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## Teacher Perspectives on Formative Assessment within a Primary Classroom

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TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT WITHIN A  
PRIMARY CLASSROOM

by

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## ABSTRACT

### TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT WITHIN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM

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Research has acknowledged the importance of the beliefs of educators and how their beliefs have implications impacting their classroom practices (Clark, 1987; Doyle 1997; Zhou & Urhahne, 2018; Graham & Pajares, 1997). Teachers' beliefs have been a significant topic for researchers due to the contribution they provide for the development of teaching and learning (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Above all, with increasing attention on teacher quality and effectiveness internationally there has been little research looking at the influences between teachers' classroom practices and their judgments on student learning (Devine, Fahie, & McGillicuddy, 2013).

Further research may benefit teachers who are searching for guidance when using and interpreting data from testing to develop appropriate feedback and scaffolding strategies (Zimmerman & DiBenedetto, 2008). Such strategies include formative assessment practices which have been shown to enhance student achievement but there is evidence suggesting teachers are lacking the support needed for implementing strategies successfully (Andersson & Palm, 2018). Additionally, the strategies providing a deep relationship between data collected by the teacher on student performance and feedback forms the center of formative assessment (Clark, 2011). It is with this interaction between collected data and feedback that teachers begin to understand student work and seek to support student learning by adjusting classroom instruction, encouraging students to articulate their motives, ideas, and beliefs (Clark, 2011).

The purpose of conducting this research is to provide an in depth analysis of the perspectives, experiences, and beliefs teachers have on formative assessment classroom practices. Furthermore, to examine the importance of understanding the nature of the relationship between knowledge or beliefs on the one hand and teacher behavior on the other, as well as that between belief and knowledge themselves (Pajares, 1992). That is, examining the teachers' perspectives on formative assessment with the purpose of improving current educational practices educators' decisions about classroom best practices are the gateway to move forward.

Today's mission is that schools will empower all students, not just a few, to learn challenging skills to higher levels of constructs which is a challenging expectation for schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010). It is proposed that in order to obtain such goals to increase student achievement, recognizing the use of formative assessment for teachers is a means to improve educational decisions resulting in quality instruction. This demands that skillful teaching and opportunities where students can experience a coherent curriculum that allows them to learn essential concepts while developing strong thinking skills are adherent (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

This study proposes that teachers' foundational beliefs about the practice of formative assessments impact the learning process. This study aims to develop an understanding of teacher perspectives on assessment practices when using formative assessments as an influence in classroom pedagogy practices (Raths, 2001). Furthermore, formative assessment practices used to develop instruction enhancing student's learning is made clear and accessible through active participation and mutual discourse between teacher and student (Clark, 2011). It is through this construct of teachers actively involving students in their learning that formative assessment has progressed as an effective strategy (Mitra, 2004; Damani, 201

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporary primary classrooms in U.S. public schools are continually evolving. Educators today are using a less traditional approach to education with a student collaborative approach in learning classrooms (Mitra, 2004; Clark, 2015). Further developments in policy frameworks have comprehended the implementation of an interactive teaching and learning called formative assessment. As shown in Table 1, in Clark's (2015) comparison of traditional versus formative curriculum teachers can provide a rich opportunity for choice at a primary stage where the school culture develops individualized projects or allow the student more control over the content and sequence of learning (Clark, 2015). Formative curriculum is supported by core principles practitioners construct into their lesson planning.

**Table1**

*Contrasting Traditional vs. Formative Curricula*

<u><b>Formative curriculum</b></u>	<u><b>Traditional curriculum</b></u>
Students work primarily in groups; flexible grouping.	Students work primarily alone.
Pursuit of student questions and interests is valued.	Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued.
The teachers have a dialogue with students, helping students construct their own knowledge.	The teachers disseminate information to students; students are passive recipients of knowledge.
Flexible schedules; learning is interactive, building on what the student already knows.	Learning is based on repetition.
Materials include primary sources of material (e.g. community resources) and manipulative materials.	Materials are primarily textbooks and workbooks
The teacher's role is interactive, rooted in	The teacher's role is directive, rooted in authority.
	Assessment is through testing, correct

<p>negotiation.</p> <p>Real world application; assessment includes student works, observations, and points of view, as well as tests. Process is as important as product.</p> <p>Knowledge is seen as dynamic, ever changing with our experiences.</p> <p>Content drawn from several subject areas to focus on a particular topic or them. Emphasizes big concepts, beginning with the whole and expanding to include the parts.</p> <p>Parents or guardians play an active role in the learning and development of their children</p>	<p>answers.</p> <p>Knowledge is seen as inert.</p> <p>Curriculum begins with the parts of the whole. Emphasizes basic skills.</p> <p>Parents and guardians do not participate in the learning and development of their children</p>
--	---

Together teacher and student share learning direction while attention from researchers focus on understanding how schools can best use student initiatives to advance reform efforts are developing (Damani, 2013). Teacher practices have progressed to include giving spaces for teacher and student to actively make choices together using formative classroom assessment to develop an individualized learning path (Murtagh, 2014). Research has concluded that the use of formative assessment has a direct impact on student outcomes (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Braund & DeLuca, 2018; Bloom, 1969).

Murtagh further explains (2014), the notion that future performance can be affected by information or feedback from previous student performance is often expressed in terms of ‘closing the gap’. Feedback seen as a primary component of formative assessment strategies is one of the key factors having the strongest influence on student learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Understandably, feedback has long been recognized as a mechanism through which teaching and learning may influence future performances (Murtagh, 2014). Formative

assessment practices incorporate the teacher collecting data, analyzing the data, and providing the appropriate feedback in order for the student to move forward in their learning. When supporting the student role in making decisions about their own learning, teachers can develop empowerment of a students' personal knowledge using formative assessment practices (Clark, 2015). Further, teachers embracing opportunities to attain student learning goals together with a curriculum, meets the needs of the twenty-first-century learner, may improve literacy, and promote the health and well-being of the student that will support skills required for positive lifelong effects (Clark, 2015).

### **Statement of the Purpose**

The present study is exploratory in nature and seeks to examine the primary teacher's perspective on implementing formative assessment and their impact on student outcomes in an elementary classroom literacy context. Correspondingly, the principle of formative assessment, which holds that thinking and learning processes are supported when students are provided with feedback regarding learning criteria and standards, hinges on the strategic adaptation of instruction by the teacher to meet the needs of their students (Clark, 2012). The use of formative assessment data for the purpose of driving classroom instruction sometimes is a skill that is not overtly discussed when teachers are collaborating (Missett, Brunner, Carolyn, Moon, Azano, 2014). A teacher's practices, beliefs, and perceptions can also impact the quality of social relationships between teacher and students as well as directly affect feedback and motivational factors in learning (OECD, 2009). Therefore, the need to begin a conversation around teacher beliefs and experiences is significant to determine the impact of how valued feedback is delivered and utilized to support student learning.

### **Statement of the problem**

Today there is empirical research on teachers' perspectives and beliefs about formative assessments in the primary grades. Much research focuses on teacher feedback and formative feedback quality (Eriksson, Boistrup, & Thornberg, 2018). However, to provide a deeper understanding of the decision-making of the teacher when providing feedback of formative assessment in order to support everyday classroom practices identifying a teacher's rationale of specific feedback is desired (Eriksson, et al, 2018). Agreed, the significance afforded to feedback within the national and international discourses on formative assessment, and the postulation that it may have significant benefits on student learning is motive for further research on formative interactions within more comprehensive theories of pedagogy (Black & Wiliam, 2006).

An exploratory analysis provided by the Teaching and Learning International Survey, (2009) focused on teachers and school principals allowing their input to provoke educational changes in some key policy areas. Included in the Teaching and Learning International Survey (2009) are suggestions that professional development may influence teacher beliefs and attitudes but so far there is little research on beliefs and practices specific to certain subjects (OECD, 2009). Emphasized was the awareness that teacher beliefs, practices, and perspectives are significant for understanding and improving educational processes (OECD, 2009). However, very little research has explored the qualitative differences between different elements of teachers' beliefs in relation to their classroom practices and contexts (Zheng, 2013). With this in mind, this research is designed to provide a deeper understanding of the impact within primary school years influenced by the educator's perspectives when using formative assessment data to promote student learning. The underpinnings of this study proposes to offer a voice to teachers as

inspirational leaders in their classroom and coordinators of the role of formative assessments used to support their instruction.

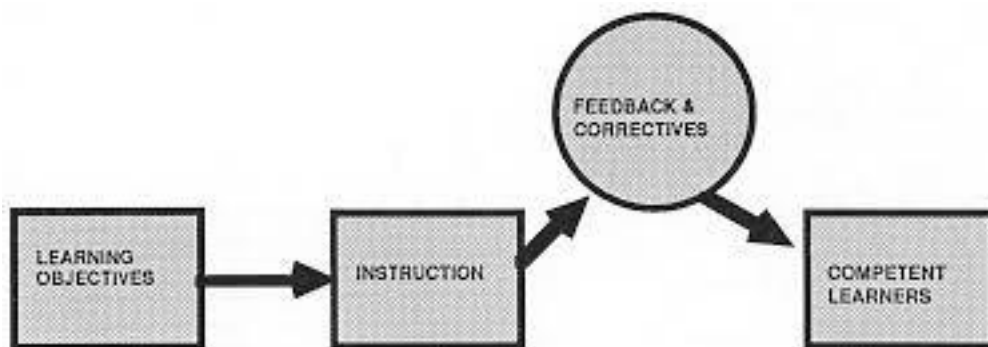
### **Standardized Assessment**

One aspect that remains more prevalent than ever is the use of classroom assessments. School districts, educational communities, and parents were concerned with low standardized testing scores and a widening of the achievement gap. Since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) 2001, schools set a purpose for assessments as a way to focus on the accountability of our educators (Klein, 2020). One of the fundamental goals of our educational philosophy has been focused on objectives and learning standards of educational practices (Lalley & Getile, 2009). As well as the goal of effectively educating all children classroom instruction and assessment practices must benefit all students. Agreement in principle is practically universal. Accurate implementation, however, is another matter (Lalley & Getile, 2009). Notwithstanding the widespread use of mastery criterion for NCLB summative testing throughout the states, few districts have integrated a definitive mastery learning formative assessment and adaptive instructional program (Zimmerman & DiBenedetto, 2008). In comparison, school standards and curriculum are designed to support educators by providing summative assessment based data which to analyze and provide evidence of learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Darling-Hammond (2010) further describes a supplementation of a more extensive school based task which based on guidance from the curriculum evaluates students' progress and provides formative information about student growth. Achievement gaps among all groups of students have concerned educational leaders and government for many years (Guskey, 2005).

## Formative Assessment

A far better approach to teaching and learning would be for teachers to use their classroom assessments as learning tools and to follow those assessments with feedback and correctives for the learner (Bloom, B. S., Madaus, G. F., & Hastings, J. T. ,1971). Bloom's ideas identified two essential learning elements: first, the feedback enrichment and learning process second, instructional alignment (Guskey, 1977). Such components are derived from Bloom's Mastery Learning approach (Bloom's 1976) (Figure 1). Through these procedures mastery learning differentiates and individualizes instruction (Guskey, 2005).

Figure 1. Bloom's Major Components in the Teaching and Learning Process



The use of formative assessment necessitates teachers to use assessment data from a wide range of sources such as observations, records, discussions, to ensure validity, monitor student progress and plan for the next steps in instruction (Clark, 2015).

Considering the intention of educating all students, educational researchers have studied many ways to help reduce the achievement gaps using formative assessments. Increasingly, teachers have been requesting for educational assessments systems that are well-balanced, meaning for the purpose of shaping ongoing instruction in the classroom, as compared to

accountability decisions made at the state and district level (Darling-Hammond & Pecheone, 2010). Justifiably, assessments have been used as a tool for teachers by providing an understanding of the knowledge acquired through the pathway of classroom instruction. While standardized assessments have been purposefully utilized as a way to collect information on teacher performance in the classroom and to evaluate the schools themselves they have failed to identify why students are not proficient in their learning (Trumball & Lash, 2014). More importantly, information for the purpose of shaping instruction to meet student needs so that students can understand and advance their learning is the goal of formative assessments which differs from diagnostic or final evaluations of learning or to evaluate the schools (Trumball and Lash, 2014).

Specifically, it is known formative assessment provided with instruction and thoughtful questioning will scaffold further inquiry and deepen cognitive processing (Clark 2011). The principle of formative assessment is to support decision-making that teachers practice when making adjustments to classroom instruction and providing feedback to students. One of the earlier researchers on formative assessment, Bloom (1964) explained, the importance of using assessments as learning tools. With appropriate feedback corrective information from a formative assessment, the students gain valuable learning specific to their needs to master a skill or concepts (Guskey, 2005). Hence the practice of utilizing formative assessments may support both student learning and closing the achievement gap.

In other words, the foundation of the formative classroom assessment or information is possibly a powerful instructional practice of sharing assessment data that supports learning embedded into the instructional process by design (Clark 2015). Additionally, teachers can provide opportunities for students to continually revise their work in response to feedback using



a mastery approach to learning including relevant pedagogies relating to student experiences and needs (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Importantly, teachers providing feedback strategies for the purpose of improving a student's learning experience will be instilling skills that will last a life time (Dorn, 2010). What we see is if teachers are allowed the freedom in which to be creative to experiment with ways to respond to student data which may vary from the predicted route, student outcomes and performances improve (Dorn, 2010). In a like manner, we should examine teacher beliefs within classroom settings as their decision influence strategies and interventions they perceive as best practices for young learners.

Accordingly, well-intentioned teachers that are using formative assessments to support student learning are overwhelmed by the time it takes to provide effective feedback to the students because they are faced with competing and inconsistent demands (Dorn, 2010). Many teachers are under a great deal of pressure put on them from pacing constraints in the curriculum. Although the significance of formative assessment on student progress has been analyzed in previous studies, implementing formative assessment in the classroom requires targeted tools and educational guidelines (Xiang, Yum, & Lian, 2020). As Xiang et al. (2020) stated the importance of examining factors that have an impact on teacher practices with formative assessment and examine the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and the use of such practices is of valued importance. The role of self-efficacy in teaching and learning captures the attention of researchers and practitioners alike (Hoy, 2000). Efficacy beliefs determine the degree of effort an individual will exert and maintain in their motivation when faced with challenges which has been understood to be an influential force in learning (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 1996). With the understanding that self-efficacy plays a significant role in classroom learning much remains to be understood about aspects of efficacy and how it impacts teacher

classroom performances (Hoy, 2000).

### **Research Questions**

This present study, employs a qualitative case study approach in order to develop a comprehensive description of the perceptions and beliefs of the participants utilizing and evaluating the use of formative assessments as primary educators. Further to examine the gaps in research on educator perspectives and the impact on implementing formative assessments. I interviewed elementary school teachers that practice the use of formative assessments during literacy context in primary classrooms specifically, kindergarten and first grade. For the purpose of this study, the use of a single case bounded system methodology allows the teacher's perspectives on personal experiences using formative assessment in the classroom to be understood. Creswell (2007), states a case study approach is appropriate when there is a clear identifiable case with boundaries based on an exploration of a process or activity. A single case study will be bound to involve nine participants in the same work environment, knowledge of formative assessment literacy practices, including using the same curriculum (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell's (2007) recommendation for a case study, this research engages in developing an in-depth understanding of the teacher perspective on formative assessment practices. The study will be conducted using both individual interviews, focus studies, and personal open-ended surveys. The present study aims to create a descriptive interpretation of elementary teachers' perspectives and beliefs on the impact of using formative assessments for teaching and learning.

The research questions guiding the proposed study are:

- How do primary grade teachers describe the relationship between formative assessment and literacy learning in their classroom practice?

- What challenges and benefits, if any, do primary grade teachers experience when implementing formative assessments for the purpose of informing pedagogical literacy practices?
- What institutional and professional supports do primary grade teachers identify as beneficial to promoting and valuing the use of literacy-based formative assessment data in planning classroom instruction?

### **Significance of the Study**

Within the learning process there are crucial moments when a teacher may understand where the student is in their learning and create specific adjustments to instruction in order to meet the student's specific needs (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Formative assessments provide student information necessary to determine appropriate feedback for teacher and student supporting classroom instruction. Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student learning is interpreted and used by the teacher (Black & Wiliam, 2009). The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine how teacher beliefs and perspectives on formative assessment impact the implementation of formative assessment strategies in a primary classroom during literacy instruction. This study focuses on a primary classroom as there is very little empirical research within this specific age group. The intention is to form a descriptive interpretation of how formative assessments are utilized by teachers and what challenges teachers face when using formative assessments. In particular to examine how to meet the needs of all students in school, to use curriculum with grade level performance at the forefront, and the unique pacing of student learning (Missett et al., 2014).

Furthermore, organizational, political, and cultural frictions have occurred relating to the use of formative assessments. As Dorn (2010) questioned, are public schools ready for a school

system practices revolve around a teachers' willingness to ask harder questions of their own instruction? A substantial body of evidence suggests that when teachers respond to structured formative assessment they base decisions on whether children's performances improve and is it a reasonable amount. Therefore, formative assessments may impact students with low achievement and close a large portion of the achievement gap (Dorn, 2010).

In this case study, the theory of self-efficacy will provide the theoretical lens used to understand how teachers align beliefs with their strategies of formative assessments and classroom practices. Perceived self-efficacy defined by Bandura (1994), as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce a selected level of performance that exercise influence over events that impact their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs help determine how much effort people will expend on an accomplishment and how long they will persevere when faced with challenges (Pajares, 1996). Without self-efficacy a person would not expend effort in endeavors because the effort would not have purposefulness (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). A growing body of empirical evidence supports Bandura's (1977) theory that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are related to the effort they invest in their teaching and their resilience when faced with confrontations (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009).

De Lange, Winberg, & Dippenaar's (2020) study on curriculum assessments policies illustrated attention lacking guidance for assessing reading comprehension. The study further explains how assessment often becomes the attention of educational policies as it is assumed to cost effective and can be both externally mandated, controlled, & mandated (de Lange, et al., 2020). Findings suggested a concern of inconsistencies in the alignment of purpose and assessment. In another study, Eriksson, et al. (2018) exhibited similar inconsistencies not only among policy implementations but also with teacher classroom practices. As with teacher

feedback, the platform of formative assessment is in need of recognized defined terms within the research field (Eriksson, et al., 2018). In addition, more research will provide both policy makers and teachers on purposeful formative and comprehensive assessments with the goal of improving authentic learning and student outcomes.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Formative Assessment:** A wide variety of methods that teachers use to evaluate a student's learning comprehension and learning mastery during a lesson, course or unit. Formative assessments are utilized during instruction while summative assessments are data collected to evaluate a student's learning after instruction is complete. In addition, the theory of formative assessment is understood to be a combining theory of instruction, which supports practice and develops the learning process by fostering self-regulated learning strategies among learners (Clark, 2012).

**Feedback:** Information provided to a student that will support them while going through the learning process.

**Self-efficacy:** Peoples' beliefs about their capabilities to produce effects. A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment (Bandura, 1994).

**Self-Regulated Learning:** Self-regulated learning is one of the realms of self-regulation, and is aligned with educational goals. Self-regulated learning improves academic outcomes and student motivation reason being that students acquire the autonomous learning characteristics required for an increase in engagement within their learning influencing future successful performances (Clark, 2012).

**Literacy:** Literacy is more than the skills of learning to read and write. Literacy instruction is a learning tool that can be used for different functions that vary according to context and culture (Zeece, 2002). In addition, through the acquisition of literacy skills children begin to grow and adapt within society. Further, literacy can be understood as a social practice. To illustrate, literacy as a communicative skill using written, oral language and in all semiotic forms.

Children's literature-based activities within an early childhood education setting contribute to all aspects of their development and to the formation of culture itself (Zeece, 2002).

**Mastery learning:** The amount and type of instruction varies among students depending upon individual differences among learners providing each student the potential to demonstrate mastery (Schunk, 2016).

**Running Record:** A reading formative assessment administered to students in order to obtain decoding, fluency, and comprehension data.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This study aims to understand and describe teacher perspectives on the implementation of formative assessments in a primary classroom because the objective of helping students using formative assessment is essential to the learning process (Eriksson, et. al., 2018). In addition, it is intended that the research will deliver an understanding of teaching beliefs on educational practices associated with scaffolding instruction supporting student learning. Therefore, the present study will depict a descriptive account of a purposeful number of teachers' beliefs and associated practices as it is meaningful to examine how they relate to the characteristics of classroom strategies (OECD 2009). Participants that teach in a primary classroom and have experience using formative assessments will be requested to share in semi-structured interviews, open-ended surveys and focus groups. This study is designed to examine how teacher perspectives, beliefs and experiences using formative assessment impact system practices in a literacy context within primary grades, as there is a wide scope for further research linking the practices of formative assessment and student learning (OECD, 2008; Clark 2011).

In a time when increased testing to ensure accountability exists, many educators are questioning the fairness of standardized tests and are enhancing instructional effectiveness with the implementation of formative evaluations. The goals of formative assessment feedback operate to reveal complex learning processes, thereby reinforcing self-regulated learning strategies which support learning, improve student outcomes, and actualize the drive for lifelong learning (Clark, 2011). This includes how teachers feel about the obligation to prepare students



for test taking and maintain curriculum pacing (Zimmerman & DiBenedetto, 2008). Attention should therefore be drawn to the teacher's responsibility to practice the use of formative assessment into a learning event (Sadler, 2010).

This review of literature will explore ways in which transformations were set in motion supporting current practices and theories. Providing that this description defines contributions to the current understanding of literacy within early childhood education, intentions are to create parameters on implementing formative assessment which support current curriculum and attain academic goals. Additionally, to gain a better understanding of how to reach all students by examining an educators' beliefs and experiences on formative assessment practices

As stated in the previous chapter, the research questions guiding the study are:

- How do primary grade teachers describe the relationship between formative assessment and literacy learning in their classroom practice?
- What challenges and benefits, if any, do primary grade educators experience when implementing formative assessments for the purpose of informing pedagogical literacy practices?
- What institutional and professional supports do primary grade educators identify as beneficial to promoting and valuing the use of literacy-based formative assessment data in planning classroom instruction?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Theoretical Perspectives Guiding the Research**

An approach to investigate teachers' thinking and decision-making about student learning is to examine their beliefs (Pajares, 1992). As this research intends to explore the ways in which practicing teachers conceptualize and employ formative assessments, the presented study is grounded in the theoretical conceptions of Bloom's (1976) curriculum development on formative assessment of classroom practices. Bandura (1986) and contemporary theorist Pajares (1996) were chosen as a framework for this study to further support the concept that teacher beliefs and their personal experiences motivate their decision-making when using data collected from formative assessments. It is the interpretation of teacher performance altering their self-beliefs which in turn informs and alters their subsequent performances (Pajares, 1996). Teacher performances are the foundation of preparing students as resilient individuals capable of pursuing their aspirations confidently (Pajares, 2007). Research findings on the understanding of teacher beliefs about teaching and learning suggest a relationship between their belief and a teachers' instructional practices (Clark, 1987; Graham & Pajares, 1997; Doyle, 1997). Self-efficacy theorists emphasize that individuals pursue undertakings and situations in which they feel confident and avoid situations in which they do not feel confident (Brownell & Pajares, 1999). Among the sources of teacher beliefs', teacher self-efficacy and mastery experiences are postulated to be the most potent (Moran & Hoy, 2007). Convincing evidence has been accumulating over the past three decades suggesting a relationship between teacher beliefs about their capabilities to impact students' motivation and achievements to important processes and outcomes in school (Moran & Hoy, 2007). Supporting this concept, Bandura's (1977) theory

explicates teacher self-efficacy beliefs in relation to the effort teachers invest in teaching further impacts their goal setting, persistence, and resilience when challenges occur (Moran & Hoy, 1998). Bandura (1989), suggested that among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central than people's beliefs about their capabilities.

Wolf and Gearhart (1994) specifically draw attention to teacher social beliefs and how their beliefs impact student feedback. Wolf and Gearhart (1994) studied an in-service program designed to enhance teacher competencies with writing assessment focuses on assessment and teacher feedback. More importantly, they found how teacher perceptions of how to give feedback in literacy may be an influence when guiding student growth as writers (Wolf and Gearhart, 1994). In addition to understanding the characteristics associated with the teachers' development of feedback using formative assessment practices, characteristics were connected to beliefs that motivated the teachers to implement activities made available to them during a Professional Development Program (Andersonn 7 & Palm, 2018).

Equally important is the teacher self-efficacy influence when examining the use of formative assessment practices. For the reasoning that teachers are facilitators of knowledge which must be understood by the student at their learning readiness. Therefore, the analysis of teacher self-efficacy and understandings play a significant role in teacher's behaviors and student outcomes (Xiam, Yum, Lian, 2020). Teachers interact based on their beliefs about a student's cognitive abilities which can impact a student's self-efficacy and plays a role in how they educate the student. The focus of this study is to seek an understanding of teachers' perceptions on learning and implementing formative assessment practices. This review of literature is seeking ways to contribute a new perspective while revealing the necessity for additional research on the concept that teacher beliefs on informative assessment may impact student learning.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The following literature review summarizes the central ideas and understandings of how educators' perspective on the evaluation process implementing formative assessment guides classroom practices. Within the research on teacher perspectives and beliefs the role of teacher efficacy when implementing formative assessment will also be defined as efficacy plays an important role in motivation and effectiveness. Researchers have conveyed that teachers' efficacy beliefs are interrelated to their instructional practices and to their orientations toward the educational process (Brownell & Pajares, 1999). The concepts guiding this research were derived from literature focused on, (a) teacher beliefs influence on teacher efficacy and practice, (b) assessment practices in early literacy, and (c) teacher use and perceptions of formative assessment in the classroom.

### **TEACHER BELIEFS INFLUENCE ON EFFICACY**

Teacher beliefs may play a significant role in the focus of educational inquiry. In other words, it may be beneficial to examine teacher understandings, conceptualizations, and proper assessments including the investigations of specific belief constructs (Pajares, 1992). Educational research on teacher beliefs can inform educational practices in ways that prevailing agendas cannot (Pajares, 1992; Rietdijk, et al, 2018). In order to understand a teacher's thought process when making educational decisions it is important to examine their beliefs (Lombaerts, De Backer, Engels, Braak, and Athanasou, 2009), since teacher ideologies are rooted in their personal life experiences which impacts their values about education (Datnow & Castellano,

2000). The goal is to have an understanding of the possible connection between teacher beliefs and decision-making on classroom practices when implementing formative assessments.

Many approaches attempt to explain how teacher perceptions and motivation influence the selection of practices (Pajares, 1996). In order to comprehend teacher motivation and perception, Pajares' (1996) explanation of teacher self-efficacy theory will provide a platform to include the concept of the personal judgement of how well one can execute a course of action. Pajares (1999) defines teacher efficacy as beliefs which are contextual judgements of the abilities to succeed in certain instructional practices. According to Bandura's (1977, 1986) theory unless someone believes they can produce the desired effect by their actions, they will have little incentive to undertake activities or persevere if challenges arise. Teacher beliefs may be rooted in the core belief that they can make a difference (Bandura, 1977, 2006). Expectations of success can be defined as individual beliefs about how well they will perform (Bostrom & Palm, 2020). In the context of this study, teacher's expectations of succeeding with the use of formative assessment practices would constitute beliefs (Bostrom & Palm, 2020).

A study on teacher beliefs concerns undertook an investigation on K-12 preservice and practicing teachers' beliefs about assessment, Barnes, Fives, and Dacey (2015), examined empirical articles on the topic of teacher beliefs and conceptions about assessment. Findings concluded teachers' decision-making about assessment practices are determined by knowledge belief distinctions which indicates explanations of practice and points toward alternative interventions (Barnes et al., 2015). When asked, teachers responded with a reflection of what assessment is rather than their beliefs about assessment practices. The study explicitly defines assessment practices as a positive influence on learning and democratic practice but on the other

hand can be used to control learners, teachers, and schools. Further investigations into these issues were absent from research in this area (Barnes et al., 2015).

According to a study by Thomas (2012) which examined assessment for promoting learning suggested that this goal has not always been the purpose within classroom practices. Comparably as with Barnes, Fives and Dacey (2015), Thomas' study is grounded on the concept that a teacher's attitude and beliefs are the foundation for their philosophy of teaching. The research compared the beliefs on classroom assessment between trained and untrained middle and secondary teachers. In conclusion it appeared that both groups of teachers believed assessment supports student performance. However, Thomas (2012) particularly with trained teachers identified a reluctance in using student-centered strategies. The teachers were challenged by the school culture of assessment as the pressure to follow assessment in the form of tests and examinations leaving no emphasis on formative assessment guiding instruction (Thomas, 2012). Both studies supported a connection between teachers' perceptions and beliefs about student assessment and classroom practices. Both studies also draw attention to the need for further research on ethics of assessment practices as an area for investigation (Barnes et al., 2015).

### **Teacher Classroom Assessment Practices**

This study's premise builds on the constructivist principle that students learn best when they understand the relevance of learning tasks to context as a result of their own active engagement in the learning process. Moreover, by collaborating with teachers and peers as Vygotsky (1978) established, students develop their cognitive understanding by engaging in independent problem solving of stimulating tasks guided by their teacher or someone with more expertise defined as the zone of proximal development. The key element in this effort is well

constructed, formative classroom assessments. Utilizing formative assessments during the teaching and learning process allow students and teachers to gauge student learning throughout instruction (Black & Wiliam, 2009). In addition, the process transmits a deeper understanding of how a teacher can scaffold the instruction to better meet the needs of the student.

Teachers are responsible for making decisions about what is most significant for the student to learn and what is irrelevant and what becoming informed requires (Graham & Pajares, 1997). A recent study depicting primary teacher decision making on classroom assessment practices and feedback (Eriksson, Boistrup & Thornbberg, 2018) posits the need to strengthen our understandings of their rationales for student feedback. It was concluded that an overlap of the need for assessment feedback to improve academic performances and to control classroom management that is off-task behavior (Eriksson, Boistrup & Thornbberg, 2018). In addition to understanding a teacher's purpose and decision making research suggests beliefs and what actually occurs may not be consistent. As with Buehl and Beck's (2015) study which led researchers to conclude that teacher beliefs are disconnected or inconsistent with classroom practices. Wolf and Gearhart's (1994) study further highlighted a lack of student guidance as during language arts instruction, findings specifically draw attention to teacher social beliefs when giving feedback rather than academic instructional benefits. The research found that teacher feedback given to students did not provide appropriate guidance needed to guide growth as writers for the reason that the teachers did not want to be too critical of the student's performance. The study further explained that sometimes teacher beliefs about how to give feedback can have a negative impact on student learning (Wolf & Gearhart, 1994). In Wolf and Gearhart's study (1994) during a language arts instruction, findings specifically draw attention to teacher social beliefs when giving feedback rather than academic instructional benefits. The

research found that teacher feedback given to students did not provide appropriate guidance needed to guide growth as writers for the reason that the teachers did not want to be too critical of the student's performance. The findings of these three studies provide important insight as to the connection between a teacher's belief, and the actual purpose or intention when practicing classroom strategies supporting formative assessment.

In a learning environment educators within every grade level recognize the significance of classroom assessments as a tool to guide instruction. It is important that teachers provide opportunities such as with the formative assessment of ongoing revision work in response to feedback from peers, teachers, as well as themselves, using a mastery approach to learning connecting a student's needs and experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Bloom (1971) emphasized how assessments for learning can be useful for improving classroom instruction allowing progression in reaching all students on various student educational levels. Torrance (2012) explains, teachers need to come to an understanding about student work and to interpret the data to assist in student learning. In other words, to understand the function of formative assessment in relation to helping the students in their learning process (Eriksson, Boistrup & Thornberg, 2018). Findings from Eriksson, Boistrup & Thornberg's (2018) study led researchers to conclude a systematic conceptualization of teachers' rationales for the feedback provided to the students on their learning. Similarly, Barnes et al. (2015) pointed out several rationales for feedback either shaped by policies, knowledge perspectives, or the need to control the learner. These studies based on classroom feedback with the perceptions of teachers on their formative practices and teaching provide insights on the rationale for how feedback is communicated in the classroom. The essential data collected from the feedback derives from the way the teachers reach a judgment on learning (Sadler, 2010). The studies concluded the valuable need to examine



integration between rationale and provided feedback strategies. Consequently, when teachers structure formative assessments to make adjustments to classroom instruction in response to feedback such adjustments can dramatically improve long-term outcomes (Dorn, 2010).

Different theoretical justifications for the development of formative assessment, and different empirical qualifications, have been apparent for many years (Torrance, 2012). Although teacher decisions about practice and utilization has been widespread but has been limited in terms of the full range of possibilities associated with formative assessment (Torrance, 2012).

With this intention, as teachers provide explanations for their judgments, they invariably make use of criteria because criteria, by definition, form constitutive elements of evaluative discourses. In addition, teachers routinely invoke whichever criteria are salient to a particular belief. This means teachers are sensitive to which criteria is relevant and which is not. Behind each decision sits an enduring quality-related concept that students, too, can acquire. Again, analyzing teacher experiences can provide a clue as to how (Sadler, 2010 p.541).

In other words, the complex nature of teaching and learning requires sophisticated skills from a teacher's interpretation of student learning (Darling-Hammond 2012). Darling-Hammond (2012) states teachers with experience begin to judiciously modify a repertoire of practices which they fluently adapt their lessons based on ongoing assessment of students' needs. Not only with the notion that teachers have valuable information about instruction viable for learning, but students also have information that is valuable for teachers when making good decisions about which learning strategies will support their learning (Damiani, 2013). As with Oxenford O'Brian et al. (2010) a study using formative assessments as a tool empowered both teacher and student so together

they can determine the best learning tools and strategies. Thus making a clear implication that teachers and students can create learning opportunities benefiting the student's learning providing that the teachers have the steadfast belief in formative practices. Furthermore, teachers must build relationships with their students in order to understand their learning processes in order to adjust instruction to meet the students' needs (Black & Wiliam, 2010). In the same way, students benefit and have an arguable right to feel committed and connected to their experiences of learning suggesting that learning is not something that an individual does on their own, but socially, through participation in activities with others (Oxenford O'Brian et al., 2010).

There are critical moments in a student's learning that create the types of experiences that expand children's capabilities beyond the acquisition of a narrow range of content (Adair, 2014). Students gaining ownership of their learning reinforced with formative assessment feedback can demonstrate the ability to define and act on their individual learning goals. We understand the connection here as a study by Miller and Lavin (2007) indicated the belief among the teachers of learning autonomy and formative assessments brought considerable positive benefits in terms of students' self-perceptions. These understandings about student learning and achievement have implications for the use of formative assessments throughout classroom instruction (Trumball & Lash, 2014). Being that the purpose of formative assessment is to support educators and students throughout the learning process toward meeting the educational standards and objectives (Andrade & Cizek, 2010). In other words, educators with the use of data collected from informal assessments are better able to support a student's academic goals focused on their personalized learning. In concise terms, all classroom assessment practices must be

designed and implemented in ways which follow and support the ‘formative curriculum’, which in turn drives assessment practices (Andrade & Cizek, 2010). For this reason, formative assessment becomes part of a process either implicitly or explicitly the teacher uses the data in order to prescribe feedback or adjust instruction (Trumball & Lash, 2013). It is in classrooms such as these you would see teacher and student working together as part of a community of learners (Trumball & Lash, 2013).

### **Teacher Perceptions and Efficacy**

Educators need more than an understanding of the curriculum and pedagogy in order to be effective teachers (Knoblauch & Hoy, 2008). Self-efficacy theory is used to understand how educator’s beliefs and perspectives align with their classroom practices when using formative assessments (Pajares, 1997). Convincing evidence suggests that the beliefs teachers have regarding their instructional capabilities have a significant impact on their teaching effectiveness. Teachers’ sense of efficacy has been defined as “the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Self-efficacy is a powerful human belief mentally created about what we can and cannot do (Pajares, 2007). In Knoblauch & Hoy’s (2008) study findings suggested that the student teachers’ self-efficacy and the contextual factors of schools including the cooperating teacher had a significant impact on the student teacher’s developing beliefs. The significance of teachers’ sense of efficacy has been well recognized. Self-efficacy theorists contend that these beliefs provide the foundation for human motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishments. In other words, as with teachers unless they believe their actions can make an impact on student outcomes they may have very little incentive to persevere when faced with challenges (Pajares, 2007). As Miller and Lavin

(2007) conclude in their study, suggesting there is a need to investigate teachers who are employing formative assessments as an integral part of their day to day and not solely for the purpose of research intervention. Miller and Lavin (2007) stated that teachers had difficulty replicating results from the interventions to meet future needs demonstrated a concern for conclusive research. Therefore, it would benefit the research if there were more studies in busy primary classrooms over a longer period of time using a range of formative assessment strategies. Together with looking more closely at the nature of interactions in the classroom environment, since we are focused on investigating the relationship between teacher belief systems, strategies employed, and characteristics of student performance would significantly determine evaluation outcomes (Miller and Lavin, 2007).

Engaging in formative assessment and providing students with supportive feedback has been defined as a positive strategy in learning. Yet the empirical evidence of the interpretation and implementation of formative assessments in action has been disappointing (Torrance, 2012). Further Torrance explains problems of a large scale implementation in an era of test-driven accountability are very significant indeed (2012). Interestingly connections are made with, Lombaerts et al.'s (2009) study conducted on the impact of teacher beliefs in a primary classroom impacting self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning refers to students performing independently, academically involving metacognition, intrinsic motivations, and strategic action all of which also reflect the goals of formative assessment processes (Zimmerman, 2002). Findings from the study concluded the following.

The promising conclusions of previous research on promoting self-regulated learning in primary school, the congruence between teacher beliefs and their classroom practices, the impact of teacher beliefs on educational innovation

and the lack of a teacher-belief scale measuring preference for self-regulated learning in primary school, indicated that the development of a new instrument to assess the beliefs of primary school teachers would be worthwhile from a theoretical as well as practical perspective (Lombaerts et al., 2009).

In other words, attention to teacher beliefs and teacher candidates should be a focus of educational research to inform educational practices in ways that prevalent research agendas have not (Pajares, 1992). In addition, teachers must have the understanding of their own self-efficacy needed to promote student agency in their classrooms. Educators must embrace changes in their instruction based on data collected from formative assessments to promote student empowerment. Furthermore, Bloom (1976) identified the theory of mastery learning as the custom of using formative assessments states, by itself feedback offered through regular classroom formative assessments does very little to improve student learning. Teachers must purposefully differentiate their instruction, both in the initial teaching and more importantly through corrective activities (Bloom, 1976).

Teachers are the evaluators of students' academic performance (Zhou & Urhahne, 2012). Zhou and Urhahne's (2012) study defined teacher judgment, student motivation, and student attributions as capable of meeting compensation for the effect of teacher judgement on student motivation (Zhou & Urhahne, 2012). Findings suggested that there are relationships between causal dimensions and psychological consequences. An outcome of their study described the effects of teacher judgment on student motivation as underestimated students demonstrated less confidence about their academic performance. Thus defining teacher assessments and conclusions about student performance convey a key role in the educational system (Zhou & Urhahne, 2012). Equally important, teachers

provide instruction, ask, answer questions, and provide feedback. Teachers use a variety of feedback in relation to their perceptions of how they can better influence a student's learning (Schunk, 2016). Webb & Jones' (2009) data sources included a combination of structured lesson observations, structured interviews, informal discussions. Webb & Jones (2009) observed changes in classes, teachers' pedagogical decision-making, the challenges they faced in developing their own practice and changes in the students' learning approaches and attitudes. With this intention, teachers have reached a perspective where they understand the good in developing and implementing formative assessments regarding them as a good thing but much empirical evidence indicates it is difficult to implement effectively and consistently (Torrance, 2012).

### **ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN EARLY LITERACY**

Early childhood education, meaning birth through age eight, concerns an essential phase of life. Young children will begin to form ideas about their learning and the expectations of society, schools, and their families prior to starting kindergarten (Engel, 2011; Piasta, 2016). Despite growing attention to early literacy experiences, many students enter kindergarten demonstrating less than emergent literacy skills (Piasta, 2016). Once the child begins school they enter a more operational stage according to Piaget (1964). Bruner writes (1963) the child in operational stage uses data about the real world organizes it selectively to find solutions to problems. It is within these phases the early childhood foundation of literacy skills are transformed as demonstrated in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *Continuum of children's development in early reading and writing. Illustration of phases along the reading and writing continuum. (IRA, NAEYC, 1998)*

Children	Teachers
<p><b>Phase 1: Awareness and exploration(pre-k)</b>  Understand that print carries a message  Identify letters and match to sounds  Identify labels and signs in the environment</p> <p><b>Phase 2: Experimental reading and writing, Kindergarten</b>    Match spoken words with written  Recognize letters and letter sounds</p> <p><b>Phase 3: Early reading and writing, First grade</b>  Write about topics that are meaningful  Use letter sound association  Orally read with reasonable fluency</p> <p><b>Phase 4: Transitional reading and writing, Second grade</b>  Spend time reading independently  Write about a range of topics  Read with greater fluency</p> <p><b>Phase 5; Independent and productive reading and writing, Third grade</b>  Make critical connections between text  Recognize and discuss elements of different text  Revise and edit their own writing  spell words correctly in final writings</p>	<p>Allow literacy related play activities  Reread favorite stories</p> <p>Create a literacy rich environment  Provide daily opportunities to read and write  Conference with students and segment words into individual sounds</p> <p>Select materials that expand children's knowledge and language development  Help students build personal lists for commonly used words from their writing</p> <p>Teach revising, editing, and proofreading skills  Create an environment that fosters evaluative and creative thinking  Model enjoyment of reading</p> <p>Teach students to examine ideas in text  Provide opportunities for reading daily  Extend children's knowledge of the correct use of writing conventions</p>

Specifically, Harris-Manske and McClaine (2015) stated their definition of literacy practice understood as engaged in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Most notably, early childhood education has historically been concerned with largely the social, emotional, and intellectual development of young children. Not long ago, primary educators felt relatively immune from many of the test-taking pressures of higher elementary and secondary grades. Debates in early childhood education used to focus on definitions and structures of development. Along with debates over educational frameworks of early childhood education, pedagogy and assessment were included to support multiple views of development (Adair, 2014). The fundamental subskills notion in a readiness perspective carried over into the instruction children received once they were considered ready to learn to read and write (Casbergue, 2011). Furthermore, the notion of literacy attained through mastery of a series of simple skills built one upon the next, early literacy instruction often took the practice of direct instruction in isolated skills that were viewed as fundamental building blocks for reading and writing (Casbergue, 2011). Additionally, these changing perspectives of early literacy development and learning can be tracked to evolving views of emergent literacy assessment. Miller and Lavin (2007) suggest a growing interest in educational researchers on the principles of formative assessments impact on teaching and learning. These efforts include curricula, best practices, and professional development (Piasta, 2016). Evidence promoted by assessment experts and education leaders suggests that formative assessment is a necessary complement to summative accountability assessments, which evaluate student learning once instruction has been completed (Andrade & Cizek, 2010). Such determinations show promise in improving children's emergent literacy skills but many gaps remain and require further research (Piasta, 2016). For this reason, in Miller and Lavin's (2007) study focused on the important insights of using formative assessment



practices in a primary classroom. Findings addressing educational gains claimed that formative assessment practice benefited in terms of affective factors such as self-esteem (Miller and Lavin, 2007). Miller and Lavin's (2007) study provided understandings into students' experiences with formative assessments with the need for further investigations between teacher belief systems, the number and type of strategies used and the characteristics of social interactions. The results of a study on teacher beliefs and writing in primary education, stated that classroom practices result from teacher beliefs, experiences, and skills, which are embedded in history and culture (Rietdijk, et al, 2018). At the same time, findings further explained the dynamics when teachers combine their experiences in lessons when they were students themselves and what they have learned and practiced (Rietdijk, et al., 2018). In particular, research is necessary to identify ways to improve meaning-focused skills, understand generalizability and sustainability of effects, and translate findings into practice (Piasta, 2016).

Literacy instruction has been perceived as a way to provide opportunities for the betterment of our children's potentials. In other words, teachers must provide opportunities throughout the instructional day for formative assessments which identify and monitor a student's literacy learning. Ultimately, it is the teachers that interpret conclusions about student work and performance which play a significant role in pedagogical decisions (Zhou & Urhahne, 2012). Many of the problems associated with traditional assessments can be overcome through the use of documentary, or observational assessments. When assessments are used for providing feedback to better instruction a student can develop learning skills that will last a lifetime. In other words, once educators have a full understanding of children's capabilities, they will be able to determine the developmental steps that are likely to occur next in individual children and target instructional interactions to support that development (Casbergue, 2011). Such informal

assessments of children's skills can be useful for teachers purposefully creating lessons and scaffolding instructional activities. For this reason, it is significant that attention is dedicated to the perceptions teachers have and their overt or covert impact on the teaching experience (Pandhiani, 2016). As teachers determine the skills and needs of children involving personal observations and perceptions.

The curriculum is the entirety of experiences which are planned for learners through their education (Clark, 2015). It determines the culture of the school as a learning community, curriculum subjects and areas, interdisciplinary learning, and opportunities to attain personal and learning goals. An effective curriculum, which meets the needs of the twenty-first-century learner improves numeracy and literacy, promotes health and well-being, supports the social and technical skills required for learning, life, and becoming contributing citizens (Clark, 2015). Developments in the policy frameworks of numerous nations have seen the implementation of an interactive style of teaching and learning called formative assessment. Formative classroom assessment is a central instructional process because the practice of sharing assessment information that supports learning is embedded into the instructional process by design. Research in this area has been evolving and has labeled classroom practices using numerous definitions encompassing the unified skills set forth by formative assessment such as self-directed learning, data-driven dialogue, and self-regulated learning.

According to their study, data-driven dialogue such as with formative assessment structure which students interact with the teacher collaboratively actively engages the student in teaching and learning (Oxenford, Nocon & Sand 2010). Students are thus equipped with their own language and tools for learning and are more likely to transfer and apply these skills for problem solving into daily life; they strengthen their ability to find answers or develop strategies

for addressing problems with which they are not familiar. In other words, they develop strong “control” strategies for their own learning (CERI, 2008). Formative assessment allows the opportunity to foster metacognition skills (Hudesman, Crosby, Flugman, Issac, Everson & Clay, 2013). Metacognition involves an awareness of how one cognitively learns a new subject matter and is sometimes referred to as “thinking about thinking”. The student who has an awareness of how he or she learns is better able to set goals, develop a variety of learning strategies and evaluate his or her own learning process. Additionally, in Oxenford O’Brian et al.’s study, (2010) students also engaged in metacognition strategies; they were both self-directed and overtly reflective about their learning experiences. In addition, the data-driven dialogue described, students not only reflected on how they did on their classroom assessment, but they were also able to explain why they got certain items correct and incorrect then establish purposeful goals to improve their learning. Similarly, in Braund and DeLuca’s study (2018) strategic questioning was frequently used to encourage student reflection as a foundation for metacognitive regulation and metacognitive knowledge. In addition to increasing the ability to understand how they learn best, the students become agentic in their own learning. As stated previously in order to support best practices and implement valuable innovations in education we must understand the thinking and behaviors of teachers that are accepting of such changes. Notably for a variety of reasons teacher beliefs may be relatively open or closed in their views to new or different ideas (Errington, 2004).

During classroom instruction, the classroom teacher must collect data which identifies where the students are in their learning. Checking for understanding provides information which can then support scaffolding the instruction to meet the students’ needs.

## **TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

Formative assessment practices have been a part of educational processes for decades. Defining formative assessment, Bloom (1971) states, as a practice that provides a deeper understanding within the curriculum to support the learning of the individual student. Formative assessment guides both teacher and student through a unit or lesson while increasing the quality of student outcome. The exploration of teacher perspectives on formative assessment defined the practice as a process intended to yield information about student learning. With this intention, teachers should utilize their classroom assessments as learning tools to support and guide student's educational development by providing specific feedback on a student's assignment results or learning process (Bloom, 1971). Since formative assessment strategies are complementary components of classroom practice, it would be beneficial to integrate them into a unity to further improve student achievement (Andersson & Palm, 2018). Clark (2012) agrees that perhaps the most fundamental of strategic considerations is the relationship between formative classroom assessment and the curriculum objectives.

The purpose of formative assessment unlike summative assessments is to provide a bridge between what students know throughout instruction and what the student has learned at the end of the year or unit providing feedback on what has been taught (Andrade and Cizek, 2010; Saddler, 1989). In other words, data which educators use to develop appropriate instruction in order to meet student's needs and information that a student may use to deepen their understanding of their learning (Trumbull and Lash, 2013). As Andrade and Cizek (2010) clarified the plan is to maximize instructional learning while gauging student progress, teachers are encouraged to implement formative assessments throughout a unit of study. Further, it is defined as assessment for learning within a unit of study where the student outcomes guide

instruction without the constraints of grading. Recent individual studies on the impact of formative assessment linked formative assessment in improving learning and the quality of a student's experience (Torrance, 2012). Educators often have discussions about how can students be active participants in their own learning to construct their own understandings (CERI, 2008). To begin, we must have a concept of formative assessment as it differs from diagnostic, which identifies students' special learning needs or summative which teachers use to form a finalized judgement about what has been learned at the end of a lesson or used at the state level to evaluate schools (Trumbull and Lash, 2013).

“Formative assessment is clearly more than a set of procedures; it is embedded in a relational view of learning. Such a perspective requires us to consider the interaction between all elements in the learning situation- pupils, the nature of the task, the teaching methods employed and the ways in which assessment information is collected and used. In comparison with traditional summative assessment, processes of formative assessment involve judgements which are essentially provisional, partial, tentative, exploratory, and, inevitably incomplete” (Drummond, 2003, p.14).

With that understanding, the role of feedback as intended for learning intentions and success criteria is clarified (Miller and Lavin, 2007). When assessment and student participation of learning are measured together, students take a central role and are expected to understand themselves as learners, contributing to the construction of knowledge (Black et al., 2003). As stated above the agentic property of self-reflectiveness can be nurtured through the use of formative assessments. Students require feedback from formative assessments to help improve

their learning and actively participate with the teacher in understanding their next steps toward their learning goals (Braund & DeLuca, 2018).

Formative assessments can assist as a practice where the participants may use both formal and informal methods of collecting data about student learning. Equally important, the teacher and the student are seen as co-agents in the preparation of instruction that also includes adapting teaching and learning to the identified learning needs, (Black & Wiliam, 2009). That is regardless of the levels of student motivation to learn, students cannot translate feedback into action for improvement without sufficient working knowledge of some fundamental conceptions (Sadler, 2010). Teachers which use feedback as guidance throughout their instruction rely on working knowledge and experience which embrace these concepts (Sadler, 2010).

As noted in the Fletcher and Shaw (2012) study, Student Directed Assessment (SDA) was developed framing the formative assessment context as the key element in which the students are prompted by the teacher to discuss and to reflect on the curriculum's outcome statements throughout a literacy lesson. Students then responded by applying their understanding to establish a check list of specific skills and language features they will address in their assessment in order to meet the curriculum outcomes (Fletcher & Shaw, 2012). Their study required both students and teachers to engage in discourse while influencing metacognition skills reflecting on how to design the students' learning goals.

Pino-Pasternak, Basilio, & Whitebread (2014) conducted a study which encouraged students to develop criteria for a talk that would allow them, first, to communicate effectively responding to their learning and secondly, to use exploratory talk to articulate and share ideas that would transcend further learning. Teachers were instrumental in modeling appropriate forms

of talk in developing with student strategies to overcome communication struggles, and in connecting the sharing of ideas to positive learning results (Pino-Pasternak, et al., 2014). Both studies provide evidence revealing the importance of formative assessment practices as utilization of communication between teacher and student.

Therefore, it is equally important to examine the role of the teacher and the interaction between teacher and learner (Andersson & Palm, 2018). The role of students and teachers and their interactions with one another regarding formative assessment practices activates students as the owner of their learning (William, 2007). Bloom's (1971) notion of formative assessments provide interaction between teacher, student, and student learning. Being that the purpose of formative assessment is to support educators and students throughout the learning process toward meeting the educational standards and objectives (Andrade & Cizek, 2010). Formative assessment provides teachers with the strategies to significantly enhance student achievement, but a strong research base on how to support educators to implement such a practice is lacking (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Black & William, 1998). A small scale research study by Crichton and McDaid (2016), explored the views of teachers and learners in two secondary schools in the West of Scotland, to identify what both groups understood about assessment for learning (AFL). Crichton and McDaid's (2016), findings showed that while teachers agreed on the usefulness of assessment for learning, in practice, they were rarely considered in class. Teachers displayed a variety of understandings regarding their purposefulness, while appreciating their value for revision of instruction, but also expressed frustration at the insignificant way in which they were implemented. The results of this study could be helpful in informing the wider education community about how assessments for learning are viewed by teachers with a view to ensure understandings are consistent with research and policy through focused professional

development courses (Crichton and McDaid, 2016).

## **SUMMARY**

This literature reviewed and examined research relative to teacher perspectives on formative assessment which may impact the implementation of formative assessment strategies in a primary classroom. Literature suggests an impact of teacher beliefs on innovation in learning and teaching (Errington, 2004; Pajares, 1992). There is enough evidence demonstrating a need to understand the beliefs behind teachers practice systems and look for evidence that teachers are not just employing formative techniques in a mechanistic way but are able to relate the use of teaching methods in an informed way (Miller and Lavin, 2007). To better understand teacher performance with formative assessment the role that self-beliefs play in motivating individuals supported the theoretical focus (Pajares, 1996). Self-efficacy beliefs strongly determine the level of accomplishment that individuals achieve (Pajares, 1996).

The examination of literature determined a necessity for more research in the primary grades as there was an impressive amount on secondary and upper school years but a limited amount on early elementary. Throughout the literature review specific formative classroom practices and the impact on student learning in a literacy context were examined. Formative assessment was originally identified as the process of using assessment throughout teaching periods to support student learning (Bloom 1969). In order to increase student success within the classroom consideration on formative assessment as a feedback strategy is viewed as a practice to promote metacognition skills (Braund & DeLuca 2018). Furthermore, all studies within this review emphasized the need for structuring formative assessments to better meet the learning needs of all students. An examination of strategies such as well-planned and implemented



formative assessments will provide how they impact student performance. While teaching for sixteen years in an elementary classroom, the term formative assessments has become part of the assessment in the grading scale within the last seven years. Formative assessment practices have always been a part of best teaching practices. As RinDone & MacQuarrie (2010) stated, formative assessment is more about good teaching than about creating assessments it is about using assessment strategies to guide instruction and support learning. Certainly, the existence of a surplus of empirical evidence documenting the improvement of educational outcomes through the use of formative assessment is established knowledge within education (Black and Wiliam 1998; Sadler, 1989).

Further, my intent is to draw attention to reliable classroom teaching practices and formative assessment strategies as they support classroom instruction. Within all classrooms Bloom (1968) describes ways in which educators may meet the needs of all students and provide a rich personalized learning opportunities no matter the circumstances. What is required is that teachers are prepared to implement strategies aimed at providing equities in education. Provided that teachers understand how to use formative assessments as feedback in student learning.

Guskey (2007) writes, by themselves feedback offered through regular classroom formative assessments do little to improve student learning. In other words, formative assessments alone yield little if any improvement. Regardless of their form, structure or quality, formative assessments simply measure student learning, they do nothing to improve learning. Measurement alone is not enough.

Significant improvement requires feedback gained from a formative assessment.

(p 111).

Therefore, as formative assessments are becoming increasingly a part of the primary classroom practice, attention should be drawn to the educational benefits (Miller and Lavin, 2007). Furthermore, to teach and use best practices, teachers must understand both the continuum of reading and writing development and children's individual and cultural variations. The most important and powerful achievements in life is the value of learning to read and write. Uniquely, all students learn the value of their accomplishments and should be able to contribute to their own trajectories of learning no matter the school age. Understandably teachers must determine when support is necessary which when using formative assessments can be transparent. As stated by IRA, NAEYC (1998) educators have a unique responsibility to educate each child and find ways to support each other when it is challenging. Together teacher and student can develop appropriate levels of instruction to successfully master educational concepts and develop personal skills that will benefit a student throughout their lifetime.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the research methods used to complete the present study's qualitative case study approach. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of teacher beliefs and perspectives on the use of formative assessment in a primary classroom's literacy practices. As such, this research will employ a case study approach in order to draw conclusions and to retain a holistic real-world perspective (Yin, 2018). A case study is appropriate for this research as this study is seeking to provide an in depth understanding of the case involving teacher participants perspectives on the use of formative assessment (Creswell, 2007). This research defines the bounded system as a primary classroom within a literacy context on specific dates and time frame. I interviewed and examined the responses of nine elementary school teachers from a specified elementary school. This chapter is comprised of a description of the research design, research questions, selection of participants, data collection sources, and data analysis used for defining major themes and findings.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This exploration is needed in order to study a group of educators that have personal experiences (Creswell, 2007) using formative assessment. One of the characteristics of qualitative research is understanding the importance of context as participants create and give meaning to their experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, this study aims to collaborate directly with participants in a flexible style that conveys their perspectives and experiences. Direct interpretation is significant for this study as it presents an in-depth representation of the case as it allows for the story to be conveyed from the teacher's perspective.

## **Case Study Approach**

The purpose of this case study is to investigate the impact of teacher perspectives on the use of formative assessment in a literacy context in a primary classroom. The research study utilized a qualitative case study approach. Qualitative research allows researchers and educators to draw conclusions and construct decisions that are framed in relations to contexts that the subject influences (Creswell, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). Accordingly, this research intends to inform educational practice by providing teachers a voice in their understandings, beliefs, and interpretations of formative assessment.

Hays & Singh (2012) state qualitative research is significant for educational settings. The aim is to determine the perspectives and beliefs through the experience of the participants as they are able to provide a comprehensive description of their understandings using formative assessment strategies. From these individual statements, meaning was derived providing the essences of personal experiences. A case study approach aligns best with this research because the research requires an understanding of an educational program within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). This research defines a case study as early elementary school participants each having experiences with formative assessments, pre-k through first grade level curriculum, and within three months of data collection. Accordingly, this research intends to inform educational practice by providing teachers a voice in their understandings and beliefs of formative assessment.

The case study approach will be an optimal design considering the research. This research seeks to understand how teachers perceive formative assessment practices in a literacy context. And, as such, case study research supports an in depth understanding unique to each participant. Case studies are the preferred approach when relevant behaviors and perceptions cannot be

manipulated and when the final outcome is to study a contemporary event (Yin, 2018). Such as in this study where the aim is to understand the perceptions of the teachers without interfering in occurrences and happenings of the events. As stated earlier the case study method will rely on multiple sources of evidence with findings needed to converge in a triangulation technique (Yin, 2018). Various sources are considered highly complementary, rigorous, and credible therefore a well-designed case study will rely on as many sources of data as possible (Yin, 2018; Creswell, 2007).

This qualitative study is exploratory in nature with the aim of examining participant experiences and opinions within context (Hays and Singh, 2012). This study aims at providing several data collections drawing on multiple sources of information, such as interviews, open ended surveys, and focus groups (Creswell, 2007). The present study will expand the limited existing literature based on early elementary school teachers as there has not been a substantial amount of data on teacher beliefs and formative assessments on the primary level. Therefore, the research aims to inform practice by providing concentrated description of processes within a particular context relevant for a particular population in order to provide them to disciplines (Hays and Singh, 2012).

### **Research Method**

As stated above data collection will include teacher interviews, open-ended surveys, and focus groups. With this intention open-ended surveys, transcribed data collected from the in-depth interviews, and focus groups will provide triangulation of data describing the individual perspectives of the participants. The goal of the study is to focus on participants that have a variety of experience utilizing formative assessments in a primary classroom. These data

resources will help further understand the experiences of the educators and how their perceptions help structure learning occurrences for their students.

The research is situated in a social constructivism paradigm as exploration and meaning is made and understood while the emphasis on multiple contextual perspectives will be pursued (Hays & Singh, 2012). Further, the goal of this proposed study is to examine to what extent and how teacher beliefs and perspectives on formative assessments impact practices in an early childhood classroom. The sample will be participants from a clear identifiable case with boundaries of classroom occurrences and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the teacher perspective (Creswell, 2007). Further, the study aims at identifying teacher belief components within the utilization of formative assessment that may have a significant role in teaching practices. Therefore, on formative assessments and teacher perspectives, it is significant to form a relationship with the participants and to develop trust within this relationship. The trustworthy collaboration is significant for the purpose of a unified goal so that together a deeper understanding of teacher perspectives will be revealed conveying a rich description of formative assessment strategies.

Through this research I am to support educators by identifying formative assessment practices which impact the student and will carry over into their future as learner, worker, and citizen. Equally important, is the notion of collaboration and communication as these are the core components of formative assessment practices. As described in the Compass to 2025 identifying inequities in learning opportunities for students and implement best practices by seeking innovative solutions lends the opportunity for facilitating the use of formative assessment. This study attempts to understand perceptions of primary educators and with the

findings provide a description of teaching and learning using formative assessment as it may have a critical impact on pedagogical practices (Giles & Tunks, 2014).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding the proposed study are:

- How do primary grade teachers describe the relationship between formative assessment and literacy learning in their classroom practice?
- What challenges and benefits, if any, do primary grade educators experience when implementing formative assessments for the purpose of informing pedagogical literacy practices?
- What institutional and professional supports do primary grade educators identify as beneficial to promoting and valuing the use of literacy-based formative assessment data in planning classroom instruction?

The research focuses on supporting both teacher and students to reach their full potential. As set forth by the City of Virginia Beach school district, the Compass 2025 are the strategic frameworks identifying equity emphasis along with educational excellence objectives and goals which align in student-centered for student success (Virginia Beach City Public Schools; retrieved 5/2022, <http://www2.vbschools.com>compass>beyond2020> ). This framework was developed by a strategic planning committee composed of parents, students, school division staff, military, business, and higher education representatives. Their goal was to consider the feedback from the community and develop goals of the framework. In accordance with the Compass to 2025, this study aligns with the multiple goals such as: educational excellence, identifying and addressing inequities in achievement, and investigating best practices. First this

study seeks to share teaching practices that are adaptable to diverse student needs. Secondly, this study aims at providing a description of the relationship between teacher perspectives on implementing formative assessment and the impact on formative assessment classroom practices. More specifically, to provide an analysis of how formative assessment provided with instruction and thoughtful questioning scaffolds further inquiry and deepens cognitive processing (Clark 2011) as it leads to educational excellence.

### **SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

This study used a purposeful sampling technique to determine participating teachers in kindergarten and first grade within the city of Virginia Beach school district. The study took place in an elementary school located in suburban area in the City of Virginia Beach. The Beach Shore Elementary school (Pseudonym name) enrolls students from Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.

#### **Description of Setting**

Classroom sizes are approximately 20 to 27 students. The entire school's enrollment is between 650 students to 700 at the present time. The student ethnicity consists of 70% White, 11% Hispanic, 11% two or more races, 4% Black, 4% Asian or Pacific Islander. The school also consists of 16% from low income families with a female gender population of 49% and Male population of 51%. Students with disabilities make up 4% of the school population compared to the state average percentage of 11.

#### **Description of Participants**

The teacher participants have a variety of experiences with formative assessment practices following the city of Virginia Beach public school curriculum. Participants were selected individuals from a specific site because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the



implementation of formative assessment central to the research problem (Creswell, 2007). As Creswell (2007) further discusses, noting that the sampling may change during the study, I chose to be flexible and plan ahead as much as possible.

For this study participants exemplified a variety of academic experiences with formative assessment and a variety of educational accomplishments. Table 5. Provides a description of the participants in this study. The chosen population was a limited sample that is not intended to be a representation of the schools in the country but a collection of all-encompassing detail on the perspectives of formative assessment. As Creswell (2007) illustrates, the general guideline in qualitative research is not only to study a few sites or individuals but to collect an extensive detail about each site or participant. Inclusionary criteria comprised of teachers with experience in an early elementary grade Pre-K through first. Criteria also included teacher use and understanding of formative assessments strategies in a classroom setting and the experience of teaching the early literacy curriculum. The school was chosen as I currently work for the administrator who approved the participation of the research at the school site. An exclusion of participants were teachers in upper level elementary who teach above the primary age level. Teachers were also excluded if they had no experience with formative assessment.

### **DESCRIPTION OF DATA SOURCES**

This single case study is oriented towards defining the teachers' perspectives on the implementation of formative assessments in a primary classroom. The study's research questions investigated the meaning of individuals' experiences within an educational setting (Creswell, 2007). I began by conducting an open-ended survey for the purpose of gathering data prior to interviews in order to clarify the direction of the research to be conducted and (Yin,

2018) strengthen a consensus over research goals. Following the survey, I identified findings for further comparison between the open-ended data and interviews to be conducted. Interviews were conducted individually allowing for insightful explanations as well as personal perspectives and beliefs (Yin, 2018) on the implementation of formative assessment. Interviews as a guided conversation were especially helpful by providing explanations of key events including participants' perspectives (Yin, 2018). Once all the interviews were completed a focus group was used to obtain data from a small group of participants using several questions not discussed during the individual interview providing that all participants are engaged (Creswell, 2007). The final written report presented the complex interpretation of the voices of the participants (Creswell, 2007). The following section will describe data sources and support justifications for each question.

### Survey Questions

The use of open-ended surveys supported triangulation of data and provided validity of the data collected. Stake (1995), suggests gathering data, replicating and triangulating data in order to validate findings. Participants provided their answers anonymously which allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' responses. Questions were given to the participants ahead of time in order to determine issues, needs, and areas that may need further exploration.

- How often do you use formative assessments in your language arts instruction?
- Can you provide an example and or artifact of how you have used formative assessments in your language arts instruction?

The above survey questions helped to develop an understanding on the perspectives of the teachers when using formative assessment. As stated above the open-ended survey is intended to allow another source which will be completely anonymous in comparison to the interviews and

focus groups. Therefore, the survey ensured a deeper understanding of the teacher perspective and increased the triangulation of data.

### Interview Questions

A well-developed case study will benefit from using multiple sources of evidence, (Yin; 2006, 2009, 2011). Yin (2006, 2009, 2011) recommends that case study research is not limited to a single data source, as in the use of questionnaires for the purpose of a survey. Therefore, following the general survey, participants meeting the inclusion criteria were invited to a brief forty-five-minute interview. Interviews were conducted to allow the educators' perspectives to be understood as described in Table 3. Interviews also supported the triangulation of data collected in order to support validity of the case study findings.

**Table 3**

*Interview questions supporting the research focus.*

Research Question	Interview Question
<b>I. How do primary grade teachers describe the relationship between formative assessment and literacy learning in their classroom practice?</b>	1. What grade do you teach? How many years have you been teaching?
	2. How do you use formative assessment in your classroom?
	3. After you collect data from the feedback how do you provide feedback to your students?
	5. Can you describe examples of literacy formative assessment feedback you have used with your students?
	7. What are your beliefs about student formative assessments used to impact student achievement in a language arts context?
	8. How do you use formative assessments to make a student feel successful?

	11. What does a literacy rich classroom environment mean to you? How does this include using formative assessments in language arts?
	12. How would you persuade or not persuade a teacher to use formative assessments in a language arts context?
	15. In what ways do formative assessment strategies support student learning in language arts?
<b>II. What challenges and benefits, if any, do primary grade educators experience when implementing formative assessments for the purpose of informing pedagogical literacy practices?</b>	4. What challenges arise when using formative assessment to analyze student progress?
	6. What changes if any would support you when using formative assessments?
	9. Describe the relationship between the use of formative assessments and student outcomes.
	10. How do you select assignments for your students and how do you select the formative assessment for each assignment?
	13. In your experience, how has the use of formative assessments and student feedback impacted your instruction?
	14. How do your students respond to feedback from formative assessments in a language arts context?
<b>III. What institutional and professional supports do primary grade educators identify as beneficial to promoting and valuing the use of literacy-based formative assessment data in planning classroom instruction?</b>	16. Can you explain how the district provides, if at all, support for teachers when using formative assessment?
	17. How do you feel the current pacing of the curriculum, designed by the school district, supports teachers utilizing formative

	assessment to guide student learning?
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### Focus Groups

Focus groups offer unique opportunities for generating data from interactions among the participants who share a common experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, I used a focus group in order to provide generate interactions among participants providing more data and support triangulation of data collected as demonstrated by the following focus group questions in Table 4. In addition, the focus group created opportunities to construct a more relaxed conversation compared to an individual interview. Further this process of focus group data collection can facilitate self-exploration regarding a topic that is being addressed (Hays & Singh, 2012).

**Table 4**

*Focus group questions supporting the research focus.*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Focus Group Question</b>
<b>I. How do primary grade teachers describe the relationship between formative assessment and literacy learning in their classroom practice?</b>	1. Have you used formative assessments in your language arts instruction?
	2. Can you provide an example/artifact of how you have used formative assessments in your language arts instruction?

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Additionally, understanding the demands teachers have throughout the day, the study was flexible about the length of time for interviews and focus groups. Therefore, interviews and focus groups did not exceed forty-five minutes unless agreed by the participant. In order to provide confidentiality to participants and data, participants names and school name are not mentioned in any publication. Researchers observe and interpret data, often from their own frames of reference (Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, I used member-checking and a reflection journal to evaluate data conclusions. Data collected is securely kept on a private computer. After the research has been analyzed, records and data will be disposed of and removed to further ensure data confidentiality. During this research process the research focused on teacher interpretations and perspectives of classroom formative assessment procedures within a literacy context.

### **Pre-data Collection**

#### *Phase I*

Initially I provided my research proposal discussing my aims, goals, and reasons for the study and received permission from the Department of Research in Education. The qualitative case study focused on the perspective of implementing formative assessment.

#### *Phase II*

The early phases of the study included developing a researcher – participant relationship with the teachers I wished to involve in the study. Taking on the role of researcher and teacher while, remembering that often when we engage in qualitative research we face challenges in the form of what might seem like opposing roles (Hays & Singh, 2012). I wanted to create a collaborative effort with the support of teachers and school principal to explore the topic of the impact of teacher beliefs on formative assessments within a literacy context. Furthermore, to

provide faithfully and ethically the representation of all participating teachers. Additionally, to maintain that ethics is about relationships and to provide adequate protection for participants as how we relate to one another in morally righteous ways that will assist within the responsibilities, expectations and contribute to a positive change for all involved (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Data Collection Phase**

#### *Phase III*

The data collection phase included a teacher open-ended survey conducted prior to conducting semi-structured interviews and focus group. For this purpose, I gained consent from participating teachers. Moreover, so as not to underestimate the importance of reflexivity when honoring the voice of the participants throughout the research (Hays & Singh, 2012). It will be important as needed to carry out additional interviews in order to verify information obtained allowing the participant the opportunity to provide further detail or explain on the information offered (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). For this purpose, the use of a reflective journal as a strategy maintaining the core components of authenticity, positive regard, and empathy (Hays & Singh, 2012). It was the intention to work together with teachers as a learner of evidence on their perceptions of the program being studied. A significant consideration was to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. This ensured protection and privacy for the teacher participants that may feel vulnerable when offering information about classroom procedures.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

The analysis stage relies on theoretical schemes and other strategies, considers and employs analytical techniques explanations, and explores opposing explanations (Yin, 2009). The data collected from interviews, open-ended surveys and focus groups was analyzed using Creswell's qualitative data analysis with the universal tradition (2007) steps to a qualitative case study, derived from Stake (1995) and Yin's (2008) approach. The process of analyzing data through a description of themes established patterns and determined correspondence between two or more categories (Creswell, 2007). The term theme was defined as an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection for the purpose of developing a thematic analysis (Saldana, 2016). Analytical generalization involves the extraction of abstract notions from each unit of analysis (Yin, 2013). These abstract concepts should link to the theoretical foundations and be potentially applicable to other cases. In the context of case studies, "data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence to draw empirically based conclusions" (Yin, 2009, p.126). Stake (1995) discussed pattern identification where the researcher examines broad categories within the case study to identify relationships or interpretations. According to Yin, the most important strategy is to follow the theoretical propositions or hypotheses that led to the case study. In other words, such propositions can help the analyst plan and focus on the most relevant data, organize the entire case study, and define alternative explanations. After this description "relatively uncontested data" (Stake, 1995), the focus was on key issues or analysis of themes allowing an understanding of the complexities that developed from the case study. The purpose of coding examined the teacher perspectives and



challenges involved when using formative assessments. A comparison of themes, subthemes, and corresponding horizons continued, until reaching a valid description.

### *Coding Patterns*

The coding procedure began with thematic analysis as a method of analyzing interview and survey transcripts (Caulfield, 2020). The transcripts were examined closely to identify common themes and patterns among the data collected from participants (Caulfield, 2020). The most common five step process is a flexible method which was adapted for this research. This process was originally developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006).

1. Familiarization- getting an overview of all the data collected before analyzing. Read through all transcripts of the participants noting any references to their personal beliefs and perspectives on the use of formative assessment and challenges described.
2. Coding- highlight text, phrases, or sentences adding codes or labels to describe their meaning. The transcripts were reread for the purpose of coding themes related to the participants' beliefs and experiences using formative assessment. Coding sources provide the range of codes and sub codes (Hays & Singh, 2012). For example, the research questions, interview questions, survey questions, and participant meanings will deliver an initial analysis framework (Hays & Singh, 2012).

“A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” (Saldaña, 2016 p. 4)

3. Generating themes- identification of patterns, linking them to specific themes. The transcripts and established codes were analyzed looking for connections identifying patterns to develop themes throughout the data.
4. Reviewing themes- make sure themes are useful and accurate representation of the data. Continue to reread all transcripts and compare the themes that were developed. Some themes may have to be restructured.
5. Define and name themes- themes were refined as the coding process continues. The process involves verification to confirm or disconfirm present codes in order to strengthen emerging models moving from exploratory to confirmatory method known as analytical induction (Hays & Singh, 2012).

In the final interpretations I provided a detailed analysis of the case study and its context. In the final section of the study I developed generalizations about the case in terms of themes and how they compare and contrast (Creswell, 2007) with published literature on teacher perspectives on the implementation of formative assessment. Member checking included the participants voice during the analysis. Participants were willingly helpful throughout the qualitative analysis steps this will include having them review initial codes individually or in focus groups (Hays & Singh, 2012). I collected data first from an open ended survey completed by nine participants. Once the survey was completed I began individual interviews with five of the participants. These five participants were selected because of their number of years teaching and specific experiences with formative assessment practices. Next, I conducted a focus group with four other teacher participants. These participants were chosen also for the number of years teaching also for their potential interests and diverse background. Then, I transcribed all data and sent the participants a copy of their personal responses to member check the data collected.

It was important to me that the interpretation of the data be an accurate description of the participants' standpoint on formative assessment practices. The first cycle of coding was to get familiar with the data. I read and reread all data and journal notes in order to get an overview of the data collected. Then, I coded the transcripts using NVivo, a software that efficiently stores, organizes, manages, and reconfigures the data to enable human analytic reflection (Saldana, 2016) (Appendix D). For the second cycle of coding I used pattern coding in attempt to organize and obtain meaning to that organization (Saldana, 2016). The primary goal of the second cycle was to delineate a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and /or theoretical organization from the first cycle of codes (Saldana, 2016). At this time, I highlighted sections of the text to identify phrases or words that potentially captured areas of research interest on the topic of formative assessment practices and beliefs.

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

To address issues of trustworthiness the use of member checks was be crucial throughout data collection and analysis. The first point of member checking occurred during the focus group and interviews, in order to actively reflect on content shared by participants back to the group for confirmation and invite opportunities for clarification or elaboration. The second point of member checking occurred following the transcription of the interviews and focus group. Each member received a blinded transcript of their interview requesting feedback and soliciting any expanded thoughts or points for inclusion following their read of the transcript. The third and final check occurred after data analysis was complete by giving all participants an initial draft of the research findings detailing the study's key themes using participant quotes in a final request for feedback and an accuracy check. As described in the data analysis section, we engaged in researcher triangulation, or intercoder agreement by reviewing and reaching consensus on all

data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

Teachers that identify clear assessment criteria and the connection of how feedback can support the student will help them regulate their learning (Clark, 2012). Feedback can have the potential to impact meta-cognitive and self-efficacy revealing hidden knowledge among learners (Clark, 2012). Therefore, teachers must put formative assessment strategies into action (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Teacher beliefs about the implementation of formative assessment and what actually happens in the classroom can differ. Teachers may misinterpret and misapply findings of educational research in such a way instruction becomes a one size fits all (Pajares & Graham, 1997). Therefore, having this knowledge, it is significant that we understand teacher beliefs and how decisions are made when implementing formative assessments. By providing an opportunity for educators to engage in a dialogue about their personal experiences and beliefs about formative assessments and analysis of data will demonstrate challenges met through academic development. Educators that express their beliefs concerning actively listening and supporting an individual's perspectives of their learning will provide opportunities that impact a student for a lifetime. With this study, the intention is to allow the story to be told from the teacher's perspective.

This study addressed ethical challenges a researcher may be confronted with when researching with educators. With the use of ethical symmetry, reflexivity, member checking, confidentiality, and multiple forms of data collection, it is intended to create validity measures to support research findings. The use of member checking was applied to avoid misinterpreting the learner's experiences in connection to the research question. Most importantly, is my

commitment to avoid any harm or stress on the participants. This research commitment is to keep a culture of openness within the study, allowing any concerns to be discussed. It is imperative that participants are able to understand the results of their invested time. In doing so results were disseminated as a construction of conclusions with all participants. Furthermore, I continuously recognize the importance of and attempted to interpret accurately the interactions and understandings of all participants. I was determined to identify valuable information relying on the teachers' perspectives when implementing formative assessments and reveal challenges in curriculum instruction and pacing during literacy within kindergarten and first grade.

In qualitative research, educators develop understandings and make decisions that are framed in relation to those individuals and the context that a phenomenon influences. As mentioned, this case study on formative assessments data collection included teacher interviews, open-ended surveys and focus groups. The individual interviews provided a deeper connection to the events of the story. A holistic analysis conveyed context as an understanding of teacher beliefs and how they impact student outcomes when utilizing formative assessments in the classroom setting. Meaning the researcher took the time to repeat and clarify teacher responses as well as descriptive data. The goal was to use a semi-structured approach, meaning the format will provide a focus on specific questions while allowing the teachers the opportunity to elaborate or diverge from a description. The educator's beliefs are an important consideration as they are the guidelines for change in educational understandings and approaches.

Research findings need to be comprehensive and relevant for a particular population if educators are to employ them in everyday classroom experiences. This form of research aims to inform practice by providing a thick description of processes within a language arts context (Hays & Singh, 2015). Using a qualitative method to form a platform allows the story from the

teacher's perspective to be understood. The representational description of the teachers' experiences will provide researchers with opportunities to examine how individuals narrate their environment symbols, social roles, and social structures (Hays & Singh, 2015). It is anticipated that the classroom experienced interpretations will produce realistic data to be used to construct relevant findings of formative assessment practices for the purpose of improving student academic outcomes. Further intentions are to demonstrate a need for future research on this topic to construct cognitive development through data collected from teachers describing their social interaction and understanding of how individuals shape knowledge (Hays & Singh, 2012).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter details the results of the research on teachers implementing formative assessments throughout instructional units. Further how teacher beliefs in formative assessment practices play a significant role in best classroom instruction. First, an overview of the context of the study and an overview of the case, I discuss participants' perspectives, experiences, and beliefs about formative assessments. The second section presents the study's results and findings that emerged from the data analysis through the description of the themes (Creswell, 2007). Data collection consisted of two primary data sources an initial survey, followed by interviews and a focus group. Using multiple sources of evidence permits going beyond the speculative coverage of a case study's scope (Yin, 2018). The data sources allowed for a desired triangulation of data collection. The triangulation process involves corroborating evidence from multiple sources in order to validate or shed light on a theme (Creswell, 2007). All nine participants were asked to respond to a two question open-ended survey. The following are examples of participant artifacts used to collect data in a literacy context. Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Examples of participant artifacts for collecting data in literacy.**

*Example of a running record used during reading instruction*

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Text \_\_\_\_\_ Level \_\_\_\_\_

Page		E	SC


Comments\_\_\_\_\_

Accuracy rate

*Example of a Small Group Guided Reading Formative Assessment*

Guided Reading Group_____ Date_____			
Objective:			
Text/Level			
Student Name	Phonics	Fluency	Comprehension
I Can statement_____			
Notes for tomorrow			



After receiving the data from the survey participants were selected to participate in an interview or focus group. Teachers were placed into these groups depending upon their responses to the open ended survey. The criteria for the groups were the overall experience teaching specific grade levels including suggested uses of formative assessment practices.

The purpose of this case study was to examine early elementary school teachers' perspective about the implementation of formative assessments in a literacy context. The study aimed to provide a rich description of the teachers' beliefs and perspectives on formative assessment classroom practices. This data provided insights as to how teachers believe they are meeting student needs and continually altering classroom instruction using the data collected from formative assessment. The data also reveals important trends in the underlying beliefs and perspectives teachers have with the relationship between formative assessment and student success.

This chapter provides in-depth description of themes and sub themes from the data analysis. Four central themes emerged after completing a thematic analysis of the data which was used to establish the findings of the study; 1. Valued Formative Assessment Technique, 2. Guidance of Instruction, 3. Challenges with Formative Assessment, 4. Teacher Ideal Changes. Themes that emerged throughout the analysis reflected this study's research questions, listed below and provided a rich interpretation based on the teacher perspective when implementing formative classroom assessments in a literacy context.

The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

- How do primary grade teachers describe the relationship between formative assessment and literacy learning in their classroom practice?

- What challenges and benefits, if any, do primary grade educators experience when implementing formative assessments for the purpose of informing pedagogical literacy practices?
- What institutional and professional supports do primary grade educators identify as beneficial to promoting and valuing the use of literacy-based formative assessment data in planning classroom instruction?

### **Context Narrative**

Formative assessment practice has evolved into the classroom as an everyday practice for many teachers. Over the last fifteen years formative assessments have become a necessity for some teachers as all participants in this study have voiced repeatedly. This study intends to gain an understanding and provide a rich description of the teacher perspectives and how their beliefs have influenced classroom practices. Therefore, it is imperative we examine the teacher viewpoint on the implementation of formative assessment within daily instructional practices. This study was conducted at an elementary school in the city of Virginia Beach public school district. This school enrolls students from Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The following table describes the elementary school participants.

### Description of Participants

**Table 5**

*Description of Participants*

Participant Pseudonym	Years Taught	Grade Levels Taught	Gender
1. Sharon	38 Years	Multiple Kindergarten through Grade 5	Female
2. Debora	25 Years	9 years in Grade 1 including grade 3 & 4	Female
3. Amanda	25 Years	Pre-kindergarten early discovery, Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2	Female
4. Diane	34 Years	Grade 2 for 1 year and the last 33 years Grade 1	Female
5. Jillian	21 Years	Kindergarten, Grade 1 & Grade 2, 6 Years as an assistant. J is a Special Ed. teacher	Female
6. Melinda	7 Years	Pre-Kindergarten	Female
7. Robin	21 Years	3 years in Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3	Female
8. Theresa	2 Years	Grade 1 & Grade 2	Female
9. Lisa	20 Years	Kindergarten Assistant	Female

### Description of Themes and Subthemes

The analysis process resulted in the following 4 themes; 1. Valued Formative Assessment Technique, 2. Guidance of Instruction, 3. Challenges with Formative Assessment, 4. Teacher Ideal Changes. In the sections that follow, I present a descriptive account of each theme, including corresponding subthemes, utilizing the voices of the participants. The presented quotations from the teacher participants were chosen for inclusion as representative evidence of identified themes. The following will present the teacher responses as they relate to each of the categorized themes developed through the analysis. Below, Table 6 provides a description of the

themes and subthemes that developed through the analysis. This is followed by Table 7 which provides a presentation of themes illustrated by participant responses.

**Table 6**

*Description of Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme
Valued Formative Assessment Techniques	Dialogue as Formative Feedback Positive Feedback Building Student Confidence Student Success
Guidance of Instruction	Whole Group & Small Group Support Literacy Rich Environment
Challenges with Formative Assessments	Variety of Learning Levels Pacing of Curriculum Classroom sizes Issues Due to Covid
Teacher Ideal Changes	Pacing of curriculum Classroom sizes

**Table 7***Presentation of Themes Illustrated by Participant Responses*

Theme	Participant Responses
<b>Valued Formative Assessment Techniques</b>	<p>“To collect data on reading comprehension, I use journal responses during small group instruction”</p> <p>“I use running records to support the PALs data.” (Participant Debora; Interview).</p> <p>“The journals are very telling. Student journals let me know if I need to revisit certain areas of instruction.” (Participant Lisa; Focus Group)</p> <p>“I made my own notetaking for my small groups. This has saved me a lot of time to collect formative data during my small groups.” (Participant Amanda; Interview)</p> <p>“I use check points throughout lessons to help understand where the student is in their learning by using slates, notetaking, recordings, running records for reading and structuring a conversation with the students.” (Participant Sharon; Interview)</p> <p>“Feedback advises the student on what they know and builds on their successes.” (Participant Sharon; Interview)</p>
<b>Guidance of Instruction</b>	<p>“Formative assessments are important and supports purposeful and specific best teaching practices. Formative assessment helps to understand the needs of the student and how to move learning forward with instruction.” (Participant Diane; Interview)</p> <p>“Formative assessments allow students to make mistakes and learn from them. It is very important that students understand the learning that comes from making mistakes.” (Participant Lisa; Focus Group)</p>
<b>Challenges with Formative Assessment</b>	<p>“I need more time with the curriculum pacing. I do feel the formative assessments help the student to feel more confident in their learning. It is just difficult finding the time” (Participant Melinda; Focus Group).</p> <p>“Some students are struggling to meet the objects while there are some students ready to move on. Theresa. mentioned, I see a lot of variety between the individual students in those groups. I have twenty-five minutes with one group of students</p>

### Teacher Ideal Changes

and I need to spend time on individual needs.”  
(Participant Theresa; Focus Group)

“Covid has changed many practices in the classroom these past two years. We have had a lot of student talk in our instruction but these last two years’ teachers have had to adapt student interactions. Students have not used vocabulary within engagement of conversation.” (Participant Sharon; Interviews)

“Classroom sizes are too large. When completing formative assessments with a large class and taking the time to evaluate the data it is very time consuming.” (Participant Lisa; Focus Group)

“ Why not give the control of how to assess back to the teacher? Meaning about what to assess and when to assess.” (Participant Melinda; Focus Group)

“I would like to see more resources on a true model of formative assessment. Give us examples of a gifted student, a middle student, and a student that may need intervention.”  
(Participant Robin; Focus Group)

### Theme 1. Valued Formative Assessment Techniques

In their interviews, participating teachers emphasized several key strategies they utilize as part of their classroom formative assessment practice. There are numerous techniques these teachers use to collect their formative data supporting their instruction. Therefore, valued formative assessment techniques transpired as a major theme. Prior research on teacher perceptions about the use of data collected from formative assessment impacts how the data is transpired to support student learning (Erikson, Boistrup & Thornberg, 2018; Torrance, 2012). In other words, teacher beliefs about the function of formative assessment in relation to helping the students in their learning process was discussed by many participants. This theme emphasizes teacher use of various formatives depending on the skill and literacy objectives they were teaching.

Collecting data from journals and written responses from students were common practices among several teachers. One teacher explains, “To collect data on reading comprehension, I use journal responses during small group instruction” (Participant Amanda; Interview). “I use running records to support the PALs data.” (Participant Amanda; Interview). In agreement, “I also use notebooks to collect data from the students during my small groups” (Participant Theresa; Focus Group).

Lisa explained, “The data tells me where to begin my instruction for the next day!”. “Whether we are working on long vowels, -ed words. The journals were very telling. Student journals let me know if I need to revisit certain areas of instruction” (Participant Lisa; Focus Group).

These journals provided teachers authentic data used to analyze a student’s written performance of skills they are working on in reading and writing. “Collecting the data using notebooks lets me know where I need to go with my instruction” (Participant Theresa; Focus Group). Collecting data using journals is described by several participants as valued because it demonstrates authentic student data. “The data collected from formative notebooks is authentic assessment” (Participant Melinda; Focus Group).

In addition to journals, teachers use notetaking to collect formative data while the students are reading aloud. Notetaking also allows teachers to analyze in the moment the skills learned by the student. “I can take notes about their decoding skills. I can note if they are making growth” (Participant Sharon, Interview). In the same way (Participant Amanda; Interview), also uses notetaking and has even developed her own template arranged by student names and objective. Amanda added “I made my own notetaking for my small groups. This has saved me a lot of time to collect formative data during my small groups” (Participant Amanda; Interview).

This expresses just how teachers perceive the importance of using formative assessments and are willing to commit themselves to providing students opportunities by incorporating formative practices. Further, Melinda explained her experiences with formative assessment within smaller groups, “Formative assessment is significant for capturing authentic assessment data”.

Supporting this concept, Andrade & Cizek (2010) explain that all classroom formative assessment must be implemented so that it follows and supports a formative curriculum practice using the data to prescribe feedback and adjust instruction. As she described, “Formative assessments are authentic assessments. Summative are not as telling of where the student is in their learning” (Participant Melinda; Focus Group). In addition, from the perspective of a specialist, Sharon stated, “Small group formative assessments support the specialists who are collecting data all day long in order to adjust instruction” (Participant Sharon; Interview).

In agreement, Lisa (Participant; Focus Group), stated “With me I work with students more one on one. Using formative assessment helps me capture if the student is passing or not. Then I can go back and revise instruction as needed.”

These statements exemplify the importance of using formative assessments to collect valuable data and enhance student instruction. Additionally, “I use check points throughout lessons to help understand where the student is in their learning by using slates, notetaking, recordings, running records for reading and structuring a conversation with the students” (Participant Amanda; Interview). As explained in previous research formative assessment becomes part the instructional process in order to prescribe feedback or adjust instruction (Trumball & Lash, 2013). These are just a few strategies participants acknowledged they use collect formative data which they perceive as valuable information when planning instruction.



One component of formative assessment is that all participants are committed to the use of dialogue with their students when giving feedback. All participants discussed that feedback is a crucial part of formative assessment. This finding is consistent with previous research where assessments used for providing student feedback will afford the student fundamental lifetime skills. Further, when teachers have a full understanding of student capabilities they are able to establish developmental phases likely to occur in a students' targeted instructional goals (Casbergue, 2011). Teacher feedback was described by participants as playing a significant role in student learning and establishing goals with the student. As S suggests, "Feedback advises the student on what they know and builds on their successes" (Participant Sharon; Interview). Debora explained, "Students like to hear how they are doing especially if they are successful. If a student is not advancing it is important to find something positive to say first, then talk about what they need to work on" (Participant Debora; Interview). Several of the teachers commented on the importance of drawing attention to student successes. Recognition and enthusiasm were strategies used by teachers to build student confidence through positive feedback. Further Jillian expressed the significance of starting with a positive, "You cannot just say don't, Good job. You must tell the student what they did well" (Participant Jillian; Interviews). "Be more specific in your feedback" (Participant Sharon; Interview).

As Robin stated" Most students are very positive. Some say sure I can do that!

They are very emotional. If they can see that they can do it and you tell them they can! Teachers need to find areas where they are successful" (Participant Robin; Focus Group).

Several teachers focused using enthusiasm and recognition of student accomplishments. All participants shared stories of how they outwardly demonstrate personal enthusiasm in their

student's success. Sharon, explained, "I teach kindergarten which requires a lot of modeling for the student (Participants Sharon, Amanda, Diane, Jillian; Interviews). I like to give big hurrahs and yippee!! I show them a lot of excitement when they get it right or are trying really hard. Always positive verbal feedback then more modeling to reteach." (Participant Jillian; Interview). More on this topic will be discussed below.

### **Positive Feedback**

One common theme reoccurred throughout the data was the use of dialogue when giving formative assessment feedback. Sharon, commented, "I like to use the conversation with the students starting with, I noticed you....., or Let's look at that again.... What did you hear.....Does this make sense? It is important to start with what they do know and build of their success" (Participant Sharon; interview). During their interviews teachers expressed how extremely important it is to begin a conversation with students using a positive comment on their progress before reviewing what the student needs to work on. As in Miller & Lavin's study (2007) findings addressing educational achievements and the students' experiences claim that formative assessment practices can benefit a student's self-esteem.

Jillian, further explained, "I always start with something positive, what the student did well and then what they can work on. More positives because my students have not had a lot of successes. I feel it is really important they feel successful. Students need to hear about their strengths. I have to think about the words I choose. Make sure you choose words where the student doesn't feel defeated" (Participant Jillian; Interview).

One teacher explained, "I always provide the students' strengths first. For example, when reviewing a running record (oral reading formative assessment), I always start with things the

student did as a good reader. I then use the formative assessment to help the student make personal goals” (Participant Jillian; Interview).

All participants report the use of formative assessment data to create student personal goals. Jillian (Participant; Interview), explained, “Setting personal goals for the students is a very important strategy as a result of collecting formative assessment data”. Goal setting was important to all participants. One teacher explained how she involved the student in setting their own personal goals with data collected from recording the student reading a text.

“One way I collect formative data in reading, Jillian (Participant; Interview), stated “I use a lot of recording the students while they are reading. I then have the students listen to themselves reading. Most of the time the students can hear areas they need to work on themselves. We listen to the recording and then have a conversation around what they have just heard together.”

One consistent concern of the teacher participants was the belief that positive feedback led to a students’ success in their learning. When assessments are used for providing feedback a student can develop learning skills that will last their lifetime (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Bloom; 1969; Braund & Deluca, Dorn, 2010; 2018; Casbergue, 2011; Murtagh, 2014).

### **Student Success**

Ultimately, it is the final outcome of formative assessments supporting the success of student learning goals that is the determination of every teacher. As Pajares (2007) stated the teacher interpretations and performances are the foundation of preparing students who are capable and confident in reaching their goals. The combined analysis of the study’s data identified student success as the principal purpose for teachers to employ formative assessments. Sharon explained, “Formative assessments are curriculum driven and support best teaching

practices. Whether using small group or whole group, formative assessment focuses on student success” (Participant Sharon; Interviews). Theresa added, “Students are more successful with the use of formative assessment. Formative assessments help you understand your students better” (Participant Theresa; Focus Group). Many teachers expressed their use of enthusiasm when giving students feedback, making it a positive experience. Teacher participants believe their enthusiasm creates a drive of success by the student performer when meeting their goals. Therefore, participants were found to emphasize that using formative assessments increases student success in the classroom.

Furthermore, (Participant Diane; Interview), explained “There is a positive correlation between using formative assessment data and student success.

Meaning the student understands where they are in their learning. They are more successful because you are not waiting till the end of the unit to provide feedback and necessary changes to instruction”.

Participants perceived that the central reason for using formative assessment was student success. Importantly, as convincing evidence has suggested a relationship between teacher perception about their students’ capabilities and school achievement (Moran & Hoy, 2007). Accordingly, teachers in this study did recognize the importance of using formatives to guide instruction allowing for students to make mistakes and learn from them prior to a unit summative exam. This follows into the next theme which emerged from the study, guidance of instruction.

## **Theme 2. Guidance of Instruction**

All teacher participant voiced the importance of using formative assessment to guide their classroom instruction. They specifically identify beliefs about the significant

purpose in using such an assessment and that learning cannot occur without formative assessment data. Analysis of the interviews and focus group determine that teacher formative assessment data provides guidance of classroom instruction. The following translates teacher insights of how formative assessments drive classroom instruction and enhances varying classroom practices to meet the needs of the students. Diane stated, “Formative assessments are important and supports purposeful and specific best teaching practices”. Diane further explained, “Formative assessment helps to understand the needs of the student and how to move learning forward with instruction” (Participant Diane; Interviews). This statement defines how teachers can better understand where a student is in their learning purposely using formative assessment.

Additionally, throughout the study teachers report using formative assessment data to improve the quality of their instruction so that a student can advance in acquiring knowledge. For example, (Participant Theresa; Focus Group), explained “Formative assessment data tells me where I need to go with my instruction. It prepares me for the next day”. Importantly, one teacher clarified another aspect of the formative assessments, “Formative assessments allow students to make mistakes and learn from them” (Participant Lisa; Focus Group) further explains, how “It is very important that students understand the learning that comes from making mistakes” (Participant Lisa; Focus Group). Robin declared, “If you have never completed a formative assessment, in other words checked in with the students to see where they are in their learning, then you are not teaching” (Participant Robin; Focus Group).

“Together the data and the information from the student, I ask are they getting what they need? I discuss with the students their progress. I also let the

parents know how they can support at home which is challenging especially for the struggling students” (Participant Debora; Interview).

Another teacher explained, “When you have that child who maybe struggling, your job is to create that expectation that is attainable for them! With the use of formative assessments, you can clearly see how to identify their next success” (Participant Jillian; Interview). All teachers provided ways that formative assessments guided their instruction. Understandably, this theme provoked the perceived necessity for using formative assessments. All teachers were very impassioned about reflecting on the data and making adjustments to their instruction. They validated a clear rationale from the data collected using formative assessments and improving on instruction to meet the needs of the students.

### **Whole Group & Small Group Support**

Formative assessments support the teachers in creating small group instruction. One teacher explained, “I like using quick checks with the slates, then I can form my small groups” (Participant Debora; Interview). Additionally, teachers provide opportunities within small group instruction with the use of formative data. Explicitly, Diane expressed, “I use formative assessments as check points to see where every student is in their learning. Then I am able to create my small groups.” (Participant Diane; Interview).

One disadvantage can be when implementing formative assessments teachers described the time it actually takes to complete the assessment is easier if it is completed in whole groups. “It is very time consuming to complete formative assessments. I prefer whole group like using white boards but at this age they all copy off one another” (Participant Diane; Interview). Although several teachers commented on the actual quality of formative assessment done in small groups.

In comparison it is the time it takes to complete individual and small group formative assessment that is a factor to be considered.

### **Literacy Rich Environment**

Conversations throughout the interviews and focus group also discuss their perception of a literacy rich environment. Sharon described a literacy rich environment as, “Student work is visible, books, conversations with students. Including in a literacy rich environment you would see, teacher - student dialogue, which we need to incorporate more of” (Participant Sharon; Interview). Additionally, Diane described this environment as, “books, writing, an environment where it is safe to make mistakes which is supported by the use of formative assessments” (Participant Diane; Interview). In agreement, Deborah described a literacy rich environment as, “Books, lots of anchor charts, learning targets. Targets are visible so that students understand what they are focusing on in their learning including, I can statements providing clear goals identifiable in the classroom” (Participant Deborah; Interview).

Another teacher description included, “Sight words around the room, decodable readers. We build our alphabet wall together for purposeful learning. We have a vowel and consonant wall we built together. All anchor charts and diagram are built together as a class which gives ownership in their learning” (Participant Amanda; Interview).

In addition, Theresa. described an environment as, “A variety of texts fiction and non-fiction. Texts on different cultures, words, letters anchor charts that you make with the students.” “Books in students’ hands! It’s a positive thing when I see a student with a book in their hand and not always on the computer” (Participant Robin; Focus Group).

### **Theme 3. Challenges Implementing Formative Assessment**

The theme of challenges implementing formative assessment is inconclusive of participants' statements regarding their experiences when faced with teacher demands. Having interviewing and conducting a focus group, participants consistently mentioned the challenge with the curriculum pacing. All but one teacher had the same perspective, meaning challenges arise when trying to meet the needs revealed through the formative assessment data and trying to maintain suggested pacing of the syllabus. Diane, voiced that she found no challenges at all (Participant Diane; Interview). All teachers maintain a fidelity to the curriculum but seek out ways to revisit skills determined as necessary by the formative data in order to benefit student learning. Melinda. explains, "I need more time with the curriculum pacing. I do feel the formative assessments help the student to feel more confident in their learning (Participant Melinda; Focus Group). Another teacher agreed, "It is just difficult finding the time" (Participant Sharon; Focus Group).

Formative assessment is done best one on one with the students. One teacher explained, "Especially the young ones tend to have wondering eyes They are always looking around at other student work. You can't control wandering eyes. This leads to a misrepresentation of data of the students who may be copying from a partner nearby" (Participant Diane; Interview). Several teachers responded by describing the variety of needs demonstrated within the small groups. "Some students are struggling to meet the objects while there are some students ready to move on" (Participant Robin; Focus Group). Diane states, "Dividing groups after looking at the formative assessments can be difficult because within each group there are many different needs within the groups of students" (Participant Diane; Interview). "The differences of the high students and low students are there and there is only so much planning time to differentiate the



instruction” (Participant Robin; Focus Group). Theresa mentioned, “I see a lot of variety between the individual students in those groups. I have twenty-five minutes with one group of students and I need to spend time on individual needs” (Participant Theresa; Focus Group). A variety within small groups is a consistent concern among the participants. The challenge between the variety of needs within small groups in literacy determined by formative assessment becomes problematic when there is pacing considerations and the demands of working with more than one student at a time with different academic weaknesses. This will be discussed further in Theme 4. Teacher Ideal Changes.

Teachers also discussed their challenges with specialists and communication of formative assessment results. For instance, Theresa describes “student intervention services are very broken and scripted. I am often observed by teaching and learning department to make sure I am following the guidelines” (Participant Theresa; Focus Group). Robin added, “When working with specialists, we have all the data but we do not have time to talk with each other. They return the student to the classroom but then we never have a discussion. They drop the students off and leave” (Participant Robin; Focus Group). In agreement Theresa stated, “Interventions such as speech, no one is communicating. Data from the formative assessments which determine progress on isolated skills but then there is very little communication between the specialist and the classroom teacher” (Participant Theresa; Focus Group).

### **Issues with Covid**

Frequently throughout the analysis teachers indicated the impact of Covid on their teaching experiences. For Covid has changed many practices in the classroom these past two years. For example, Sharon explained, “We have had a lot of student talk in our instruction but these last two years’ teachers have had to adapt student interactions. Students have not used

vocabulary within engagement of conversation” (Participant Sharon; Interview). Another teacher mention, “Books in hand, writing materials, students working with partners, reading buddies, or just having a conversation with each other has changed” (Participant Diane; Interview). Unfortunately, due to Covid that has all changed. Because of Covid students are missing out on the interaction piece in their learning” (Participant Jillian; Interview). Robin further explained, “I would like more time using formative assessments. I have students but are missing out due to Covid. We can only meet with them for fifteen minutes in small groups instruction. This becomes a problem when grouping, after looking at the formative data and there is a lot of variety within that group.” (Participant Robin; Focus Group). Lisa remarked, “Interestingly, with Covid we did have smaller classroom sizes so it was easier to keep up with the formative assessments.” (Participant Lisa; Focus Group). When comparing Pre-k, Melinda stated, “When it comes to meet the needs of the students in pre-k. it is all about Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs. We are looking at what is going on at home. We are using formative assessments to assess where they are academically, socially and emotionally. Especially during Covid, to understand what is going on at home and are they ready to learn.” (Participant Melinda; Focus Group).

Some teachers expressed the challenge teaching virtually during Covid and having to be creative when using formative assessments. One teacher used Jam Board to interact with students and collect formative data.

Jillian further explained, “Last year being mostly remote with these students, all year we had to use technology to do all of this. We used technology to find ways to make students feel successful. Interaction wasn’t optimal. Virtual impact on some of these students will last for many years. Using assessments virtually was

challenging when parents would come to the meetings.” (Participant Jillian; Interview).

Covid will have an impact on many of our students especially the earlier grades that so far haven’t had a normal school year.

#### **Theme 4. Teachers Ideal Changes**

It was essential to understand the viewpoints from the teacher participants as to what was important even necessary to change to best meet student learning needs. The analysis of data from both the interviews and focus groups defines what teachers perceive as principal changes they would like to see with formative assessment practices. The following describes personal experiences impacting teacher experiences when using formative assessments.

##### **Classroom Sizes**

The premise of classroom sizes was also a prevailing topic in both the interviews and focus group. As simple as having fewer students makes sense, it often goes overlooked as to just how large numbers of students in a classroom can impact teacher instruction and student learning. All teachers agreed that having a smaller number of students would allow more time to build confidence in their learning. Sharon stated “There needs to be a change in classroom enrollment. Classroom sizes are too large (Participant Sharon; Interview). As Torrance (2012) stated in his research, teachers have a perspective where they understand the good in formative assessment practices and the time it takes and much empirical evidence indicates the difficulties teachers face when implementing them effectively and consistently. Teachers in this study have also recognized similar viewpoints. “Think about the kids, smaller classroom sizes and pacing considerations, giving us more time to provide instruction (Participant Deborah; Interview). Melinda, mentioned “I do feel that formative assessments help the students to feel more

confident in their learning as compared to summative which can be a blow to their ego” (Participant Melinda; Focus Group). Robin agreed, “I would like more time for using formative assessments” (Participant Robin; Focus Group). Lisa explained, “The classroom sizes are too large. When completing formative assessments with a large class size then to take the time to evaluate all the data is very time consuming” (Participant Lisa; Focus group). Further, Lisa stated, “I have nineteen kindergarteners in my inclusion class and not enough time to reach all student academic needs” (Participant Lisa; Focus Group). “We need to think about the kids and their needs. Smaller class room sizes would allow a teacher to have more time to provide valuable instruction to their students” (Participant Melinda; Focus Group). Lisa. continued, “Classroom sizes are too large. When completing formative assessments with a large class and taking the time to evaluate the data it is very time consuming. In kindergarten the students here are the ones who need the appropriate instruction the most” (Participant Lisa; Focus Group). All teacher participants described the challenge of having a high number of students posing an issue when trying to meet all the students’ needs with not enough time moving forward with classroom instruction to fully apply data from formative assessment.

### **Pacing of Curriculum**

The curriculum is set to provide pacing of instruction within each grade level for the purpose of meeting all objectives and skills. At the end of each unit teachers are given summative assessments to be administered to all students within a specific timeframe. All teachers had the same perspective that summative assessment is not reflective of student learning and that a greater emphasis should be placed on the formative assessment process.

Melinda (Participant; Focus Group), clarified, “Formative assessments are authentic assessment. Summative assessments are not as telling of where the

students are in their learning. They are not as reflective. I get a better picture of where the student is with formative assessments throughout the unit. Formative assessment allows the student to make mistakes then I can make adjustments in the instruction. Further Melinda added, “Why not give the control of how to assess back to the teacher. Meaning about what to assess and when to assess” (Participant Melinda; Focus Group).

In addition, Robin explained “Yes, teachers should decide when to give their students an assessment. The city mandated testing isn’t real testing. They are not testing what is real learning. The question of summative testing opens up a lot of student misconceptions. Assessment should be driven by student needs only! (Participant Robin; Focus Group), As for city mandated testing, a lot of the time what we are really testing doesn’t match the objectives from our curriculum.” In response Theresa. (Participant; Focus Group), specified, “With my small groups I find the pacing of the curriculum to be too fast paced. In comparison to city mandated testing, formative assessment is absolutely more valuable when it comes to student learning!” “I would like to see more resources on a true model of formative assessment. Give us examples of a gifted student, a middle student, and a student that may need intervention” (Participant Robin; Focus Group).

The four themes; Valued Formative Assessment Techniques, Guidance of Instruction, Challenges Implementing Formative Assessment, and Teacher Ideal Changes all express the participants’ viewpoints on formative assessments in a literacy context. The theme Valued Formative Assessment Techniques allowed the participants to provide descriptions of what works in their classroom. Further to explain which techniques they believe are significantly supportive of their students learning. This leads to the theme Guidance of Instruction which

evolved through the analysis. Participants continually addressed how formative assessment data was central to their teaching. The use of the data was described as influential in their preparation of classroom instruction. Participants had many concerns of what they perceived as challenges therefore it was significant that the theme Challenges Implementing Formative Assessments be addressed. As portrayed through the analysis participants had very similar challenges using formative assessment, classroom sizes, curriculum pacing, and issues with Covid determined to be significant challenges. Lastly, Teacher Ideal Changes focused on participants' discussion of changes that would support their use of formative assessment in the classroom. All participants believe in the value of using formative assessments but justify areas that need improvement. Therefore, this study intends to conclude aims for future research to address these areas for the purpose of supporting student learning in the classroom

### **Conclusion**

Chapter four postulated a descriptive analysis about the themes and sub themes on the importance of using formative assessments to support student learning. All teachers participating in the study justified their beliefs in the process of formative assessment to support the goal of positively improving learning for all students. Perspectives from the teachers on the experiences and challenges were instructive and provided much discussion for future research. The following chapter will discuss findings, explain the limitations of the study, and the implications of the findings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

In chapter five it is my intention to discuss and review my findings. An overview will summarize key findings of the data collection focusing on implementation of formative assessment practices in an early elementary classroom. This chapter will also discuss limitations and implications for further research on formative assessment practices.

One of the greatest impacts on studying assessments in recent years has been the shift towards the relationship between assessment and classroom learning and away from restrictive form of tests, (Black & Wiliam, 1998). All teacher participants had the same perspective that formative assessments were authentic and summative assessments were not providing an accurate description of student learning. This research intends to allow teacher participants the opportunity to reveal their perspectives on the use of classroom formative assessments to influence student learning and provide insights for future research.

This study's intentions were to pursue a descriptive account of teachers' perspectives of formative assessment. Therefore, data was collected with an open ended survey, interviews, and a focus group interview session in order to support a triangulation of data. The open-ended survey was given to nine participants with the purpose of collecting information prior to the interviews and focus group. This information was used to effectively construct questioning prompts asked during the interviews and focus group session. The interviews were conducted with five of the teacher participants while four different participants were selected for the focus group. To begin the analysis, I read and reread in order to develop a set of precodes. Reading and rereading carefully reviewing data before and as coding them themes emerge from analysis (Saldana, 2016). Next, the use of NVivo software allowed the researcher to use word-count

queries and source code data as a tool to develop selective codes from the data. In analyzing the depth of the data in support of categorizing and organizing the four themes transpired. As defined by the data triangulation the following four themes were defined: Theme 1. Challenges Implementing Formative Assessment, Theme 2. Changes Teachers Would Make When Using Formative Assessment, Theme 3. Formative Assessment Strategies, and Theme 4. Guidance of Instruction.

### Findings Related to Research Questions

Formative assessment practice is a powerful instructional process because the practice of sharing assessment information supports learning as it is embedded into the instructional process by design (Clark, 2015). Findings from this study indicate teacher participants perceived the practice of using formative assessments as necessary when promoting best instructional practices. The table below shows how the sources are connected to the studies research questions. Further the table displays the outcome of themes and subthemes from the analysis.

**Table 8. Description of Sources, Correlating Research Question and Themes**

*The following table illustrates the relationship between data sources, themes, and research questions.*

Source	Research Question	Theme	Subtheme
Open Ended Survey, Interview, and Focus Group	How do primary grade teachers describe the relationship between formative assessment and literacy learning in their classroom practice?	Valued Formatives Assessment Techniques	Dialogue as formative assessment
			Positive feedback
			Building student confidence
		Guidance of Instruction	Student Success
			Whole group and Small group instruction



			Literacy Rich Environment
Interview and Focus Group	What challenges and benefits, if any, do primary grade educators experience when implementing formative assessments for the purpose of informing pedagogical literacy practices?	Challenges with Formative Assessment	Variety of learning levels Pacing of curriculum Classroom sizes Issues due to Covid
Interview and Focus Group	What institutional and professional supports do primary grade educators identify as beneficial to promoting and valuing the use of literacy-based formative assessment data in planning classroom instruction?	Teacher Ideal Changes	Pacing of curriculum Classroom sizes

### **Relationship Between Formative Assessment and Literacy Learning**

The first research question asked, how do primary grade teachers describe the relationship between formative assessment and literacy learning in their classroom practice. Formative assessment data has been identified as useful in helping teachers plan for future instruction (Clark 2015; Darling-Hammond 2010; Trumbull and Lash 2013). As in this present study all participants described how evaluation and reflection of formative assessments drove their instruction on a daily basis. Importantly, teacher engagement in reflection grounded in formative assessment data has been shown to influence student learning (Dorn 2010; Missett et al., 2014). In the present study participants explained the importance reflection when designing productive learning tasks and activities. Similarly, perceptions were discussed by Dorn 2010 & Missett et al., 2014 describing the importance of the willingness of teachers to examine and ask questions about their personal instruction on a

daily basis focusing on the meaningful relationship between a student and their learning is central to positive learning opportunities. As each participant in this study described, data collected from the assessments gave them insights on improvement of instructional designs and individual learning processes. This study reveals a common perspective of participants on the importance of using formative assessment to improve their instructional alignment to the students' needs leading to the highest standard of educational achievement. This study captures how all participants perceive the significant value of formative assessment and the confidence of choosing which strategies works best for the student. As Xiang et al. (2020) explained such important examining factors have an impact on teacher practices with formative assessment. In other words, the teachers' self-efficacy and the use of such practices is of valued importance which has an impact on teacher performance (Hoy, 2000; Xiang, 2020). Further Pajares (1992) refers to the importance of understanding teacher perspectives and that teacher candidates should be a focus of educational research.

In this present study, teacher participants noted that it was most effective to engage in one on one formative assessment data gathering with a student. Although all participants use formative assessments during small group and whole group instruction. Participants in this study conclusively articulated the data collected one on one provided authentic accurate data especially when evaluating student reading skills including self-correcting and comprehension of text. Similarly, this study aligns with the concept of previous research, meaning teachers utilize data to provide feedback in relation to their perception of how they can influence a student's learning (Schunk, 2016). Teachers in this study described how professional practices using formative assessment data to be influential specifically when focusing on student reading objectives.

Data analysis revealed several key formative assessment techniques found to be valuable

to participants. Notably, during read alouds, checklists or running records were noted as best for fostering an accurate documentation. In addition, audio recordings were seen as useful in helping to support student's own evaluation of their skills and could then be used to foster meaningful goal setting. Participants in this study frequently used white boards to collect immediate feedback throughout whole group and small group instruction. When evaluating student writing skills, several participants routinely use writing journals to collect data and moderate lessons. Similarly, as in Miller and Lavin's study (2007), this present study illuminated findings of the awareness of an understanding into student's experiences with formative assessment including the investigation between a teachers beliefs influencing the number and type of strategies used.

### **Student Success and Feedback**

Teachers in this study perceived the use of dialogue as significant when providing formative feedback as an effective contributor when redirecting students and leading them to obtain educational goals. Teachers also addressed the concept of positive dialogue between teacher and student when eliciting feedback. In Wolf and Gearhart's (1994) study attention was drawn to the lack of guidance during a language arts lesson and specifically highlighted that teachers in their study did not want to be too critical of the students' performance. Interestingly, participants in this study explained, when having a conversation with a student it is important to focus on student's strengths influencing how the student identifies with the feedback. Such as in Fletcher and Shaw's study (2012), which discussed the key elements of formative assessment allowing students and teachers to engage in discourse while reflecting on the curriculum objectives throughout a literacy lesson is significant. One teacher in this study stated, "My students haven't had a lot of successes. I feel it is really important they feel successful. They

need to hear their strengths” (Participant Jillian; Interview). Several participants referred to the enthusiasm they openly express when a student reaches a goal or even minor accomplishment. The participants perception was to build the successes of the student which leads an increase in the students confidence as a successful learner. In addition, another participant explained, “Make sure you choose your words wisely”. The impact of how you provide the feedback is very powerful. No longer should teachers say “Good job” without demonstrating evidence of what the student is doing well. This indicates the teacher perception on the reflection of student understanding and student internalizing feedback. As in this study, teachers described the necessity to choose words carefully so that quality learning is not negatively impacted.

The participants in this study referred to numerous ways formative assessment leads to student success in the classroom and obtaining student goals. Teachers also described the formative assessment framework not only demonstrates academic success in the present but students are given tools they will need to be successful using feedback increasing their self-esteem in future challenges. Pino-Pasternak, Basilio, & Whitehead (2014) concluded in their study teachers were encouraging students to participate and share ideas in order to overcome communication struggles leading to positive learning outcomes. In addition, regardless of the merits a good teacher should always find something positive to say (Pajares & Bengston, 1995). As teachers shared how they expressed enthusiasm contributing to the overall well-being and accomplishment of each student. In fact, the most important thing a teacher could do is be encouraging and to respond positively to the students’ effort (Pajares & Bengston, 1995).

Several of the teachers used student journals. This was important when evaluating student writing. The journals allowed informal observations of student skills during writing lessons.

They felt the formative data collected from the journals was authentic assessment which can then be shared with the student to clarify learning intentions. Teachers also described the use of slates when collecting data. Using slates as an informal way of collecting data from whole group and small group when needed, provides immediate attention on the development of skills within a unit of instruction. In literacy, teachers described slates as a way to take an informative check on sight words, PALs features, and phonics lessons. This leads into the next research question as to the challenges of formative assessment.

### **Teacher Challenges using Formative Assessments**

The second research question leads teachers to illuminate what challenges and benefits, if any, do primary grade educators experience when implementing formative assessments for the purpose of informing pedagogical literacy practices. The teacher participants perceived challenges to be the class room sizes, Lisa (Participant; Focus Group), explained, “The classroom sizes are too large. When completing formative assessment with a large class size and taking the time to evaluate all the data is very time consuming.” Most teachers voiced the time it would take to implement the formative assessments and analyze the data along with providing feedback to be overwhelming. Although as useful as the data is, they felt that the pacing of the curriculum and the number of students played a challenge of formative assessments. Several teachers also emphasized using formative data to create their small groups but challenges arise when notably there is developmental variety of student abilities within each group. Therefore, teachers expressed needing more time to support individual student needs after determining their personal areas of weakness was a challenge. Previous research suggested the same as teachers’ pedagogical decision-making and the challenges they face in developing their own practice impacting the students’ learning approaches and attitudes. As RinDone & MacQuarrie (2010)

stated, formative assessment is about good teaching than creating assessments it is about using assessment strategies to guide instruction and support learning. The formative assessment process is intended to yield information about student learning so that the information can support teachers to shape instruction to meet the students' needs and that students can use to better understand and advance their learning (Trumball & Lash, 2013). Similarly, the teachers in this present study discussed formative assessment as a powerful tool supporting their classroom instruction. The data collected during formative assessment allows each teacher to better meet student needs. Therefore, this study has identified ways we can increase student learning by allowing teachers appropriate pacing, and classroom sizes. With this understanding teachers have reached a perspective where they understand the necessity in developing and implementing formative assessments but empirical evidence indicates it is difficult to implement effectively and consistently (Torrance, 2012) still holds true today. Next this study aimed to identify teacher perspectives on institutional and professional supports promoting the value of formative assessment.

### **Teacher Support Using Formative Assessment**

Thirdly, research focused on the institutional and professional supports primary grade educators identify as beneficial to promoting and valuing the use of literacy-based formative assessment data in planning classroom instruction. Formative assessment is defined by its purposefulness which is to help form, or shape, a students' learning during the educational process (Trumball & Lash, 2013). As in this study teachers identify the supports that are in place which promote the use of literacy based formative assessment within instructional practices. Teacher participants identified specific approaches to the use of formative assessment. Explicitly participants described strategies such as notetaking, positive feedback, white boards,

and recording as formative data collection practices. Some of the teachers were creating their own templates that worked specifically during language arts small group instruction. Previous research illustrated attention lacking guidance for literacy assessment and inconsistencies in curriculum alignment (Erikson, et al. 2018; De Lange, Winberg, & Dippenaar, 2020). Such is the case with this study as participants voiced their concerns about a need for a purposeful formative assessment model for classroom practices. Further participants mentioned the need for authority to make decisions throughout instruction as to when to implement formative assessments including which assessment will support their student. Therefore, as uniformed as the curriculum is among grade levels all teacher participants felt validated when using their personal judgments to create instructional changes meeting all student needs.

Findings from this study reinforce the concept of formative assessment purposely determining how to best provide classroom instruction. Classroom developments have seen the implementation of an interactive style of teaching and learning using formative assessment practices (Clark, 2015). All teacher participants discussed the role of formative assessment in guiding their instruction and supporting reflection of their instruction affording the opportunity to make important instructional changes throughout their lessons. Their perceptions disclosed that with formative assessment pivotal moments reveal how changes in classroom instruction can better meet student needs.

As teachers in this study discussed, formative assessment practices benefit student learning. Teachers revealed valued perceptions and strategies they viewed as successful. The themes valued formative assessments and guidance of instruction determined teachers intensely believe that you are not successfully teaching the students unless you are implementing formative assessments. For reasons such as, data from formative assessment

drives classroom instruction and the students are better supported when you have a deeper understanding of where they are in their learning.

### **Research Limitations**

The current study should be considered within its context of limitations. In this study, I served as the principal investigator collecting and analyzing all data but I was also colleagues with the participants. This research was conducted by a colleague which may have impact on the validity of the data gathered. The interviewee may answer questions differently knowing that all participants and researcher work in the same school. I also found that I have a trusting and positive relationship with all participants therefore they were willing to participate and be open about their experiences. Therefore, it was very important that I continued member checking throughout the analysis to validate the results of the data. I continued providing written documentation allowing time for the participant to review prior to finalizing the outcomes. Another limitation could be the sample size. A larger sample size and another school district would allow multiple perspectives from multiple schools. Participants consisted of nine elementary school teachers. Although the data from the interviews and focus group provided a rich description of the teachers' perceptions the case study included a small sample size.

This study did use multiple grade levels and a variety of expertise in the field. Participant's number of years teaching provided a wide span of perspectives on the evolution of formative assessment practices. The data could be influenced by variables such as school climate, school culture or current events. In order to counter this limitation, member checking was used during data collection, and throughout analysis providing participants multiple opportunities to offer additional feedback or propose modifications.



### **Implications for Future Research**

The outcomes of this study suggests the following implications concerning formative assessment practices and the perspectives of teachers in early education. This study concluded the focus on formative assessment practice has become more purposeful within the last fifteen years. As several teacher participants have experienced this evolution themselves having taught for more than twenty-five years. Their perceptions provided a valid account of where we are headed and the needs to better support our students.

### **Implications for Teacher Education Programs**

In the future, Professional Development programs for teachers should focus on teacher control of formative assessment practices. Programs could provide teachers with clear understandings and guidelines as to such practices. Research needs to be extended to evaluate teacher perspectives regarding using formative assessment practices including the analysis of data and applying appropriate feedback to students in grades Pre K through first. As mentioned, included in the Teaching and Learning International Survey (2009), suggested teacher professional development may influence teacher beliefs and perspectives but there is little research specific to certain areas in education (OECD, 2009). Therefore, this study's design offered teachers an opportunity to explain a variety of components in relation to their classroom practices.

This study revealed teachers have a deep understanding of how to use formative assessment practices as compared to summative assessments when providing opportunities for increased student learning. Participants in this study continually are using formative practices in order to modify instruction to meeting their students' needs. They explained in detail their perspectives on how formative assessments contribute to the success of their students on a daily

basis. Based on this study's findings more attention on feedback delivery to the students and what is best to move students forward in the learning process needs to be evaluated.

Understanding the teacher perspective will support identifying gaps between teacher perspectives on formative assessment and classroom practices. With this understanding school districts can support teachers by providing the necessary teacher education programs to move forward successfully.

### **Implications for Classroom Educators**

Teachers in this study have expressed challenges that are impeding on the successful use of formative assessment practices. Most importantly is how to support teachers so that they are using formative assessments to continually provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their level of understanding throughout the learning process. The present study identifies primary teachers' perspective on challenges they face when using formative assessments and data such as classroom sizes, curriculum pacing, and with the data, providing equity for all students. We need to better understand teacher perspectives so that we may support teachers' classroom practices and the impact on student outcomes in an early elementary classroom literacy context. This study allowed teachers to voice their beliefs about what is happening in their classrooms. They have all stated positive experiences using formative assessments that are working successfully with their students. Further research could emphasize how to understand teacher decision-making when connecting formative data to student feedback encouraging positive learning experiences. These progressions through learning will allow schools to better provide quality instruction for our students.

Secondly, the majority of the research on formative assessment has been in the upper grade levels. School districts need to understand the impact of formative assessment on early

elementary grades including both teachers and student performance. Formative assessment practices support closing the gaps in student learning on all grade levels. The earlier school years are the building blocks for a student's future education. In other words, it is important teachers construct a well-developed foundation for future learning. This study has proven formative assessments as a powerful tool in accomplishing this educational goal.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion this study contributes to the area of research in early childhood education and the perspective of teachers on formative assessment practices. The findings from this qualitative study revealed teachers believe their instruction better meet students' needs with the use of data collected from the formative assessment. Teachers all have various structures and strategies that provide a unique opportunity for student success.

#### **Contributions of This Study.**

This study provides insights that teacher beliefs are related to positive student instructional experiences. Data collected through this study provides an understanding to the challenges teachers are faced with on a daily basis when using formative assessments. By providing an understanding of these challenges we can begin to collaborate to better understand and work through these challenges in order to support our teachers. Discussed earlier in their study, Eriksson, et al., (2018) on alignment and purpose of formative assessment, findings showed their conclusions recognized a need for defined terms within the assessment platform. Such inconsistencies were also discussed in this current study among teacher participants. Therefore, demonstrating a need to continue researching teacher perspectives on using formative assessment. Findings from this study will support our school systems, educational institutions

and teachers who desire to create a positive authentic learning experience for all learners in early education.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Consent to Participate in Research

#### **Teacher Perspectives on Formative Assessment within a Primary Classroom**

Researcher: Dawn MacDonald

Department: Darden College of Education

Faculty Advisor- Dr. Angela Eckhoff, Old Dominion University

Dear Teacher,

My Name is Dawn MacDonald and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University and a first grade teacher at Three Oaks Elementary in Virginia Beach City Public schools. You are being invited to take part in a research study about teachers' beliefs and use of formative assessments in the primary classroom. As a requirement for my dissertation and part of my qualitative research study on formative assessments in a primary classroom, I am asking for volunteers to participate in open-ended surveys, interviews and focus groups. As I understand the demands of educators, I hope you can find the time to participate. Your time will be valuable for future research on the implementations of formative assessments and the support of our students.

Participating in this study will include:

A virtual interview that should last no more than 45 minutes and that will be conducted at a time of your convenience. Prior to this conversation, I will submit the interview questions to you and so that you might review them. This conversation may be recorded by a tape recorder, and I will also be taking written notes. Follow up meeting may occur which will allow me to check for accuracy of my notes and to ask any follow up questions or clarifications.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study at any time. If you agree to participate in this study, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and school will not appear in the study. Your stories will be referenced by a fictitious name. Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study prior to participating or while the research is taking place. I will be delighted to share the results with you at the completion of the study. Guaranteeing the confidentiality of data is custom in research. Your name or school name will not be used in the dissertation dissemination process; rather it will only be known to the researcher. Code names will be used for participants (i.e. Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and so on) and general expressions will be used in reporting results (i.e. "Five of the teachers commented...;" "Two teachers reported that...;").

There are no known risks/discomforts associated with participating in this study. There are several expected benefits from participating in this study. They are: 1) information on the experiences of educators who have become successful with the use of your formative assessments 2) a better understanding of the impact of formative assessment practices on students in a language arts context; and 3) the student outcomes as a result of utilizing formative assessments.



A signed copy of this consent form will be given to you for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Consent obtained by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer/Student Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please contact me by replying by email to [dmmacdon@vbschools.com](mailto:dmmacdon@vbschools.com) Feel free to contact me by phone at (757) 748-4837.

Sincerely,

Dawn MacDonald

## Appendix B

## Teacher Open-ended Survey

Directions: Teachers, please respond to each question by providing your perspectives on the following. Remember there are no wrong answers but please take your time when answering each question.

1. Have you used formative assessments in your language arts instruction?
2. Can you provide an example and or artifact of how you have used formative assessments in your language arts instruction?

Response 1.
Response 2.

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

#### Interview Protocol

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location/Technology Used for Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher Introduction:** I want to thank you for taking time out of your schedule to meet with me today. I will be recording and transcribing verbatim our conversation. So that I may accurately provide you a voice and represent your experiences I will be asking you to read my transcriptions and notes that I make during my interpretations. My interest is in examining teachers' beliefs and perspectives on the implementation of formative assessments in a primary classroom within a language arts context. There may be a need for me to ask additional questions to clarify our discussion. Most importantly, I am interested in your perspectives, please feel free to discuss your experiences and viewpoints. You may ask questions at any time.

#### Questions:

1. What grade do you teach? How many years have you been teaching?
2. How do you use formative assessments in your classroom?
3. After collecting the data from the formative assessment how do you provide student feedback?
4. What challenges arise when using formative assessments to analyze student progress?
5. Can you describe examples of formative assessment feedback you have used with your students?
6. What changes if any would support you when using formative assessments?
7. What are your beliefs about student formative assessments used to impact student achievement in a language arts context?
8. How do you use formative assessments to make a student feel successful?
9. Describe the relationship between the use of formative assessments and student outcomes.
10. How do you select assignments for your students and how do you select the formative assessment for each assignment?
11. What does a literacy rich classroom environment mean to you? How does this include using formative assessments in language arts?
12. How would you persuade or not persuade a teacher to use formative assessments in a language arts context?
13. In your experience, how has the use of formative assessments and student feedback impacted your instruction?
14. How do your students respond to feedback from formative assessments in a language arts context?
15. In what ways do formative assessment strategies support student learning in language ar



## Focus Group Protocol

Location:

Subjects:

Date:

Time start:

Time End:

Research Question:

Researcher Introduction:

Location Description/ Technology Used:

## Participant Quotes

*	Each symbol will be for a different participating teacher
-	

## Post/ Notes


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Questions:

1. How would you describe formative assessment practices in relation to literacy best practices in teaching and learning?
2. How do formative assessment practices support your reading and comprehension instruction?
3. How do formative assessment practices support your writing instruction?
4. When using formative assessment in a literacy context do you feel you are where you want to be in terms of meeting student needs?
5. What aspects of the implementation of formative assessment presents the biggest challenge?
6. If you could ask our professional support teams ways in which teachers' formative assessment practices could be better reinforced, what would you request? Why?

Notes:

Reflection:

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## Appendix E

**NVivo: Codebook Open Ended Survey, Interviews, and Focus Group**

Dissertation 2022

**NODES**

Name	Description	Files	References
Challenges		1	28
Changes You Would Make		1	17
Dialogue as Formative Feedback		1	7
Valued Formative Assessment Strategies		1	14
Guidance of instruction		1	30
Issues with Covid		1	10
Literacy Rich Environment		1	5
Positive Feedback Importance		1	12
Small Group Support		1	5
Student Success		1	32

## VITA

Dawn M. MacDonald  
Department of Education  
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia

1987	B.S.B.A. School of Management, Suffolk University
2006	M.S. Ed. Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia
2006-2022	Three Oaks Elementary School, Virginia Beach First Grade Teacher
2022- Present	Three Oaks Elementary School, Virginia Beach Kindergarten Teacher
April 2018- Present	VBEA Organization
2018, 2015, 2014, 2009	Virginia Beach Reading Council
September 2009- June 2011	Program Council
February 2014- May 2015	Fourth Grade SOL Tutor
2020-2021	Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow

## FIELD OF STUDY

Early Childhood Education, Teacher Experiences, Early Childhood Education and Curriculum  
Instruction