

Residency: Powerful Assessment and Professional Practice

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The idea of being “in residence” offered a framework for an *assessment learning* team consisting of two learning support facilitators, a coordinator, and a superintendent to come into a school and to sit alongside teachers, both individually and in teams, as they worked on refining their practice. This process allowed for the application of *light* pressure and *tight* support (Davies, Herbst & Sherman – in press) in the most authentic way possible – in the classroom with the students.

Having determined that we would work in residence, we began the task of choosing the schools that would participate in late spring of the year prior to beginning the residency. As a team, we created criteria for selection that included:

- Variety of school sizes
- Staff buy-in
- Previous involvement with assessment initiatives
- Capacity for change
- A willingness to share successes and show leadership in the process.

Schools were encouraged to consider the criteria prior to applying for the opportunity, and those who applied were interviewed to ensure consensus for participation. Choices were made following the review of the application and meeting. During the first year (Year One), we chose four elementary schools in a variety of contexts and geographical locations.

Figure 1 shows our residency model and its connections to the big ideas of assessment *for* learning. It illustrates the parallels between using these big ideas or principles with teachers and leaders in much the same way teachers do with students.

Students

- Focus groups of five to ten students were put into place at each residency school. These opportunities provided invaluable insight and feedback on students' perceptions of the changes in assessment, as well as the impact on their learning experiences in their classrooms. (Conversations and observations)
- The assessment team was "embedded" in each of the residency schools so that members became familiar adults in the learning community. As we worked alongside teachers, a level of comfort in the classroom enabled the team to collect informal feedback from students. (Observations and conversations)
- Small groups of students were invited to help create the messages of change for fellow students. One group worked with an assessment team member to create a comic strip describing changes in assessment. As a result, student ownership increased, and student voice was valued. (See Figure 7.) (Conversations, observations, and products)



This comic strip was created at MakeBeliefsComix.com. Go there to make one yourself!

Figure 7. Student created Cartoon—Change in Assessment

abandon some of the old favourite units and lessons which no longer fit. Some teachers in the residency schools are working on post-graduate qualifications and have chosen topics related to their experience with the residency and assessment *for* learning. Other teachers have continued to lead professional development at their own schools, for the school district, and beyond.

Impact on Leaders

School administrators are first and foremost teachers, and so they share in the learning described above. The residency model also gave them the opportunity to work together, with the assessment team, as a professional learning community of instructional leaders focused on a common goal. In their monthly meetings they discussed what was happening in their residencies and ways they might support teachers, spend time in classrooms working alongside teachers, and model assessment *for* learning in their own practice.

School-based administrators shared with the assessment team that they felt supported through the assessment residency model. They noted that supports were built into the overall plan including release time for teachers, classroom coverage (substitutes), resources and supports as needed, and planned and purposeful embedded professional learning with follow-up. They further commented on the assessment team's commitment to, not only working with teachers in schools, but also to continually checking in, asking questions, listening to feedback, and providing extra support and guidance as needed.

The residency is an effective model for implementing change in assessment. It has also generated significant interest from within our district and beyond to other districts as a vehicle to implement system change through embedded professional development.