

Instructional Talk Throughs

Learning Conversations that Enhance
Teacher Practice and
Student Learning

Balwin School - dean.michailides@epsb.ca

Britannia School - david.morris@epsb.ca

George H. Luck School - linda.inglis@epsb.ca

Glenora School - mary.michailides@epsb.ca

Spruce Avenue School - nancy.petersen@epsb.ca

Velma E. Baker School - dorothy.cronk@epsb.ca



EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Canada

Assessment for Learning – Instructional Talk Throughs
Spruce Avenue School Visit
Wednesday, October 25, 2006

Schedule for the morning:

8:15 – 8:45 School Tour

8:45 – 9:00 Welcome and Introductions
Principal – Nancy Petersen
Facilitators – Harnaik, Rhonda, Joanne and Jim

9:00 - 9:15 Classroom Visit #1

9:15 – 9:30 Classroom Visit #2

9:30 – 9:45 Classroom Visit #3

9:45 – 10:00 Classroom Visit #4

10:00 – 10:15 Break and Self Reflection Tool

10:20– 11:30 Reflective Conversations and Lunch

Groups for Visitations:

Host Teachers from Spruce:				
	Sandra Kahn Grade 2 Room 27	Shaun Weber Grade 9 Room 20	Amber Harriman Grade 5 Room 23	David Hoyle Music Room 14
Visit #1 9:00 – 9:15	Anna Rees Jay Procktor Lia Tomasiuk Jennifer Wallace Sandra Fedorak	Renee Parker Donna Daniel Jennifer Hill Tara Price Kyla Hampton	Rob Manson Lin Irvine Diane Stott Brigitte Pady	Jennifer Mitchell Karen Teague Karen Sturwold
Visit #2 9:15 – 9:30	Jennifer Mitchell Karen Teague Karen Sturwold	Anna Rees Jay Procktor Lia Tomasiuk Jennifer Wallace Sandra Fedorak	Renee Parker Donna Daniel Jennifer Hill Tara Price Kyla Hampton	Rob Manson Lin Irvine Diane Stott Brigitte Pady
Visit #3 9:30 – 9:45	Rob Manson Lin Irvine Diane Stott Brigitte Pady	Jennifer Mitchell Karen Teague Karen Sturwold	Anna Rees Jay Procktor Lia Tomasiuk Jennifer Wallace Sandra Fedorak	Renee Parker Donna Daniel Jennifer Hill Tara Price Kyla Hampton
Visit #4 9:45 – 10:00	Renee Parker Donna Daniel Jennifer Hill Tara Price Kyla Hampton	Rob Manson Lin Irvine Diane Stott Brigitte Pady	Jennifer Mitchell Karen Teague Karen Sturwold	Anna Rees Jay Procktor Lia Tomasiuk Jennifer Wallace Sandra Fedorak

Groups for Lunch and Conversations:

Group 1:

Balwin – Anna Rees
Britannia – Tara Price
George H. Luck – Karen Teague
Velma E. Baker – Diane Stott

Group 2:

Balwin – Renee Parker
Britannia – Jennifer Wallace
George H. Luck – Jay Procktor
Glenora – Kyla Hampton
Velma E. Baker

Group 3:

Balwin – Rob Manson
George H. Luck – Donna Daniel
Glenora – Karen Sturwold
Velma E. Baker – Lia Tomasiuk

Group 4:

Balwin – Jennifer Mitchell
Britannia – Brigitte Pady
George H. Luck – Lin Irvine
Glenora – Sandra Fedorak
Velma E. Baker – Jennifer Hill

Teacher: Terry Mah
Grade: 2
Room: 6

As you visit my classroom, I want you to know where I am on the Assessment for Learning journey...



Dirt Road X

The journey is bumpy, with lots of roadblocks and pitfalls. The road to the final destination is unclear.



Paved Road ☐

The journey is smoother, with fewer detours, and I'm moving along cautiously.



Highway ☐

The journey is turning into an adventure and I'm exploring and experimenting along the way.



Yellow Brick Road ☐

The journey is smooth, with knowledge and skills embedded in daily practice, and I'm moving along confidently.

LESSON PLAN OUTLINE:

- word clues in the cozy corner with students providing feedback to each other
 - written and oral
- math measurement (decimetre measurement)
 - we will set measurement criteria and review criteria for illustrations
 - students will locate and record items in the class measuring in decimetres
 - students will work with a partner and 'prove' their answers to each other
- spelling
 - self and peer assessment of printing

WHAT TO LOOK FOR (BACK TABLE AND AROUND THE CLASSROOM):

- pen pal letter books – criteria lists following letter #3
- bat research – reflection and self assessment
- learning logs – parent assessments
- story study – self assessment and feedback
- criteria lists posted in the classroom for:
 - printing
 - illustrations
 - learning logs
 - research
 - listening
 - persuasive writing
 - good sentences
- criteria forms

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE STUDENTS:

- What is criteria?
- Who makes the criteria?
- How does having the criteria help you with your assignments?
- When do you use criteria?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS:

Welcome to my Assessment for Learning Journey

HOST TEACHER: RUSSELL ROOM #: 15

GRADE: K SUBJECT(s): MATH

AREA OF FOCUS FOR FEEDBACK: Personal assessment/reflection in math journals.

As you visit my classroom, I want you to know where I am on the Assessment for Learning journey...



Dirt Road ☐

The journey is bumpy, with lots of roadblocks and pitfalls. The road to the final destination is unclear.



Paved Road ☐

The journey is smoother, with fewer detours, and I'm moving along cautiously.



Highway ☒

The journey is turning into an adventure and I'm exploring and experimenting along the way.



Yellow Brick Road ☐

The journey is smooth, with knowledge and skills embedded in daily practice, and I'm moving along confidently.

Lesson Overview: MATH - Specific Learning Outcome: SORTING

- Shared writing in class journal
 - Teacher demonstration of sorting task
 - Review of journal writing criteria/display exemplars
 - Students engage in sorting activity; adults scribe children's personal reflections
- What to look for:
- The use of both verbal & visual criteria
 - "Expensive" Feedback that reiterates criteria
 - Are the children referring to criteria display & exemplars?
 - Progression of the lesson (sequencing from teacher demo. to group activity & then into an individual task)

Questions you could ask my students:

- Can you show me the "Marty the Math Monster Word Wall"? How does the Word Wall help you?
- Explain your sorting rule.
- Can you show me another way to sort your objects?
- What 3 things do you need on your journal page?
In my classroom, please notice... Where can you look if you need help?
- I can statements
- The power of modeling (peer & teacher)
- Routines that support independence
- Weekend Homework packages that include Parent Feedback

Teacher's Name: Russell Room: 15

Feedback Provided By: Cathy

TWO STARS AND A WONDER:



Great teaching decision to progress from ME, WE, YOU. I think all levels can benefit from this structure. I'm rethinking my math lessons in grade 5!!



Your use of exemplars (NO and YES) and visual criteria with kid-friendly pictures is right on the money! Many of the students kept looking up at the display and adding on to their journal entries.

?

A possible next step is to have your students check to see if they've met the 3 pieces of criteria you set out. Could you make a simple rubric or even a checklist?

Teacher's Name: _____ Room: _____

Feedback Provided By: _____

TWO STARS AND A WONDER:



?

Teacher's Name: _____ Room: _____

Feedback Provided By: _____

TWO STARS AND A WONDER:



?

Feedback on Instructional Talk Through Process at Balwin School

Please check those that apply in each area:

After the talk through at Balwin...

- ☐ I'm unsure how the assessment strategies I observed connect to my current assessment practices.
- ☐ I'm confident the assessment strategies I observed could improve my assessment practices but I'm not sure about my next steps.
- ☒ I have deepened my understanding of how to implement these assessment practices in my classroom.

In the next month in my classroom....

- ☐ I will need more help with implementing the basic concepts of assessment.
- ☒ I am ready to try experimenting with one or more assessment strategies.
- ☐ I can integrate new information to modify my existing practices of assessment.

My next steps toward using effective assessment practices to improve student achievement are....

- ☐ I need to observe more teachers using assessment strategies in a variety of contexts.
- ☒ I would benefit from further conversations about assessment with other teachers in my grade level/subject area.
- ☒ I feel I am ready to get specific feedback on my practice in the area of assessment.

My learning conversations will be different because...

- ☒ I can talk about general concepts surrounding assessment.
- ☒ I can explain what assessment strategies I am using and why.
- ☒ I can elaborate on current or new assessment practices and make clear connections to how they improve student learning.

2 STARS and a WISH for the Instructional Talk Through process:



The longer I'm in the group the deeper the conversations are! It's not often that we get the uninterrupted time to sit down together & talk philosophically. Thank you!!



It's been a really good idea to have a "teacher-leader/facilitator" in each group. The conversations flowed more easily & it helped me to see the connections between my teaching & my observations today.



I'd like to see more opportunities to visit & meet with teachers in my grade level. Sometimes the gap between Div I & Div III is just too much of a leap.

ALSO, Thanks for the school map. I didn't get lost this time 😊

Welcome to my Assessment for Learning Journey

HOST TEACHER: _____ ROOM #: _____

GRADE: _____ SUBJECT(s): _____

AREA OF FOCUS FOR FEEDBACK: _____

As you visit my classroom, I want you to know where I am on the Assessment for Learning journey...



Dirt Road ☐

The journey is bumpy, with lots of roadblocks and pitfalls. The road to the final destination is unclear.



Paved Road ☐

The journey is smoother, with fewer detours, and I'm moving along cautiously.



Highway ☐

The journey is turning into an adventure and I'm exploring and experimenting along the way.



Yellow Brick Road ☐

The journey is smooth, with knowledge and skills embedded in daily practice, and I'm moving along confidently.

What to look for:

Questions you could ask my students:

In my classroom, please notice...

INSTRUCTIONAL TALK THROUGH: SELF ASSESSMENT

Coming into this Instructional Talk Through today, I would rate myself as being on the...



Dirt Road ☐

The journey is bumpy, with lots of roadblocks and pitfalls. The road to the final destination is unclear.



Paved Road ☐

The journey is smoother, with fewer detours, and I'm moving along cautiously.



Highway ☐

The journey is turning into an adventure and I'm exploring and experimenting along the way.



Yellow Brick Road ☐

The journey is smooth, with knowledge and skills embedded in daily practice, and I'm moving along confidently.

In the four classrooms I visited I noticed...

Something I have seen/tried/used that is similar is...

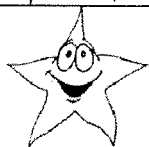
Back in my classroom I could try...

In order to continue my own journey down the assessment for learning road, I need to...

Teacher's Name: _____ Room: _____

Feedback Provided By: _____

TWO STARS AND A WONDER:

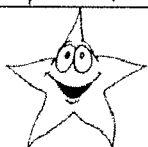
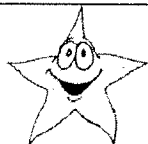


?

Teacher's Name: _____ Room: _____

Feedback Provided By: _____

TWO STARS AND A WONDER:

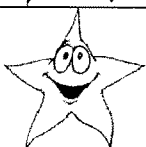


?

Teacher's Name: _____ Room: _____

Feedback Provided By: _____

TWO STARS AND A WONDER:



?

Sept. 20/06

850-920

850 Routinest Expectations
Set / Clear / Positive



o Plenty of P.R! - Thank you!
o Student Leadership to assist
o in corporation of BL - shared reading!

o no limited...

what are we striving for?

In supporting the work of the classroom,
feedback is an essential component for improved learning.

As leaders in learning, we need to know what feedback to provide you with, in your Assessment
For Learning journey! Below are elements of AFL. Please choose ONLY one area of focus in
which you want feedback on.

Elements of AFL

- ☒ **Sharing learning expectations** - Clarify and share intentions and criteria
- ☐ **Questioning** - Engineering effective classroom discussion
- ☐ **Feedback** - Provide feedback that moves learners forward
- ☐ **Self-Assessment** - Activate students as owners of their learning
- ☐ **Peer-Assessment** - Activate students as instructional resources from one another

Visual - board representation

Order of BL sheets

① White

② Yellow

③ Bright Yellow

④ Lined Paper.

What evidence do you want me to look for?

- students know routine
- " " are clear about expectations
- students are aware of purpose

What I observed:

- o Routinest + Expectation were clearly identified: ie sheet ordering
- o Incorporating - "why" we are doing what we are doing
- o extracting info from students re: guided reading;
- o T-asking "How" did that work?
- o Engagement of "I can" statements - where did I get these?

I wonder:

As you look at the criteria
with students, would having
samples for them to
view make a diff in the
quality of work you expect?

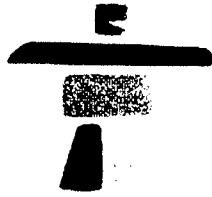
How would
this
impact
all students?

→ explanation of
how journals will
be utilized
→ criteria was shared

Self-reflection: (What I need to do next in my learning - Ruth Sutton)

Continue on this train - making the connections
making the learning "real" for everyone.

Examples
conversations
criteria



**In supporting the work of the classroom,
feedback is an essential component for improved learning.**

As leaders in learning, we need to know what feedback to provide you with, in your Assessment For Learning journey! Below are elements of AFL. Please choose **ONLY** one area of focus in which you want feedback on.

Elements of AFL

- ☐ **Sharing learning expectations** – Clarify and share intentions and criteria
- ☐ **Questioning** – Engineering effective classroom discussion
- ☐ **Feedback** – Provide feedback that moves learners forward
- ☐ **Self-Assessment** – Activate students as owners of their learning
- ☐ **Peer-Assessment** – Activate students as instructional resources for one another

What evidence do you want me to look for?

What I observed:

I wonder:

Self-reflection: (What I need to do next in my learning - Ruth Sutton)

Instruction Talk Throughs

Professional Development at It's Best!

By Aaron Muller and Irene Stuive

Who would have thought that bringing teachers together “to talk” would bring about such a transformational process! It all started for both of us with a principal request to be part of a new initiative.

What are Instructional “Talk” Throughs?

Instructional Talk Throughs came about through a vision from four principals within the Edmonton Public School District who wanted to create an opportunity for professional collaboration that focused primarily on Assessment For Learning. The framework mirrored parts of Edmonton Public School's *Walk Through* process. The process involved a five-minute visit into classrooms, discussions outside the classroom and feedback provided to the school. What the teachers were looking for was powerful conversations and specific feedback.. From this need to “want more”, was born the Instructional Talk Through model. This model focused specifically on teachers visiting other teacher's classrooms to provide them with evidence observed in regards to classroom observations, conversations or products related to Assessment for Learning. Instructional Talk Throughs were designed to provide teachers the connections and feedback that they, as learners, were looking for.

What Does It Look Like?

Each school, during the course of the year, would take a turn to host twelve teachers who came from four schools that represented Kindergarten to Grade Eight. Groups of four teachers were scheduled to circulate through several classrooms for thirty minutes time blocks. Participants were asked to look for evidence of assessment of learning in the form of observations, conversations and products. Classrooms were open for student conversations, observations of student work and to observe the day to day classroom experience all the while looking for evidence of assessment for learning practices. Each participant had the opportunity to see each of the other participating teacher's classrooms.

Time was provided for teachers to engage in professional conversations based on gathered evidence found within the classrooms. Words cannot adequately describe the richness and depth of the conversations, the trust and relationships that developed in the room and the incredible learning that left the room at the end of each visit.

During the course of the year teacher's voices and reflections were heard and the process had the flexibility to support changes to meet teachers' needs and yet keep in tact the intent of the experience.

Factors That Led to A Successful Experience:

Participants needed to be risk takers who were willing to open their classrooms and approach the opportunity as life long learners. A sense of collaboration and a willingness to participate

was also essential. It was critical that the participants themselves made the choice to be there and be open to a new learning opportunity. This commonality created an environment that lead to a sense of trust, relationship building, and a focus on a shared goal of moving our practices forward.

It is also important to note that this process would not be possible without the vision, support and trust from our administrators. They honored teachers as individual learners and encouraged us to ask ourselves reflective questions to push our thinking and practices forward. In addition, they supported this process with the “gift of time.”

How the Experience Benefited Our Practices:

- Provided an opportunity for powerful professional conversations that helped move us forward in our assessment for learning journeys.
- Provided a common language.
- Provided an outlet for the sharing of resources
- Created and honored a culture of learning and growth
- Allowed us to interact, test our ideas, challenge our inferences and interpretations and process and integrate new information with each other to improve student learning.
- Empowered us to guide the process.
- Created a professional learning community beyond our individual school communities.
- Relationships were built, maintained and fostered in conversations and resource sharing.

The Work Goes Beyond the First Year:

This Instructional Talk Through model expanded the following year to the involvement of six schools. To support and sustain this process there were several teachers who continued on from the first year and then new teachers came on board. Three teachers from the initial talk throughs were put in place as facilitators.

As we approach our third year of instructional talk throughs, teacher input and suggestions has created a differentiated framework which will honor where individual teachers are in their assessment for learning journey


Our Final Thoughts:

The Instructional Talk Through model has been a significant experience in each of our learning journeys. We are forever changed for being part of this experience. Relationships have been established that involved the sharing of resources and ideas to improve student learning. Our ever-changing Assessment for Learning practices have strengthened and deepened through this experience. The professional conversations have enriched and bettered our teaching practices and this in turn has had a direct impact on student learning. When we reflect on the experience, it gives us a renewed sense of hope for meaningful professional development opportunities and also gives us a sense of honor and pride in being part of a larger professional learning community called teachers.

Instructional Talk Throughs

Learning Conversations that Enhance
Teacher Practice and Student Learning

ASCD
2007 Annual Conference
Anaheim, California

 EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Journey of Instructional Talk Throughs

AGENDA

- Welcome
- Building Professional Communities
- Introductions "6 pack"
- District Context-Site Based Decision Making
- Instructional Talk Throughs (ITT's) What are they?
 - Relationships
 - Responsibilities
 - Roadblocks
 - Results!
- Celebrations/The Journey Continues...

Sharing a Common Vision

"When people share a common vision,
they can perform feats
that would otherwise be impossible..."

There is something in the human spirit
that longs for participation with others,
that wants to be involved in a collective endeavor"

-Robert Fritz-

Think Big...Start Small

Your Professional Development Experiences

- Think about PD experiences you and your staff have had.
- Have these experiences fostered on going professional relationships that have enhanced teacher practice and student learning?
- Why or why not?
- Table Talk

Capture the Feedback

The Journey of Instructional Talk Throughs

WHY even consider an ITT...

Staff stated they wanted Professional Development that:

Differentiated according to their needs

Involved in-depth conversations with other teachers

Meaningful

Relationship

"Teacher-Student relationship is the critical factor in the classroom."

-Dr. William Glasser

"Teachers working together will take responsibility for helping their peers learn and grow"

ITT – What is it?

Administrative Commitment

Targeted Theme

Teacher Owned and Operated

Classroom Visitations

Meaningful Conversations

Administrators' Commitment

- Build in time (mentorship) for planning and deep conversations
- Provide support and opportunities for teachers
- Focus on moving forward and enhancing practices
- Foster leadership and mentorship
- Frequently asking essential questions
- Breaking through roadblocks

Role and Responsibility of the Administrators

- Ongoing conversations with all staff around professional growth and student learning
- Organization of the process, planning and finances
- There in spirit, not in body!
- Gather, reflect and respond to feedback
- Modify the process as required
- Relinquish control but not responsibility
- Working with facilitators/consultant
- Celebrate many successes!

Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers

- Commitment to learning
- Active engagement-claim ownership
- Risk taking
- Deep conversations
- Collaboration
- Self-reflection
- On going feedback
- Change in practice
- Be a learner!

The ITT Process

- Essential Elements of the ITT process
- Refer to the ITT templates provided
- Q and A

ITT Video Clip Teachers in Action

"It is one of life's great ironies:
schools are in the business of teaching and learning,
yet they are terrible at learning from one another.
If they ever discover how to do this,
their future is assured."

-Michael Fullan-

- Observe the ITT process
- Note role of classroom teacher, students and visiting teachers

Teacher Voice "Professional Development at it's Best!"

- Specific model focused on teachers observing teachers - providing evidence in regards to classroom observation, conversation or product
- Development of trust and relationships
- Teacher in the driver's seat, PD taking them to where they need to go
- Ownership of learning, get out as much as you put in
- Choice built in
- Learning from each other

Teacher Feedback!

- "This experience transcends age and experience and brings teachers together in respectful relationships of trust so we can grow as professionals"
- "I implemented stronger teaching practices from this process right away because of seeing, having conversations and going back and putting the practice into my teaching"
- "Yes, it has been a valuable learning tool...traveling the journey together...people around the same level...collaboration and sharing."

Role and Responsibility of Facilitators

- Group contact
- Prepares handouts
- On site, sets the stage for the learning experience and trouble shoots if necessary
- Monitors logistics of visitation schedule
- Listens and guides conversation
- Provides administrators with feedback and insights towards next steps

Teacher Leadership

- Facilitating conversations
- Creating and sharing resources
- Professional presentations
- Publishing articles
- Professional satisfaction and well being

Going Beyond...

- Resource Share Fair
- Collaborative PD days among 6 schools
- Joint on going planning and resource development between teachers
- Professional articles/published work
- Influenced professional development practice both within and beyond our district
- 6 Pack Playground <http://afl6pak.wetpaint.com>

The Journey of Instructional Talk Throughs

WHY even consider an ITT...

Staff stated they wanted Professional Development that:

Differentiated according to need
Involved in-depth conversations with other teachers
Meaningful

STUDENTS!

ITT Professional Development

- What resonates with you?
- Questions, feedback, thoughts
- Table talk

Essential Elements of Successful Professional Development

- Enhanced Student Learning
- Choice for Participation
- Collaboration
- Trust/Respect
- Individualized PD growth
- Collective Accountability
- Relationships!

Final Thoughts for Future Conversations!

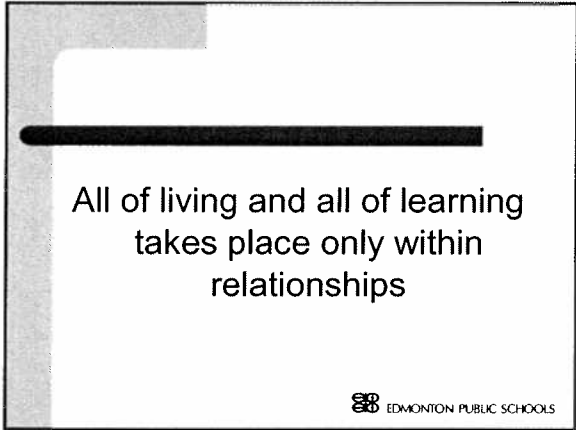
- This P.D. has been inspiring to me as a teacher...powerful!
- It was great. I thought I was doing some pretty great things in my classroom, but I found out some were really only good. From this P.D. I had the opportunity to let go of those good things and replace them with better practices.
- This was intimidating at first but the most inspiring P.D. as well.
- I look forward to fierce conversations!
- We called it our reality P.D. Real teachers; real kids; real learning.

Global Responsibility

"As the world becomes more inter-connected organizations that will truly excel in the future will be (those)...

That discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn"

-Peter Senge-



All of living and all of learning
takes place only within
relationships

 EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Instruction Talk Throughs

Professional Development at It's Best!

By Aaron Muller and Irene Stuive

Who would have thought that bringing teachers together “to talk” would bring about such a transformational process! It all started for both of us with a principal request to be part of a new initiative which involved the practices of Assessment for Learning that had been part of each of our school’s learning journey. So began our Instructional Talk Throughs.

What are Instructional “Talk” Throughs?

Instructional Talk Throughs came about through a vision from four principals within the Edmonton Public School District who wanted to create an opportunity for professional collaboration that focused primarily on Assessment For Learning. The framework mirrored parts of Edmonton Public School’s *Walk Through* process. This process involved a short five-minute visit into classrooms, discussions outside the classroom and feedback provided to the school. Teacher’s often felt left out of the process and wanted more of an individual connection and response from the participants who had been through their rooms. What the teachers were looking for, powerful conversations and specific feedback based on evidence gathered from the classroom, was not part of the objectives with respect to the current Walk Through experience. From this need to “want more”, was born the Instructional Talk Through model. This model focused specifically on teachers visiting other teacher’s classrooms to provide them with evidence observed in regards to classroom observations, conversations or products related to Assessment for Learning. Instructional Talk Throughs were designed to provide teachers the connections and feedback that they, as learners, were looking for.

What Does It Look Like?

The process started as many other Professional Development Days with an opportunity to meet and greet over coffee and goodies. A tentative feeling permeated the group as they knew that the framework, as of yet, was not established or fleshed out but rather was waiting for our experiences, reflections and feedback to drive the work forward. Participants were curious, excited and eager to embrace a new opportunity to deepen their understanding of Assessment for Learning practices.

Each school, during the course of the year, would take a turn to host twelve teachers who came from four schools that represented Kindergarten to Grade Eight. Consultants from Edmonton Public School Board, with assessment for learning understanding, came to support a beginning framework and provide encouragement and support along the way. Small groups of four teachers were scheduled to circulate through several classrooms for thirty minutes time blocks. Participants were asked to look for evidence of assessment of learning in the form of observations, conversations and products. Classrooms were open for student conversations, observations of student work and to observe the day to day classroom

experience all the while looking for evidence of assessment for learning practices. Each participant had the opportunity to see each of the other participating teacher's classrooms.

So far, this was similar to an extended Instructional Walk Through that many of us had participated in. The uniqueness of this type of P.D. was still ahead. Time was provided for teachers to engage in professional conversations based on gathered evidence found within the classrooms. There was a positive energy that infused the room as the teachers engaged in these conversations, sharing of ideas and lesson plans. Words cannot adequately describe the richness and depth of the conversations, the trust and relationships that developed in the room and the incredible learning that left the room at the end of each visit. It was an amazing collegial and professional experience that at its core was professional development at its best and in its truest form.

During the course of the year teacher's voices and reflections were heard and the process had the flexibility to support changes to meet teachers' needs and yet keep in tact the integrity and the intent of the experience. Teachers had a sense of being in the driver's seat and letting this professional development take them where they wanted to go.

Another unique factor of this P.D. was that it was teacher driven and it was clearly evident that the focus and energy you put into the process was directly reflected in your learning growth as a professional.

Factors That Led to A Successful Experience:

Participants needed to be risk takers who were willing to open their classrooms and approach the opportunity as life long learners. A sense of collaboration and a willingness to participate was also essential. It was critical that the participants themselves made the choice to be there and be open to a new learning opportunity. This commonality created an environment that lead to a sense of trust, relationship building, and a focus on a shared goal of moving our practices forward.

It is also important to note that this process would not be possible without the vision, support and trust from our administrators. They were visionary in their outlook and understanding of assessment for learning practices. They sculptured an environment that honored teachers as individual learners and encouraged us to ask ourselves reflective questions to push our thinking and practices forward. In addition, they supported this process with the "gift of time."

How the Experience Benefited Our Practices:

- Provided an opportunity for powerful professional conversations that helped move us forward in our assessment for learning journeys.
- Provided a process by which we could learn from each other and have a common language.
- Provided an outlet for the sharing of resources
- Created and honored a culture of learning and growth
- Allowed us to interact, test our ideas, challenge our inferences and interpretations and process and integrate new information with each other to improve student learning.

- Empowered us to guide the process. Where increased levels of accountability were established and an environment of sharing of ideas and resources became common practice.
- Created a professional learning community beyond our individual school communities.
- Relationships were built, maintained and fostered in conversations and resource sharing.

What Other Participants Had to Say About the Process:

"My practice has become and better and deeper as I have had the opportunity to share and learn along with my colleagues. Meaningful conversations have pushed me to the next level in my journey on the Assessment For Learning path."

"An incredible experience with first hand, real life experiences and learning taking place. Wonderful opportunity to connect with those that really do the work."

"This has been the most meaningful professional development of my career."

"I appreciated how the process evolved to meet my learning needs and the needs of others"

"I have learned that there is a community of teachers who are committed to AFL and from this experience have learned how powerful this type of practice can be to improve teaching and learning."

"Opportunities to visit other schools and talk with teachers from a variety of settings helps teachers not to feel isolated and to gain a broader perspective."

"I would love to participate in this process again. I have grown so much since entering this process and have developed and established teacher that I now commonly collaborate and share with."

I would like to continue with this process as each time I participated it directly improved my teaching practices."

The Work Goes Beyond the First Year:

This Instructional Talk Through model expanded the following year to the involvement of six schools with four teachers from each school who would visit each other over a six month period. To support and sustain this process there were several teachers who continued on from the first year and then new teachers came on board. To continue with the teacher driven philosophy, three teachers from the initial talk throughs were put in place as facilitators. Time spent in classrooms was slightly reduced to allow for increased time for dialogue. Teachers were empowered to guide the process by providing written feedback prior to the visit in terms of what assessment practices they were working on and what they would like feedback on. A reflective component was built into the process for teacher feedback and self reflection. Not only was there conversation and dialogue but participating teachers were provided with written feedback in response to what they asked us to observe.

As we approach our third year of instructional talk throughs, teacher input and suggestions has created a differentiated framework which will honor where individual teachers are in their assessment for learning journey. One grouping will continue their journey as others just begin the voyage. The second annual Assessment For Learning Fair is also currently planned for October 23, 2006 in which many of the participating teaching in the Instructional Talk Throughs will share their resources and experiences with others that were developed through the context of the Talk Throughs.

Our Final Thoughts:

The Instructional Talk Through model has been a significant experience in each of our learning journeys. We are forever changed for being part of this experience. Relationships have been established that involved the sharing of resources and ideas to improve student learning. Conversations between teachers, students and parents are evolving as a common language and approach to assessment is being established. Our ever-changing Assessment for Learning practices have strengthened and deepened through this experience. The professional conversations have enriched and bettered our teaching practices and this in turn has had a direct impact on student learning. When we reflect on the experience, it gives us a renewed sense of hope for meaningful professional development opportunities and also gives us a sense of honor and pride in being part of a larger professional learning community called teachers.