappuis (2002) offered approaches that parents can use when trying to increase their knowledge base about assessment practices in schools to help further their children's learning. Chappuis and Chappuis (2002) suggested that parents focus on building a relationship based on mutual respect. Parent need to assert that they want to support the system that the teacher has established; that they just want to be informed. Additionally, they suggested that parents talk to teachers about the types of assessment practices being used in the classroom. They encouraged parents to ask about the schools grading policy and ask how their child's progress will be communicated. These types of approaches on parents' behalves can help to further inform parents about how the learning of their child can be increased.

Research conducted by Lewis and Henderson (1997) as cited by the National PTA (2000) supported this argument by stating that parents who understand the purposes of outcomes and are involved in standard based reforms are better able to provide at home support of the educational standards that are required in schools.

The National PTA (2000) furthered its promotion of building partnerships by outlining the benefits of these partnerships to the educator, school, student and parents. The benefits of partnerships to educators include: increasing the morale and self-esteem of the staff, increasing respect for the profession, and increasing job satisfaction (National PTA, 2000). Morale and esteem is increased among educators because they feel that parents recognize the effort and passion that they put into their profession. Respect for the profession

is higher within these partnerships because parents and families are exposed to the complexities of the job instead of being fuelled by the misguided information that teachers arrive at the school by nine, leave by three and get their summers off. Finally, teachers experience a higher level of job satisfaction because there are partnerships involved to support them. They do not have to feel that they must do all the work with little acknowledgment or understanding.

Schools would also experience benefits from building parent and family partnerships. The National PTA (2000) argued that schools would recruit better representatives in the community, and experience higher performance in student achievement by making the effort to build partnerships. By recruiting better representatives from the school community, schools are ensuring that they have other voices that are going to represent the interests of the school and the education that they desire to provide to their students. Student performance will increase because of increased attendance and increased two-way communication between the parents and the school. Parents will also be made aware of the particular outcomes and standards that their children are required to meet and be given strategies to help support them at home in meeting these outcomes and standards.

Building partnerships promotes obvious benefits in student behaviour because there is a constant communication and understanding between schools and families. Students experience better attitudes, are motivated, and have increased self-esteem because both teachers and parents are working hard to ensure their success. Research by Epstein (1999) as cited by the National PTA (2000) showed that when family and schools interact in a positive manner lower rates of suspension, discipline, alcohol use, violence and anti-social behaviour exist.

Parents also experience benefits from building partnerships with schools because they are able to develop a true awareness of their child. Parents become more sensitive to their social, emotional and intellectual development needs. They are also more aware of students' distress. Additionally, they develop confidence in their abilities of being a parent and making appropriate decisions (National PTA, 2000). It is necessary for schools, educators, students and parents to experience the benefits of building partnerships otherwise there will be no motivation to do so.

McMillan's (2007) work focussed on a shift in mindset among the educational hierarchy to include: communities, school boards and legislations. He stated that these groups need to expand the scope of their vision for achievement and they need to understand that the concept of balanced formative and summative assessment as essential to student learning and achievement. These bodies that hold political influence must become aware that in order to maximize student learning they must be prepared to build an information system for all needs of assessment, reflect on current assessment practices, and provide all educators with the opportunity to learn how to use formative assessment to support their students (McMillan, 2007). Support from the top is considered fundamental by McMillan (2007) in supporting a modification in the current assessment practices used in education today. Fullan and Hargreaves (1998) supported the idea of appealing to the higher levels of educational governance in a book, *What's Worth Fighting For Out There?*. In this book, Fullan and Hargreaves (1998) outlined several guidelines for parents that can assist them in the educational change process by allowing them to have a voice. They suggested the following for parents: press the government to create the kind of teachers they see as effective, express specifically what you want to see in education today, ask what you can do for your school

and what your school can do for you, and put praise before blame. By emphasizing these guidelines for parents, Fullan and Hargreaves give permission for parents to have a voice; an essential in the educational change process.

Chapter Summary

The extensive literature collected for this project supported the notion of parent involvement in assessment for learning practice in schools. The literature mentioned in this action research project was divided into three sections. These sections included: Assessment for Learning, Parent and School Relationships, and Strategies and Benefits. The section on assessment for learning focused on defining assessment for learning, the evolution of assessment practice, and the specific strategies that are used to support student academic achievement and improvement in teaching and educational practice. The section on parent and school relationships focused on the necessity of involving parents in schools, reasons for lack of parent relationships with schools, parent's rights in schools, and strategies that can be used and developed by schools to encourage parent participation in schools. The final section of the literature review; strategies and benefits, discussed the role of educational leaders, intuitions and teachers in educational change. This section specifically asserted the importance of involving parents and community members in student education, and the rights, roles, and responsibilities that teachers, administration, and districts hold in ensuring parent and community involvement in education. This section also promoted the idea of building action teams to establish partnerships and the benefits to student education in having collaborative partnerships. Each section of the literature review was supported with articles and case studies that represented the information proposed in each section. Parent and

community involvement in schools is essential in the educational change process and can be driven by parent exposure to good assessment for learning practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose for this project was to promote effective parent involvement in schools by teaching the Six Big Assessment for learning (AFL) strategies. Additionally, it was hoped that parents would begin to accept assessment for learning practices in schools and focus on student motivation, accountability, ownership, and critical thinking skills as measures of student success. Focussing on student motivation, accountability, ownership and critical thinking is a change in thinking from academic success being measured solely by letter grades and percentages. Chapter 1 presented my central research question, the significance for the research, and the background for choosing to focus on parent involvement in schools and assessment for learning. Additionally, Chapter 1 gave an overview of the project and what was intended for the project research. Chapter 2 provided a literature review focussing on assessment for learning, parent and school relationships, strategies and benefits for increasing parent involvement in schools, and making shifts in the views of assessment practices. This chapter will present the action research project in greater detail by defining and describing the types of research methods chosen for the project, and how these methods were used in the data collection process.

Participants

A number of staff, students, and parents participated in this research. Classroom teachers in Grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9 taught two new AFL strategies to their students each month beginning in September 2011 and ending in November 2011. I introduced two AFL strategies to a group of parents who were in attendance of the learning "launch" each month beginning in September 2011 and ending in November 2011. Parents participated in semi-structured interviews at the end of all three learning launches. Teachers engaged in

professional development geared at learning the Six Big AFL strategies and completed a focussed group interview. Students completed a survey about each of the Six Big AFL strategies at the end of each month.

Research Methods

In this section, I have provided an explanation of why mixed methods research was chosen for this project and given a detailed explanation of what action research is and how it has been utilized for my project. Additionally, I have given an overview of triangulation in data collection and why this method is appropriate in project research. Finally, I have presented each method I used in the data collection process and outlined the procedures which I followed for each method.

Mixed-methods research. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in conducting the action research for this project. Creswell (2008) described action research as data collection that can be based on a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The nature of qualitative research is to analyze social settings, culture, daily activities, motives, meanings, and reactions. Actions and change in behaviour are interpreted by the researcher and are accepted as data (Rother, 2000). The interpretive nature of qualitative research was suited to my inquiry of the improvement of parent involvement in schools through teaching the Six Big AFL strategies because I relied heavily on the views of the parent participants. In support of this inquiry, I also described the changes in the views of teachers and the students as they became familiar with the Six Big AFL strategies. Qualitative research was acceptable because there was an emphasis on understanding and description versus prediction, and a focus on the trust in the views and opinions from the participants (Rother, 2000). Quantitative research was also beneficial in my study because of

the use of sampling through student surveys. The findings were expressed numerically as a percentage. I used a mixed-methods approach by including quantitative data because it helped to overcome some of the weaknesses in the qualitative data such as subjectivity. My research focused on increased parent involvement in schools, on the shift in views about assessment practices, and on the benefits that assessment for learning holds for teachers and students in the form of ownership, motivation, and accountability in all learning environments.

For the purposes of this project, increased parental involvement in the school and the shift in mindsets about assessment practices from parents, teachers and students were identified through quantitative and qualitative methods of research. To obtain quantitative data, I tracked the number of parents in attendance at the monthly assessment for learning launches, and student surveys tracking the percentage of agree, somewhat agree, disagree or don't know for statements about learning intentions and criteria, descriptive feedback and deep thinking questions, and peer/self-assessment and ownership (Appendix D). The qualitative methods used were: identifying themes from the verbal and written feedback from the parent Assessment for Learning launches (Appendix A), the semi-structured parent interviews conducted at the end of all three parent AFL launches (Appendix B), and the focussed group teacher interview (Appendix C). Both Appendix A, B, and C provided documented evidence that were themed and coded.

Action research. Action research is defined as a process of systematically evaluating the consequences of educational decisions and adjusting practice to maximize effectiveness (McLean, 1995). The definition of action research outlined the purpose for my project as I have reflected on an issue surrounding lack of parent involvement in schools and lack of

understanding in the area of AFL. I believed that a lack of parent involvement in schools and lack of understanding of formative assessment practices is a consequence of educational decisions. Introducing parents, staff, and students to the Six Big AFL strategies was a means to adjust educational practice and to maximize the effectiveness of parent involvement at our school. I collected and analyzed data in order to support any recommended changes to my school setting based on my findings.

Community-Based Action Research was the most suitable research design for my project because it worked on the assumption that all stakeholders whose lives are affected by a particular difficulty or problem should be engaged in the process of investigation (Stringer, 1996). Based on the premise that parents, teachers, and students are stakeholders in education at our school; the three groups were a part of the process of inquiry, data collection, and analysis. Collaborating as a research team helped all parties to understand the issues at hand and to share diverse knowledge, and experience to help improve the quality of involvement and educational practice (Stringer, 1996).

The major principles of action research include: teacher-researchers having the decision-making authority to study educational practices as part of ongoing professional development, teacher-researchers being committed to school improvement, teacher-researchers reflecting on practices individually or in school based teams composed of students, teachers and administrators, teacher-researchers using identifiable procedures to study an identified problem, and teacher-researchers choosing an area of focus, data-collection techniques, analyzing and interpreting data, and developing action plans (Creswell, 2008). These principles were followed throughout the course of this study. I adhered to these principles by presenting the Six Big AFL strategies as part of ongoing

professional development for the staff, by committing to this study for a period of three months to foster improvements in the areas of parent involvement and understanding AFL practice at St. Mary's, by working in a community-based situation to involve students, teachers, parents and administration in the inquiry and data collection process of the research, and by using appropriate research methodology and techniques to gain suitable data to further develop a course of action for improvement at our school.

This research focused on a specific school situation (parent lack of involvement in schools) with a view toward improving practice through (introducing parents to the Six Big AFL strategies). At the commencement of the action research, (at the first parent launch), teachers and parents collaborated and asked questions to help promote increased parent involvement and use of AFL strategies. These questions included: How can we empower parents to participate in academic planning? What steps do we need to encourage parents to enter the school? What are the reasons parents are not participating in their children's education? How can we empower teachers to participate in AFL? What supports need to be provided to support teachers in trying AFL?

Triangulation. I combined several methods for data collection while conducting the research for this project. Combining methods in research is known as triangulation (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994).Triangulation is a beneficial research methodology because it helps to overcome the weakness of one research method by using a variety of methods to supplement and check one another (Rother, 2000). Additionally, triangulation helps to maximize the time spent on data collection and to see the same scene from different angles (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). Triangulation may include a variety of methods

such as: interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and observations (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994).

Data Collection

Data for this project were collected using the methods of checklists, public meetings, semi-structured parent interviews, a focussed group teacher interview, and student surveys.

Checklists. Checklists were used to track the number of parents who expressed interest in attending the parent launches as well as the actual number of parents who attended each AFL parent launch. Checklists allowed me to identify a trend based on the numbers of interest and the numbers in attendance each month.

Public meetings. Public meetings with an opportunity for feedback were held directly after each assessment for learning strategy launch. These public meetings gave parents an opportunity to give verbal and written descriptive feedback regarding the usefulness of the session. The feedback allowed me as the researcher to gain further insight in to the current views regarding assessment practice, as well as allowed parents to ask questions and engage in discussion in an open and private forum.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews regarding parents' views about assessment practice, parent launches, and the school were conducted in December once all three parent launches had been completed. Parents that were willing to participate in an interview signed up and their names were pulled in a lottery. Five parents were selected to participate. A series of semi-structured questions were prepared in advance to guide the discussion about how parents viewed assessment practice, the parent launches, and the school. Parent interviewees had the opportunity to allow their views to unfold in a non-threatening environment.

Focussed group interviews. A focused group teacher interview was conducted outlining the positive and negative changes that teachers' saw in their classrooms, their students, and school as a result of the use of AFL strategies. Focused group teacher interviewees guided the interview with their thoughts and experiences with me, the researcher using prepared probe questions to clarify teacher answers.

Student surveys. Student surveys were distributed at the end of each month after the two strategies had been taught by their teachers. Student surveys assessed student views about the AFL practices being used in their classrooms. Students answered pre-determined questions by circling agree, somewhat agree, disagree or don't know. These answers were used to tabulate and analyze student responses and views about formative assessment practices.

The public meetings provided descriptive feedback regarding the usefulness of the AFL sessions and presented themed views about how effective and beneficial parents felt the sessions were to them and their children. The semi-structured parent interview questions provided documented text themes on parents' thoughts and opinions for school improvement, assessment practices and parent learning launches. The focussed group teacher interview questions regarding the use of AFL strategies showed the themed impact that AFL was having on the students and on teaching instruction. Student surveys tabulated the number of students' views regarding use of each AFL strategies in the classroom and provided insight into how the language and methodology of these strategies were impacting their learning.

Assessment for Learning Launch data. Levels of parent expressed interest and the actual numbers in attendance for each AFL strategy launch were documented and compared

to the next month. A trend of attendance was visible by November 2011. The information from this data was presented in a histogram to visually report the trend of parent attendance.

The monthly assessment for learning strategy launches for teachers, parents, and students were formatted similarly for all three groups, so that each group was utilizing the same language for each strategy. For example, the first assessment for learning strategy launch began in September 2011, and introduced the strategies of learning intentions and setting criteria. Parents and teachers were shown a PowerPoint describing the effects and importance surrounding the use of learning intentions and criteria. I explained to the teachers, students and parents that learning intentions provided students with clarity and understanding about what they are learning in a specific lesson and that setting criteria provides students with a clear focus for an assignment. Students learn exactly what to include and do not have to guess what the teacher's expectations are. To reinforce the lesson, each group was given the opportunity to create their own learning intentions and criteria as practice. Having the parents engaged in the type of lesson that the students were engaged in was important because it allowed them to experience the same type of learning as their children. Engaging in the lessons also allowed parents to ask relevant questions about student lessons in classrooms. After the AFL launch for each group was completed, parents had the opportunity to give public and written descriptive feedback about what they learned, the benefits of the strategy lessons, and things that they wished to see in the next strategy lesson. Additionally, the reflection time allowed each group to ask questions about things they were unsure of. The feedback given was utilized by me and the participating classroom teachers to inform and redirect future assessment launches and instruction. The AFL launches allowed parents to have active involvement in their children's learning, allowed

them to have a common educational language with the teachers and students, and gave them the opportunity to reflect and ask questions about the type of learning and assessment practice that their children were working on.

Analysis of Data.

The descriptive feedback from each public meeting at each parent strategy launch was sorted and coded for major themes and sub-themes in a multi-level theme codebook.

For example, the written descriptive feedback was first highlighted from key words or phrases that that stood out such as *teaching philosophy*. Next, the feedback was analyzed for words or phrases that occurred more than once. The multiple occurrences of these words or phrases were used to create major themes. For example, one parent said, "More discussion among parents and teachers about all the changes and challenges of new and old ways would be beneficial." Another parent said, "I would like to have more specialized types of meeting on how the system is being used." These two comments had a similar message and so they were placed as a major theme *1.000 – Being informed about today's education practices*.

After the major themes for the multi-level codebook had been established from 1.000 to 3.000, sub-themes that would fit under the major theme headings were placed in the codebook. For example, one parent said, "I would like to have a seminar at the beginning of each year for teachers to explain to parents the learning and teaching philosophy." The sub-theme of *teaching philosophy* was coded as 1.100 under the major theme – *Being informed about today's education practices*. The codebook themes attested to what parents had learned from the launches, what they wished to see most in student learning, and what they wanted as participants in the school. The most common themes presented in each codebook

were calculated as a percentage and demonstrated in a table to show the most prevalent major themes and sub- themes.

Semi-structured parent interview data. The semi-structured parent interview was completed by a sample of five randomly selected parents. The interview questions probed parent views about how successful they felt the launches had been and how their views about assessment and parent involvement in schools had changed. When parents were given the opportunity to actively comment on their own learning and their children's education, they began to discuss student learning for the sake of understanding, motivation and ownership as opposed to discussing student learning for the sake of receiving high letter grades.

The parent responses in this interview were also coded in a codebook and the major themes and sub-themes were calculated for the number of occurrences in text.

For example, discussions about *previous knowledge of assessment for learning* occurred frequently, so it was coded as 1.000 as a major theme. One parent commented, "I knew just the basics like in unit tests." This particular piece of text fit under the major theme of *previous knowledge of assessment for learning*. Additionally, many of the parents talked about assessment in terms of a letter grade and a percentage. This became sub-theme 1.100 coded under 1.000 for *Letter grades and percentages*. One parent explained, "Letter grades and percentages have been used at looking for what to improve as a measuring stick." The numbers of themed occurrences were used to calculate the most prevalent major themes and sub-themes in the interviews.

Teacher focussed-group interview data. The teacher focussed group interview was completed by the teachers who taught grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9. These teachers formally agreed to participate in this action research project. In the focussed group interview, teachers

were guided by pre-determined questions regarding the success they had witnessed with the use of assessment for learning strategies, the changes they were seeing in the students with the use of the strategies, the response from parents with the use of the strategies, the positive and negative outcomes they were observing with the use of the strategies, and what they believed to be important in the future with the continued use of assessment for learning strategies.

The views from these teachers were also themed and coded in a codebook. For example, one of the questions asked in the interview was *how assessment for learning has furthered the abilities of teachers*. This particular question became one of the major themes coded 2.000. Another of the interview questions was about changes that teachers had seen in students with assessment for learning. This question was coded as 3.000. Several other frequently-occurring words or phrases occurred in the text of interview when it was transcribed including accountability and students and parents. These particular words were coded as sub-themes *2.100 accountability*, *2.120 students*, and *2.130 parents*, which fit as deeper sub-themes under accountability. For example, one teacher stated, "Accountability for the learning outcomes of the students by setting criteria and learning intentions means you are accountable as well as the kids are accountable." The numbers of occurrences were calculated as a percentage to isolate the most prevalent major themes and sub-themes. Additionally, each of codebooks from the parent assessment for learning launches, the parent semi-structured interviews, and teacher interviews were compared for common themes regarding teacher and parent views about assessment and educational practice. The most common themes were presented in a table to demonstrate the similarities parents and teachers see in education.

Student survey data. At the end of each month, when full use of the AFL strategies had been implemented, students were required to fill in a student survey about how they felt about learning the AFL strategies, how the strategies had impacted them as learners, and how the strategies had benefited them academically. In the survey, the students circled pre-determined statements by choosing *agree, somewhat agree, disagree* or *don't know*. Providing students the opportunity to reflect on something they had learned allowed them meaningful input into their education and what they deemed to be important in their learning journey. This opportunity to reflect held the students accountable to take ownership of their learning. Student surveys were calculated per grade and as a total number of student participants in the school for the number of agree, somewhat agree, disagree, or don't know based on the specific statements for each strategy. The results were interpreted to find the most common views about each strategy. Interpreted data from the checklists, codebooks, and surveys were used to demonstrate increased parent involvement in the school and shift in mindsets regarding assessment practice for parents, teachers and students.

Summary

The purpose of this action research project was to increase parent involvement in school by exposing parents to the Six Big AFL strategies. Additionally, it was hoped that with this action research there would be a shift in the mindsets from parents viewing academic achievement in terms of letter grades and percentages to instead viewing academic achievement in terms of student critical thinking, motivation, ownership, and accountability for their learning. The methods through which this action research was conducted were: introducing parents, teachers and students to two of the Six Big AFL strategies monthly beginning in September 2011, collecting data based on the numbers in attendance for each

parent strategy launch, parents giving descriptive feedback regarding the usefulness of the parent strategy launches, semi-structured interview questions for parents regarding their views about the school, assessment, and student learning which were themed and coded, a focused group teacher interview regarding the successes teachers were seeing in the classrooms with the use of AFL strategies, and surveying students on their views about learning the AFL strategies. Learning the AFL strategies provided encouragement to parents that they are valued members of the school community and to their children's education. It was hoped that learning these strategies would lead to increased parent involvement in schools by building team-oriented, collaborative, and trusting relationships with parents, and would encourage student ownership, motivation, and accountability for learning. The next chapter will present the findings for the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The previous chapters of this research provided a wide variety of information to support the action research inquiry of increasing parent involvement in schools with the use of assessment for learning strategies. Chapter 1 gave a detailed introduction to the project by providing the reader with information on the significance, background, and personal location of the project. Additionally, Chapter 1 provided an overview of the project and of the intention of the project research. Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive literature review focussing on assessment for learning, parent and school relationships, strategies and benefits for increasing parent involvement in schools, and making shifts in the views of assessment practices. Chapter 3 gave the reader a detailed definition and description of the research methods used for the project, why particular types of research methods were chosen, and how data was collected for the project.

This chapter presents the data collected from the action research inquiry of increased parent involvement in schools and shift in mindsets about assessment practices through teaching the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. The data that were collected from the Parent Assessment for Learning launches, parent semi-structured interviews, the teacher focussed group interview, and student surveys during the 2011 school year from September 2011 to December 2011 were analyzed, represented in the form of a figure and tables, and presented with a description of the results. The results of this data analysis have been provided in detail to present an answer to the research question of whether parental involvement in schools will increase after being taught the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies.

Results

The results section of this chapter provides an overview of the data collection methods used in the parent assessment for learning launches, the semi-structured parent interviews, the teacher focussed group interview, and the student surveys. Additionally, the results section of this chapter presents a figure and tables representing the numeric values of data gathered from the checklists, descriptive feedback, interview questions, and student responses.

Parent Assessment for Learning Launches

Checklists. As described in the previous chapter, parents attended three Assessment for Learning strategy launches at St. Mary's School. At each of the three launches, parents learned about two of the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. They learned how these strategies were being used in their children's classrooms and how they could use these strategies at home. The attendance for these launches was tracked using two methods. First, RSVP forms were sent home in advance and returned to the school to gather numbers of parents who expressed interest in attending the launches. Secondly, at each launch parents signed in when they arrived, so that the numbers of expressed interest could be compared to the actual numbers in attendance of the three parents AFL launches. The data from the RSVP forms and the parent sign-in sheets were tracked using checklists. The figure below (Figure 1), shows the results of the number of parents who expressed interest in attending the Parent AFL launches, shows the results of the number of parents who actually attended the launches, and shows the results of the number of parents who did not attend the launches.

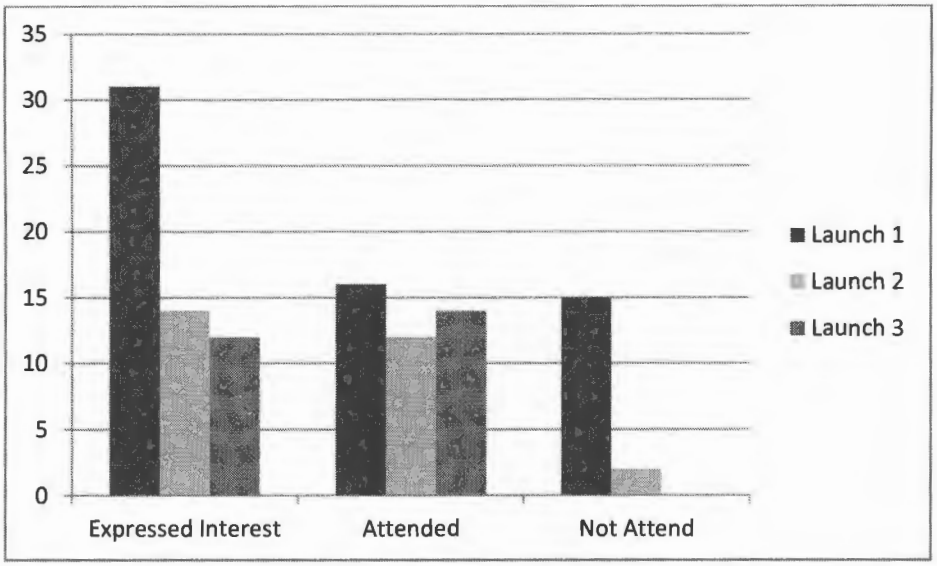

Figure 1.

Results of parents` expressed interest and attendance for all three learning launches

Figure 1 shows the results from Parent AFL launches one, two, and three. Figure 1 demonstrates a difference of 17 parents who expressed interest in launch number one compared to launch number two and a difference of 19 parents who expressed interest in attending launch number one compared to launch number three. There was also a difference of two parents who expressed interest in attending launch number two compared to launch number three. Sixteen parents attended launch number one, while 12 parents attended launch number two demonstrating a difference of four parents who attended launch number one compared to launch number two. Fourteen parents attended launch number three demonstrating a difference of two parents between launch number one and three. Fourteen parents attended launch number three, while 12 attended launch number two which was an increase of two parents from launch number two to launch number three. Additionally, there was a difference of 15 parents who expressed interest in attending launch number one compared to parents who attended launch number one, a difference of two parents who

expressed interest in attending launch number two, compared to parents who attended launch number two, and an increase of two parents who expressed interest in attending launch number three compared to parents who attended launch number three.

Descriptive feedback. At the end of each Parent AFL launch in September, October, and November, parents were asked to give written and verbal descriptive feedback on what they had learned from the launch and about each strategy, what they valued in the launch, and what they wished to see in the next launch. The descriptive feedback was transcribed and assigned sequence codes. The words and phrases in the transcribed descriptive feedback were used to create a list of codes in a codebook. These codes were highlighted for major themes and sub-themes that could be used to identify parents' involvement in the school, their views about assessment practices and education, and what they valued in their school and their children's education. There were three major themes extracted from the descriptive feedback from the Parent AFL launches. These themes included: *being informed about today's educational practice*, *supporting children at home*, and *parents and teachers working together*. The rest of the theme codes that were extracted, were assigned as sub-themes that fit under the three major themes. The tables below (Table 1, 2, 3, and 4) represent the number of occurrences and percentages of the sub-themes within the transcribed text under each major heading. Additionally, a sample quote from the text showing evidence of a sub-theme is presented.

Table 1 represents the percentage of discussion of the Parent Assessment for Learning launches. The major theme *supporting children at home* was the most frequent at 34 percent of the text discussion. *Being informed about today's educational practice* and *parents and teachers working together* shared an equal value of the text discussion at 33

Table 1

Percentage of Occurrence of Major Themes in Parent Assessment for Learning Launches

Major Themes	Percent
Supporting children at home	34
Being informed about today's education practice	33
Parents and teachers working together	33

percent. All three major themes values were almost identical from the parent descriptive feedback at the Parent AFL launches, with only the major theme *supporting children at home* being higher by one percent.

Table 2 represents the major theme (being informed about today's educational practice) from the parent AFL launches, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 42 total occurrences (n=42) in the transcribed descriptive feedback. *Learning strategies* was the most common topic from the descriptive feedback from parents and it represented twice or more as many comments as the last seven sub-themes. *Learning changes*, the *Six Big AFL strategies*, and *specific grades and subjects* each had an equal value of five occurrences in the text, making them 12 percent each of the text discussion. The sub-themes students being involved and insight into how students were being taught each had four occurrences in the text making them ten percent of the overall discussion, respectively. These data indicate that 20 percent of the total descriptive feedback from parents had to do specifically with students. The remaining five sub-themes represented 16 percent, in total, of the overall comments.

Table 3 represents the major theme (supporting children at home) from the Parent AFL launches, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 43 total

Table 2

Parent Assessment for Learning Launches Theme: Being Informed about Today's Educational Practices (in raw number and percentage in parentheses)

Sub-Theme	Occurrences[1]	Quote
Learning strategies	**6 (14)**	
Learning change	**5 (12)**	
The Six Big AFL strategies	**5 (12)**	
Specific grades and subjects	**5 (12)**	
Students being involved	4 (10)	
Insight into how students are being taught	4 (10)	
Insight into student learning	3 (7)	"I love the parent information sheet to help us Implement the strategies we have learned at home."
Being included	3 (7)	
Explanation of learning and teaching	2 (5)	
philosophy	2 (5)	
Low effort	2 (5)	
Easy to follow	1 (2)	
Achievement	1 (2)	
Specialization	1 (2)	

Note 1: Subthemes that represented >10% of the total number of responses are bolded.

occurrences (n=43) in transcribed text. Other workshops, access to information, and parent opportunity are similar in nature because they all refer to parent learning in order to support their children at home. When the percentages from the top three sub-themes are added together, the data show that 49 percent of the transcribed descriptive feedback from the Parent AFL launches has to do with parent learning. The remaining 15 sub-themes

Table 3

Parent Assessment for Learning Launches Theme: Supporting Children at Home (in raw number and percentage in parentheses).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Other workshops at home	8 (19)	
Access to information	6 (15)	
Parent opportunity	6 (15)	
Helping my child at home	4 (9)	
Terminology	3 (7)	
Language	2 (5)	
Criteria	2 (5)	
Parents and children working together	2 (5)	"I would like more parents sessions and involvement, keep it going with our children's teachers."
Learning intentions	1 (2)	
Application in daily lives	1 (2)	
Across all grades	1 (2)	
Developmental stages	1 (2)	
Kid friendly language	1 (2)	
On-going process	1 (2)	
Collaborative	1 (2)	
What is expected	1 (2)	
Improved conversation	1 (2)	
Caring	1 (2)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded

represented 51 percent in total of the overall parent comments. Individually, each of the remaining sub-themes fall below the baseline of ten percent.

Table 4 represents the major theme (parents and teachers working together) from the Parent AFL launches, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 42 total occurrences (n=42) in the transcribed text. The number of occurrences and percentages are displayed in ascending order. Parent contribution and connection show a difference of five percent. The sub-themes open to direction and change in learning, value, and inclusion

Table 4

Parent Assessment for Learning Launches Theme: Parents and Teachers Working Together (in raw number and percentage).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Parent contribution	8 (20)	
Connection	6 (15)	
Open to direction and change in learning	5 (12)	
Value	5 (12)	
Inclusion of more parents	5 (12)	
Motivating students	3 (7)	
Support teachers	3 (7)	"How can I as a parent contribute to the process?"
Buy-in	3 (7)	
School wide language	1 (2)	
Discussion among parents and teachers	1 (2)	
Administrative support	1 (2)	
Clarity	1 (2)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded.

of more parents demonstrate that when combined, 36 percent of the descriptive feedback provided by parents in the AFL launches had to do with changes that parents need to make in order to encourage parents and teachers working together. The remaining seven sub-themes represented 29 percent in total of the overall comments about parents and teachers working together.

Semi-Structured Parent Interviews

As discussed in the previous chapter, five parents were who participated in all three Parent AFL launches were drawn in a lottery as a sample to participate in the individual semi-structured interviews in December 2011. The interviews for each parent were guided by previously established interview questions that prompted parent responses, but allowed them freedom to express their views. Before each interview began I communicated to the parents that all responses would be kept completely anonymous, that all written record of the interview would be destroyed after the research was completed, and that they were free to refuse to answer any questions they wished.

Interview questions. The answers from the semi-structured parent interview questions were transcribed and assigned sequence codes. The words and phrases in the transcribed interview question answers were used to create a list of codes in a codebook. These codes were highlighted for major themes and sub-themes that could be used to identify: parents' involvement in the school, their views about assessment practices and education, what they had gained as learners that would enable them to support their children at school, and what they valued in their school and their children's education. There were four major themes extracted from the semi-structured parent interview questions. These themes included: *previous knowledge of assessment for learning, participating in Parent*

Table 5

Percentage of Occurrence of Major Themes in Semi-Structured Parent Interviews

Major Themes	Percentages
Improvement with participation in child's education	28
Previous knowledge of Assessment for Learning	24
Participating in Assessment for Learning Launches	24
Success with Assessment for Learning Launches	24

Assessment for Learning launches, *improvement with participation in child's learning*, and *success with Parent Assessment for Learning launches* were assigned as sub-themes that fit under the three major themes. The tables below (Table 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9) present the number of occurrences and percentages of the sub-themes within the transcribed text under each major heading and present a sample quote from the text showing evidence of a sub-theme.

Table 5 represents the percentage of discussion of the semi-structured parent interviews. *Previous knowledge of Assessment for Learning*, *participating in Assessment for Learning launches*, and *success with Assessment for Learning launches* had an equal value of 24 percent of the text discussion. The discussions about *previous knowledge of assessment*, *participating in Assessment for Learning launches*, and *success with Assessment for Learning launches* were of equal significance with only a difference of four percent from the sub-theme *improvement with participation in child's education.*

Table 6

Semi- Structured Parent Interviews: Previous Knowledge of Assessment for Learning (in raw number and percentage).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Letter grades and percentages	9 (30)	
Measure	5 (17)	
Progress	5 (17)	
Success	3 (9)	"I like percentages better because this is my first time with Grade 7. However, it does not tell me exactly where they are. I always had percentages."
Rating scale	3 (9)	
Standards	2 (6)	
Improvement	1 (4)	
Tangible	1 (4)	
Homeschooling	1 (4)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded.

Table 6 represents the major theme (previous knowledge of assessment for learning) from the semi-structured parent interviews, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 31 total occurrences (n=31) in transcribed text. The number of occurrences and percentage are displayed in ascending order. Measure and progress had equal occurrences in the text making them 34 percent of the transcribed text when combined. The bottom six sub-themes represented a total of 36 percent of the overall comments about previous knowledge of assessment for learning. This is a difference of 28 percent of the top three sub-themes combined, so approximately half of the total text discussion.

Table 7 represents the major theme (participating in Parent Assessment for Learning launches) from the semi-structured parent interviews, the number of occurrences and

Table 7

Semi- Structured Parent Interviews: Participating in Assessment for Learning Launches (in raw number and percentage).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Learning goals	4 (13)	
Include parents in education at school	3 (10)	
Value	3 (10)	
Growth	3 (10)	
Know what to look for	3 (10)	
Sharing and discussions	3(10)	"I know what to look for in the report cards. The report cards and the sessions have helped me to understand the goals of education. It is different than when I went to school e.g. memorization and process oriented."
Philosophy of learning	2 (7)	
Know what is expected	2 (7)	
Appreciation	2 (7)	
Acknowledgment	2 (7)	
Parents	1 (3)	
Process	1 (3)	
Balance	1 (3)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded.

percentages of each sub-theme of 30 total occurrences (n=30) in transcribed text, as well as the highlighted significant sub-themes above the baseline of 10 percent. The number of occurrences and percentages are displayed in ascending order. The four sub-themes of: including parents in education at school, value, growth, know what to look for, and sharing

Table 8

Semi- Structured Parent Interviews: Improvement with Participation in Child's Learning (in raw number and percentage).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Support at home	6 (17)	
Moving forward	5 (14)	
Formative and Summative assessments	5 (14)	
Criteria	5 (14)	
Conversation with children	4 (11)	"I have learned about different takes on criteria, how to set it out, they know what is expected, we are using it at home."
Achievement	3 (8)	
Better understanding	2 (5)	
Language	2 (5)	
Ask questions	2 (5)	
Self-evaluation	2 (5)	
Peer-learning	1 (2)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded.

and discussions represent a total of 50 percent or half of the text discussions about the Parent Assessment for Learning launches. The remaining seven sub-themes represent 37 percent of the overall comments about the Parent Assessment for learning launches. This is a difference of 26 percent from the combined percentages of the top six sub-themes.

Table 8 represents the major theme (improvement with participation in child's learning) from the semi-structured parent interviews, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 37 total occurrences (n=37) in transcribed interview text. The number of occurrences and percentages are displayed in ascending order. When the

Table 9

Semi- Structured Parent Interviews: Success with Parent Assessment for Learning Launches (in raw number and percentage).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Parent learning	14 (47)	"I like the balance of letter grades and formative assessment. I like knowing the difference between formative and summative assessment."
Sense of community	5 (17)	
Strategies	4 (13)	
Support teachers	4 (13)	
Conversation with teachers	3 (1)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded

values of Moving forward, formative and summative assessments are added together they make up a total of 42 percent of the text discussion about improvement with participation in child's learning. The bottom six sub-themes represent 30 percent in total, of the overall comments about improvement with participation in child's learning. This is a difference of 40 percent from the top five sub-themes added together.

Table 9 represents the major theme (success with Parent Assessment for Learning launches) from the semi-structured parent interviews, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 30 total occurrences (n=30) in transcribed text, as well as the highlighted significant sub-themes above the baseline of 10 percent. The number of occurrences and percentage are displayed in ascending order. Parent learning was the most frequent sub-theme with 14 occurrences at 47 percent of the transcribed text, approximately half. Sense of community, strategies, support teachers, and conversations with teachers were close in value with respective differences of only three and four percent.

Table 9 represents the major theme (success with Parent Assessment for Learning launches) from the semi-structured parent interviews, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 30 total occurrences (n=30) in transcribed text. The number of occurrences and percentage are displayed in ascending order. Parent learning was the most frequent sub-theme with 14 occurrences at 47 percent of the transcribed text, approximately half. Sense of community, strategies, support teachers, and conversations with teachers were close in value with respective differences of only three and four percent.

Teacher Focus Group Interview

In November 2011, I conducted a focus group with the teachers from Grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 who had agreed to participate in the action research for this project. For this focus group, we met in a private conference room and all the teachers were made aware that all participants in the discussion would remain anonymous and all responses from the focussed group interview would be destroyed upon completion of the research. The discussion for the focussed group was directed using pre-determined questions that prompted discussion, but did not limit it to single answers. These questions were geared towards gathering information from the teachers about their previous knowledge of assessment for learning, how learning the AFL strategies had furthered their abilities as teachers, the changes they had noticed in their students with the use of the AFL strategies, any interaction with parents about the AFL strategies, what teachers found beneficial and difficult in implementing the AFL strategies, and how teachers would like to use these AFL strategies in the future to help enhance their teaching and their students learning.

The comments from the teacher focussed group interview questions were transcribed and assigned sequence codes. There were four major themes extracted from the teacher

Table 10

Percentage of Occurrence of Major Themes in Focussed Group Teacher Interview

Major Themes	Percentages
Previous knowledge of Assessment for learning	45
Assessment for Learning has furthered abilities as teachers	33
Change in students with Assessment for learning	13
Working with parents	9

focus group interview questions: *Previous knowledge of assessment for learning*, *assessment for learning has furthered abilities as teachers*, *changes in students with assessment for learning*, and *working with parents*. The rest of the theme codes that were extracted, were assigned as sub-themes that fit under the four major themes. The tables below (Table 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14) represent the number of occurrences and percentages of the sub-themes within the transcribed text under each major heading. Additionally, a sample quote is presented from the transcribed interview text showing evidence of a sub-theme.

Table 10 represents the percentage of discussion of the teacher focussed group interviews. *Previous knowledge of assessment for learning* and *assessment for learning has furthered abilities as teachers* were the closest in value with a difference of 12 percent. The values of the top two major themes suggest that 78 percent of the discussion in the focussed group interviews had to do with teachers' personal knowledge and growth.

Table 11 represents the major theme (previous knowledge of Assessment for Learning) from the teacher focussed group interviews, the number of occurrences and

Table 11

Teacher Focussed Group Interviews: Previous Knowledge of Assessment for Learning (in raw number and percentage).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Formative	12 (19)	
Summative	9 (14)	
Training needed	7 (11)	
Overwhelming	7 (11)	
Difficulty	6 (10)	"I find it easier to do learning intentions in math and I will tell them to go over these learning intentions in their formative assessment group."
Exposure	6 (10)	
Changes	5 (8)	
Support	5 (8)	
District initiative	2 (3)	
Talked about different forms	1 (2)	
Learned about difference	1 (2)	
Confusion	1 (2)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded

percentages of each sub-theme of 62 total occurrences (n=62) in text. The number of occurrences and percentage are displayed in ascending order.

The sub-themes summative and formative had a difference of five percent. Difficulty and exposure had a difference of nine percent from the top sub-theme formative. The remaining six sub-themes represent 25 percent or a quarter of the overall comments about previous knowledge of Assessment for Learning.

Table 12

Teacher Focussed Group Interviews: Assessment for Learning has Furthered Abilities as Teachers (in raw number and percentage).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Kid friendly language	9 (19)	
Outcomes to learning intentions	6 (13)	
Using different assessment	6 (13)	
Accountability	5 (11)	"I introduced it in Grade 1 as a fancy word because criteria are a fancy word for when we make a list of what we need to include in our work."
Across all grades	5 (11)	
On-going process	5 (11)	
Developmental stages	3 (7)	
Collaborative	3 (7)	
Learning outcomes	2 (4)	
Students	1 (2)	
Parents	1 (2)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded

Table 12 represents the major theme (Assessment for Learning has furthered abilities as teachers) from the teacher focussed group interviews, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 46 total occurrences (n=46) in the transcribed text. The number of occurrences and percentages are displayed in ascending order. Accountability, across all grades, and on-going process were a combined total of 33 percent of the text discussion. The top six sub-themes show a respective difference of two to six percent. The remaining five sub-themes represent 22 percent in total, of the overall comments.

Table 13

Teacher Focussed Group Interviews: Changes in Students with Assessment for Learning (in raw number and percentage).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Better understanding	5 (28)	
Ownership	5 (28)	"I am noticing with criteria they are really thinking about what is in the assignment that is going to match up with my marking."
Quality	4 (21)	
Setting rules	2 (11)	
Confidence	1 (6)	"My students are beginning to ask if this assignment is formative or summative."
No surprises	1 (6)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded

Table 13 represents the major theme (changes in students with Assessment for Learning) from the teacher focussed group interviews, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 18 total occurrences (n=18) in the transcribed text. The number of occurrences and percentages are displayed in ascending order. When better understanding and ownership are combined, these two sub-themes represent 56 percent of the total text discussion. The sub-theme setting rules is approximately half of the sub-theme quality. The remaining two sub-themes represent 12 percent in total, of the overall comments about changes in students with Assessment for Learning.

Table 14 represents the major theme (working with parents) from the teacher focussed group interviews, the number of occurrences and percentages of each sub-theme of 12 total occurrences (n=12) in transcribed text. The sub-theme everyone on board represents three quarters of the text discussion about working together with parents. This sub-theme

Table 14

Teacher Focussed Group Interviews: Working with Parents (in raw number and percentage).

Sub-Theme	Occurrences	Quote
Everyone on board	9 (75)	"We can implement all we want but at the end of the day parents have to be on board."
Motivation to be involved	2 (17)	
Learning outcomes	1 (8)	

N. B.: Subthemes that represented 10% or greater of the total number of responses are bolded

was 60 percent and 67 percent more significant than the other two sub-themes listed in Table 13.

Comparison of Parent Assessment for Learning Launches, Semi-Structured Parent Interviews, and Teacher Focussed Group Interviews

Once the codebooks for the Parent Assessment for Learning launches, semi-structured interviews, and teacher focussed group interview had been created and assigned percentage values for the number of occurrences of major themes and sub-themes in the text discussions; all three pieces of data were compared for common themes. Each of the codebooks was highlighted for themes that were present in all three codebooks. The themes that had the same meaning but were worded differently among all three codebooks were re-written to demonstrate the common themes in a table. Additionally, the percentages of occurrences of these themes among all three codebooks were also compared to demonstrate what was considered more significant and less significant in the text discussion for all three codebooks. The table listed below (Table 26) is a comparison of the focussed group teacher interview, the Parent Assessment for Learning launches, and semi-structured parent interviews for common themes and percentages of occurrences in transcribed text.

Table 15 represents the reworded common themes from the teacher focus group interview comments; the Parent Assessment for Learning launches responses, and the semi-

Table 15

A Comparison of Common Themes and Percentages of Occurrences in Transcribed Text among Focus Group Responses, Parent Assessment for Learning Launches, and Semi-Structured Parent Interviews (in percentage)

Common Themes	Focus Group	Learning Launches	Parent Interview
Everyone including parents, teachers, and students need to be on board with changes in assessment practice	25	2	2
Consistent usage of Assessment for Learning language across all grades	25	4	5
Training and learning strategies through other workshops	19	17	10
Recognition that changes in assessment practice is an ongoing process	14	2	2
Recognition in changes to learning goals	14	10	10
Assessment for Learning strategies across all grades	14	2	7
Need for parents and teachers to work together in education	6	10	7
Parent involvement and having the knowledge to help their children at home	3	8	7
Philosophy of teaching and learning	2	5	7

structured parent interview data. The common themes that were extracted from all three codebooks include: *philosophy of teaching and learning*, *training and learning strategies*

through other workshops, *recognition in changes to learning goals*, *assessment for learning strategies across all grades*, *consistent usage of Assessment for Learning language across all grades*, *parent involvement and having the knowledge to help their children at home*, *recognition that changes in assessment practice is an on-going process*, *need for parents and teachers to work together in education*, and *everyone including parents, teachers, and students need to be on board with the changes in assessment practice*. The theme *everyone including parents, teachers, and students need to be on board with the changes in assessment practice* was discussed 23 percent more in the focus group than in the learning launches and parent interview. The theme *consistent usage of Assessment for Learning language across all grades* was discussed 21 percent more than in the learning launches and 20 percent more than in the parent interviews. The theme *training and learning strategies through other workshops* represented a two percent difference between the focus group and the learning launches, a ten percent difference between the focus group and the teacher interviews, and a seven percent difference between the learning launches and parent interviews. The theme *recognition in changes to learning goals* demonstrates an equal percentage of discussion between the learning launches and parent interviews at ten percent of the text discussion and a four percent difference compared to the focus group. The theme *assessment for learning strategies across all grades* represents a 12 percent difference in text discussion between the focus group and a learning launches and a seven percent difference between the focus group and parent interviews. Additionally, there is a five percent in this text discussion between the learning launches and the parent interviews. The remaining three themes demonstrate differences in the text discussion of no more than five percent among the focus group, learning launches, and parent interviews.

Student Surveys

Once students had been introduced to the monthly set of assessment for learning strategies by their teachers and had the opportunity to implement and practise them in their daily work in classrooms, participating students in Grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 were asked to complete an anonymous survey. This survey asked students to respond to how they felt about the strategies they had learned and how learning the strategies had supported them in their learning. At the end of September 2011, students completed a survey on learning intentions and setting criteria. At the end of October 2011, students completed a survey on descriptive feedback and deep thinking questions. At the end of November, students completed a survey on peer/self-assessment and student ownership. Each survey issued had statements related to the AFL strategy that they had been introduced to. In this survey they responded to the statement by circling *agree*, *somewhat agree*, *disagree* or *don't know*. It is important to note that after the first survey on learning intentions and criteria, it was mentioned by the Grade 1 and 3 classroom teachers that this survey's questions were too difficult for them to understand. Do to this difficulty; I created a similar survey with statements that had the same meaning, but easier to understand. Students in Grade 1 and 3 chose response of no, not sure, or yes (Appendix E). The results from the student surveys were tallied per grade and for the total number of participants in Grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 for each set of strategies that were introduced in all three months. These results were counted for the number of *agree*, *somewhat agree*, *disagree*, *don't know*, *no*, *yes*, and *not sure* and represented as a percentage. Tables 16 to 25 listed below represent the total results for students in Grades 1 to 9 for their views on the Six Big AFL strategies of learning intentions and setting criteria, descriptive feedback and deep thinking questions, and peer/self-assessment and student ownership.

The results in Table 16 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the learning intention statements. On average 55 percent of students agreed with the learning intentions statements than disagreed or didn't know. In an analysis of the individual student survey results on learning intentions, the highest percentage of all *agree* statements with an average of 81 percent was "using learning intentions helps me to know what to study for a test". The second highest percentages of all *agree* statements, with an average of 68 percent was "using learning intentions has helped me to understand the point of what I am learning".

Table 16

Total Results for Student Survey on Learning Intentions (n=104) in Grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9 (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Learning Intentions	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Using learning intentions has helped me understand the point of what I am learning	76 (73)	21 (20)	4 (5)	3 (2)
Using learning intentions allows me to better communicate to my family about what I have learned at school	54 (52)	28 (27)	7 (7)	15 (14)
Using learning intentions has helped me to know what I am supped to study for a test	69 (67)	18 (17)	6 (6)	10 (10)
Using learning intentions has helped me to make decisions about what I understand in a lesson and what I still need to learn in a lesson	60 (57)	30 (29)	6 (6)	8 (8)

Table 17

Total Results for Student Survey on Criteria (n=104) students in Grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Setting Criteria	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Setting criteria allows me to know exactly what is expected for an assignment and what I need to include	79 (76)	18 (17)	1 (1)	6 (6)
Setting criteria allows me to have say in what should be included in an assignment	70 (67)	25 (24)	2 (2)	7 (7)
Setting criteria allows me to see what I have forgotten to include in an assignment	76 (73)	15 (14)	5 (5)	8 (8)

The results in Table 17 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the setting criteria statements. In looking at all three statements, Statement 1 was the highest percentage of agreement by students; however, statement number three only had a difference of three percent for *agree* statements by students. The average *disagree* or *don't know* responses from all three setting criteria statements was nine percent. In an analysis of the individual grade student surveys on setting criteria, statement number two, "setting criteria allows me to have a say in what should be included in an assignment", was the highest percentage of *agree* responses for all three statements among students in Grades 1 and 3. The highest percentage of *agree* responses among Grade 5, 6, 7, and 9 students was "setting criteria allows me to know exactly what is expected for an assignment and what needs to be included" (statement number one). The

Table 18

Total Results for Student Survey on Descriptive Feedback (n=40) Students in Grades 1 and 3 (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Descriptive Feedback	No	Not Sure	Yes
1. I like it when my teacher tells me what I have done well and what I need to practice on	1 (3)	1 (3)	38 (94)
2. I like it when my teacher tells me what I have forgot in my criteria, and I get to go back and fix it	9 (23)	5 (13)	26 (64)
3. When my teacher tells me what I have done well and what I need to fix it helps me to be a better learner and student	1 (3)	0 (0)	39 (97)

statement with the highest percentage of *disagree* statements for all four grades was "setting criteria allows me to see what I have forgotten in an assignment" (statement number two).

The results in Table 18 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the descriptive feedback statements for Grades 1 and 3. The results show that, on average, 85 percent of the students had a *yes* response for all three statements on descriptive feedback compared to an average of nine percent who answered *no* to all three statements, and an average of five percent who answered *not sure* to all three statements. In an analysis of the individual grade student surveys on descriptive feedback for Grades 1 and 3, the highest percentage of *yes* out all three statements for both grades was statement number one at 90 percent *yes* for Grade 1 and 100 percent *yes* for Grade 3. In the individual grade student surveys for Grade 3, there were zero *no* responses circled for any of the three descriptive feedback statements. In Grade 1, the highest percentage of *no* responses

Table 19

Total Results for Student Survey on Deep Thinking Questions (n=40) Students in Grades 1 and 3 (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Deep Thinking Questions	No	Not Sure	Yes
I like when the teacher asks us deep thinking questions because we get to discuss them with our classmates	2 (5)	8 (20)	30 (75)
Discussing questions in class makes it easier to solve problems	7 (18)	6 (15)	27 (67)

was for statement number two, "I like it when my teacher tells me what I forgot in my criteria, and I get to go back and fix it". This statement represented 43 percent of the *no* student responses. The average *no* response for all three descriptive feedback statements in Grade 1 was 17 percent.

The results in Table 19 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the deep thinking questions statements for Grades 1 and 3. The results from statement number 1 for deep thinking questions shows that 75 percent of grades 1 and 3 students like it when their teacher asks them deep thinking questions, while 25 percent of students are not sure or don't like it. Statement number one indicated a difference of 50 percent between *yes*, *no*, and *not sure* responses. The results for statement number two on deep thinking questions for Grades 1 and 3 shows that approximately 50 percent of the students in Grades 1 and 3 "like discussing questions in class to make it easier to solve problems" and approximately 50 percent of students in Grades 1 and 3 do not like it or are not sure. In an analysis of the individual grade students' surveys on deep thinking questions for Grades 1 and 3, Grade 1 students show 20 percent more *no* responses for statement

number two than statement number one, while Grade 3 students show only a five percent difference for *no* responses between statement number one and statement number two.

The results in Table 20 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the descriptive feedback statements for Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9. The results for all five statements on descriptive feedback show that zero percent of all students disagreed with any of the statements. The highest percentage of *agree* responses from all four grades was 86 percent for statement number three, "my teacher allows me the opportunity to use descriptive feedback to fix what I need and resubmit my assignments". The second highest percentage of *agree* statements from all four intermediate grades was 82 percent for the statement, "I like getting descriptive feedback on my completed assignments". The difference between statement number one and statement number three was six percent. Statement number two and statement number four had an equal percentage of *agree* statements, at 72 percent, respectively. In an analysis of the individual grade student surveys on descriptive feedback for Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9, the highest percentage of *agree* statements among all four grades was "my teacher allows me the opportunity to use descriptive feedback to fix what I need and resubmit my assignments". An average of 82 percent of students agreed with this statement.

The results in Table 21 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the deep thinking questions statements for Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9. The results in Table 21 show that the largest percentage of *agree* statements from all four grades was statement number one, "deep thinking questions allow me to have discussion with my classmates" at 61 percent. The results of the value in statement number one

Table 20

Total Results of Student Survey on Descriptive Feedback (n=64) Students in Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9 (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Descriptive Feedback	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
I like getting descriptive feedback on my completed assignments	52 (82)	10 (15)	0 (0)	2 (3)
Getting descriptive feedback allows me the opportunity to see where I need to improve before handing in my assignment	46 (72)	12 (19)	0 (0)	6 (9)
My teacher allows me the opportunity to fix what I need and resubmit my assignments	55 (86)	9 (14)	0 (0)	0 (0)
When I receive descriptive feedback it is based on the criteria of an assignment, so I know exactly what I need to change to improve	46 (72)	17 (26)	0 (0)	1 (2)
Getting descriptive feedback helps me to improve as a learner	40 (63)	24 (37)	0 (0)	0 (0)

indicate a difference of 17 percent between statement number two and a difference of 11 percent between statement number three. There was a difference of 49 percent between the *agree* and *disagree* or don't *know* responses for statement number one, and a difference of 21 percent between *agree* and *disagree* or *don't know* responses for statement number two. The highest differentiation in the values between the *agree* responses and the *disagree* or *don't know* responses was for statement number three. In an analysis of the individual grade students' surveys on deep thinking questions for Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9, the highest percentage of *agree* statements among all four grades was "deep thinking questions allow me to have

Table 21

Total Results of Student Survey on Deep Thinking Questions (n=64) Students in Grades 5, 6, 7 and 9 (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Deep Thinking Questions	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Deep thinking questions allow me to have discussions in class with my peers	39 (61)	17 (27)	0 (0)	8 (12)
Deep thinking questions give me the opportunity to take risks in what I wish to say	28 (44)	21 (33)	6 (9)	9 (14)
Deep thinking questions are helping me to think critically and problem solve	32 (50)	20 (31)	1 (2)	11 (17)

discussion in class and with my peers" with an average of 64 percent of students agreeing with this statement.

The results in Table 22 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the peer/self-assessment statements for Grades 1 and 3. The highest percentage of *no* responses for all three peer/self-assessment statements was statement number two demonstrating 15 percent of the students in Grades 1 and 3 responding *no* they "don't like to think about their work and decide what they did well and what they could do better". All three of the statements about peer/self-assessment showed an average of eight percent of the students responding *no*. The highest percentage of *yes* responses was statement number one. This statement one showed a difference of 20 percent compared to statement number two, and a difference of five percent compared to statement number three. In an analysis of the individual grade student surveys on deep thinking questions for Grades 1 and 3, the highest percentage of agree statements was for statement number one, "I like it

Table 22

Total Results of Student Survey on Peer/Self-Assessment (n=40) Students in Grades 1 and (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Peer/Self-Assessment	No	Not Sure	Yes
I like it when other students look at my work to help me know what I need to fix	3 (7)	1 (3)	36 (90)
I like to think about my work and decide what I did well and what I can do better	6 (15)	6 (15)	28 (70)
I have enjoyed learning about learning intentions, criteria, questioning, and descriptive feedback	1 (3)	5 (12)	34 (85)

when other students look at my work to help me to know what I need to fix". The average percentage of *yes* responses for students between the two grades was 88 percent. The average percentage of *yes* responses for statement number two was 69 percent and 85 percent for statement number three. These values for individual students in Grades in 1 and 3 demonstrate a three percent difference in the average *yes* response for statement one and statement three.

The results in Table 23 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the ownership statements for Grades 1 and 3. The results from Table 23 indicate that 80 percent of the students responded *yes* to feeling they get choices about how they learn, and 82 percent of the students felt that they were improving in their learning. The percentage of *yes* responses for both statements on ownership shows a

Table 23

Total Results of Student Survey on Ownership (n=40) in Grades 1 and 3 (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Ownership	No	Not Sure	Yes
I feel I get choices about how I learn	4 (10)	4 (10)	32 (80)
I am improving in my learning	1 (3)	6 (15)	33 (82)

difference of only two percent. The difference in percentages between *not sure* responses for statements number one and two was five percent. The difference between *no* responses for statements number one and two was seven percent. There were more *no* responses for statement number one, "I feel I get choices about how I learn" than statement number two, "I am improving in my learning". In the analysis of the individual grade student surveys on ownership for Grades 1 and 3, the highest percentage of agree responses for Grade 1 was statement number two, "I am improving in my learning" at 90 percent. The highest percentage of *agree* statements for Grade 3 was statement number one, "I feel I get choices about how I learn".

The results in Table 24 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the peer/self-assessment statements for Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9. The results indicated that statement number four, "I like to think about what I have done well and what I need to fix after I receive back an assignment" had the highest percentage of *agree* responses at 68 percent. The second highest peer/self-assessment statement for *agree* responses at 49 percent was statement number one, other

Table 24

Total Results of Student Survey on Peer/Self-Assessment (n=53) Students in Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9 (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Peer/Self-Assessment	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
1. Other students commenting on my work gives me an idea of what I need to change	26 (49)	21 (40)	5 (9)	1 (2)
2. I would rather get feedback from other students than my teacher because I can easily understand what to fix	10 (19)	17 (32)	19 (36)	7 (13)
3. Getting feedback from other students allows me to talk about what I know and don't know about a topic	18 (34)	23 (43)	3 (6)	9 (17)
4. I like to think about what I have done well and what I need to fix after I receive back an assignment	36 (68)	13 (25)	3 (6)	1 (2)

students commenting on my work gives me an idea of what I need to change". The difference in *agree* responses among Statements 1 and 4 is 19 percent. The percentage difference is 60 percent between the *agree* responses and *disagree* and *don't know* responses for Statement 4. Thirty-four percent of students agreed that getting feedback from other students allowed them to talk about what they knew and did not know on a topic and 36 percent of the students reported that they would rather get feedback from students than teachers. Seventeen percent of students liked feedback more from their teacher more than from their peers. In an analysis of the individual grade students surveys on peer/self-

Table 25

Total Results of Student Survey on Ownership (n=53) Students in Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9 (in raw number and percentage)

Statements Answered on Ownership	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
I can set goals of where I need to improve to help me be a better learner	25 (48)	23 (43)	2 (3)	3 (6)
I often make a plan or set goals in the areas I need to improve in a subject or as a learner	19 (36)	20 (37)	1 (2)	13 (25)
Learning the strategies of: learning intentions, criteria, descriptive feedback, deep thinking questions, and peer/self-assessment has encouraged me to take more ownership of my learning	34 (64)	15 (28)	1 (2)	3 (6)

assessment for Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9, the highest percentage of *agree* responses was for statement number four, "I like to think about what I have done well and what I need to fix after I receive back an assignment". An average of 62 percent of students agreed with statement number four in each grade.

The results in Table 25 represent the numerical value as well as the percentage of students' views for each of the ownership statements for Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9. Table 25 results show that there is a difference of 39 percent between the students who agreed that they could set goals of where they needed to improve to help them become better learner and to the students who disagreed. Additionally, there was a difference of nine percent of students who agreed to the statement, "I often make a plan or set goals in the areas I need to improve in a subject or as a learner" compared to students who disagreed. Statements

number one and number two, both discussing the topic of goal setting, had a difference of 12 percent for *agree* responses. Statement number three, "learning the strategies of: learning intentions, criteria, feedback, deep thinking questions and peer and self-assessment has encouraged me to take more ownership of my learning", which encompassed the student learning from all three months, revealed a difference of 62 percent between the students who agreed with the statement and those who disagreed. In an analysis of the individual grade students' surveys on ownership for Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9, the highest percentage of *agree* statements for ownership was statement number three. Each grade's percentages for *agree* statements for statement number three was 75 percent. One-hundred percent of Grade 7 students agreed with statement number four. Grade 9 was the only grade with *disagree* responses on student ownership. Twenty-five percent of the students disagreed that they could set goals of where they need to improve to help them be a better learner, 12 percent disagreed that they often make a plan or set goals in the areas they need to improve in a subject or as a learner and 12 percent disagreed that learning the strategies of: learning intentions, criteria, feedback, questions and peer and self-assessment has encouraged me to take more ownership of my learning.

The results of the various research tools have been presented in this section. In the next chapter, the discussion of the impact of these results will occur in relation to the central research question.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the research findings collected through the course of this action research inquiry from September 2011 to December 2011. The inquiry for this research was based on increasing parent involvement in schools and shifting mindsets about assessment

practice through teaching the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. The data collected from the Parent AFL launches, semi-structured parent interviews, and teacher focussed group interview were presented in the forms of a figure and tables. These data represented the numbers in attendance at the Parent AFL launches, the percentages of major themes and sub-themes from the Parent AFL launches, the teacher focus group interview, and the parent semi-structured interview, and the percentages of *agree*, *somewhat agree*, *disagree*, *don't know*, and *yes*, *no*, *not sure* responses from the student surveys for Grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9. Chapter 5 will provide an explanation of what these data mean in relation to the central research question of: To what degree will teaching parents the Six Big Assessment for Learning Strategies increase parent involvement in school?

Chapter 5: Discussion

A great deal of information has been presented in the previous chapters of this research to support the action research inquiry of increasing parent involvement in schools with the use of Assessment for Learning strategies. Chapter 1 provided information concerning the significance, background, personal location, and intention for the project research. Chapter 2 delivered a comprehensive literature review that provided information regarding Assessment for Learning, parent and school relationships, strategies, and benefits for increasing parent involvement in schools, and making shifts in assessment practices. Chapter 3 presented the definition and description of the research methods used for the project, why particular types of research methods were chosen, and how data were collected for the project. Chapter 4 described the results of the data collected in 2011 from the Parent Assessment for Learning launches, the semi-structured parent interviews, the teacher focus group interview, and the student surveys.

This chapter interprets and discusses the data that were collected from the action research inquiry of increasing parent involvement in schools and shift in mindsets about assessment through teaching the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. Additionally, I will synthesize the results into four distinct themes in support of the central research question: To what degree does teaching parents the Six Big Assessment for Learning Strategies increase parent involvement in school?

Synthesis

The outcomes of the action research inquiry of increased parent involvement in schools and shift in mindsets about assessment through teaching the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies is supported thematically. I have interpreted the data collected by

discussing the themes of: *parental involvement, teacher development, student development,* and *shift in mindsets*.

Parental Involvement

Data collected from the Parent Assessment for Learning launches and semi-structured interviews indicated a general response from parent that they want to be involved in their children's educations and school; they just need the tools and guidance to do so. Data collected from the Parent AFL launches in the form of themed descriptive feedback (See Table XX) indicated that at least half of the total parental comments dealt with parents wanting to support their children's learning at home and at school. Parents discussed recognizing that there is a change in learning methods; wanting to learn strategies for specific grades and subjects to support their children including the Six Big AFL strategies; and, giving parents the opportunity to be involved with access to information by providing workshops. Additionally, parents discussed the realization that they are capable of making a contribution in their children's educations. Providing parents with the opportunity to learn the Six Big AFL strategies was shown to be effective in increasing parent involvement in schools because over half of the transcribed feedback from each Parent AFL launch was related to parent learning, involvement, and contribution.

Interestingly, the checklists used to track the levels of attendance for the Parent AFL launches (See Table XX) did not appear to support the research question since parental involvement was minimal at the actual launches. The levels of attendance were significantly lower than the expressed interest for Parent AFL launch number one. Only half of the parents who expressed interest actually attended. The largest number of parents in attendance was for Parent AFL launch number two, which included 16 parents with children in Grades

Pre-K to Grade 9. Out of over 330 parents in the school community, approximately 0.05 percent of the parent population was in attendance of the Parent AFL launches. This percentage indicated that parent involvement was not increasing according to the levels in attendance. Levels of attendance could have been affected by various reasons including: previous commitments, not receiving the appropriate information, or feeling uncertain about coming to the school

The data collected from the semi-structured parent interviews (See Table XX) showed overwhelming support for increased parent involvement in schools through teaching the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. Parents wanted to understand the differences between formative and summative assessment; to have more understanding in regards to measurement, letter grades, and percentages, to know what to look for; to know the learning goals in the classroom and school; to understand the new philosophies of learning; and to improve in supporting their children at home. The most-frequently occurring sub-theme related to parent learning and parent contribution which indicated that the parents who participated in this research recognized the need for a fervent effort to increase their knowledge and contribution to support their children's educations at school. Parents recognized that in order meet this need, they had to become more involved at school.

The comparison of common themes presented in the See Tables XX and XX) also supports a movement toward increased parent involvement in schools. The common themes among the focus group, learning launches, and parent interviews with the most-frequently occurring discussion had to do with parent involvement and having the knowledge to help their children at home, being given training and learning strategies through other workshops, and understanding the philosophies of teaching and learning that are being used in the

school. Again, these data promoted the idea that parents want to be more involved in their children's educations. They need to be provided the opportunity and skills to do so. These findings support Fullan's (2000) argument that parents can have a positive impact on students' progress and development if they are encouraged to participate. Introducing parents to the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies was the vehicle to begin the process of increased parent involvement in schools.

Teacher Development

Data collected from the teacher focus group interview (See Table XX) indicated that teachers had some exposure to the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. Three quarters of the focus group interview included a discussion that mentioned that there was a definite need for teacher training and exposure in the area of Assessment for Learning, but that a complete shift in assessment practice left some overwhelming feelings from teachers. Teachers did recognize that becoming knowledgeable in the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies would provide increased accountability of teachers to their students and to their students' parents. These data support Stiggins and Chappuis' (2006) realization since they argued that AFL principles can only be effective when they are used in a competent manner by educators. They asserted that teachers must know why they are assessing. Teachers felt that if a shift in assessment practice was going to be successful, everyone needed to be on board including teachers, parents, and students. All parties needed to be exposed to Assessment for Learning language so that there was consistency across all grades and in the school community. As shown in Table XX, one quarter of the text discussion of the focus group interview had to do with wanting to ensure that everyone, including parents, teachers, and students were in support with changes in assessment practice. Interestingly, this

discussion occurred much more frequently in the focus group discussions than in the learning launches or parent interviews. These data indicate that teachers believe that parent involvement in schools is important, but that there needs to be a consistent effort from teachers to promote this involvement in schools. Epstein (2002) argued that when partnerships are established among the school, family and community the benefits are obvious. There will be improvements in school climate, better access to family services and support, increased parental skills and leadership, and rise in the support for teachers in student learning. Additionally, the theme promoting the need for parents and teachers to work together in the comparison of common themes, was relatively equal in occurrence among the focus group, learning launches and parent interviews. There is a recognition among teachers and parents that there is a need to work together to promote parent involvement and student progress.

Student Development

Data collected in the teacher focus group (See Table XX) and parent interviews (See Table XX) indicated that with the introduction of the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies, there has been an observable change in students by their teachers and in children by their parents. Additionally, students have expressed the benefits of learning the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies in the results of the student surveys. As indicated in the teacher focus group interview, over half of the discussion of changes in students with Assessment for Learning had to do with teachers witnessing better understanding, ownership and quality of work within their students in Grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9.

Parents in the semi-structured interview made frequent mentions about improved conversation with children about what they were learning, and supporting their children at

home because of having the Assessment for Learning knowledge and language to which their children were being exposed.

Data collected from the student surveys indicated that most students in Grades 1 to 9 agreed that learning about and using the strategies of learning intentions and criteria, descriptive feedback and deep thinking questions, and peer/self-assessment and ownership had improved their abilities as learners. Students expressed that they were more conscious about what they were supposed to be learning in a lesson; they were more aware of what was expected for assignments; they appreciated having the opportunity to fix their work; they appreciated more in-depth discussions; they liked the opportunity for other students to look at their work; and, they felt they were more in control of the success of their learning. When both parents and teachers have witnessed improvements and successes in their children and students, teachers are feeling more apt to involve parents in student learning and parents are more apt to increase their involvement in the children's educations and the school. These data collected from the Parent AFL launches, semi-structured parent interviews, teacher focus group interview, and student survey support this belief. Additionally, because students are beginning to experience further successes at school, they feel more inclined to want to have their parents more involved in school. The datum in the semi-structured parent interviews, mentioning improvement in conversation with children at home supports this assumption.

Shift in Mindsets

Data collected throughout this action research have supported the inquiry of increased parental involvement in schools and shift in mindsets about assessment through teaching the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. A shift in mindsets regarding assessment

practice has become evident among parents, teachers, and students. The results from the Parent AFL launches and semi-structured interviews indicated that parents felt much more informed about assessment practices. From the knowledge that parents gained from the AFL launches, parents indicated in the feedback that they valued knowing the difference between formative and summative assessment, and they liked having the knowledge about assessment to ask appropriate questions regarding their children's progress. A majority of the parents did state that they did like seeing a percentage, but the knowledge gained from the Parent launches informed them of questions to ask of their children and their children's teachers in regards to their academic achievement and progress.

The teachers who participated in the research demonstrated a clear shift in mindset regarding assessment practice because they felt more knowledgeable about formative assessment and Assessment for Learning strategies and how to effectively implement them in their classrooms. As demonstrated in the discussion during the focus group interviews, teachers recognize that changing assessment practice is an on-going process, but they feel more inclined to continue to make appropriate changes because of the positive results from their students in the form of better understanding, better quality work, and increased ownership.

The students who participated in the research also demonstrated a shift in mindset as demonstrated by their survey responses. The majority of students who completed the surveys agreed that learning the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies helped them to be better learners. While students in Grades 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 felt that learning these strategies had bettered their learning and wanted to continue use these strategies, they still liked to see letter grades and percentages as measures to compare them to other students. Letter grades

and percentages are still considered important to demonstrate learning because they are entrenched in the evaluation in intermediate grades.

Summary

Chapter 5 has discussed the data that were collected through the course of this action research inquiry based on increasing parent involvement in schools and shifting mindsets of parents, teachers, and students regarding assessment practice through teaching the *Six Big AFL* strategies. The discussions for these data were presented thematically. The themes that I used to present the interpretations of these data included: parental involvement, teacher development, student development, and shift in mindsets. The discussions reported that there is a movement toward increased parent involvement in schools. This was expressed by the parent participants in the research. Teaching parents the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies was a vehicle to start and continue the process of increased parent involvement. Parents were glad to be involved in their children's learning and to have the strategies to further support their children at home. Additionally, parents felt more prepared to effectively converse with their children's teachers about their children's progress because they now have the knowledge to do so. Parents have said that they want to continue their learning at school to continue to support their children in other workshops.

A shift in mindsets regarding assessment practice has occurred among parents, teachers, and students because they have increased their knowledge base, know what to look for, and feel better prepared to support each other in this process. Although, changing assessment practice and views about assessment practice is considered to be an on-going process, parents, teachers, and students have taken a step in the right direction. Each group

are valuable members of a learning team and need to continue to work together for future development of themselves and education.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter 1 introduced this project by outlining the significance, background, and personal location of this action research project that is geared toward increasing parent involvement in schools and shifting mindsets about assessment practices by teaching the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. A comprehensive literature review emphasising the areas of: Assessment for Learning, parent and school relationships, strategies and benefits for increasing parent involvement in schools, and making shifts in the views of assessment practices were provided in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 outlined the specific research methods and the particular reasons that for choosing these methods for this action research project. Chapter 4 presented the results of data collected to help support the answer to the research question of whether parental involvement in schools would increase after parents were taught the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. Chapter 5 interpreted and discussed these data collected to provide an appropriate answer to support the research question. This final chapter with provide my conclusions for this action research project regarding teaching the Six Big Assessment for Learning strategies, parental involvement, and parents, teachers, and students working together. Additionally, this chapter will provide recommendations based on what I have learned throughout this study. Recommendations will be based on learning for parents, learning teams, communication with parents, professional development, and my personal development.

Conclusions

The degree of increased parent involvement in schools and shift in mindsets regarding assessment practice was measured through the feedback from the Parent AFL launches, responses to interview questions from the parent semi-structured interviews and teacher focus group interview, and student responses from the student surveys. The

conclusions based on data presented in Chapter 4 are presented in this chapter by discussing: teaching the *Six Big AFL strategies*, parental involvement, and parents, teachers and students working together.

Teaching the Six Big AFL Strategies

Earl (2003) stated that we are living in an era in which individuals must possess competence and confidence in a broad range of areas and have the tools to adapt to new knowledge as it comes. Chappuis and Chappuis (2003) supported this argument by asserting that we must recognize the changes in the world we are living and adjust our educational practice. In an effort to recognize the need to change our educational practice and increase parent involvement in schools, I placed focus on teaching parents the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. Research completed by Chappuis and Chappuis (2002) suggested that parents need to be involved in understanding school and teacher assessment practices as a means to support teachers and their children. They promoted that parents have a right to ask questions about particular assessment practices occurring in their children's classrooms. In order to promote the idea that parents could have increased involvement through Assessment for Learning, I provided parents participating in the AFL launches with visuals, and interactive activities based on the *Six Big AFL* strategies. These activities were representative of how the classroom teachers were teaching their students these same strategies. It was necessary for me to teach parents the difference between formative and summative assessment and to teach them the strategies and benefits of Assessment for Learning in the Parent AFL launches. By teaching parents, there was consistent language and understanding of the strategies being used in the classrooms among parents, teachers, and students. The data collected regarding parent, teacher and student learning using the *Six Big AFL* strategies

supported that parents felt: pleased to have better knowledge about assessment practices, capable of knowing what questions to ask regarding assessment practices, and they had an idea of how to use assessment strategies to help their children at home. Additionally, parents expressed that although they still valued receiving a letter grade and percentage for their children's work, they were more prepared to grasp meaning behind what their children were learning and how they were being assessed. Teachers were pleased at finding a new way to support their students in the classroom and were witnessing the benefits of using the AFL strategies in classroom in the form of students understanding, quality and ownership. Student responses to using the strategies were overwhelming. The majority of students in Grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 felt that learning the *Six Big AFL* strategies have helped them to be better learners because they have new learning strategies to use. Parents, teachers, and students who participated in this research feel they have benefited from learning about Assessment for Learning strategies as reflected in data collected.

Parental Involvement

Epstein (2002) discussed that we cannot make assumptions about parents knowledge and understanding about student curriculum and assessment. Instead, we must provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home. This particular literature by Epstein (2002) was the bases for including parents in learning the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies. Providing learning sessions for parents at the school promoted that parents are essential to their children's success. Parents expressed in their feedback and interviews that they felt acknowledged and valued in participating in this learning by the end of all three Parent AFL launches. At the end of all three learning launches, parents expressed that they wanted more workshops and learning in other areas like

literacy and math to continue to support their children at home. Additionally, they recognized that there were a limited number of parents in attendance and came up with suggestions on how the school and teachers could encourage more parent participation and how parents could encourage more parent participation. I believe the parent involvement at our school will continue to increase if we as a staff continue to promote their involvement. Parents recognized that their involvement over the course of three months had impacted their views regarding assessment and educational practice and had had an impact on their children's achievement. Fullen (2007) supported the idea of promoting parent involvement by stating parents can have a positive impact on students' progress and development if they are encouraged to participate. He pointed out that most parents do not want to run the school; they just want to participate. I conclude that this was absolutely the case for the parents who participated in this research.

Parents, Teachers, and Students Working Together

Parents, teachers, and students working together through a common language of Assessment for Learning have created a shift in mindsets regarding assessment practice. Teachers have said that they feel more accountable to their students and are focussing more on formative assessment versus summative assessment. Parents and students genuinely understand the difference between formative and summative assessment and the benefits of using Assessment for Learning strategies. Teaching *the Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies has been a vehicle to promote the benefits of parents, teachers, and students working together. Epstein (2002) argued that when partnerships are established among the school, family and community the benefits are obvious. There will be improvements in

school climate, parental skills and leadership, and rise in the support for teachers and student learning.

Recommendations

Despite my efforts to have a significant number of parents in the school community at the Parent AFL launches, the numbers in attendance were not as high as I anticipated them to be. However, the information gathered from parents, teachers, and students from data collected through the course of this action research is invaluable for future work in the areas of increasing parent involvement in schools and Assessment for Learning. Listed below are some areas of focus and improvement to be taken in to consideration for future educational success regarding increased parent involvement in schools.

Learning for Parents

Throughout the course of this research, parents consistently commented that they wanted to see future learning opportunities specifically in the areas of literacy and math. I recommend that at the beginning of a school year, a parent meeting be held to elicit information on the types of workshop they would be interested in attending for the year. I would suggest that one or two topics be chosen as a focus for the year based on parent feedback. Additionally, I would suggest that learning sessions should occur more frequently and throughout the whole year. I feel the Parent AFL launches would have encouraged more parent participants if they had been held twice per month and throughout the entire school year. Parents could have had two opportunities to attend parent workshops if one time was not as suitable as the other, and the learning would have been reinforced through the whole year instead of being condensed into three months. Finally, I recommend accessing parents in the community to deliver workshops to other parents. Parents in the community are

untapped resources that are capable to sharing valuable knowledge to parents, to staff and to community members.

Learning Teams

Epstein (2002) recommended that creating action teams for establishing partnerships allows a variety of voices to be heard in the process of educational change. Once the types of desired parent workshops have been established at school, I would recommend that learning teams comprised of parents, teachers, and if possible students be established. These teams could work together to create and lead desired workshops. Teachers often feel that the onus is on them to present parents with the information. I disagree; I believe that teachers, parents and students can work together to present beneficial learning for all parties.

Communication with Parents

Based on the low numbers in attendance at the Parent AFL launches compared to the number of parents in our school community, I suggest improvement in communicating with parents about opportunities to support their children. I recommend teachers contacting parents directly by phone to encourage them to participate in future learning opportunities. I suggest that a parent liaison position be created for any future parent learning workshops, so that they could help promote parent learning opportunities in the community. Having a parent involved in organizing parent learning workshops would be beneficial because it may help reduce feelings of anxiety or intimidation that may arise when teachers are trying to promote learning workshops.

Professional Development

As a teacher, I have found that every year we are constantly bombarded by new philosophies and new ways of teaching and assessing. This can be overwhelming for

teachers and cause them to retreat to their classrooms and continue with what is comfortable and familiar. I recommend that as a staff, coming to a consensus on one specific area of professional growth that is to be the focus for the year. For example, if the focus is improving with the use of Assessment for Learning strategies, teachers should try to implement one or two strategies for the year. Introducing one or two strategies is more manageable than introducing six. Additionally, assign teachers to professional learning communities or teams that have a regular meeting schedule so that they have the opportunity to really reflect and improve in the area of focus for the year. If teachers are feeling successful with their learning, they will be more inclined to promote outside learning to others such as parents.

Personal Development

The journey to completing this action research project has impacted my teaching, my colleagues, my students' parents and my students in a positive manner. I have enhanced my abilities to make connections in the community and with my colleagues. I have realized the need consistently reflect on the needs of the school community rather than solely the needs of my classroom. Finally, I have realized the need to be passionate about learning. If teachers, parents, and students are going to continue to be inclined to learn, they need to see value in what they are learning. It is up to us as educators to promote the need for lifelong learning.

Conclusion

This action research project was completed to investigate if exposing parents, teachers, and students to the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies would increase parent involvement in schools and create a shift in mindsets regarding current assessment

practices. The research was completed by teachers introducing their students to the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies, and by parents attending Assessment for Learning launches geared at enhancing parent learning in this area. Data was collected for the action research using qualitative and quantitative methods in the form of checklists, public meetings and feedback, interviews, and surveys. In order to support the purpose for this project an extensive literature review was completed discussing the areas of: Assessment for Learning, parent and school relationships, strategies and benefits for increasing parent involvement in schools, and making shifts in the views of assessment practices. The results of the data for action research inquiry indicate that parent involvement in schools has increased by introducing the *Six Big Assessment for Learning* strategies, and a shift in mindsets regarding assessment practice has occurred among parents, teachers, and students concerning assessment practice.

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Appendix A

Date_____

Descriptive Feedback for Assessment for Learning Parent Launch # 1

Task: **Learning Intentions**

Parent Name_____

Three things you feel have gone well in this launch are:_____
_____
_____
_____

Three things that you have learned from this launch are:_____
_____
_____
_____

List three things that you feel need improvement or that you would like to see in the next launch._____
_____
_____
_____

What is one thing that could you take from this launch to help you be more active in your child's learning at school?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix B

Parent Semi-structured Interview Questions

Name:_____ Date:_____

1. Describe your previous knowledge and understanding of assessment practices

2. Why are letter grades or percentages important to you and/or your children?

3. How have letter grades or percentages impacted you or your children in the past?

4. What have you gained from participating in the parent assessment for learning launches?

5. Do you think learning these strategies have improve your participation in your child's learning at school? How?

6. How has learning these strategies promoted your involvement in your child's education and at the school?

7. Do you feel the parent launches have allowed you to better converse with your child about his or her learning? Describe how.

8. What do you feel has been successful about the parent assessment for learning launches?

9. What do you feel needs to be improved about the parent assessment for learning launches?

10. Do you have any other information you wish to share or go back and discuss?

Appendix C

Focused Group Teacher Interview Questions Date: _____

1. Describe your previous knowledge of assessment for learning

2. Describe how learning assessment for learning strategies has furthered your abilities as a teacher.

3. Describe the kinds of changes you have noticed in your students with the use of assessment for learning strategies

4. Describe any discussions you have had with parents this month about students learning or use of assessment strategies in the classroom

5. What has worked this month for you with regards to using the assessment for learning strategies, and what has been difficult?

6. Describe how you would like to use these strategies in the next month to enhance yours and your students learning

Appendix D

Student Survey Assessment for Learning Strategies # 2

(Descriptive Feedback and Deep Thinking Questions)

Grade: _____ Date: _____

Please circle the answer that best describes you for each question.

1. I like getting descriptive feedback on my completed assignments.

   Agree **Somewhat Agree** **Disagree** **Don't know**

2. Getting descriptive feedback allows me the opportunity to see where I need to improve before handing in my assignment.

   Agree **Somewhat Agree** **Disagree** **Don't know**

3. My teacher allows me the opportunity to use descriptive feedback to fix what I need to and resubmit my assignments.

   Agree **Somewhat Agree** **Disagree** **Don't know**

4. When I receive descriptive feedback it is based on the criteria of an assignment, so I know exactly what I need to change to improve.

   Agree **Somewhat Agree** **Disagree** **Don't know**

5. Getting Descriptive feedback helps me to improve my skills as a learner.

   Agree **Somewhat Agree** **Disagree** **Don't know**

6. Deep thinking questions allow me to have discussions in class and with my peers.

   Agree **Somewhat Agree** **Disagree** **Don't know**

7. Deep thinking questions give me the opportunity to take risks in what I wish to say.

   Agree **Somewhat Agree** **Disagree** **Don't know**

8. Deep thinking questions are helping me to learn to think critically and to problem solve.

   Agree **Somewhat Agree** **Disagree** **Don't know**

Appendix E

Student Survey Assessment for Learning Strategies # 2

(Descriptive Feedback and Deep Thinking Questions)

Grade: 1 Date: _____

1. I like it when my teacher tells me what I have done well and what I need to practice on

 **No**  **Not Sure**  **Yes**

2. I like it when my teacher tells me what I forgot in my criteria, I get to go back and fix it.

 **No**  **Not Sure**  **Yes**

3. When my teacher tells me what I have done well and what I need to fix it helps me to be a better learner and student

 **No**  **Not Sure**  **Yes**

4. I like when the teacher asks us deep thinking questions because we get to discuss them with our classmates

 **No**  **Not Sure**  **Yes**

5. Discussing questions in class makes it easier to help me solve problems

 **No**  **Not Sure**  **Yes**