

An Exploration of Teacher and Student Perceptions of Classroom Assessment

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Education

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Abstract

My study explores a teacher's intentions for and students' perceptions of formative assessment practices enacted within the classroom. Adopting a constructivist epistemology (Merriam, 2009) to explore how interactions impact the learning environment, I use the relativist ontology (Reason, 1994) to examine how different individuals experience the same assessment interactions differently due to their unique perspectives. A qualitative case study methodology allows me to simultaneously explore varying understandings of, intentions with, reactions to, and perspectives on assessment practices in one teacher's classroom through the use of a wide range of data collection techniques. Using the *story model* as my framework, I offer a discussion of Ontario's current educational context in order to highlight implications for theory, make recommendations for further study, and highlight how findings from this study may be taken into consideration for further curriculum reform.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the many support systems I have in my life: my family, my friends, and my teachers.

Thank you to my supervisor, Susan Drake, for being the inspiration you are. The advice you provided and the confidence you instilled within me has helped me to grow as both an educator and as a person. Your passion for teaching and your dedication to helping others learn is truly contagious! To Vera Woloshyn, thank you for your support and interest throughout this entire process. Without our discussions, my project would not have realized its full potential. And to Michael Savage, thank you for all of the insights you've offered. Your feedback helped to shape my thinking in ways that had influential bearing on my interactions with students.

To Brooke (you know who you are!):, I am a better teacher for having had the opportunity to watch and learn from how you create a caring classroom culture. Thank you for welcoming me into your classroom! To the student-participants and students in participating classes, I hope you continue to realize the importance of your voice. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of sharing the many valuable ideas you have to offer about your experiences with assessment.

As I complete this degree, I look back on my life and realize that my family members were my original teachers, the ones who instilled within me a love for learning, and the ones who taught me that everyone's voice matters. To my Mom and Dad, thank you for being my number one supporters in every decision I make and every challenge I take on. Without your love and support, I would not be the person I am today. To my extended family and friends, I thank you all for every bit of support you have provided

over the past three years. Each laugh, coffee break, encouraging word, and celebration of milestones has given me the energy to complete this project.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Tables.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
Theoretical Framework: Story Model.....	2
Background of the Problem: Influences of The Old Story.....	3
Statement of the Problem in Context: The Emerging New Story.....	5
Importance of Teacher Perspective in this Study.....	6
Importance of Student Voice in Research.....	7
Scope and Limitations.....	9
Meeting My Limitations and Biases.....	11
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	13
Implications.....	14
Outline of the Remainder of the Document.....	16
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	18
Story Model.....	18
Formative Assessment Theory: Defining Formative Assessment.....	20
Fairness, Reliability, and Validity.....	24
Consistency in Assessment Form and Purpose.....	27
History of Assessment: The Old Story.....	30
Assessment <i>for</i> and <i>as</i> Learning: The New Story.....	34
Ontario’s Assessment Context: Purpose Beyond Learning Outcomes.....	36
Literature in Context: Student vs. Teacher Perspectives.....	38
Summary.....	44
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES.....	45
Qualitative Characteristics.....	45
Case Study.....	47
Pilot Interview.....	49
Recruitment.....	51
Participants.....	53
Feedback.....	59
Confidentiality.....	60
Instrumentation.....	62
Methods for Data Collection.....	63
Data Processing and Analysis.....	71
Establishing Credibility.....	73
Ethical Considerations: Gaining Access (REB Approval).....	79
Entering the Field.....	81
Researcher Influence.....	82
Reciprocity.....	85

Exiting the Field.....	86
Summary.....	87
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS.....	89
Findings.....	90
Conclusions.....	132
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS...135	
Summary of the Study.....	135
Discussion.....	137
Implications for Practice.....	149
Implications for Theory.....	153
Implications for Further Research.....	156
Final Word.....	158
References.....	162

List of Tables

Table	Page
3.1 Themes and Codes Chart.....	72
3.2 Themes and Research Questions Chart.....	73

List of Figures

Figure	Page
1.1 Visualization of the Story Model.....	3
4.1 Teacher Versus Student Perceptions of Assessment Purpose and Benefits.....	111
4.2 Simple Diagram for Increased Academic Success from Assessment.....	132
4.3 Diagram for Ideal Teacher <i>and</i> Student Understanding.....	133
of Formative Assessment	
5.1 Impacts on Classroom Culture.....	150
5.2 New Proposed Teacher <i>and</i> Student Assessment Reflection Model.....	152

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study explores a teacher's intentions for and students' perceptions of formative assessment during a time of *transformation*¹ in the field of education. Much of the available research conducted about formative assessment was conducted under the practices associated with the behaviourist paradigm (Shepard, 2000). The recent shift that has occurred in education however, or the *new story* (Drake, Reid, & Kolohon, 2014), means that there are now influences from both the traditional behaviourist and constructivist paradigms within practices and policies in education. Each paradigm has its own unique understanding of learning; therefore, there is a need for new research of formative assessment practices that interrogates both the behaviourist and constructivist understandings of teaching and learning. As the constructivist paradigm understands students' learning and development to be constructed "within a social context," (Shepard, 2000, p. 8) and "shaped and advanced by interactions with others" (DeLuca, Klinger, Pyper, & Woods, 2015), researchers are now compelled to step into the classroom and study how formative assessment practices are carried out and perceived by teachers, and also how formative assessment practices are received by students, within the context of the learning environment. Engaging students in conversations about formative assessment has the potential to provide teachers with insight and valuable information about why they have – or have not – found success with formative assessment strategies. Furthermore, asking students to share their perceptions and discuss their experiences with formative assessment may further students' knowledge of the purpose of these

¹ *Transformation* is a term used by Nieto (1994) to describe a mentality shift that can be witnessed in students, teachers, administrators, and parents following education policy reform.

assessment practices, and also show students that there is concrete value in their opinions of classroom practices.

Theoretical Framework: Story Model

This study is influenced by the *story model*, a theory that presents a framework for understanding the process of change “from the personal to the social, cultural, global, and universal” (Drake et al., 2014, p. x). Drake et al. (2014) explain that there are four key features in the story model. The first key feature is that there is always a new story emerging as the world continues to evolve. Secondly, parts of the old story remain relevant as the new story emerges, but some parts of the old story become dysfunctional, incompatible, or irrelevant within the new story that is unfolding. The third element in the story model is that as the new story emerges alongside the old story, the relationship between old and new stories becomes *dialectical*, meaning that practices move back and forth between the old story and the new story until these practices are reconciled into the new accepted “norm” (Drake et al., 2014, p. x). Finally, the fourth – and arguably most important – element of the story model is that a new story can be created purposefully by a group of people adopting new practices based on their knowledge, values, and beliefs. Within this study, the story model will highlight how one teacher’s decisions to integrate formative assessment into her teaching practices may serve to facilitate and enact the positive changes that she sees occurring in Ontario’s assessment policies. My exploration of this teacher’s practices and students’ reactions to these practices, as well as sharing my results, are actions I am also using as a researcher to push forward positive changes that I see emerging in the new story of assessment in Ontario.

Within the story of assessment, the old story adopts a behaviourist approach, whereas the new story is more heavily influenced by a constructivist approach to assessment. Figure 1.1 provides a visual of the elements of the story model.

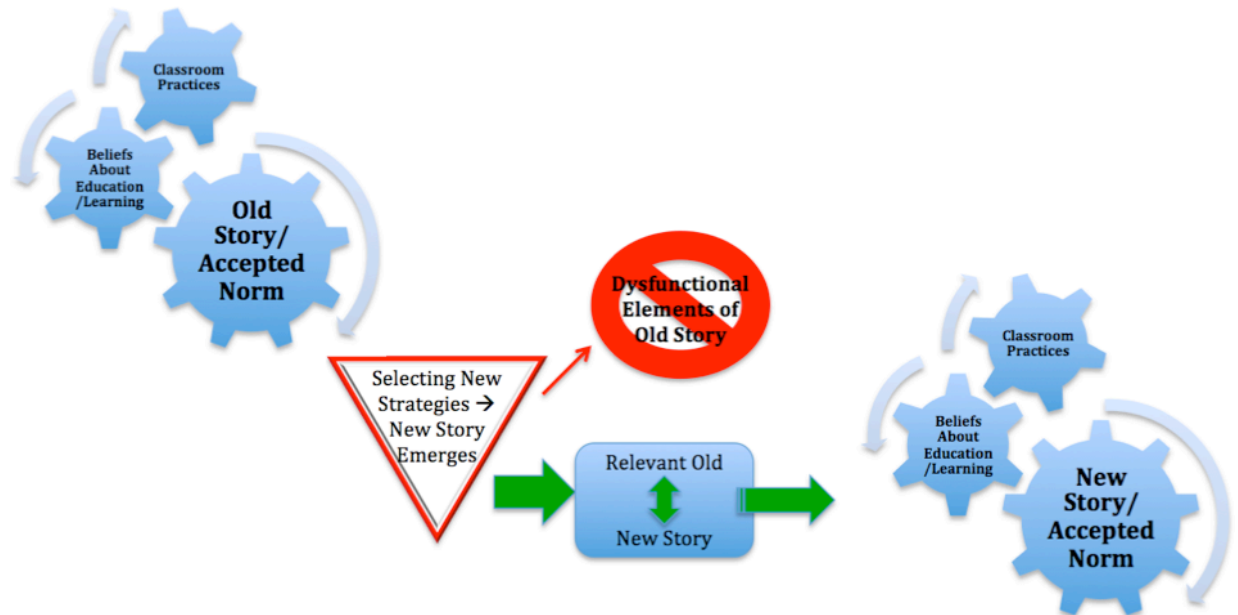


Figure 1.1. Visualization of the Story Model.

The first and last images in Figure 1.1 illustrate how beliefs about education and learning influence classroom practices, and together, work to form the current story in education. The middle image illustrates the action steps that lead to a transition from the old story towards a new, emerging story. These action steps, which lead to change, illustrate how important it is that teachers consciously choose assessment practices that communicate the values of the new story of assessment.

Background of the Problem: Influences of the Old Story

The predominant understanding of learning and knowledge within the field of education has shifted back and forth between the traditional behaviourist and the constructivist paradigms (Drake et al., 2014; Shepard, 2000). The old story in education

viewed these two paradigms as mutually exclusive, and often times, at odds with the practices being used. Within the traditional approach, learning is viewed as a stimulus response, and actions are understood under the behaviourist paradigm where humans respond to positive and negative reinforcement (Skinner, 1954). In the old story, evaluation is the traditional form of assessment, where students are assessed on their ability to demonstrate their learning at the end of a unit of study (Earl, 2003). Teachers were viewed as experts, and students as passive learners (Drake et al., 2014). In the old story, assessment is primarily used to test students' knowledge and/or skills at a particular point in time, where positive or negative reinforcement often came in the form of grades.

In contrast to evaluation that comes at the end of a unit of study, *formative assessment* is assessment carried out by teachers and students throughout classroom learning. It involves continual checks for learning, guidance for next steps, and increases both student and teacher awareness of learning progress. Butler (1988) found that few studies offer in-depth descriptions of teachers' formative assessment practices in the classroom setting over time. More recently, Shepard (2000) found that previous research carried out on formative assessment aligned with the old story in education, as it was conducted under behaviourist assumptions; for instance, there are "hundreds of studies on feedback but nearly all of them [have] instruction [that] is of short duration, posttests closely resemble pretests, feedback is in the form of being told the correct answer and so forth" (p. 12). With the paradigm shift that has occurred in the education field, previous research of formative assessment carried out using traditional behaviourist assumptions proves to be less relevant within the current educational context. As argued by Shepard (2000), "to develop effective practices based on constructivist perspectives, it will

become important to conduct studies in classrooms where instruction and assessment strategies are consonant with the model” (p. 12). New studies are thus needed to reflect the paradigms currently present in the field of education in order to produce information that is more relevant to the best practices and policies presently used in Ontario’s education system.

Statement of the Problem in Context: The Emerging New Story

The new story in education has a *both/and philosophy* that borrows from the principles underpinning both the traditional approach as well as the constructivist approach. While behaviourist theories view learning as a stimulus response action (Skinner, 1954), constructivist theory leverages a more complex understanding of learning and development. The constructivist approach views learning as a social interaction that leads to student development (DeLuca et al., 2015; Drake et al., 2014; Shepard, 2000). Social collaborations between teacher and students, and likewise, students with their peers, are seen to have a great impact on student learning within this theory. Rather than assessment being used only as a measure of skills at the end of a unit of teaching, formative assessment is now, within the constructivist approach, interwoven throughout the teaching process to gather information used to further student-learning progress (Drake et al., 2014; Earl, 2003). While behaviourist and constructivist theories both influence the current policies and practices in education, the move towards a greater use of formative assessment practices within the new story of education is aligned with the school of thought associated with the constructivist paradigm. One such policy in Ontario is the *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* policy document, which mandates that teachers must collect evidence of student

achievement “over time from three different sources – *observations, conversations, and student products*” (Ministry of Education, 2010, 39). Use of Assessment *for* Learning (formative assessment), in addition to Assessment *of* Learning (formal evaluation), and taking classroom interactions and observations of student performance into consideration when evaluating students, is now mandatory throughout Ontario schools.

As constructivist theory puts forward the idea that student learning occurs “through interactions with their teachers and peers” (Drake et al., 2014, p. xiii), it becomes important to examine teachers’ intentions with their assessment designs, as well as students’ reactions to these assessment practices. Furthermore, the constructivist belief that student learning and development is constructed “within a social context” (Shepard, 2000, p. 8) makes it ever more imperative that research turns its focus to understanding how formative assessment practices are enacted by teachers, and furthermore, how they are understood and perceived by students *within* the context of the classroom.

Importance of Teacher Perspective in This Study

It is important that teachers have clear intentions in mind when designing assessments. In turn, it is equally important that researchers explore the alignment – or misalignment – between teacher intentions and students’ reception of formative assessment practices. Research that discovers that there is alignment is equally as important as research that uncovers a misalignment between teacher intentions and students’ perceptions of formative assessment practices. A realization that there is alignment between teachers’ and students’ views of assessment can help teachers to re-examine their approach to engaging students as *co-conspirators* in the learning process (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992). A realization that there is misalignment between

teacher intentions and student perceptions of assessment can also help raise future questions surrounding the reasoning for this misalignment, and can promote an examination of assessment policies to question what might cause students to perceive assessment differently than their teachers. Without a discussion of all three elements – the teacher’s voice, students’ voices, and observations of assessment practices as enacted in the classroom – vital components of the interrelated process of assessment within the classroom dynamic would be missing.

A teacher’s beliefs about knowledge and learning impact his/her assessment strategies (Black & Wiliam, 2010; Brown, Harris, & Harnett, 2012). Beliefs that support the need for standardized testing and evaluation separate from classroom assessment are beliefs that are still held by some teachers (Fisher, Frey, & Pumpian, 2011; Shepard, 2000). Nieto (1994) argues that while changes to policies and practices in schools are important, equally as important are changes to how educators view students and assessment practices: “the most crucial element is a shared belief among teachers, counsellors, and administrators that all students are capable of learning” (p. 395). If changes in policy are not accompanied with changes in teacher thinking about assessment and student learning, then the full potential of these changes is never realized.

Importance of Student Voice in Research

Current research argues that there have been few studies conducted that examine how students perceive formative assessment practices (Chapman, DeLuca, & Klinger, 2015; Hue, Leung, & Kennedy, 2015). The focus of existing literature has been centered upon the impact that formative assessment has on student academic performance (Black & Wiliam, 1998), on teachers’ knowledge and skills with formative assessment

(Chapman et al., 2015), and on teacher perceptions of formative assessment (Hue et al., 2015). Furthermore, current research that does integrate students' perspectives on formative assessment has been conducted primarily in New Zealand and Europe (Chapman et al., 2015). Consequently, there is a need for research to be conducted within Ontario's educational context to examine *both* teacher *and* student understandings and perceptions of formative assessment.

Chapman et al. (2015) argue "the use of AfL [Assessment for Learning or formative assessment] strategies with students does not mean that students will appreciate or learn from those strategies" (p. 4-5). Much of the research regarding formative assessment assumes that providing students with feedback means that students will appreciate, learn, and self-correct from receiving this information (Chapman et al., 2015; Shepard, 2000). Gathering students' perspectives on formative assessment will help to examine this assumption and develop an understanding of students' reception of formative assessment practices in the classroom. This knowledge can lead to a deeper understanding of how formative assessment practices may be used to improve student-learning experiences in the classroom.

Due, in part, to the difficulty of obtaining research ethics clearance for projects with student involvement, "students' perspectives are often not represented, but [are] needed, in educational research" (Tilley, Powick-Kumar, & Ratkovic, 2009, para. 43). Milne (2005) argues that the separation of the researched from the researcher reduces the opportunity that students are given to "have a greater say in their learning" (para. 33). Valuing students' perspectives on assessment strategies can help teachers to reframe their thinking of students from people they must coerce into learning interactions to co-

conspirators in creating the best formative learning interactions (Phelan et al., 1992). Soo Hoo (1993) echoes the argument that in ignoring the student voice, we are missing a key perspective on education: “Somehow educators have forgotten the important connection between teachers and students. We listen to outside experts to inform us, and consequently, we overlook the treasure in our very own backyards: our students” (p. 391). In fact, multiple theorists have found students’ perspectives on teaching, learning, and school to be highly aligned with contemporary educational theorists (Brown, 2011; Nieto, 1994; Phelan et al., 1992). Furthermore, student awareness emerges as a function of them having the opportunity to express their opinions; they become aware that their opinions on and engagement with assessment is valuable and has an impact on how formative assessment is enacted within their classroom.

Scope and Limitations

This project presents the tension between the paradigms influencing education as only including behaviourist and constructivist understandings. In actuality, there are numerous paradigms that have influenced the shape of the education system (e.g., analytic thought and cognitivist paradigm). Discussion of the influence that additional theories have had in education is presented (e.g., analytic thought on the traditional model); however, to provide focus within this project, the concentration of the discussion remains focused on the two most central schools of thought: behaviourist and constructivist thinking.

This study is not about policy; this study is about intentions and perceptions, how those can be aligned or misaligned, and how the climate created in a classroom can help to ensure fewer miscommunications or misalignments between teacher intentions and

students' reception of formative assessment interactions. More focus could have been placed on the history of assessment in Ontario, but I wanted my work to focus on the reality of the classroom and the ideas that are currently, in the present moment, shaping the mentality of education and assessment. Policy is a strong influence on that, as is academic research, so I attempted to reach a balance by integrating all of this into my discussion.

The design of my study assumes that both a teacher and her students will critically reflect on their perceptions of and engagement with formative assessments. However, receiving teacher and/or student feedback that indicates a lack of self-reflection on their engagement in formative assessment is also valid data for this study.

There is research in existence regarding students' reception of feedback (Butler, 1988), students' interpretation of teacher emotions through oral feedback (Butler, 1994), students' discussions of what they require in a school atmosphere (Phelan et al., 1992), as well as students' perceptions of AfL (Chapman et al., 2015; Hue et al., 2015; Brown 2011) and it was my goal to integrate and supplement these discussions into a study that is focused on the practical experiences of formative assessments in the classroom. This study was designed in order to meet the call for an in-depth exploration of a teacher's plans, the culture of the classroom, as well as students' reactions to assessments in the classroom that has been raised by previous researchers (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Chapman et al., 2015; Hue et al., 2015; Shepard, 2000). Due to the constraints of time and resources, this study will engage with a single case: one teacher and her students. The qualitative case study methodology uses the *epistemology of the particular*, meaning it assumes that something can be learned from studying a particular case (Stake, 2005). My

study is adopting the *instrumental case study* philosophy, which is interested in the study of a single case in order to produce knowledge and learning for further use (Stake, 2005). While this will limit my ability to generalize beyond this case, the purpose of the instrumental case study methodology is to offer detailed descriptions of a case that will resonate with the reader in order to “provide insight into an issue” (Stake, 2005, p. 237), not to generalize beyond the case. In this approach, the case is of secondary interest to the phenomenon being studied, and allows for a deeper understanding of that phenomenon.

This study is not looking to be generalizable; rather, this study works to explore the experiences of a teacher adopting formative assessment practices and her students’ responses to these formative assessment practices. While working with only one teacher limits the scope and generalizability of the findings, this preliminary study will help to raise question for further research such as: How can engaging students in discussions on formative assessment impact their engagement? How can misalignments between teachers’ understandings of and intentions for assessment versus students’ understandings and perceptions of assessment be clarified throughout classroom discussions?

Meeting My Limitations and Biases

The constructivist epistemology was chosen for this study because the purpose of this project is to focus on interactions in the classroom and how they work to shape and reshape teaching and learning. My experiences as a practicing teacher have shown me that while my plans, ideas, and constructs about learning have great influence on my teaching plans, students’ plans, goals, and constructs about learning all have an equal influence within the classroom. It is the negotiation between individuals in the classroom that make up the learning interactions that take place. As a teacher, I can work to control

that as much as possible, or I can work *with* students to negotiate learning with them. Understanding learning as a social interaction is more aligned with the experiences I have had in my own classes.

Due to my previous teaching experiences with formative assessment, I hold the assumption that students will see formal evaluations as important, and that they might not be aware of daily formative interactions as a form of assessment. Having completed teacher education in New Zealand and taught abroad in the United Kingdom, I have seen and experienced first-hand how different forms of assessment impact students' engagement in their studies. My international teaching assignments have provided me with experience in education systems heavily reliant on high-stakes summative assessment practices. In New Zealand and the United Kingdom, for instance, I observed how a heavy reliance on summative assessment often caused students to disengage from day-to-day classroom formative assessments. Part of my assumption is that this was because students believed that formative assessments would not influence their summative grades. This structure of schooling caused the emphasis of learning to fall on the final performance, rather than making students aware of the importance and impact of practice and daily assessments for improving their ability to perform better on the final assessment. I have seen first-hand how this form of high stakes assessment, which focuses on the product rather than the process of learning, can negatively impact the level of engagement students have throughout the learning process.

Even though current Ontario assessment policies are aligned with current research exploring the positive impacts of formative assessment, the systems that determine student success are grades-based, and are still largely structured by the old story in

education. Therefore, I anticipated finding students who held beliefs and approaches to education that were aligned with the old story, even when they were participating in the classroom of a teacher who adopted assessment practices that are aligned with the new story in education. Keeping a daily journal and audit trail throughout the process of data collection and analysis will help me to expose my personal thoughts and biases (Merriam, 2009), and how they might be influencing my collection and analysis of data.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study explores the practices of an Ontario secondary school teacher who uses formative assessment strategies, and her students' responses to these strategies. The research was conducted at a secondary school that uses the mandated Ontario curriculum. The purpose of this project is to simultaneously explore two perspectives on formative assessment: the teacher's understanding of and intended goals for assessment, and the students' understanding of and responses to the assessments. Exploring both teacher and student experiences of formative assessment allowed for an examination of how teacher-student and student-student interactions impacted assessment practices as they were enacted in the classroom. The knowledge gained from this project will also contribute to the body of research in existence on formative assessment.

A second purpose for this project is to include the much-needed student voice in exploring assessment experiences. Within the current body of research on formative assessment, a lack in student voice and perspectives is noted (Chapman et al., 2015; Hue et al., 2015). This project's design provided an opportunity to represent students' voices in understanding how a teacher's assessment design decisions impacted the classroom climate, while also providing an exploration of how students' response impacted a

teacher's assessment design plans. Taking these two conversations together has the potential to address "the discrepancy between student perceptions...and the expectations of teachers" noted by previous research (Hue et al., 2015, p. 270), while also providing an opportunity to show the value that exists in hearing students' perspectives on and experiences of formative assessment. To remain aligned with the cultural paradigm, this study is concerned with exploring how learning is shaped through classroom interactions. The overarching purposes and objectives for this research project include:

1. To explore a teacher's understanding of her role in developing students' learning progress through her assessment designs.
2. To explore how students understand and respond to formative assessment practices.
3. To explore the complex interactions that impact the teacher's perceptions and students' reception of formative assessment as it is enacted in the classroom.

Implications

Black and Wiliam (2010) argue that in order to make changes in the classroom, teachers need living examples of what these changes might look like:

What teachers need is a variety of living examples of implementation, as practiced by teachers with whom they can identify and from whom they can derive the confidence that they can do better. They need to see examples of what doing better means in practice. (p. 88)

This is one of the main purposes that the current study will serve: to offer an in-depth example of complex phenomena. By exploring a teacher's intentions, as well as providing an in-depth description of her classroom practices, this study hopes to provide

a living example of what the new story of assessment might look like and sound like from a teacher's perspective. Furthermore, Black and Wiliam (2009) argue that,

[A]ny evidence of formative interaction must be analysed as reflecting a teacher's chosen plan to develop learning, the formative interactions which that teacher carries out contingently within the framework of that plan – as realised in the social world of the classroom and school – and the internal cognitive and affective models of each student of which the responses and broader participation of students provide only indirect evidence. (p. 26)

Integrating interviews with a teacher to glean insights into her plans with formative assessment, alongside classroom observations of those plans as they are enacted, and supplementing with focus group discussions with students to gather their perspectives on classroom assessment practices, allows this study to obtain a higher level of alignment between the complex interactions at play during the enactment of formative assessment in the classroom. Engaging students in a conversation about formative assessment practices in their classroom will also begin to address the lack of student voice present within the literature on formative assessment, and help both teachers and students see the value in engaging students in conversations around the purpose that formative assessment practices can serve for student learning.

This study offers insights into what Ontario's current assessment policy looks like in practice, how it impacts a teacher's planning, and how students react to these assessment practices. Findings from this study will help to highlight policies in relation to evaluation and reporting that caused students' perceptions of assessment to be inconsistent with the current research of best practices in teaching and learning.

Discussion of the consistencies and disconnects between the teacher's intentions and students' perceptions of formative assessment also emerged from this study's design. The story model allowed for the discussion of external and internal influences that lead to both the connections and disconnects between teacher intentions and students' perceptions of formative assessment.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

In this first chapter, I outlined the need for qualitative research regarding formative assessment that specifically takes an in-depth look at teacher practices and students' responses to formative assessment, in a way that explicitly provides insight into the intricacies of classroom interactions. Using the story model, I explained the new understanding of assessment emerging in education, how there is a move to integrate more formative assessment practices, and how the old focus on grades and evaluation has become dysfunctional with the new understanding of the purpose assessment should serve in moving student learning forward. I also argued that there is a need for research to explore *both* teachers' and students' experiences with formative assessment as enacted in the classroom in order to offer a more holistic understanding of the intricacies of assessment.

In Chapter Two, I introduce, in more detail, relevant literature that discusses the trends in assessment within the last century of education to highlight how these trends still influence policies and practices in modern education. This discussion will help to illuminate the state of transition between the old story and new story that the field of education is currently experiencing. Within Chapter Two, I also introduce literature that

offers more complex definitions for formative assessment, as well as studies that discuss the impact that formative assessment has on student progress.

In Chapter Three, I outline my methods and methodology. I argue that the qualitative paradigm is best suited to this study as I wish to simultaneously examine both a teacher's and students' understandings of and experiences with formative assessment. Furthermore, literature on the qualitative case study methodology is used to support my decision to stay with one teacher-participant and her students in order to offer an in-depth exploration of the practices in her classroom.

In Chapter Four, I present my data, analysis, and findings. Themes that have emerged from the data and qualitative content analysis are discussed. These findings are presented in a way that allows the reader to gain insight into the culture created in the classes that were observed, and highlights the development of self-reflection practices observed in both the teacher-participant and student-participants by participating in this study.

In Chapter Five, I further the discussion of my findings to highlight the specific connections to existent research on formative assessment and implications for the field of education that result from my study. Discussion of relevant theory on students' perceptions of formative assessment and educational theory are used to support my analysis and findings. A specific discussion of how this study contributes to the existent research of formative assessment is offered in this chapter, along with suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is influenced by formative assessment theory, which acknowledges the important role teachers' assessment designs can play in enhancing the student learning experience. Research and theory that analyses the impacts of formative assessment view this approach as a valuable part of the learning process. The story model provides a framework for understanding the changes that are occurring in assessment practices in education, as well as a way to analyze and understand the resistance with which these changes have been met, and the potential disconnect between teacher intentions and student perceptions of assessment practices as they are carried out in the classroom.

Story Model

The *story model* framework offers a way of understanding individual experience. It does so by presenting the idea that people make meaning from both personal and universal stories (Drake, 2010). There are four frames that make up each person's unique way of knowing and interpreting the world: personal, cultural, global, and universal. The story model explains that each individual has his or her own story, and each individual has a unique way of knowing that is influenced first by "a frame informed by our personal experience" (Drake et al., 2014, p. x); this can account for some of the differences individual students may experience when engaging with formative assessment. The story model takes into account personal social pressures, which can be seen as pressures the students place on themselves, as well as pressures they perceive from parents, teachers, and peers. Cultural pressures and expectations are included within this model, as well. Within the story model, *culture* is defined as "the set of values and beliefs that drive group life in the particular culture we live in" (Drake et al., 2014, p. x)

and can include the “political, economic, social and cultural landscape” (Drake, 2010, p. 3). Cultural pressures may include the student’s cultural heritage, practices, and beliefs, as well as the culture of the school, neighbourhood, classroom, and ministry policies. The global frame reminds us that in today’s society, we are all connected to issues that resonate within the global community (Drake et al., 2014). An example of a global issue is unequal access to education between students of different genders. While this would look different within the context of each community, it is an issue that resonates on a global scale. The emphasis of the first three frames is on the unique character each individual has due to their own story. The final frame, the universal frame, connects to the human story. This final frame reminds us “we are all human beings with similar needs, drives, and emotions” (Drake et al., 2014, p. x). An example of a universal story is a desire to feel like you are respected as an intelligent, competent person and that your voice is being heard.

The story model framework also presents a way to understand the process of transformative change, where the subjects of this change are required to envision possible new versions of themselves and the situations they are in. It requires that these subjects take deliberate actions to move forward the positive changes that are made possible within the emerging new story (Drake et al, 2014). A new story can be created purposefully by a group of people adopting new practices based on their knowledge, values, and beliefs. For a new story to emerge, it requires a re-visioning of what is possible for the self and the situation, as well as deliberate actions to achieve this end.

The story model framework is relevant to this project, as it offers a way to interrogate the process of change occurring with Ontario’s assessment practices, how one

teacher adopts practices that move forward the positive elements of those changes, and how students react to and engage with new and old forms of assessment in the classroom. It also allows for an exploration of both individual experiences and perceptions of assessment practices, as well as an examination of the culture created by the transition from the old to the new story in education, and how this transition impacts formative assessment practices as they are carried out in the classroom and in educational policies.

Formative Assessment Theory: Defining Formative Assessment

Shepard (2000) argues that most forms of classroom interactions are formative in that they shape student learning and knowledge. Black and Wiliam (1998) describe *assessment* as “activities undertaken by teachers – and by their students in assessing themselves – that provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities” (p. 140). Drake et al. (2014) state: “Formative assessment refers to strategies that make student learning visible so that the teacher as well as the student can take steps to improve performance” (p. 14). Fisher and Frey (2014) define *formative assessment* as, “assessments that inform instruction” (p. 16); however, they take their definition further by arguing that a “system for collecting and analyzing evidence for learning, one that signals what needs to happen next” (p. 16) needs to be implemented for formative assessment to be effective. What is stressed throughout the research is that for assessment to be effective in improving student learning and to truly be considered *formative* assessment, then both teachers *and* students must use the knowledge gained about students’ learning needs to shape future actions in teaching and learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Drake et al., 2014; Earl, 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2014). For assessment to be formative, there must be a forward focus with the knowledge gleaned from the

assessment; therefore, there must be adjustments to future actions as a result of the knowledge teacher gains about student needs, and the self-knowledge students gain from the assessment interaction, in order for it to be considered formative.

Drake et al. (2014) explain that in much of the literature on formative assessment, the term Assessment for Learning (AfL) is used as an umbrella term to discuss both teacher-directed and student-centred formative assessment practices. Educational theorist Lorna Earl (2003) argues that there are primarily three forms of assessment: Assessment *of* Learning (AoL), Assessment *for* Learning (AfL), and Assessment *as* Learning (AaL). Each of these three forms of assessment serves a different purpose in teaching and learning. Earl (2003) emphasizes the need for delineation between AaL and AfL, as the practices, purposes, and benefits for student self-assessment are different from those associated with AfL. Earl (2003) argues that,

Assessment as learning goes even deeper, however, and draws on the role of personal monitoring and challenging of ideas that are embedded in the learning process, and the role of both students and teachers in fostering this process. (p. xi)

AaL comes in the form of student self- and peer-assessment, and allows students to learn through the process of assessing the task they have been asked to be complete.

In their work, Dunn and Mulvenon (2009) offer an understanding of the difference between assessment and evaluation that differs from other theorists. While the previously mentioned theorists understand assessment to be daily classroom interactions that provide information to both teachers and students that move learning forward, and evaluation as tasks that come at the end of a unit of work where a mark is record (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Drake et al., 2014; Earl, 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2014), Dunn and

Mulvenon (2009) define *assessment* as “instruments for collecting information” (p. 3). By this definition, tests that come at the end of a unit are also assessments; *evaluation*, however, “has to do with the use of assessment-based data” (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009, p. 4). In this definition, what is done with the data collected through the instruments is what defines a task as either “formative evaluation” or “summative evaluation.” Dunn and Mulvenon (2009) define *formative evaluation* as “the evaluation of assessment-based evidence for the purposes of providing feedback to and informing teachers, students, and educational stakeholders about the teaching and learning process” (p. 4). This seems to align with the previously discussed researchers in their definition of the terms *formative* and *summative*; the difference, however, lies in the understanding of the terms *assessment* and *evaluation*.

Where Dunn and Mulvenon (2009) define *assessment* as the tool and *evaluation* as the act, Drake et al. (2014) use these terms to differentiate between the distinctive forms that appraisal of student learning can take. While the ideas are the same, the difference in language choice is what causes confusion within the discussions of formative assessment in educational research. Dunn and Mulvenon (2009) argue that the lack of operational definition for formative assessment makes it difficult to have a conversation about the effectiveness of these practices.

In order to reflect the changing understanding of the different purposes assessment and evaluation serve, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) assessment policy document explains that the use of previous terms “such as diagnostic, formative, and summative ... have recently been supplemented with the phrases assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning” (p. 30). Earl (2003)

discusses how this shift in the understanding and discussion of assessment also shifts the focus from evaluating students' performance and making judgements to "creating descriptions that can be used in the service of the next stage of learning" (p. 24). For the purposes of this project, the definition of *assessment* will be the current definition used by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010): "Assessment is the process of gathering information that accurately reflects how well a student is achieving the curriculum expectations in a subject or course. The primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning" (p. 28). Here, the definition is determined by "what the information is used for" (Drake et al., 2014, p. 30). As Harlen (2006) explains,

Using the terms 'formative assessment' and 'summative assessment' can give the impression that these are different kinds of assessment or are linked to different methods of gathering evidence. This is not the case; *what matters is how the information is used*. It is for this reason that the terms 'assessment for learning' and 'assessment of learning' are sometimes preferred. The essential distinction is that assessment for learning is used in making decisions that affect teaching and learning in the short term future, whereas assessment of learning is used to record and report what has been learned in the past. (as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 30)

Within this definition of assessment, how the information is used, rather than how the information is gathered, is the determinant in defining what type of assessment is being enacted.

Fairness, Reliability, and Validity

Drake et al. (2014) define three aspects of assessment as the key elements needed for an assessment to be of value: *fairness*, *reliability*, and *validity*. *Fairness* in assessment is not a new concept. It has connections back to Frederiksen and Collin's (1989) concept of *transparency*; Shepard (2000) explains *transparency* as,

the idea that students must have a clear understanding of the criteria by which their work will be assessed. In fact, the features of excellent performance should be so transparent that students can learn to evaluate their own work in the same way that their teachers would. (p. 11)

Fairness begins with teachers' intentions; teachers should be clear about what they are trying to teach and achieve with their students within each assessment activity. This purpose needs to be clearly communicated to students in order to ensure that students are grasping what they should be learning and to ensure that they are aware of what they are being assessed on. In the new story, *fairness* means that students will have “sufficient and appropriate opportunity both to learn and demonstrate their learning” (Drake et al., 2014, p. 21). The language of *sufficient* and *appropriate* opportunity, instead of *equal* or *standardized*, acknowledges that different amounts of time and chances may be required for different learners. The prior principle of standardization in assessments does not account for individual student needs and is, therefore, not always a fair approach to assessment.

In the new story, *fairness* is about providing students with opportunities to practice, gain support in developing skill, and seeing transparency in expectations; however, Shepard (2000) cautions that principles of *fairness* have the potential of

creating expectations that can obstruct true learning: “We should not, for example, agree to a contract with our students which says that the only fair test is one with familiar and well-rehearsed problems” (p. 11). While it is important that students understand the knowledge and skills that will be tested in each assessment, students must also be instructed on ways that allow them to gain deep knowledge of a concept or skill, so that this knowledge becomes transferable to other contexts and situations. The second guiding element of the defining principles of assessment is *reliability*, which can be understood to relate to the transferability of skills. Drake et al. (2014) provide a definition of *reliability*:

Reliability is the degree of consistency of the assessment results...if a student’s performance results are consistent across multiple assessments in the same domain when it is assessed in different ways (e.g., projects, tests, oral presentations) and by different assessors then a fairly reliable judgment about proficiency can be made. (p. 19-20)

If a student is able to perform well on a task that is well-rehearsed, but is not able to transfer those skills to another task or situation, then the assessment is not reliable for testing that student’s mastery of a skill. What that assessment is testing, alternatively, is how well the student has rehearsed for that particular assessment performance. Allowing students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their mastery and understanding is not only better for students, but it also allows teachers to gather more accurate and holistic assessment data.

Drake et al. (2014) define *validity*, the final criteria for a good assessment, as “the trustworthiness of the judgements that can be made based on the assessment data” (p. 29). *Validity* can be determined by answering the question: “to what degree does the

assessment method measure what it is supposed to measure?” (p. 19). In the current educational climate, the use of criterion-based assessment is practiced. This means that a set of criteria are outlined as the expectations for the assessment, where,

[T]eachers assess and evaluate student work with reference to established criteria for four levels of achievement that are standard across the province, rather than by comparison with work done by other students, or through the ranking of student performance, or with reference to performance standards developed by individual teachers for their own classrooms. (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 19)

Whereas norm-referenced grading was used to put students into ranked order and categorize students by ability, *criterion-referenced grading* works under the assumption that all students can achieve excellence when provided with the criteria they will be assessed on and when given proper instructional scaffolding to develop the knowledge and skills needed to meet those criteria (Drake et al., 2014). With the practice of criterion-based assessment comes the need for the creation of valid assessments that are designed to assess the skills and knowledge being evaluated. Wiggins, McTighe, and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum (2005) suggest that the most effective way to ensure an assessment holds *validity* is to plan assessment tasks first, using the curriculum expectations as a guide for the skills and knowledge students are expected to demonstrate. Once the assessments are planned, teaching and lesson planning can occur in order to ensure the students are being supported in developing the skills and learning needed to successfully complete each assessment. Planning assessment allows for the opportunity to communicate expectations to students from the outset, as well as

scaffolding the students through the learning process so that they are able to complete the assessment successfully.

Consistency in Assessment Form and Purpose

Earl (2003) discusses the “paradox” of classroom assessment, being that it serves multiple purposes. Some of the purposes of assessment include providing feedback to students, teacher diagnostic information, summary information, records, evidence for reports to administration and parents, and directing efforts for adaptation of learning (Earl, 2003). These purposes are, at times, contradictory in nature. The paradox arises when assessment is used as a tool for student development, where students are encouraged to take chances and learn from their mistakes, but the demands of accountability and reporting require marks to be assigned and recorded for these tasks. The process of reporting and grading causes students to avoid making mistakes when learning, for fear that those mistakes could negatively impact their grades. Instead of eliminating summative assessment and external exams, Earl (2003) argues for a re-weighting of assessment so that assessment that moves learning forward is valued just as much as assessment that tracks and monitors student learning progress.

Black and Wiliam (2009) agree with Earl’s argument that summative tests and assessments have a valuable place in education, but only when they are properly utilized: “Summative tests (or more properly, tests designed primarily to serve a summative function) provide ways of eliciting evidence of student achievement and used appropriately, can prompt feedback that moves learning forward” (p. 8). Summative assessments are not ‘bad’ in and of themselves; this style of assessment only becomes problematic when it is the sole form of assessment used for monitoring and reporting

student progress. Similarly, formative assessment is not inherently better than summative assessment; formative assessment is only useful if it is done and used properly as well. For example, implementing the use of student self-assessment without providing students with proper guidelines, scaffolds, and discussion of the purpose of this type of learning activity will result in poor learning experiences from these activities.

Drake et al. (2014) argue that in the new story, traditional forms of assessment should not be completely replaced with the new assessment strategies: “We need to identify and build into the emerging new story the positive aspects from the traditional and constructivist paradigms that are still very much with us” (p. xiv). Instead of simply replacing the old assessment strategies, the new story of assessment takes a *both/and* perspective and asks that teachers borrow from both the traditional and constructivist paradigms to design assessment strategies that best fit the curriculum expectation(s) and purpose of the assessment. Consistency between the intended purpose of an assessment (e.g., assess student prior learning; report on student learning) and the assessment form that is used (e.g., informal questioning; formal written test) is vital. In order to create an assessment that holds *fairness, reliability, and validity*, the purpose for an assignment must be determined and understood by both teachers and the students.

Trying to provide students with more information (i.e., grades *and* formative feedback simultaneously), rather than simply providing them with clear and relevant feedback that supports the purpose of the assessment, can actually lead to confusion for students (Butler, 1988). Butler (1988) argues, “combining task and ego-involving evaluation will induce an ego-involving orientation, just as does the provision of ego-involving evaluation” (p. 13). An *ego-involving orientation* means that students are

motivated to complete a task for extrinsic factors, such as receiving feedback that will boost their ego (i.e., a high grade) or to avoid hurting their ego (i.e., avoiding the embarrassment of performing poorly on a task). Ego-involving tasks are highly motivated by student “self-esteem-based pressure” (Butler, 1988, p. 2). Ego-involving tasks stand in contrast to task-involving tasks. *Task-involving assignments* are characterized as tasks that inspire intrinsic motivation in students where “motivation is characterised by the concern to improve mastery” and are connected to a desire for self-improvement (Butler, 1988, p. 2). A grade, though it does provide feedback on where a student’s performance stands in comparison to other students or a norm, does not provide feedback on *what* a student has done well or on *how* a student may improve in future learning. If a task involves a grade, it will likely cause an ego-involving reaction from most students due to the normative nature of grading – even if that task is also accompanied by formative feedback in the form of an individualized comment.

Butler’s (1988) study exposes some of the issues associated with using grades as a form of feedback; however, this research does not prove that grades do not have a purpose within the education system. What this research suggests is that there are strengths, weaknesses, and purposes to each form of assessment feedback. Careful teacher planning to ensure alignment between the learning goals and assessment form is needed to ensure an explicit message is being communicated to the students regarding the purpose of their learning. Those intentions need to be clearly communicated to the students so that they are aware of the purpose of each assessment they complete, and, furthermore, that they are aware of how to process the feedback they are being given. Providing multiple forms of feedback simultaneously will not eradicate the drawbacks of

each form; however, more of a balance in the use of each assessment strategy, as is currently mandated within Ontario's assessment policy, *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Ministry of Education, 2010), will help to reduce the negative impacts of each form of assessment. Furthermore, Butler's (1988) research highlights how important it is that teachers, administrators, and policy makers question the merits of using grades as the sole measure for accountability and reporting of student success. Teachers, students, administrators, policy makers, and parents must all examine the perceptions they hold about assessment. Doing so will allow for an exploration of the underlying ideologies that support the practices they value, while also facilitating an examination of whether there is consistency between the values they hold about learning and the assessment and reporting practices they feel are necessary.

History of Assessment: The Old Story

In order for change to occur, an understanding of old beliefs about the purpose of assessment, students' role within assessment interactions, and the purposes serving the new formative assessment strategies must be understood. Drake (2010) argues that,

[I]n order to understand the 'story of any phenomenon,' we need to explore backward to forward, as well as forward to backward. The exploration of temporality includes the present story (today), the perceived past story (old story) and the anticipated future (new story). (p. 3)

As with all social transitions, practices and thinking from the past influence the present. Shepard (2000) argues that it is important to understand the ideologies that supported traditional views of testing "because dominant theories of the past continue to operate as the default framework affecting and driving current practices and perspectives" (p. 4).

Practices in education are reflective of the dominant paradigm in the education field at the time during which they emerged. Many of our current practices of evaluation, which are dissonant with the new paradigm leading education, for instance, are held over from the scientific and industrial revolutions of the early 1900s.

Social efficiency was a movement in the early 1900s that grew out of a belief “that science could be used to solve the problems of industrialization and urbanization ... modern principles of scientific management, intended to maximize the efficiency of factories, could be applied with equal success to schools” (Shepard, 2000, p. 4). For John Franklin Bobbitt, a “leader of the social efficiency movement,” the most important principal of the social efficiency movement was to educate students “according to his capabilities” so as to not waste time teaching students skills they would never use (Shepard, 2000, p. 4). The purpose of this system was efficiency and proficiency, not holistic development or self-improvement. Shepard (2000) explains that,

The central ideas of social efficiency and scientific management in the curriculum circle were closely linked, respectively, to hereditarian theories of individual differences and to associationist and behaviourist learning theories. These psychological theories were, in turn, served by scientific measurement of ability and achievement. (p. 4)

Within *scientific hereditarian* theories of individual difference, it was believed that students were born with dispositions and talents that made them suited to particular jobs. One of the purposes of schooling was thus to establish students’ skills and train them for the workforce. It was believed that working in such a way was of benefit to students, to save them the time and effort of learning skills they were not gifted in, and to society, by

training students for the workforce in the most cost and time efficient manner. The behaviourist theory viewed learning as a stimulus response (Shepard, 2000; Skinner, 1954), where positive and negative reinforcement often came in the form of a grade (Drake et al., 2014).

The associationist, connectionist, and behaviourist psychology theories were also prominent at the time (Drake et al., 2014; Earl, 2003; Shepard, 2000). The associationist and connectionist theories placed an “emphasis on the fundamental building blocks” in learning, where each skill or bit of new knowledge needed to be taught in specific small steps to be evaluated with “[p]recise standards of measurement ... to ensure that each skill was mastered at the desired level” (Shepard, 2000, p. 4). Within these schools of thought, the best way to determine students’ capabilities was through systematic measurement of skills that were demonstrated through performance on tests. Earl (2003) explains that, historically, the education system has been largely reliant on AoL, which is used to “accredit or judge the work of students” (p. xi). In a review of the literature on teacher perspectives of assessment, Hue et al. (2015) found, “under the influence of an examination-oriented culture, teachers are used to applying the principles of fairness and uniformity in assessment” (p. 266). Fairness, under this paradigm, is associated with testing conditions and instruments that ensured identical conditions for each student undergoing the assessment. As the analytic philosophy, which see knowledge as derived from empirical research, was the dominant view in the old story, structures in the school system began to privilege “evaluat[ion] based on paper-and-pencil measures (test); standardized tests allowed for rank-ordering of students in a class, region, province, or country; and competition and power were underlying values” (Drake et al., 2014, p. xii).

This view of assessment creates a culture of competition and views intelligence as a fixed attribute.

In the “traditional classroom assessment environment,” teachers teach and then test, which often leaves “unsuccessful students, those who might not learn at the established pace and within a fixed time frame, to finish low in the rank order” (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002, p. 40). While individual students possess strengths and attributes that make them more inclined to succeed and enjoy particular aspects of school, this view of intelligence is limiting and often damaging to student resilience and engagement. Furthermore, the old story model also originated from the beliefs that “to increase learning we should increase student anxiety and that comparison with more successful peers will motivate low performers to do better” (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002, p. 40). This line of thinking is more often accurate for students who are able to find success on their own, without receiving much support and guidance in their learning; however, for students who struggle to succeed academically, the constant embarrassment and defeat of being placed at the bottom of the rank order may lessen their desire to engage in school.

Stiggins (2002) delivers a poignant reminder that *all* students must be kept in mind when assessments are being designed:

...when some students are confronted with the tougher challenges of high-stakes testing, they do redouble their efforts, and they do learn more than they would have without the added incentive. Please note, however, I said this is true for “some students.” Another significant segment of the student population, when confronted with an even tougher challenge than the one that it has already been failing at, will not re-double its efforts ... These students will see both the new

high standards and the demand for higher tests scores as unattainable for them, and they will *give up in hopelessness*. (p. 760)

In this way, the ideas supporting the old story of assessment are not wrong – they just are not *always* right, and they are certainly not right for all students (Stiggins, 2002).

Shepard (2000) agrees with this observation, noting that,

A longer-term span of history helps us see that those measurement perspectives, now felt to be incompatible with instruction, came from an earlier, highly consistent theoretical framework ... in which conceptions of “scientific measurement” were closely aligned with traditional curricula and beliefs about learning. (p. 4)

Examining assessment practices within their educational context is vital to evaluating their validity, reliability, and fairness. Just like the theoretical frameworks and beliefs that structure education today, the practices of measurement and evaluation were not wrong within the educational context of the early 1900s. Continuing to use the practices from a system that is not aligned with current beliefs about learning is inconsistent and confusing for administration, parents, teachers, and students.

Assessment for and as Learning: The New Story

It is important to note here that educational context does not *just* mean the time period; it can also signal the beliefs, paradigms, and practices that support a specific discipline. An important element of the new story of education is the *both/and* approach to assessment. The *both/and*, rather than the *either/or*, approach to assessment uses “instructional strategies from any model according to whatever best fits the learning goals, the students, the classroom environment, and so on” (Drake et al., 2014, p. 9). The

new story is malleable and adaptive to the curriculum expectations, and also responsive to the needs of the individual students and teachers that comprise the learning environment of the classroom. Instead of viewing learning as a one-size-fits-all institution, where assessment is meant to ascertain students' strengths and weaknesses to determine their future, the new story views assessment as an opportunity to detect students' strengths and weaknesses in order to determine the next steps in teaching and learning.

Shepard (2000) describes how the cognitive revolution, of the 1970s, changed our understanding of learning:

[W]e now understand that learning is an active process of mental construction and sense making...existing knowledge structures and beliefs work to enable or impede new learning, that intelligent thought involves self-monitoring and awareness about when and how to use skills, and that "expertise" develops in fields of study as a principled and coherent way of thinking and representing problems, not just as accumulation of information. (p. 6-7)

This new understanding of the mind and learning is what influences the constructivist understanding of knowledge acquisition, where learning is viewed as a social activity.

Drake et al. (2014) explain how the shift to a more constructivist understanding of learning has impacted assessment practices to be more interactive and inclusive: "as curriculum shifts to a more constructivist approach that accommodates diverse learning needs, the purpose of assessment is also shifting from measuring achievement to promoting learning" (p. 16). Earl (2003) also describes the shift in how assessment should be conceived: "Assessment, instead of being the means for categorizing students

and avoiding working to help them learn, becomes the mechanism for deciding what to do to push the learning forward” (p. 87). This re-framing of teaching and learning recognizes individual students where they are and where they are going in their learning progress.

Black and Wiliam (1998) argue, “an obsessive focus on competition and the attendant fear of failure on the part of low achievers – are not inevitable. What is needed is a culture of success, backed by a belief that all pupils can achieve” (p. 142). In the new story, mistakes are not avoided for fear of repercussions; instead, mistakes are used as a learning opportunity for both teachers and students. Through mistakes, teachers can gain insight into where their students are developing skills and what areas a student or students may need support in developing learning strategies. Assessments also provide students with feedback on their performance in a timely manner so that they may use this information to direct future learning efforts and develop learning strategies to become more independent.

Ontario’s Assessment Context: Purpose Beyond Learning Outcomes

The Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2010) document *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* offers an extensive discussion of the types of assessment and evaluation used in Ontario schools, as well as the purpose each assessment and evaluation strategy serves. Within this document, there is a discussion of the importance of assessing and providing feedback on achievement in both content and performance standards, as well as learning skills and work habits. As explained within the Ministry of Education (2010) document, “The content standards are the curriculum expectations identified for every subject and discipline. They are the

knowledge and skills students are expected to develop and demonstrate in their class work, on tests, and in various other activities” (p. 16). On report cards, content and performance standards are assigned a grade, as well as formative feedback. At the secondary level, meeting the success criteria for these curriculum expectations determines if students are awarded a credit in a course, or if they are required to upgrade or repeat the credit. The *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* policy document also places value on the development of learning skills and work habits in students (Ministry of Education, 2010). As described by the Ministry of Education (2010), *learning skills and work habits* are,

The skills and habits that can be demonstrated by a student across all subjects, courses, and grades and in other behaviour at school ... promote student achievement of the curriculum expectations ... [and include] responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative, and self-regulation” (p. 149).

These skills and habits are behaviours that teachers are responsible for modeling, developing, and assessing in students. These behaviours are seen to be influential in student success across subject areas in school, as well as being integral to their success in life and work outside of school. Ontario’s current reporting and assessment policy places importance on developing student learning in content and performance standards, as well as the learning skills and work habits.

The learning skills and work habits outlined by the Ministry of Education (2010) are not assessed with a grade; however, it is expected that teachers continually assess these skills and habits as demonstrated by students. Formally written feedback is

provided to both students and parents on student report cards. In Ontario at the secondary level, Provincial Report Cards are issued two times per semester in semestered schools (October/November, January/February, March/April, and June), or three times a year in non-semestered schools (October/November, March/April, and June). It is also expected that “communication with parents and students about student achievement should be continuous throughout the course” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 54). It is mandatory that subject teachers provide a letter grade with written feedback for each of the curriculum expectations, as well as a level of Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, or Needs Improvement for each of the six learning skills and work habits. Within any given assessment, teachers may be assessing multiple curriculum expectations, as well as numerous learning skills and work habits. Alignment with curriculum expectations is integral for reliable, valid, and fair assessment of students; however, alignment with the learning skills and work habits that are also being assessed is integral, as well, to ensure that the value of these skills and habits are communicated throughout the tasks and assessments students are asked to complete as a part of their classroom work.

Literature in Context: Student vs. Teacher Perspectives

In their 1998 meta-study, Black and Wiliam found that previous research supports the claim that formative assessment contributes to significant learning gains for students. Beyond the positive impacts formative assessment is noted to have on student achievement, the importance of formative assessment within the “new story” has also resulted in literature and studies that have explored the impacts of formative assessment on students’ self-conceptions of ability (Butler, 1994), resilience (Dweck, 2007), motivation for completing work (Butler, 1988), and metacognitive awareness (Kadioglu,

& Kondakci, 2014); however, within this existent research there is a significant exclusion of students' own perspectives of formative assessment (Chapman et al., 2015; Hue et al., 2015). Most of the research of formative assessment focuses on teachers' experiences, knowledge, and skills (Chapman et al., 2015; DeLuca et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2012), and very little is known about students' perceptions of how assessment practices can serve to promote students' learning progress (Hue et al., 2015). Furthermore, a significant portion of existing research that does explore students' perspectives is reliant on quantitative survey-based methods for data collection, such as the SCoA survey², which have helped to prove that students are able to self-evaluate their understanding and engagement with assessment (Brown, 2011). What is limited within existent research are qualitative accounts of students' perceptions of formative assessment are missing from the body of knowledge on formative assessment. One valuable resource in existence is McInerney, Brown, and Liem's (2009) work: *Student perspectives on assessment: What students can tell us about assessment for learning*. This book presents a range of empirical studies that gather perspectives on classroom assessment from students ranging to primary to university, and helps to highlight how insightful students can be when providing their perspectives on formative assessment.

Chapman et al. (2005) used a written survey to gather information from 1079 K-12 students exploring their perceptions of formative assessment. The questions on the survey were designed to gather data on the range of AfL strategies students reported engaging with in their classroom and the value these students ascribed to AfL strategies. It was found that secondary students are less likely to report AfL strategies, such as

² The SCoA is a quantitative inventory survey that uses a self-rating scale to gather student conceptions of the purposes and functions assessments serve (Brown, 2011).

engaging in self- or peer-assessment, as helpful. Hue, et al. (2015), also found that elementary students valued informal and interactive formative assessment practices much more highly than secondary school students: “The secondary students conceived that teacher-dominated assessment was more important. As students accumulate experience in school, they become more conscious of how grades affect their level of success and progress. Given the importance of formal evaluation and final grades in a student’s educational career, students may pay little attention to formative interactions and tasks. Students begin to look to their teacher as an “expert” or as a shortcut to gaining the right answer (Hue, et al., 2015). This is in line with Butler’s (1988) finding that students who were provided a grade with no written feedback completed the task “in the easiest way possible, by concentrating on the quantity rather than the quality of performance” (12). When students were asked to complete a task and told that they would only be receiving a grade, they completed this work in a way that produced the highest amount of marks for the least amount of effort. Instead of trying to learn and develop while completing this work, these students became fixated on completing the work in a way that brought them the highest grades in the most efficient manner.

Current research regarding assessment finds that integration of formative assessment into daily teaching practices is an effective strategy to improve student academic performance (Black, & Wiliam, 1998). In a review of the literature of students’ perceptions of formative assessment, Brown (2011) also found that students’ perceptions of assessment as being ‘good’ for students, valid, making students accountable, and improving student learning and teacher instruction all had positive relations to increased academic performance. Furthermore, Peterson, Brown, & Irving (2010) found that

students holding continuous and lifelong conceptions of learning had a positive relationship to academic achievement, whereas students who believed learning was a ‘duty’ were found to perform lower. The low value that students place in peer feedback activities (Chapman et al., 2015; Hue et al., 2015) becomes concerning because it indicates that students may only see value in assessment that are directly and explicitly linked to the formal evaluations they will later complete. Holding a short-term goal of grade achievement reduces the likelihood of the student holding the long-term goal of continuous and lifelong conceptions of learning, therefore reducing their engagement with classroom formative assessment practices – and missing the potential benefits that this provides. Until the new story has permeated students’ thinking in a way that allows them to value their personal growth and development over a grade, then it seems that even those teachers who attempt to integrate more student-centred formative assessment into their practices will not have the desired impact with their assessment plans.

Making cognitive processes, teacher thinking, and informal assessment interactions evident is what Shepard (2000) emphasizes as a key to the success of formative assessment practices in the classroom: “I emphasize the need to sometimes ‘mark’ informal assessment occasions for students as they occur within the normal flow of classroom discourse – because this helps students become self-aware about how assessment can help learning” (p. 10). To ‘mark’ or highlight formative assessment as it occurs “helps students become self-aware about how assessment can help learning” (Shepard, 2000, p. 10), and it also encourages an open discussion between the teacher and the student on the purposes of various formative assessment practices. Students need to be shown the benefits of formative assessment practices, such as AfL and AaL,

through explicit metacognitive discussions in the classroom. *Metacognition* is the development of knowledge, awareness, self-reflection, and regulation skills related to cognitive processing (Pintrich, 2002). Recent research suggests a positive correlation between metacognitive awareness and achievement level in elementary to college level students (Kadioglu & Kondakci, 2014; Pennequin, Sorel, Nanty, & Fontaine, 2010; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1993). This body of research points to the value of integrating metacognitive discussions of assessment into the classroom. By highlighting formative interactions for students within everyday classroom interactions, teachers can help students to become consciously aware of the value that these seemingly unimportant interactions can have for developing their learning progress.

Black and Wiliam (2009) argue that for any theory of assessment to have substance, it must take into account “three spheres[:] the teacher’s agenda, the internal world of each student, and the inter-subjective” (p. 26). From this perspective, interactions between teacher and students will influence each subject’s reactions to assessment. Though the teacher has plans for assessment and students carry their own conceptions of assessment based on their previous experiences, the unique inter-subjective relationships that are created within the classroom will alter both the teacher’s and students’ reception of assessment as it is enacted in each unique classroom environment. Furthermore, there is a possibility that students’ experiences of formative assessment may differ from the intentions behind a teacher’s assessment design (Chapman et al., 2015). This is why it is vital that research begin to explore teacher

understandings and intentions, *as well as* student perceptions and responses to formative assessment practices.

Research has suggested that the effectiveness of student-centred and teacher-student interactive assessment practices are dependent on student perceptions of these practices (Hue, et al., 2015). While teacher experience and training may impact the quality of assessment design (Chapman et al., 2015), if students do not see the value in the assessments they are asked to engage in, or are unaware that the activities they are completing are a form of assessment designed to further their learning progress, then they will not benefit fully from the assessment experience. In their study, Harris, Brown, and Harnett (2009) asked 46 students, ranging from primary to secondary age, to draw pictures relating to their conceptions of assessment. Tests, at 39%, and test-like practices, at an additional 19%, were the most common images that students drew. Most of the remaining drawings, though not labelled as a test, “remained pen and paper based” (Harris et al., 2009, p. 62). This aligns with Hue et al.’s (2015) finding that it is “common for students to consider that only formal test-like assessment practice improve learning and consider interactive-informal assessment practices as either purely socially beneficial or to be ignored” (p. 257). Furthermore, students are less likely to place value in the feedback provided to them by their peers (Chapman et al., 2015; Hue et al., 2015), and are, therefore, less likely to invest energy in self- and peer-evaluations. Harris et al. (2009) indicate that the propensity for students to associate the word assessment with tests was even more evident within the high school aged participants in the study and suggest that students within this age group may think of formative assessment practices as a part of the teaching process, rather than ‘assessment’ itself.

Summary

In order to understand the current story, it is helpful to develop an understanding of the history of assessment practices (Shepard, 2000). Using the story model (Drake, 2010; Drake et al., 2014) provides this study with a framework for exploring current assessment practices within the context of the old story that lead into the new story in education. This framework provides the opportunity to explore how the current story in education is still in transition, and how aspects of the old story still impact the current practices and ideologies. This study is exploring the current Ontario context, and will use the definition of *formative assessment* outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010).

Available research on formative assessment focuses on teacher perspectives, knowledge, skills, and understandings, which ignores an important perspective: that of the students (Chapman et al., 2015; Hue et al., 2015; Nieto, 1994). In order to meet the need for including more student voices in formative assessment research, this study will utilize a qualitative case study design, and will explore one teacher's formative assessment practices with her students, as well as the students' perceptions of those assessment practices as they are enacted. The next chapter will detail the methods for data collection and discuss how the qualitative case study methodology is best suited to this research study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

As previously discussed, any theory of assessment should take into account “three spheres[:] the teacher’s agenda, the internal world of each student, and the inter-subjective” (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 26) in order to account for the various interactive elements at play that influence both teachers’ and students’ perspectives of formative assessment. Taking an in-depth look at assessment practices in one teacher’s classroom allowed me the opportunity to explore how those three spheres intersect to create the climate of her classroom. Using a qualitative case study methodology allowed for the use of a wide range of data collection techniques to explore two perspectives on formative assessment simultaneously: the teacher’s understanding of and intended goals for assessment, and the students’ understanding of and responses to the assessments. Merriam (2009) explains that a study’s *epistemology*, the researcher’s “ideas about the nature of knowledge and its construction” (p. 66), should have logical links to a study’s methodology and the questions the study is exploring. Therefore, using a qualitative approach is most fitting for this study, as it allowed me to use the *constructivist epistemology* (Merriam, 2009) to explore how interactions impacted the learning environment, as well as adopt the *relativist ontology* (Reason, 1994) to see how individuals reacted to and experienced the same assessment interactions differently. By adopting a qualitative case study methodology, this study has the opportunity to explore in-depth the varying understandings of, intentions with, reactions to, and perspectives on assessment practices in one teacher’s classroom.

Qualitative Characteristics

Carter and Little (2007) argue that consistency between epistemology,

methodology, research questions, and methods is a key feature in creating a valid and rigorous qualitative study. Yilmaz (2013) explains that qualitative research “explores what it assumes to be a socially constructed dynamic reality through a framework which is value-laden, flexible, descriptive, holistic, and context sensitive” (p. 312).

Constructivism, the epistemology supporting current trends and changes in education, works under that assumption that “we make meaning by interacting with others; learners construct their own knowledge through interactions with their teachers and peers” (Drake et al., 2014, xiii). This understanding of learning allows for an examination of how complex interactions and relationships in the classroom may result in different responses to formative assessment practices from each individual in the class. Adopting a qualitative approach allowed this study to maintain consistency between the epistemology supporting the methodology and the epistemology that supports the changes currently occurring in assessment practices in education. Carter and Little (2007) also explain that qualitative research “asks open questions about phenomena as they occur in context rather than setting out to test predetermined hypotheses” (p. 1316). The constructivist epistemology allows for the inclusion of multiple and even contradictory participant responses to and understandings of assessment, as well as varying answer to the research questions: What are a teacher’s understandings of and intended goals for assessment? What are the students’ understandings of and responses to assessment?

It is believed within the qualitative research paradigm that “humans construct knowledge out of their somewhat subjective engagement with objects in their world” (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003, p. 4). Adopting the relativist ontology allowed me to examine how different individuals reacted to and experienced the same assessment interactions

differently. The relativist ontology understands reality dualistically and in an iterative relationship that is both dependent on the individual participant as well as a separate, external, independent reality that impacts the individual (Reason, 1994). The story model highlights the idea that external practices and curriculum policies will have impact on both teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment. Asking questions about individual experiences within the framework of the story model highlights the reciprocal relationship between individual experiences and external influences on the understanding of assessment experiences enacted in the classroom.

The qualitative paradigm is emergent in nature (Yilmaz, 2013). This is well-suited to a study hoping to explore both teachers' and students' perceptions of and responses to formative assessment within the context of the classroom, as the emergent design allowed me to be responsive to lesson plans as they changed according to student need. Since one of the purposes of formative assessment is to use it as a tool for assessing student learning in order to make adjustments to future teaching plans (Drake et al., 2014; Earl, 2003), it was essential that my research design could be flexible and responsive to the teaching and learning plans as changes occurred. For example, student conversation interviews emerged from events as they occurred in class. The emergent nature of qualitative research allowed for prompts to emerge from observations in order to gather in-class immediate reactions from both the teacher and students to assessments as they were enacted throughout classroom observations.

Case Study

When examining a single case, one of the most important aspects is to define what makes this particular case worth studying. Merriam (2009) explains that a case

might be selected in order to produce a rich data set, as “a researcher could study it [the selected case] to achieve as full an understanding of the phenomenon as possible” (p. 42). The teacher chosen for this study, Brooke³, a secondary English and drama teacher with 11 years of teaching experience, volunteered to participate in this study because of her personal and professional interest in formative assessment. Brooke and I have worked together in the past. She has invited me into her classroom as a guest teacher, and I have worked with her to help coordinate student performances of musical theatre productions at her school. Having worked with Brooke in the past, I was familiar with her strong desire to integrate formative assessment into her teaching practices. From these previous interactions and her given interest in the current study, I felt that observations of her classroom, discussions with her students, and interviews with her would result in rich data on teacher intentions, student reactions, and classroom practices with formative assessment.

The case study methodology does not define specific methods to be used in data collection or data analysis (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2007) emphasizes the need for multiple data sources, such as “observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents,” in order to provide and explore “case-based themes” (p. 73) when completing a case study. *Verisimilitude* is the researcher’s ability to reproduce “the real” by complying with the “laws of its genre” (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 579). A literary term meaning writing that is “clear, engaging, and full of unexpected ideas” within qualitative research, *verisimilitude* is argued to be a marker of quality as it allows the reader to experience the events of the research through writing that provides thick

³ A pseudonym has been chosen for the teacher-participant to protect her identity.

description “accurately reflecting all of the complexities that exist in real life” (Creswell, 2007, p. 46). A key marker for validity in the case study methodology is the reproduction of the context observed and the ordinary daily activities to provide the reader with a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The use of multiple data collection methods allowed for a rich, thick description of the case being studied, as well as an exploration of multiple perspectives and features of the case. Merriam (2009) describes the case study methodology as “particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” with its “specificity of focus [making] it an especially good design for practical problems – for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from every day practice” (p. 43). My study looks at exactly that: everyday assessment practices. My study explores how a teacher’s intentions for and students’ reactions to formative assessment interact in the classroom, and how these varying perceptions of formative assessment may intersect within the classroom context.

Pilot Interview

In the spring of 2015, I was given the opportunity to complete an interview with April⁴, a secondary math and science teacher completing her sixth year of teaching who is interested in integrating formative assessment practices into her everyday classroom teaching. This interview served as a pilot for the interviews to be completed with Brooke as a part of the current study. Merriam (2009) describes *pilot interviews* as crucial to the process of developing a strong interview, as they allow the researcher opportunity to develop their interview skills, as well as gain insight into how to further develop interview questions in a way that better suits the purpose of the study. At the time of our

⁴ A pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the participant in my pilot interview.

interview, April was completing professional development courses on the use of formative assessment practices to increase student engagement in schooling. Allowing the conversation to stray from the questions I had prepared for the interview produced rich data as a result of the anecdotes April offered from the professional development she was engaged in at her school. From this pilot interview, I became aware that my interviews would better serve the purposes of this study if I included a limited number of open questions. This allowed the interviews I later completed with Brooke to become more of a conversation than an interview.

My initial plan was to use Participatory Action Research (PAR) as my methodology. The PAR methodology is highly collaborative in nature, and includes participants in shaping the design of the study (Maiter, Joseph, Shan, & Saeid, 2013). As my research design became more focused on students' perspectives of formative assessment, it became evident that the PAR design would be challenging, and potentially impede the collection of accurate data sets. Through the pilot interview conducted with April, as well as discussions with members of the Research Ethics Committees, I became aware that I would have to limit the teacher's access to students' raw data in order to maintain confidentiality for ethical purposes (i.e., so that students did not censor their answers for fear of repercussion or feel coerced to participate in the study). Providing students access to data produced from my interviews with Brooke would have also presented ethical issues, and potentially limited the amount of information Brooke was willing to share in these interviews. These ethical considerations caused me to come to the realization that a qualitative case study methodology was more suited to my research questions and the purposes of this current study.

Findings within my pilot study aligned with current theory on formative assessment. April discussed the importance of creating a classroom culture where students felt comfortable sharing their answers and learning from their mistakes. Her discussion was consistent with theory that supports the use of formative assessment to create a classroom culture that promotes student development as more important than students' final grades (Drake et al., 2014; Shepard, 2000). April's teaching practices, as well as the practices she and her colleagues were learning about in their professional development sessions, aligned well with the ideologies supporting formative assessment as a way to aide in student learning progress. The findings that emerged from this pilot interview suggest that creating a culture of learning through the use of daily formative assessment practices aides students' learning progress by making learning visible to both the teacher and students.

Recruitment

Upon receiving Research Ethics Board (REB) approval from both Brock University and the district school board, a letter of invitation was sent to administration at the school where Brooke is employed. Administration at the school confirmed their consent formally regarding having a teacher and students at their school participate in the research study by completing an informed consent form. Upon receiving consent from administration at the school, Brooke was formally approached for participation in this study with a letter of invitation. Brooke confirmed her interest formally with respect to participating in the research study by also completing an informed consent form.

Students were under the age of majority; therefore, once informed consent was obtained from Brooke, a letter was sent home with the students to provide to their

guardians. This letter detailed the purpose of the study, benefits anticipated from the study, what participation in the study included, and explained that participation in the study was voluntary and could be terminated upon participant request. Students and their guardian(s) were asked to sign and return this letter if they wished to provide assent/consent for their participation in the study. This assent/consent form provided two options for the level of student participation: *students in participating classes* (e.g., class observations, and informal conversation interviews only), and *student-participants* (e.g., class observations, informal conversation interviews, and student focus group discussions). Furthermore, students and guardians were informed of their ability to withdraw the student and any/all of the data they had contributed from the study at any point prior to the completion of observations within these letters.

I requested to receive all letters of consent/assent, whether signed or not, in unmarked envelopes to ensure confidentiality of students' decisions to participate in the study. This procedure allowed students to keep their level of participation in the study confidential, as they had the opportunity to return their forms, signed or unsigned, to me in sealed envelopes. All signed letters were kept by me and secured with the research materials in a locked drawer in my private residence. Due to the nature of student focus group meetings, Brooke and other students in the classes were aware of who was participating in the study at the student-participant level. This raised a social risk for student-participants, which was detailed in the student and parent/guardian letters of invitation. In order to reduce the level of social risk for student-participants, all data associated with student-participants was labeled with a pseudonym at all points throughout data collection and analysis to secure a high level of confidentiality.

Participants

I invited Brooke and two of her secondary level drama classes, one Grade 10 and one Grade 11, to participate in a one-unit inquiry that lasted three weeks. Due to the highly cooperative nature of qualitative research, I felt it important to select a teacher-participant who is interested in the project and who also feels comfortable with my presence in her classroom.

Brooke and I have known each other professionally for three years. She has been kind enough to welcome me into her classroom as a collaborator on school performances, and has trusted me with her students as a guest teacher in her classes. She has an infectious optimistic demeanour. Teaching is her passion and her goal is to motivate students through creating a classroom environment that is supportive, positive, and accepting. Her teaching practices include formative assessment strategies with AfL and AaL integrated throughout classroom activities. I have witnessed Brooke use student self-assessment tools, which require students to reflect on the impact effort has on their level of achievement and progress in class, in an attempt to communicate the message that she believes every student can learn and develop, regardless of previous performance in a subject if they continue to try. Brooke's teaching practices embody the new story of teaching and assessment.

Brooke and I met in a professional setting; however, due to our shared passion for teaching, we have been able to develop a strong collegial rapport that is built on mutual respect. When I met with Brooke for a social interaction in the fall of 2014, conversation came around to my ideas for this study. Brooke's reaction was positive, and she said she would be happy to be involved in this project and to have me in her classroom. As a vital

aspect of this project is the exploration of the use of a variety of formative assessment practices (e.g., teacher verbal feedback, teacher written feedback, student self-assessment, student peer-assessment), a teacher who employs a variety of assessment practices and engages in self-reflexivity in his/her teaching practice was vital to the success of this study. As is a common practice within the qualitative case study methodology (Stake, 2005), purposeful sampling was used when selecting the teacher-participant in order to ensure data collected during the study allowed for optimum learning opportunity. As Janesick (1994) argues, “Access and entry are sensitive components in qualitative research, and the researcher must establish trust, rapport, and authentic communication patterns with participants” (p. 211). With me as the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009), the rapport that Brooke and I had already developed was likely to increase the honesty and openness of her discussions, thus resulting in richer data sets. Brooke was also selected for her belief in the benefits of formative assessment, her interest in this project, as well as the inviting atmosphere she creates in her classroom.

Teacher participation included three open-ended interviews, observations of two of Brooke’s classes, informal conversation interviews with Brooke throughout classroom observations, and *member reflections* on transcripts and initial data analysis from open-ended interviews. *Member reflection* is a term used by Tracy (2010) to describe a more participant-centered member check strategy, where participants are asked for input throughout the process of data analysis. While I have witnessed some of Brooke’s teaching practices in the past, this project offered me the opportunity to explore the reasoning behind her assessment designs. I know Brooke to be a highly conscious and

reflective teacher, but had never had the opportunity to openly discuss the motivations behind her assessment designs. Our previous history allowed for a reciprocal relationship of learning between Brooke as a teacher and me as a researcher. Throughout classroom observations, Brooke would engage in aside conversations with me. Within these discussions, I was able to offer my knowledge of current research on formative assessment practices and offer reflection on why assessment practices were or were not going as Brooke had planned. In turn, Brooke offered me more practical knowledge of experiences with formative assessment in the classroom and insights into the challenges and benefits of implementing the new story of assessment into her practice. I did not enter the classroom as an expert telling Brooke the answer to the question: what are a teacher's understandings of and intended goals for assessment? Instead, we worked together to uncover her intentions with formative assessment and reflect on the practices as they were enacted in the classroom in order to develop an understanding of how classroom dynamics and students' responses impact plans for assessment in practice.

The focus of this study is on Brooke's assessment practices; however, it was vital that students felt their importance as participants and co-researchers in this study as well. A reciprocal relationship of learning needed to be developed between the teacher and researcher, as well as between the students and the researcher. When introducing myself to Brooke's classes, I emphasized how students' voices and perspectives on assessment were integral to me reaching the goals for this study and answering *both* primary research questions. This emphasis on the importance of students' voices was maintained throughout discussions with students in class and during focus group meetings. Students' reactions to assessment, as well as their reflections on assessment, influenced the findings

of the project. The feedback provided by students through informal conversation during classroom observations, as well as the data provided by their self-reflections and focus group discussions, have been used to answer the question: What are the students' understandings of and responses to assessment? What complex interactions impact students' reception of formative assessment as it is enacted in the classroom?

Student participation occurred on two different levels: *students in participating classes*, and *student-participants*. *Students in participating classes* were observed by myself during classroom observations, and were asked to engage in informal conversation interviews intermittently throughout the period of classroom observations. Two to five *student-participants* were also selected from each of the two participating classes. In addition to the activities completed by students in participating classes, these *student-participants* were asked to participate in three focus group meetings outside of class time. Initial analysis of the data collected from student-participants was completed prior to the final focus group meeting, and these initial analyses were used in the final focus group meeting with student-participants so that they had a chance to discuss, add, and reinterpret the data that they contributed throughout the project.

Prior to observations commencing, I sought assent from all students in Brooke's two participating drama classes, as well as consent from the guardians of these students. A low success rate for receiving assent/consent returned from students reduced the amount of fieldnotes that could be completed during classroom observations. Though students verbally communicated their comfort with me in the classroom and being involved in the study, without written student assent and parent consent, students could not be included as a part of the study. During the process of receiving ethics clearance

from Brock University and the school board, I had proposed using the process of default assent and default consent. With the process of *default assent* and *default consent*, students or parents of students who do not wish to be a part of the study may return a form requesting that the student be excluded from all research activities. Those students and parents who do not return a form offer their assent and consent through default. This request for default assent and default consent was denied, as the research ethics boards explained that there would be no way to prove that either the student or the parents had received or read the form if nothing was returned. The process of written assent and written consent was required for the project to move forward. Students who did not return assessment/consent were not noted in fieldnotes for the study, nor were they engaged in informal conversation interviews. This low rate of return of consent/assent forms may be due to parental concerns with their child participating in the research, parents forgetting to fill out the form, students forgetting to give the form to their parents, students losing the form, students feeling like there was no benefit to them being involved in the project (i.e. no grades were attached to their participation), or it may be because students are not used to being engaged in conversations that ask for their perspectives on assessment. If students are not taught to see the value in their own perspective, then it is less likely they will see the value in participating in a research study that asks for their ideas and perspectives.

Sampling of student-participants was based on student availability and willingness to participate in the focus group meetings during the lunch hour on the days selected for the study. A convenience sampling of two to five students from each of the two participating drama classes, among the students whose assent and parental consent to

participate was given, were included as student-participants in the study as representation of the student voice in each class. As only two students from the Grade 10 class and five students from the Grade 11 class volunteered as student-participants, all interested students were able to participate in the focus group meetings. In the Grade 11 class, there were 14 students on the register and 12 in regular attendance. Five students volunteered as student-participant from this class. In the Grade 10 class, there were 17 students in regular attendance. Two student-participants volunteered to participate from this class. It was suggested by Mel⁵, a student-participant in the Grade 10 class, that the lower levels of student involvement from her peers was because students do not like to give up their lunch hours; therefore, it could be argued that those students who did volunteer to give up their lunch hours to participate in the focus group meetings were more highly invested in investigating their learning and educative processes.

Merriam (2009) warns against the use of convenience sampling, as it may result in the production of *information poor* rather than *information rich* data sets; however, because students' experience with assessment is the phenomenon of interest, any student voice is desired within this study. While there was a smaller sampling size from the Grade 10 class, the two student-participants were eager to be involved in the project and were most willing to engage in conversation about formative assessment. This makes convenience sampling a valid form of sampling technique within the parameters of this study. It must be noted that because convenience sampling is the method of sampling used for student-participants, students who willingly volunteer to participate in the study may be of a unique population (i.e. more involved students; high achievers); however, it

⁵ Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all student-participants and students in participating classes.

is just as possible that students who do not enjoy assessment would want the opportunity to express their opinions of assessment. The student-participants from both classes represented a range of abilities in drama and discussed having varying levels of academic achievement in their other courses such as math, science, history, and English. All student-participants in both classes communicated a shared enjoyment of drama and had selected this course as one of their elective credits.

Feedback

Brooke was sent a transcript, along with a summary of my initial data analysis, for each teacher interview within a week of each of our first two teacher interview meetings. Each time, Brooke was provided with a letter that detailed the purpose and process of completing a member reflection. Brooke was also asked to engage in an approximately one-hour long, final open-ended interview with me. In this interview, we discussed initial data analysis and themes that had emerged in the data collected from classroom observations and teacher-interviews. Brooke was able to suggest additions and changes to my interpretations of the findings relating to her data contribution. While this final interview was originally scheduled for February 2016, approximately two weeks after the close of classroom observations, due to scheduling issues, this final interview did not take place until June 2016. It was originally scheduled for immediately after the close of classroom observations so that events being discussed would remain fresh in Brooke's mind; however, the delay in the completion of this final interview meant that Brooke had another semester of teaching experience to discuss, which added to the rich discussion Brooke offered on reflections of her formative assessment practices in class.

Student-participants were asked to engage in an approximately 45-minute final

focus group meeting with me, the researcher, at the close of classroom observations. This final focus group meeting at the close of classroom observations served the purpose of providing student-participants the opportunity to complete a member reflection on my initial data analysis of classroom observations and student focus group meeting discussions. Initial data analysis and themes were brought to this final focus group meeting and opportunity was provided for the student-participants to add, change, and discuss their interpretations of the findings related to their data contributions.

Upon completion of data collection, all student-participants, students in participating classes, and Brooke were provided with a feedback letter to thank them for their participation in the project and to outline the contribution that they made through participation in the project. Once completed, the final report was provided to the school board, teacher-participant, and administration of the school to share with student-participants.

Confidentiality

As argued by Milne (2005), concepts that are intrinsic to quantitative methods in research are not always inherently compatible in qualitative research methods. Milne (2005) argues that the perpetuation of these guidelines in research may be impeding the progress and benefits of particular research paradigms:

Concepts such as *informed consent*, *risk/benefit analysis*, and *confidentiality* are not inherent truths of ethics or categorical imperatives ... A deeper understanding of the complexities of classroom life, establishing collegial research relationships between teachers and students, and providing opportunities for students to have a greater say in their learning will not come from continued separation of the

researched and the researcher. (para. 33)

Formal procedures necessary to ensure participant safety may reduce the level of rapport initially established between the researcher and participants; however, my study respected the expectations of the two REB committees from which I sought approval. I worked with both REB committees to create a comfortable and ethical research environment for all research participants.

One of the ways my study worked to create a non-coercive and comfortable study for participants was by maintaining participant confidentiality within all research data. No names of school boards, schools, students, colleagues, or teachers were attached to the data in any stage of data collection or analysis; however, Brooke's gender, subject areas, years of teaching experience, and position within her school board were included in the data and final analysis reports. With only one teacher-participant in this study, the use of a pseudonym did not grant Brooke confidentiality among administration, parents, students, and, potentially, other staff at her school. In order to reduce the level of social risk from participating in this study, Brooke was provided with the opportunity to review all transcripts and initial data analysis resulting from the in-depth interviews with her in order to complete a member reflection. Given the number and size of school boards in Ontario, the identifying features that do appear in the data will not put the participants at risk for being identified by anyone reading the final reports.

For students in participating classes and student-participants, only gender, subject area for the participating class, and grade-level/age remained attached to the research data. Pseudonyms were used in replacement of student names for all data and reports resulting from the study to protect the identity of students who chose to participate in the

study. Names were collected for the sole purpose of the consent/assent forms, which have been kept separate from data collected at all times. Anonymity was not possible within this research project. Due to the collaborative nature of focus group meetings, student-participant contributions could not remain confidential among student-participants. To increase student comfort and security, student-participants were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement at the start of the first student focus group meeting. This agreement served the purpose of making students aware of their rights as participants, protecting the confidentiality of information shared by focus group participants, and to ensure students were aware of how to properly respect the confidentiality of the opinions and ideas that their peers shared in these meetings. Other students in the classes were aware that these students were participating in the focus group meetings, but they did not have access to any of what was discussed during those meetings.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument for data collection was me, the researcher, as is expected with most forms of qualitative research, and within the case study methodology, in particular (Merriam, 2009). At two points during the fall/winter 2015/2016 semester, I interviewed Brooke to discuss her integration of formative assessment into her teaching practices with her Grade 10 and 11 drama classes. I recorded fieldnotes while observing her classroom over the course of one unit of study to monitor the enactment of these specific formative assessment practices and students' corresponding responses. I also engaged in a convenience sampling of students in discussions of their responses to assessment practices during three student focus group discussions. All interviews and focus group meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed by me using a combination of

naturalized and denaturalized transcription methods. I used *denaturalized transcription* methods, transcription that maintains the integrity of the interview but removes unnecessary elements (Mero-Jaffe, 2011), by removing repeated thinking words and auditory pauses like “umm” that did not seem relevant to or interrupted the understanding of participant answers. Naturalized transcription methods that include details of the interview discourse (Mero-Jaffe, 2011) were used to include pauses, thinking noises, and vocal emphasis that I interpreted as relevant to the meaning of the data and participants’ ideas. At times, these noises can influence the interpretation of spoken word and are important to maintain consistency between verbal and written data sets. The combination of transcripts from teacher interviews, fieldnotes from classroom observations, transcripts from student focus group meetings, and my daily researcher journal make up the data sets for this study.

Methods for Data Collection

The methods of data collection used were audio-recorded teacher open-ended interviews, audio-recorded student focus group discussions, observations, fieldnotes, informal conversation interviews with teacher and students during observations, researcher journal, and transcription of all audio-recorded discussions/interviews. The following is a detailed description of each method that occurred within this research study.

Interviews

At the outset of the study, Brooke participated in an approximately one-hour long open-ended interview with me about positive/negative experiences she has had with formative assessment practices, past experiences with using formative assessment in her

teaching practice, and her understanding of formative assessment. To increase Brooke's level of comfort, I offered her a copy of the list of questions I planned to ask in the interview. As this was an in-depth, open-ended interview, I reminded Brooke that the questions I sent to her were merely an idea of what I planned to ask, and that all questions might not be raised while other new questions would emerge throughout our conversation. I wanted Brooke to feel prepared and flexible regarding what might occur in our conversations. During the final week of observations, Brooke and I engaged in one approximately hour-long open-ended interview to discuss formative interactions with students in her classroom seen during observations, and her experiences of implementing her formative assessment plans.

Teacher interviews were semi-structured, and questions were open-ended so as to create a comfortable atmosphere for the participant. The purpose of this project was to explore the intentions behind Brooke's assessment design, as well as to capture her reactions to students' engagement with assessments as they occurred in class. In order to do so, the interview structure and questions needed to be flexible to what Brooke brought up in conversation, as well as adaptive to integrate discussion of specific occurrences from classroom observations. Merriam (2009) argues that the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 90). The use of the semi-structured interview design was chosen for its flexibility, as this best suited the purpose of capturing Brooke's beliefs and understanding of the purpose of her assessment design, instead of using an interview design that is guided only by researcher questions.

Brooke was asked to engage in an approximately one-hour long final open-ended

interview with me after classroom observations were completed. This final interview served the purpose of discussing my initial interpretations of classroom observations and teacher interviews, and providing Brooke with the opportunity to complete a verbal member reflection on my initial data analysis.

Focus Group Meetings

Student-participants from each class were invited to participate in two approximately 45-minute open-ended focus group sessions with some of their peers and myself during their school lunch period. In these focus group meetings, we talked about the positive and/or negative experiences the students had with formative assessment in school, their understanding of formative assessment and assessment more generally, as well as formative interactions with Brooke that I had observed in their drama class during observations for this study. Each class had their own focus group consisting of two to five students. The use of focus group meetings for data collection is consistent with the constructivist epistemology that informs this study because in focus groups knowledge is created through group interactions and negotiated through conversation between participants (Merriam, 2009). Throughout each of our meetings, student self-reflection, as well as peer negotiation of meaning, was noted, and a deeper understanding of formative assessment was evident from each student-participant within the final focus group meeting. Having students participate in focus group meetings, rather than individual interviews, had the potential to result in students influencing their peers' answers; however, within this study, it appeared that student-participants benefitted from listening to their peers' responses. By hearing and learning from their peers' self-reflections, student-participants began to provide richer data as they deepened their understanding of

formative assessment and the importance of self-reflection through these focus group meetings. Kitzinger (1995) cites that there are drawbacks to the use of focus group meetings, such as the loss of participant voices who dissent from the prevalent view and alteration of opinion due to dominant group opinion, focus groups also offer the “safety in numbers factor” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299) for students who may have been too shy to speak one-on-one. I also attempted to balance the drawbacks of focus group discussion by capturing individual student voices within the individual conversation interviews that occurred during classroom observations.

Student-participants were also asked to engage in an approximately 45-minute final focus group meeting with their peers and me at the end of the final week of observations. This focus group meeting at the close of classroom observations served the purpose of discussing my initial interpretations of observations and focus group discussions, as well as providing student-participants an opportunity to complete a member reflection regarding my initial data analysis. Students had the opportunity to add, change, and discuss their interpretations of the findings related to their data contribution. Findings relating to the teacher-participant were not shared with the student-participants in this final focus group meeting.

One problem that arose from holding focus group meetings at lunch was that we were severely limited in time. For example, on January 8, 2016 with the first focus group meeting with the Grade 11 students, the class before lunch went longer than anticipated. As this was the first focus group meeting held, we had to discuss the confidentiality agreements, so we only had approximately 20 minutes for student discussions. This limited the amount of data resulting from this first focus group meeting.

Fieldnotes

I took fieldnotes during all open-ended teacher interviews, the 45-minute student focus group meetings, after conversation interviews, and throughout all classroom visits. The focus of fieldnotes from classroom observations was formative assessment practices in the classroom and interactions between Brooke and students that constitute formative interaction (i.e., verbal feedback during classroom discussion/activities, written feedback, student self-assessments, student peer-assessments).

As Walford (2009) discusses, taking fieldnotes should be unobtrusive, and sometimes, writing just a word or two to allow recall of the interaction is sufficient, as long as those fieldnotes are augmented with out-of-field notes shortly after. As I wanted to make sure my memory was fresh when completing my out-of-field-notes, I began completing out-of-field notes soon after completing observations or participating in a discussion with participants. I used these out-of-field notes to augment and supplement the data collected during teacher interviews, student-participant focus group discussions, as well as conversation interviews from classroom observations. The completion of these out-of-field notes was integral to the development of discussion during teacher-participant open-ended interviews and student focus group meetings, as well as a part of the data collected from this study.

Observations

I observed the two participating classes for the duration of one unit of study, approximately three weeks. For the duration of this unit, I was present to observe every class in its entirety (i.e., Monday to Friday for the duration of each 75-minute class for both classes), for a total of approximately 15 hours per class. Classroom observations

consisted of completing a scan of the environment to note important environmental factors that create the culture of the classroom (e.g., furniture arrangement, wall displays). The focus of these classroom observations was to collect ethnographic fieldnotes, including the frequency with which Brooke and her students engaged in formative interactions (i.e., verbal feedback, written feedback, completion of formative assignments, self-assessments, peer-assessments), observation of how Brooke used formative assessment in her practice, observation of how students reacted to and engaged with formative assessment, comments made by Brooke to her students and myself about formative assessment, comments made by students to Brooke, to their peers, and to myself about formative assessment, and general reporting of classroom behaviour in response to ongoing formative assessment practices. Observations of students and student interactions with Brooke were limited to observation of students whose informed assent and informed consent was provided from both the student and his/her guardian.

Conversation Interviews

Once familiarity was established between participants and myself, informal conversation interviews were used to record student and teacher reactions to formative assessment practices as they were enacted in the classroom. Brooke, student-participants, and students in participating classes were engaged in these conversation interviews. Questions were targeted at gathering data on student perceptions of teacher intentions (e.g., What do you think your teacher meant when she told you...), teacher responses to student engagement (e.g., How does this student's reactions cause you to change your teaching plan?), and discovering whether students and the teacher viewed casual assessment interactions as formative assessment (e.g., When you chat with Brooke about

quick fixes to your presentation, do you see this as assessment?). I immediately recorded these conversation interviews within fieldnotes, using verbatim quotes when able, and supplemented with out-of-field notes at the close of classroom observations for the day.

Merriam (2009) describes the purpose for unstructured or informal interviews to be developing more knowledge about a phenomenon in order to develop relevant questions to ask in further interviews. The purpose of using informal interviews with students and Brooke during classroom observations was two-fold. The first purpose was to capture participant reactions to and understandings of formative assessment as it was enacted in the classroom (i.e., following incidents that are identified as critical, following instances of formative interactions witnessed between Brooke and students, following the assignment of a formative assessment tasks). The second purpose was to gather data to formulate questions and shape discussion in subsequent interviews with Brooke and focus group meetings with student-participants. This less structured style of interviewing “assume[s] that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90), and allowed for differing perspectives on assessment practices to be captured within the data collected for this study.

In order to reduce the disruption of these interviews, I only completed conversation interviews with students when they were on rehearsal periods, and did not conduct conversation interviews on performance days when students were being formally evaluated. Brooke also offered time for me to talk with students at the end of classes when student performances were evaluated, so as to gather student reactions immediately after a formal presentation.

Transcription

All interviews with Brooke, as well as student-participant focus group meetings, were audio-recorded and transcribed by me within a week of their completion. Many researchers posit that transcription is actually a part of the process of analyzing interview data (Bird, 2005; Brandenburg & Davidson, 2011; Mero-Jaffe, 2011; Tilley, 2003). Decisions about what information is included, what is excluded, and how verbal data is represented in written form impacts the transcription of data. This is why I felt it was vital that I complete transcription of all interviews and focus group meetings myself within a short timespan. This way, the memory of what had transpired during the interaction with the participants was still new and easier to recall as I attempted to recreate the events and discussions in written form.

The first goal for transcription was to translate spoken word into written text in a way that clearly communicated how Brooke and her students had explained their experiences with assessment strategies. My second goal for transcription was to maintain a high level of detail to reproduce an accurate representation of what had occurred in person. I purposely borrowed from both naturalized and denaturalized transcription practices to meet a balance between the two, at times contradictory, goals I held for my transcription. As I listened and re-listened to the auditory information provided by the interviews and focus group recordings, I attempted to synthesize participants' words and ideas with my understanding of our conversations into a written representation of our exchanges.

Transcription is an interpretive act (Tilley, 2003). From my decision to use transcription practices that lay between naturalized and denaturalized techniques, to the

choices I made for what to include and exclude in each transcript, the written representation of each discussion is an interpretation of what took place. Each transcript is, thus, already coloured with my analysis and biases. In order to reduce the level of bias within each transcription, I utilized Tilley and Powick's (2002) *transcription legend*. This legend provided me with guidelines on what sounds to note, how to use punctuation, and what demonstrative expressions to include in my transcripts so that this auditory information was apparent in the written text and was able to be integrated into my further analysis of the data provided by these discussions.

Data Processing and Analysis

The findings discussed are the result of qualitative content analysis (Cho & Lee, 2014; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) of teacher interview transcripts, fieldnotes and out-of-field notes from classroom observations, fieldnotes and out-of-field notes detailing conversation interviews with Brooke and student-participants, and student focus group meeting transcripts. Within the qualitative case study methodology, the practices associated with data analysis involve data being coded and recoded, in order to look for “criss-crossed reflection” and recognizable patterns in the data (Stake, 2005). By using the *qualitative content analysis* approach, I was able to use codes that are derived from interview and focus group prompts, as well as codes that emerged from the data itself and have specific relevance to the participants of this study (Cho & Lee, 2014; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Constan, 1992).

As analysis began, a list of codes and themes was maintained with a description for each code, as well as details on where each code had emerged within the data. Once all data sets were analyzed and a code list was finalized, all data sets were analyzed again

using this finalized codes list to ensure that codes developed later in the analysis process were applied to data sets that were collected earlier. Table 3.1 displays the codes that emerged through data analysis and cross lists them with the associated theme. These codes, as well as their related themes, emerged from the process of qualitative content analysis (Constas, 1992) of the data sets collected throughout fieldwork for this study.

Table 3.1

Themes and Codes Chart

Brooke's Formative Assessment	Bump-up Activity
	Culture of Care
How Assessment is Understood	Assessment as Diagnostic
	Assessment as Testing
	Assessment for Reporting
	Assessment as Everyday Practices
Influences on Assessment	Curriculum Influences
	Intrinsic Motivation in the Grading Culture
Responsive Teaching	Student to Teacher Feedback
	Formative Assessment and Exams
	Emphasizing Development

In order to maintain focus, the discussion of data within Chapter Four is organized by theme rather than code. Table 3.2 displays the themes that are discussed in more detail within Chapter Four and maps out how each theme relates to addressing a particular research question.

Table 3.2

Themes and Research Questions Chart

Code	Related Research Question
Brooke's Formative Assessment How Assessment is Understood	1. To explore a teacher's understanding of her role in developing students' learning progress through her assessment designs.
How Assessment is Understood	2. To explore how students understand and respond to formative assessment practices.
Influences on Assessment Responsive Teaching	3. To explore the complex interactions that impact the teacher's perceptions and students' reception of formative assessment as it is enacted in the classroom.

Establishing Credibility

Within the qualitative paradigm, the practices of triangulation, member reflections, and audit trails help to establish a project's credibility by integrating data from multiple sources and making the process of data collection and analysis transparent to the reader. Below are details of the steps taken within this research project in order to establish credibility.

Triangulation

A featured element of the case study methodology is the use of triangulation in order to improve the study's credibility. Stake (2005) defines the practice of *triangulation* within the case study methodology as "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (p. 454). Due to the highly interpretive and subjective nature of qualitative case studies, triangulation of description and interpretation is used throughout the entirety of the study in order to "identify different ways the case is being seen" (Stake, 2005, p. 454). Rather than using triangulation in order to find a singular truth, this understanding of triangulation sees that multiple interpretations of the same event or same case are valid and credible. Tracy (2010) offers the term *crystallization* in replacement of the term triangulation, to offer a more complex understanding of reality: "Crystallization encourages researchers to gather multiple types of data and employ various methods ... to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue" (p. 844). Instead of using multiple data sources to look for consistency to locate a single truth, the practice of *crystallization* opens up the idea of truth to encompass multiple perspectives. Within my study, the purpose of using multiple data sources is to gain access to the varying perspectives and potentially contradictory interpretations of formative assessment that interact and create the climate of the classroom.

Two of the most common approaches to using triangulation within the case study methodology are "redundancy of data gathering and procedural challenges to explanations" (Stake, 2005, p. 454). Within this study, triangulation and crystallization are achieved through use of multiple data source inputs. Interviews and focus group

meetings were used to gather both teacher and student perceptions of formative assessment. In order to supplement these conversations, and analyze how they align with daily classroom practices, observations were completed for the duration of the unit of study.

Member Reflections

The epistemology supporting the process of member checking stems from a positivistic understanding of reality, where participants are asked to check for the accuracy of data analysis in order to find a singular truth resulting from the data (Tracy, 2010). The practice of using member reflections is better aligned with the constructivist epistemology, as instead of looking for a single truth, my study is looking at how different interpretations come together to form an experienced reality. Tracy (2010) introduces the term *member reflection* for the process of seeking input from participant throughout the process of analyzing data and creating reports. This continued input from participants is not valued as a “test of research findings”; rather this “sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study’s findings” serves the purpose of providing an “opportunity for *collaboration* and reflexive *elaboration*” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). Instead of simply relying on participant input as a member check that occurs after all coding and analysis has taken place, the practice of member reflections allows participants to collaborate with the researcher at multiple points throughout the data collection and data analysis processes. As this study is interested in individual perceptions and experiences of formative assessment, it was vital that room be made for multiple interpretations of the data to be reflective of the varying opinions both Brooke and student held on formative assessment.

Brooke was provided with a copy of the transcript from each interview along with a member check letter which described the process and purpose of completing a member check approximately one week after each interview was completed. She was asked to read each transcript and notate any suggestions for additions and/or alterations to the transcript. In order to move this process beyond a member check for accuracy and into a member reflection to include Brooke in the process of data analysis, she was also provided with an initial data analysis summary with each transcript. This initial data analysis summary sent to Brooke after each interview included a list of tentative codes emerging from the interview, as well as a sample of quotes that connected to each emergent code. Brooke was asked to provide written feedback, such as alternative interpretations or additions to the data analysis, in order to incorporate her interpretations into the analysis of the data she provided to this study.

Due to confidentiality limitations, students could not be provided with transcripts from focus group meetings; however, I wanted the student voice to still be a part of the data analysis process. The final focus group meeting with each student group served the purpose of a member reflection as codes and themes that resulted from initial analysis of student focus group discussions were used as the focus group prompts for this meeting. In this final meeting, students in each group were provided with a written copy of the themes and codes resulting from the data their group had provided to this study. Students discussed their interpretations of these findings, offered suggestions for reorganization of codes under different themes, and discussed additional ideas they felt were relevant to their understanding of formative assessment.

By providing Brooke with initial data analysis and a transcript after each

interview, as well as the final interview with Brooke and final focus group meetings with student-participants where participants were provided with the opportunity to discuss and share their perspective on my initial data analysis, interpretation of data became a collective process between researcher and participants. For example, students negotiated their understanding of peer-assessment and whether or not it should be organized under a different theme from self-assessment:

Nicole: So, student peer-assessment. Do you see it [fitting under the theme of Assessment *as* Learning] when you're giving one of your peers feedback?

James: Is it helping you for yourself? Is it still helping you for yourself or is it helping...well you're helping someone else so I don't think it would help you, because you already know. Because you're assessing the other person. So I don't think it would be the same category. I think it would be in a different thing.

Nicole: Okay. And what do you think, Mel?

Mel: Same as James. But actually, I think it kind of helps you in a way. Because you're kind of figuring out what you know about the certain topic and you're also helping yourself become better at criticizing. (Focus Group, January 21, 2016)

While Mel initially agreed with James, upon deeper reflection, she realized that she saw how the organization of self- and peer-assessment could be under the same theme.

Students benefited from hearing each other's reflections on data analysis and new codes emerged from participant discussions of initial data analysis. Suggestions that emerged from participant discussions and negotiation of meaning in these final focus group meetings and the final interview with Brooke influenced subsequent analysis of data and reorganization of codes under different themes, as suggested by participants.

Audit Trail

According to Merriam (2009), an *audit trail* in a qualitative study “describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p. 223). The purpose of the audit trail is to allow the researcher to relay to readers how data were collected and analyzed, so that credibility and validity can be assessed. By keeping a “research journal” or “memos on the process of conducting the research” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223), details of how data were collected and analyzed will be more accurate when you come back to writing about the process.

I began writing a researcher journal as I completed the process of receiving REB approval from both Brock University and the school board. This researcher journal was written in when significant occurrences happened throughout the process of seeking REB approval. Once fieldwork began, I wrote in my researcher journal daily. This researcher journal served multiple purposes. One purpose was to detail events and feelings I was having as they occurred, so that they were not forgotten throughout the process of data collection and analysis. These reflections included a focus on my thoughts on teacher needs and student needs, my thoughts on the teacher’s intentions with formative assessment, and my thoughts on students’ responses to formative assessment. A separate journal was kept as an audit trail and detailed the dates significant methods were carried out, such as dates of interviews and when transcriptions were completed. My researcher journal was kept separate from my fieldnotes and out-of-fieldnotes so as to keep my personal reactions to the events of data collection separate from the study’s data. Writing in the researcher journal helped to make my biases visible to myself, and also to the reader so that readers have the opportunity to interpret how these biases impact my study.

Ethical Considerations: Gaining Access (REB Approval)

The process of receiving REB approval from both Brock University and the school board took longer than anticipated. With Brock, I received clearance for file number 15-048 – DRAKE on November 5, 2015. With the school board, approval was delayed due to running out of time in the August 2015 meeting scheduled to discuss my research. Once approval was received, beginning with the school was delayed due to a backlog of work resulting from the job sanction occurring within the board at the time of my application. My initial plan was to begin my research halfway through October 2015, but these delays revealed that my timeline would need to be flexible. Near the end of the research ethics process, I wrote in my research journal:

I feel more prepared and excited to be conducting this research. I feel grateful for the process of completing research ethics applications with two separate research ethics committees, as the feedback and revisions helped me to solidify my methods and the purpose of my study in my mind. (Researcher journal, November 19, 2015)

While the process of receiving ethics clearance from two separate ethics committees delayed my fieldwork, in the end, it helped me to create a stronger project by forcing me to clarify the purpose behind each method I planned to use.

Once I had received final approval from both research ethics committees, I had to wait for the school board REB to receive written confirmation from the principal at the participating school, Lesley⁶, and Brooke that they were both interested in participating in my project. Once the school board REB had received this confirmation of interest, I was

⁶ A pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the principal at the participating school.

able to approach Lesley and formally approach Brooke with letters of invitation.

Observations for my study commenced in January of 2016.

One piece I found difficult throughout the process of gaining REB approval was balancing my pre-existent friendship and collegial relationship with Brooke along-side the strict procedures of the school board's research ethics process. This is the first time that Brooke had taken part in a research study. I assured Brooke throughout the entire process that she should not feel obligated to participate, and I attempted to remain ethical in my contact with Brooke about the project while still informing her of what is happening with the process gaining REB clearance from both committees. I explained in my REB applications that Brooke and I had already discussed the project, and that she was interested in participating. I informed the school board that I would be willing to work with other teachers, or even at another school, should they find that more suitable, should the principal not agree to allow me to conduct my research at the school, or should Brooke decide she was no longer able to participate in the project. As Brooke was excited about the project and eager to work with me again, I felt it was appropriate to keep her informed throughout the process of acquiring research ethics. I was also sure to inform Brooke throughout the process that research ethics had to be granted from both Brock and the school board, and that the principal at Brooke's school must also approve of me conducting research at the school and with Brooke before I would be able to confirm with Brooke her full commitment to participating in the project. I wanted to ensure that Brooke felt neither pressured to participate, nor disappointed if she were not able to participate in this project with me.

In order to protect participant confidentiality, data collected during this project

was encrypted using password protection. Hardcopies of data and reports were stored in a locked drawer in my private residence. Data will be kept for three years, after which time all electronic data will be deleted, and all hardcopies of data will be shredded and disposed of. Access to this data will be limited to myself, Nicole Redmond, the principal investigator/supervising professor, Susan Drake, and members of the thesis committee, Vera Woloshyn and Michael Savage.

Participation in this project was completely voluntary. Participants were informed, both verbally and within their letter of invitation, of their right to decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the interviews, focus group meetings, and conversation interviews during observations without repercussion. Participants were also encouraged to submit their ideas in writing confidentially if they felt uncomfortable sharing their ideas and opinions in front of others. Finally, all participants were informed of their right to decide to withdraw from the project at any time without any penalty until the completion of data collection on February 29, 2016.

Entering the Field

Due to the apparent power imbalance between researcher, teacher, and students, once I entered the field, it was vital that I developed a strong sense of trust with all participants. A level of trust and respect was already developed between Brooke and myself due to our previous experiences; however, it was vital that I respected her knowledge as an experienced teacher and continued to learn from our interactions. Another consideration for the power differential was the students' level of comfort with me in their classroom. Tilley et al. (2009) explain how the power differential in research involving *student-participants* must be negotiated with care: "students stand on 'muddy

ground' and may be anxious that non-participation in the research might result in the decline in relationship with their teacher and/or school grades" (para. 36). As students were aware that their teacher was interested in participating in the project, I had to take care not to make students feel pressured or coerced into participating in the project. There was a fine balance between creating excitement about the project and avoiding creating situations where students might feel obligated or coerced to participate in the research study. As suggested by Milne (2005), guardian informed consent and student informed assent forms were returned in sealed envelopes that were addressed to me, so that Brooke was not aware of who was or was not participating. If students wished to be excluded from participation in the study, they were asked to return their *unsigned* form in the sealed envelope. Asking that *all* students returned their forms meant that the only parties privy to who had chosen to participate would be the students, their guardians, and myself. No students communicated a wish to not be a part of the study. Non-participation was by default, as many students did not return their forms.

One way that I worked to build trust with the students was by ensuring confidentiality of their data. All data and findings relating to the students in participating classes and student-participants were not shared with the teacher-participant until after final grades had been assigned and disseminated for the course (i.e., February of 2016). Conversations and interviews with Brooke throughout the study were limited to data resulting from classroom observations and teacher interviews.

Researcher Influence

One consideration to note when entering the field is the potential impact my presence in the classroom could have on the classroom dynamic and student engagement.

I noted in my researcher journal on January 4, 2016:

The classes are great, really inviting, and they don't seem to be distracted by me at all. They don't come and talk to me or watch what I'm doing. They are very involved in their work and I don't feel that my presence is impacting their behaviour in the least. It really is an ideal group to observe – or so it seems.

During my first classroom observation, though I was unfamiliar with what behaviour in the class was like prior to my attendance, the on-task behaviour and lack of interaction students had with me seemed to signal that my presence was not impacting their engagement in regular class activities. In another journal entry on January 11, 2016, further into my class observations, I noted after completing some informal interviews with students:

Students are more than willing to oblige me in conversation, but I do see discomfort when they are interacting with me in this formal setting. They look down, turn red, or become quiet. I wish I had more time for them to feel comfortable with me. It makes me realize that my presence in class as an observer is less intrusive. [It is important that I] respect this and not do too many conversation interviews and lose that level of comfort they have with me in the room.

One of my methods of data collection was the use of informal interviews with both Brooke and students in participating classes in order to gather responses to formative assessment as it was enacted in the classroom; however, the discomfort exhibited by students during these interactions made me aware that using this method too much may increase the researcher influence on classroom observations. The passage from January

11, 2016 can be contrasted to my entry on January 12, 2016, where students approached me to see if I had any questions or discussion for them participate in:

The fact that students were asking me after class today if I had questions signals to me that they are comfortable with my presence in the class. I told them that I will begin to ask them more questions throughout class periodically, but that I also don't want them to feel put on the spot. They communicated to me that they were comfortable with me asking questions, so I think I will begin to integrate into the class more in my remaining days. Again, I think the most important thing is that I do not disrupt the flow of the class.

Familiarity and comfort between researcher and participants is vital to the collection of relevant and accurate data. The level of comfort that developed between me and the students can be seen in the difference between the level of discomfort I noted on January 11, 2016 compared to the active engagement in the data collection students showed on January 12, 2016 when they approached me to ask if I had any questions. Though students began to show a higher level of comfort when interacting with me, my focus remained on maintaining a low level of intrusion in Brooke's classroom throughout observations.

The impacts of my presence were felt at varying degrees throughout the process of data collection. At times, I noted in my researcher journal that it felt like students were giving me "the answers that they should give, rather than telling me what their natural reaction to feedback/assessment" (Researcher Journal, January 12, 2016). I attempted to address this by telling students that any answer was the right answer, even if their answer was "I don't know," or "I've never thought about that," during interviews and focus

group meetings. Furthermore, a major finding from this study was the impact that having discussions of formative assessment had on student understanding of and engagement with formative assessment practices. While this can be seen as researcher influence, it is also what added to the reciprocity for the study and is a contribution to the field of research in existence on student perceptions of formative assessment.

Reciprocity

Throughout our many exchanges during classroom observations, Brooke sought feedback from me on her assessment strategies when she encountered difficulties. These interactions allowed me to share with Brooke some of my developing knowledge on formative assessment theory. Furthermore, our interviews required that Brooke engage in critical self-reflection. Brooke expressed that this reflection resulted in her developing a deeper understanding of how practices she found success within her drama classroom could be replicated when teaching her second subject, English. During our final interview, Brooke communicated to me that our discussions helped her to reflect not only on ways to improve her teaching practice, but also to realize the positive impact she has on her students – especially after completing a challenging teaching semester:

No, but as you were talking I was reflecting on my whole first semester. I was reflecting on what you saw, what you didn't see, when you came in, what you observed, and it was also such a *positive* semester after such a *challenging* one, so it helped me realize that I do okay (*laughs*). (Brooke, Interview, June 19, 2016)

These positive realizations added to the benefits Brooke experienced from participating in my study.

Student-participants also communicated and demonstrated benefits from being

involved in the project. My hope as a researcher was to make student focus group meetings both beneficial and enjoyable for student-participants. Initially, the lack of students who returned consent/assent forms caused me to be concerned that I would not get any student-participants; however, the results of having a small number of truly engaged students who appreciated the opportunity to discuss and share their experiences and understanding of assessment was beneficial to the study through the rich data sets their discussion provided. Through participating in these focus group discussions, students demonstrated a growing understanding of and an ability to reflect on the purposes of engaging in formative assessment practices. Students also communicated their enjoyment of participating in the focus group meetings. At the end of the second focus group meeting, one student asked if the meetings would continue into next semester. The students in this group seemed interested in continuing the meetings and expressed disappointment when I said that our meetings would finish at the close of the semester. One student communicated disappointment that more of her peers did not take the opportunity to engage in this project. These exchanges showed me that students enjoyed their time engaged in the project, that they valued this project which incorporated the student voice, and that they thought their peers could have benefited from this opportunity.

Exiting the Field

On January 25, 2016, I went into the Grade 10 and Grade 11 drama classes to begin the process of exiting the field. On those classroom visits, I did not take fieldnotes, as I wanted to exit the field how I had entered: in an informal and integrated way. I sat with the class during all activities. At times, Brooke and the students asked for my

feedback on the students' final exam task. In the Grade 10 class, I helped students to organize the leaders of the warm-up and what activities they would use as their warm-up for a part of their sixth exam task. In the Grade 11 class, I provided students with specific feedback on the final rehearsal of their exam performance, as well as pointers on how to prepare for the final performance on their own time over the next few days. These interactions were a nice way to end my time with these groups, and I was able to formally thank the students and Brooke for allowing me to come into their class. All students in both participating classes were provided with a feedback letter.

Students in the Grade 11 class invited me to watch their final exam performance. Brooke welcomed the opportunity to have me in her class for another day, so I went on January 28, 2016 to watch the final performance as a guest, rather than a researcher. Students expressed to me at the end of their final performance that they enjoyed being a part of this project and asked how they could become more involved in sharing their ideas and opinions about the school system. Having them invite me to their final performance, as well as the questions they asked about getting more involved in sharing their ideas on school showed me that students enjoyed having me in their classroom, that through participating in the project these students began to learn about the value their voices can have in making positive changes, and that they also learned the importance of reflecting on their engagement in school.

Summary

The current study explores the practices of one Ontario secondary school drama and English teacher who uses formative assessment strategies with her students, alongside students' responses to these strategies. The research was conducted at a public

secondary school in Ontario that uses the mandated Ontario curriculum. The researcher invited one teacher and two of her drama classes to participate in a one semester collaborative inquiry with the following objectives:

To explore a teacher's understanding of her role in developing students' learning progress through her assessment designs.

To explore how students understand and respond to formative assessment practices.

To explore the complex interactions that impact the teacher's perceptions and students' reception of formative assessment as it is enacted in the classroom.

The methodology chosen for this study was selected because it supports the constructivist epistemology informing this study. Rather than achieving generalizability, the purpose of a qualitative case study inquiry is to “describe the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can experience these happenings vicariously and draw their own conclusions” (Stake, 2005, p. 450). The qualitative case study methodology asks readers to make the research relevant to their own experiences. This is aligned with the constructivist epistemology, as it allows for multiple interpretations of the single case and allows for relevance of information being presented to be valued more highly over generalizability of findings. The use of multiple data sources – teacher interviews, classroom observations, and student focus group meetings – created the opportunity of exposing differing perspectives on formative assessment. Furthermore, the case study methodology allowed for an in-depth study of the practices and perceptions of formative assessment in one teacher's classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

“...while policy and curriculum makers and teachers may design and implement learning environments that attempt to encourage or promote certain conceptions of learning, the way that students then interpret or perceive these learning environments may be different” (Peterson, Brown, & Irving, 2010, p. 168).

How teachers plan and how students view learning environments may differ and therefore impact student engagement in the teacher’s planned curriculum (Peterson et al., 2010). This is why the purpose of this study is to explore *both* a teacher’s conceptions and plans with formative assessment, as well as students’ understandings and responses to formative assessment as it is enacted in the classroom. This study includes an Ontario high school teacher and two of her secondary drama classes. The teacher chosen for this study, Brooke, volunteered to participate because of her interest in formative assessment. Students who were chosen as student-participants in the study volunteered from the two participating classes.

The findings discussed are the result of qualitative content analysis (Cho & Lee, 2014; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) of fieldnotes from classroom observations, and transcripts from teacher interviews and student focus group meetings. *A priori* codes were developed from the interview and focus group schedules, while *in vivo* codes were developed from ideas and words that continued to appear throughout discussions and observations. Once all data sets were analyzed and a code list was finalized, all data sets were analyzed again using this finalized codes list to ensure that codes developed later in the analysis process were applied to data that were collected earlier.

This chapter provides greater detail on the codes and themes outlined in Chapter Three. Discussion is offered to describe what each theme means, along with supporting data from teacher interviews, student focus group meetings, classroom observations, classroom conversation interviews, and my researcher journal being presented.

Findings

While themes and codes connecting to the practical influences on assessment design – such as time constraints and access to resources – came up in discussion with Brooke and student-participants, it is not within the scope of this study to go into detail of the impact that these school-specific influences play on assessment design and implementation. Furthermore, specific themes and codes emerged that related to feedback – such as the purpose of feedback, feedback as class discussion, student development from feedback, and grades as a form of feedback – but it is also beyond the scope of this project to go into great detail on teacher and student perceptions of feedback specifically. In order to meet the goals set at the outset of this study, the remainder of this document will focus on teacher plans with and student conceptions and reception of formative assessment design as they were enacted in Brooke’s classroom.

In order to make analysis of data more manageable, data sets were organized using codes that emerged through the identification of “themes and patterns” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26) in the data. An example of a code that emerged from the data is *assessment as diagnostic*. This code came up in the initial teacher interview with Brooke, “you need to know, in order to differentiate, who knows what, who understands, what the learning gaps are, which methods you’re using that work and that drive the message home, and which clearly failed: (January 2, 2016). Here, Brooke discusses her use of

formative assessment to gather data on student understanding that she uses during pedagogical reflection to alter future teaching plans. This code also emerged within the initial focus group meeting with students: “I think teachers do [pre-tests] to get a better understanding of who in the class has more trouble with things, and who in the class has less trouble with them,” (Mel, January 7, 2016). Mel discussed her understanding that teachers use assessment to gather students’ prior knowledge. At times, the participant explicitly stated codes like “ongoing diagnostics” (Brooke, interview, January 2, 2016); however, the majority of codes and themes were inferred from participant discussion, as in the first two examples. Connections between teacher and student discussions of assessment as a diagnostic tool continued throughout interviews, focus group meetings, and observations so this code continued to be used to organize data sets.

While not all themes and codes were discussed by both Brooke and her students, I have arranged the codes so that they are organized under the larger related theme rather than juxtaposing codes that emerged in teacher data with those that emerged in student data. As the purpose of this study is to simultaneously explore teacher plans with formative assessment alongside students’ reactions to such formative assessment, it seemed more fitting to integrate discussion of both teacher and student discussion, rather than to simply compare Brooke’s plans against students’ discussions of classroom experiences. It is my goal to communicate the complexities of classroom interactions and how multifaceted understandings of formative assessment held by both Brooke and her students shaped what was carried out in the classroom.

Brooke's Formative Assessment – Culture of Care

The context for the current study is unique, as I entered Brooke's classroom at the *end* of the first semester. While the purpose of this study was to explore teacher and student perceptions of formative assessment, the irony was that entering the classroom at the end of the semester meant that final evaluations were taking place; a time when, typically, formative assessment does not have a place. Traditionally, *formative assessment* is thought to be “in-course (formative) improvement-oriented interactions between learners and instructors” (Brown, et al., 2012, p. 968). The end of the semester in the typical Ontario secondary school classroom tends to focus on formal, end-of-course, summative assessment *of learning*. Fortunately, Brooke's pedagogy and practices integrated formative assessment within her examination structure and were aligned with the new story in Ontario's education system.

During our first interview before classroom observations began, I asked Brooke if she could recall a time when a group of her students learned from an assessment interaction. Her response captured just how integral formative assessment is within her pedagogy: “Everyday! Everyday is that experience. I know that you'd like something more specific, but it's that commonplace” (Interview, January 2, 2016). Brooke's use of the words “Everyday!” and “commonplace” shows the value Brooke has for the practice of using formative assessment in her teaching. She values formative assessment as an integral aspect of her teaching and she sees positive impacts everyday. During one of my classroom observations in the Grade 11 class, I noted in my fieldnotes: “Feedback is a common and constant occurrence in Brooke's classes. Students do not appear offended or phased by her interjections throughout their creative process. Students carefully consider

her feedback and immediately implement it to the best of their ability” (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 7, 2016). This constant loop of feedback between Brooke and her students created a learning environment that was community-based. Furthermore, by providing verbal feedback and the opportunity for students to immediately implement that feedback into dramatic performances that were watched by their peers, Brooke created an environment where students benefitted from observing their peers complete the process of receiving and implementing teacher feedback. By delivering constant verbal feedback, Brooke also modeled for students the skill of providing constructive feedback. Students then had chances to practice this skill throughout the numerous opportunities for peer-assessment that Brooke integrated into her teaching practice. In order to further assist students’ ability to assess their own work, Brooke began each class communicating clear expectations for the task ahead. A rubric was provided to each student at the outside of each formal evaluation task that detailed the success criteria. These criteria were explained to students clearly, with practical examples provided, prior to the students engaging in the creative and rehearsal process for their presentations.

Brooke’s sense of ease in front of the class, in part due to her 11 years of experience, created a comfortable environment for her students. She openly communicated to them how she was trying to create assignments that would reduce the level of anxiety they felt when performing, and she also offered students choice in the assignments that she gave. A unique quality in Brooke’s pedagogy was the culture of care that she imbued in her teaching. Beyond teaching the curriculum, Brooke expressed that an important part of her job was to help students reach their full potential as both students *and* members of a community. This was reflected in how she modeled respectful,

constructive feedback to students and how she listened to them as individuals. Brooke shared with me details about students who were better able to manage their behaviours and engaged throughout group work with fewer struggles by the end of the semester they spent in her drama class. An atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance was witnessed whenever Brooke asked students to get into groups and all students were included; any alterations Brooke suggested for group composition were met with acceptance without hesitation from the students (Observation, Grade 10 drama, January 7, 2016). While Brooke's teaching privileged learning, she also communicated the belief that creating a classroom culture where students feel cared for was vital for learning to occur and for students to reach their full potential. In our interview, Brooke explained:

Nicole: You want the student to see themselves learning...but you privilege a culture of caring as well. You get the students to care about each other, care about themselves, and *you* show that *you* care...

Brooke: Because that's where achievement comes from. (Interview, June 19, 2016)

Brooke expressed that creating this sense of care for her students provided the best environment for them to engage with assessments and achieve their fullest potential. Students seemed to demonstrate a level of comfort with Brooke. They would actively seek out feedback from her and approached her for support during independent work times (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 7, 2016). During my first visit to the classroom, students took time to talk to me to ensure that I knew that, in their opinions, Brooke was a great teacher (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 4, 2016). During my second day of classroom observations, I noted:

Behaviour in this class seems quite respectful. There is banter between students, but they all seem to get along (laughter, etc.). They are willing to get involved in each other's performances and help each other demonstrate the skills. Audience members are willing to offer support and advice to the people who volunteer to participate. (Observation, Grade 10 drama, January 5, 2016)

This comfortable atmosphere seemed to allow students to feel supported in their work, comfortable performing their tasks, and willing to engage in their peers' dramatic performances.

A great example of Brooke's approach to assessment was seen in an activity she had both her Grade 10 and 11 drama classes complete. The 'Bump-Up Activity' required students to reflect on the eight drama skills they learned throughout the course – movement, voice, creativity, cooperation, relaxation, sense of awareness, self-control, and concentration – and decide which skill they needed to develop or 'bump-up' the most. Brooke then challenged the students to create a performance that would allow them to both strengthen that skill and demonstrate the progress they had made with that skill by taking this drama course. When she introduced the assessment to the students in each class, Brooke attempted to reduce student anxiety in completing the task by telling them that there was 'no risk' because their mark would not decrease if the performance went poorly (Observations, Grade 10 and Grade 11 drama, January 4, 2016); however, students did have opportunity to raise their mark if their performance demonstrated growth in a skill area. This Bump-Up Activity allowed students to demonstrate metacognition and self-reflection, as they were asked to determine their own area for development from skills they had learned throughout the course of the semester, then develop and perform a

piece that showed their growth in that particular skill area. Brooke described how she has used this activity within the context of multiple classes:

I've done it with different classes in different ways. In English...there's [a curriculum] expectation that students can reflect on their learning needs, set goals and work towards them, etcetera...So at the end of the semester, I've implemented this interview process where one-by-one they can talk to me about what was their weakness, where is their area of growth, etcetera. They are able to bump up that area by explaining to me that they know what they need to do and how they can apply it in the future...It's curriculum motivated, but it's also building their confidence as individuals. Wanting them to see how far they've come at the end of the semester, and me wanting to see it as well. (Brooke, Interview, January 30, 2016)

The multiple purposes this assessment strategy served allowed Brooke to meet curriculum expectations, students to have multiple and varying opportunities to display their learning, and highlighted for students the areas for growth and the progress they have made throughout the course, thus boosting their confidence and engagement in the learning exercise.

During classroom observations of preparation for this Bump-Up Assessment, I noted in my fieldnotes that Brooke provided individualized feedback to each student and showed a familiarity with each student and their needs through these formative interactions (Observation, Grade 10 and Grade 11 drama, January 4, 2016). By having students seek her approval on the skill they had selected before they began to shape their presentations, Brooke ensured that she had the opportunity to provide individualized

guidance to every student for how they might plan their task. These formative interactions were not one-sided; students also demonstrated self-knowledge and self-reflection in these discussions with Brooke. When one student approached Brooke for guidance on developing their performance, for instance, Brooke responded with prompts instead of answers: “How can you challenge yourself? Which one of those skills will challenge you? I don’t want to tell you. You’re choosing the one that you think you need to improve on the most,” (Observation, Grade 10 drama, January 4, 2016). Both Brooke and the student offered ideas on what each of their individual dramatic performances might look like.

During the performance of the Bump-Up Activity, within the span of a single class, each student demonstrated progress. Brooke allowed each student time to ease into the presentation of their Bump-up performance. Most students were provided with enough time to have three attempts of their Bump-Up performance in class, so that growth and comfort were demonstrated (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 5, 2016). One student, Matt, selected voice as his skill to perform. Before beginning the dramatic performance of his Bump-Up presentation, Matt explained that he selected the voice skill because he believed that he needed to work on his projection (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 5, 2016). The self-reflection each student provided prior to beginning his or her performance made metacognition observable to both Brooke and the other students. In order to show his development in the voice skill, Matt asked his peers to give him different characters to perform. Throughout this performance, he altered his voice to communicate the character he was performing and worked to maintain a consistent and audible volume by projecting his voice (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 5, 2016).

Each performance was also followed-up with specific feedback from both Brooke and students on the growth that was shown in each individual student's performance. For example, Helen explained that Matt used his voice especially well at the point in the performance where he slowed his speech and his voice trailed off in order to portray that he was falling asleep (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 5, 2016). This peer-assessment demonstrated how students benefitted from watching their peers' presentations by gaining a deeper understanding of what each skill looked like in performance. It also allowed the student receiving the feedback to gain more awareness of their skills and areas for development. Though there was no threat of grade loss involved in the Bump-Up assessment, all students actively engaged in the activity, were willing to complete multiple attempts at their performance when prompted, and some students opted to have challenges (such as demonstrating an increased level of concentration by not calling out, interrupting, or speaking when others were talking) that lasted throughout the duration of the 75-minute drama period.

How Assessment is Understood – Teacher's Understanding Versus Students'

Developing Understanding

The purpose of the first teacher interview, which occurred before classroom observations began, was to explore Brooke's understanding of and plans for formative assessment in her teaching. When asked what formative assessment is to her, Brooke responded:

It's my understanding that formative assessment is basically what the board is working towards with assessment of, as, and for learning. It's an understanding that the teacher has about what the student already knows, what they currently

know, and where you want them to go with it. It's important because as you're going through a unit of study, you need to know, in order to differentiate, who knows what, who understands, what the learning gaps are, which methods you're using that work and that drive the message home, and which clearly failed. In which case, you yourself, as an educator, need to go back and redo it. It's also giving the kids descriptive feedback along the way, in words that they understand. Not just "eduspeak," but in student friendly language. (Brooke, Interview, January 2, 2016)

Brooke's response indicated a well thought-out understanding of formative assessment and its place within her teaching practices. Brooke detailed that, to her, the phrase *formative assessment* made her think of curriculum policies and goals for assessment provided by the school board. It also made her think of diagnostic information that was important to her as a teacher in shaping her lessons. Furthermore, she discussed how formative assessment served as information that helped students to develop in their learning. In this first response from Brooke, then, there were already many connections to responses students provided throughout student focus group meetings, as well as connections to curriculum policies and current research that supports the reasoning behind her uses of formative assessment.

The purpose of the first student focus group meeting was to gather students' understandings of what assessment meant to them. At the beginning of this first meeting, I outlined with students the difference between formative assessment and summative assessment:

What my project looks at is assessment that you're not getting graded on and how that helps your learning. That's called formative assessment. There's also summative assessment and that is something that you're graded on. You're showing your learning and you're demonstrating the skills that you've [learned].

(Nicole, Focus group, January 8, 2016)

I attempted to avoid examples within my definition so as to not influence student answers. Though I lead with this definition of the difference between formative and summative assessment, initial student answers to the question, "What *does* the word assessment mean to you?" (Nicole, Focus group meeting, January 8, 2016) demonstrated these students' tendencies to think of assessment *of* learning when asked to define assessment. These first conversations highlighted that the understandings of assessment that students initially held were different from the definition Brooke provided for formative assessment, as most initial student responses centred around formal evaluations and diagnostic testing; however, it seems that within the context of this project, students began to reflect on what assessment meant to them.

Within the first focus group discussion, students began to grapple with their previously held understanding of the word assessment to be synonymous with testing:

Alex: So, I'm kind of confused here. When you say 'assessment,' does that include tests, quizzes...

Nicole: Mhmm.

Alex: ... and just overall assessments that don't count for marks? Is that assessment? (Focus group, January 8, 2016)

At times, as students began to develop an understanding of formative assessment, the discussion turned around and students began to ask me questions in order to further their understanding of what assessment could include. Through discussion, students' understanding of assessment, especially formative assessment, began to expand: "I never actually thought that much into assessments improving on people before. But I've noticed in the past it kind of has a little bit," (Matt, Focus group, January 8, 2016). Here, reflection that occurred in this first focus group meeting caused Matt to begin to see how previous assessment experiences were not only assessing his ability but also served to improve his learning. With this new understanding of the difference between formative and summative assessment, students' answers became more aligned with Brooke's description of formative assessment. As student focus group meetings progressed, I offered students further description of formative assessment as "assessment that is feedback; assessment that you learn from" (Nicole, Focus group, January 15, 2016) hoping that use of the language "feedback" would be more familiar to them. Through these discussions, students also appeared to develop a deeper understanding of the purpose of different forms of assessment through engaging in self-reflection and peer discussion of formative assessment.

As is indicated within Brooke's response, "It's an understanding that the teacher has about what the student already knows, what they currently know, and where you want them to go with it," teachers may use formative assessment as a diagnostic tool to gauge student understanding and shape future teaching. Students' responses in the focus group meetings also alluded to assessment serving diagnostic purposes, but initially lacked a depth of understanding on how this might impact a teacher's plan:

So, before I came and talked to you about formative and summative assessment, what did you think about when you heard the word assessment?

James: Umm, assessing us on how we're going to do on something. So, a pre-test on how we're going to do in this course... We always did assessments in math before we started a new thing to see how well we would probably do in this part of the class. (Nicole, Focus group, January 7, 2016)

In this initial discussion of assessment, the language that James used described assessment as a predictive tool to label student ability, rather than as a diagnostic tool that could be used to help teachers shape their teaching plans. I questioned James further on why he thought teachers might want to know how students would do. I hoped to explore whether he saw pre-tests as an exercise strictly for labeling ability, or if he saw ways teachers might use the information gained from pre-tests for other purposes:

Nicole: Okay, and why do you think teachers do that?

James: So that they know who is going to need less help, and who's going to need more help. (Focus group, January 7, 2016)

This insight suggests that James was aware of the diagnostic nature of assessments and the impacts that pre-testing can serve in teaching.

As previously discussed, Mel also held an understanding of assessment as a pre-test or diagnostic tool. In this discussion, Mel went on to talk about the value she sees in these diagnostic practices:

I think teachers do it to get a better understanding of who in the class has more trouble with things, and who in the class has less trouble with them. So, if they're doing group projects or anything they can even it out. Like put the people who

know more with the people who don't, instead of having all the people who don't really understand it in one group so that they have more trouble. (Mel, Focus group, January 7, 2016)

Both James and Mel provided answers that reflected some of the purposes behind diagnostic assessment. While James and Mel did not view diagnostic assessment serving a punitive purpose or impacting their performance in a course, Mel still expressed feelings of anxiety associated with this form of assessment:

[T]he word [assessment] just kind of makes me stressed...because usually teachers do assessments when you're coming back, either from a holiday or from the summer break, or starting the new semester. So it's, you haven't done it in awhile, and then you're like, "Oh no! This is really bad because I don't remember anything!" (Mel, Focus group, January 7, 2016)

Though Mel was able to communicate the value she sees in the practice of diagnostic assessment, the thought of these assessment practices was a cause of stress for her. Whereas Brooke discussed her use of formative assessment practices as "everyday" practices, within this initial focus group meeting, students discussed *diagnostic assessments* as formal written evaluations that were evaluated by the teacher. Discussion of teacher observations of daily classroom activities did not occur within students' discussion of formative assessment, serving diagnostic purposes during the first focus group meeting.

In a later focus group meeting, Mel offered discussion of how she saw Brooke using observational feedback as a diagnostic tool to impact her assessment practices:

There was one time where this student had trouble with his/her group and he/she was also having trouble with the concept of what was [being taught]. So Brooke allowed him/her to do his/her own thing, kind of different from the rest of the class, so that he/she understood it better and he/she could do it by him/herself...I think she does it to kind of make sure that the people who are having more trouble still have a chance at doing really well in the course because sometimes you may not understand exactly what's going on...It's really good to see a teacher actually going out of her way to change some of the curriculum as much as she can for that student to pass so that, yes, they get the basic knowledge that they need but it's not so hard to understand. (Mel, Focus group, January 21, 2016)

Mel's discussion highlights how she sees Brooke's use of diagnostic information to differentiate assessment as a positive practice in her teaching. The sentiment expressed by Mel in a later focus group meeting echoed how Brooke described formative assessment impacting her practice:

[Formative assessment is] important because as you're going through a unit of study, you need to know, in order to differentiate, who knows what, who understands, what the learning gaps are, which methods you're using that work and that drive the message home, and which clearly failed. (Brooke, Interview, January 2, 2016)

Mel's developing understanding of assessment as a diagnostic tool used throughout classroom learning aligned with how Brooke saw herself using formative assessment to inform her teaching practices.

During the initial focus group meeting, students were also asked what they thought the purpose of assessment might be. Rob explained that he saw assessment serving the purpose of reporting on student progress and ability: “I think assessments are done to update where you’re at in the course ... and how you did on certain topics. Just, in school, it would just be to update an average, which goes to university and all that,” (Rob, Focus group, January 8, 2016). During the second focus group meeting, Matt and Alicia echoed Rob’s argument that the purpose of formal evaluation was to serve as information to outside authorities:

Matt: ...the exams and tests, I don’t actually think it’s for us, mostly. I think it’s more for...

Alicia: For them (*referring to teachers*).

Matt: ...the schools and the universities, and the government in general... (Focus group, January 15, 2016)

Matt and Alicia agreed that they saw some of the purpose behind assessment as providing a grade and information on student ability to outside authorities such as the government and universities. This line of reasoning follows from students initially associating the idea of assessment with formal evaluations.

During focus group discussions, students also brought up the learning skills and work habits sections of their mid-term reports. The learning skills and work habits section reports on students’ demonstration of responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative, and self-regulation skills. Assessment of these skills on the report card does not impact students’ abilities to progress to the next level in school or gain entrance and scholarships for university or college. Alex discussed his reception of

this information:

I kind of find that interesting that they have [the section on learning skills and work habits], because, honestly, if you have all “S’s” or satisfactory or whatever, the student probably isn’t going to care that much, for the most part. It’s just kind of showing you, “Yeah, okay, I’m a satisfactory student, alright.” And for the student it’s not entirely useful...On a report card, marks, again, probably the most important thing on it is the number itself...To me as a student. If I’m going to university or a college, it doesn’t matter what [else is] there. All that matters is the mark. That’s the most important thing. (Alex, Focus group, January 8, 2016)

Alex communicated that the value of grades assigned to curriculum expectations and their impact on his academic future caused him to view the learning skills and work habits section of the report card as something that he did not need to give much attention. Contrastingly, Matt argued that personal learning habits were so integral to student learning progress that they should hold more bearing in students’ academic futures:

Where I find it interesting is that universities will accept you based on the number [grade] you have, where there’s different qualities in a person that aren’t there on the sheet. You know, there’s reliability...confidence, you’re situation and all that. (Matt, Focus group, January 8, 2016)

Here, Matt and Alex highlighted the crux of the issue: using grades assigned to curriculum expectations as the only determinant for student academic advancement causes other components to student success (e.g., reliability, self-regulation) to be undervalued.

Some students argued there are important qualities students possess that go beyond what merely a grade can tell. Rob stated that he did engage with the formative feedback provided on his report card because of how his parents engaged with his reports:

When I get a report card, I look at the mark and then I think about that and I talk with some people and then eventually I'll look at the feedback...And my parents, when we get report cards, they look at the marks but they don't really say, "Come on, you can boost that up 5%!" or this and that. They say, "Have you read the comments?" and then they say: "Can I see your report card, I want to read the comments."...I think it's a good thing for the parents to know because a student could be doing great academically, but as a person they could be disruptive or this and that, and they could just write the answers they know on the test. So when they have the feedback, they know how the student is performing on another level. (Rob, Focus group, January 8, 2016)

Rob explained how his parents influence the value he placed on receiving formative feedback. Matt's and Rob's discussions echoed Brooke's perspective that school is a place where work habits and interpersonal skills, such as reliability and collaboration with peers, are developed. Some students picked up on the idea that schooling is important for developing both knowledge *and* learning skills, and that the comments provided on a report card are a time that communication about those skills can occur between teacher, student, and parents.

Brooke discussed formative assessment as explicitly connected to board mandated evaluating, reporting, and accountability policies and procedures when she stated,

“formative assessment is basically what the board is working towards with assessment of, as, and for learning” (Interview, January 2, 2016). There are more implicit connections that can be drawn between the information Brooke gathered through her formative assessment practices and information she is required to provide to the student, administration, and parents on report cards when she discussed the pressure to perform she saw her students exhibiting:

there are some students who are so, whether or not there is a lot of home pressure, they are so marks conscious that they are not willing to go through any process. They’re not willing to fail and then learn from it, and make that a part of their practice. (Brooke, Interview, January 2, 2016)

Brooke’s discussion here raised the idea that the presence of grades in reporting increased the chance of external pressures (e.g., parental expectations) fostering a fear of failure. Implicitly, Brooke is discussing how formal reporting practices that involve grades influence students’ willingness to take risks, learn from mistakes, and engage in the process of developing from taking on challenges.

Formative assessment is such a large part of Brooke’s teaching that when I asked if she could think of a time when students learned from an assessment itself. Her response was: “everyday is that experience ... it’s that commonplace that that’s what education is” (Brooke, Interview, January 2, 2016). This idea of everyday practices is something I explored with students within focus group meetings. I attempted to discover if students also saw formative assessment impacting and improving their learning, or if these “commonplace” interactions did not have an impact that was memorable to them. One of

the key areas I wanted to explore with students was classroom talk and teacher verbal feedback:

Nicole: ...do you see that class discussion as assessment? Or do you see it just as part of a lesson, or class talk? How do you see that feedback?

Mel: I see it, kind of, as both...I feel like it's, well maybe not really much as an assessment...I feel like it's more her giving us pointers as a class. Like a class talk to try and get us to improve on our assessments. (Focus group, January 14, 2016)

Mel communicated that she saw feedback provided to the class verbally as an important way that Brooke tried to get students to improve, but she did not consider it to be assessment. During classroom observations, Brooke often offered self-regulation feedback⁷ by suggesting ways that students could better use their rehearsal time. After one such occurrence, where Brooke suggested that students “perform in front of each other and give each other feedback” (Observation, Grade 10 drama, January 8, 2016), no change in student behaviour from receiving this feedback was observed. I took time to engage two students in a conversation interview about this feedback Brooke gave to the class. Both Ashley and Mel agreed that Brooke made this class announcement to encourage students to seek feedback from their peers. When I asked if they saw this interaction as assessment, both students said they saw this as peer assessment; however, they did not acknowledge the feedback Brooke provided to the class as a form of assessment (Conversation interview, January 8, 2016). The students communicated an awareness of the purpose behind the peer-assessment activity Brooke suggested, but they overlooked the point that Brooke suggested this activity to inform students in the class

⁷ Self-regulation feedback provides students with strategies on how they can improve their own work (Brown et al., 2012).

that the way they were engaging in the rehearsal process was not making full use of class time. Students did not fully benefit from Brooke's feedback here because they did not see her feedback as constructive criticism of their current rehearsal practices. This lack of self-awareness caused them to overlook the benefits that could be gained through engaging in the peer-assessment, as Brooke suggested to them.

Assessment tasks that were not going to be graded, but would have resulted in learning that could produce better student performances on a graded task – such as Brooke's suggestion of peer-assessment while developing a presentation – more often than not went unobserved by students; however, teacher formative feedback provided during a graded evaluation was observed and integrated by students. Students seemed able to see the connection between feedback and development during an evaluated task; however, this understanding of the importance of feedback did not appear to translate into their rehearsal process. This may be because students value teacher feedback more highly over peer feedback (Hue et al., 2015). Another possible explanation for this was how these discussions were framed in the classroom (e.g., teacher general announcements to utilize peer-assessment during rehearsals, versus class discussion where the benefits of implementing teacher feedback were more clearly outlined during performance evaluations), or it may be due to students' poor understanding of how integrating feedback into their practice could translate into a stronger final performance.

The top line of Figure 4.1, pictured below, outlines Brooke's understanding of and reason for engaging her students in assessments. The bottom line of Figure 4.1 offers a comparison with students' initial understanding of the purpose of engaging in assessment:

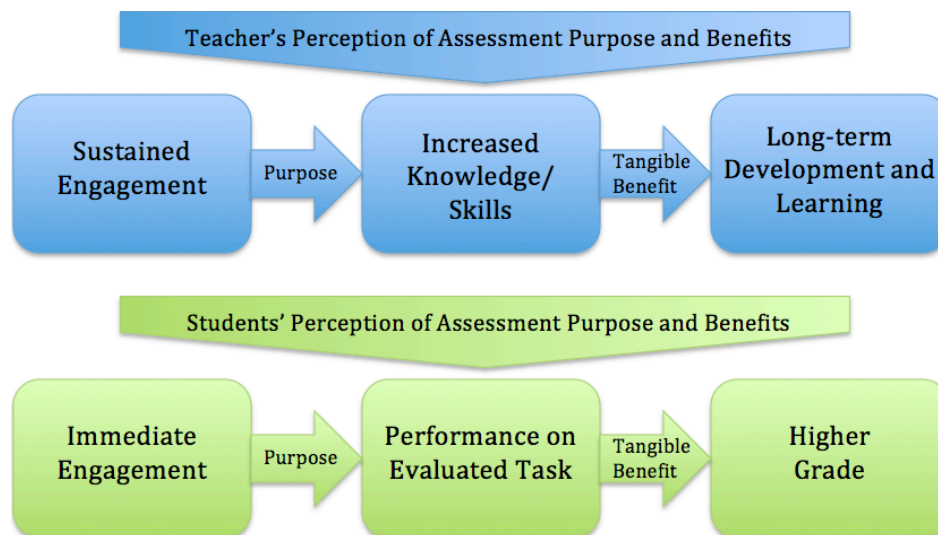


Figure 4.1. Teacher versus student perceptions of assessment purpose and benefits.

Brooke's goal in adopting formative assessment practices was to create learning that sustained over time. She wanted her students, who she saw across multiple years in her drama classes, to develop skills and knowledge that continued past the performance on an evaluated task. Students, however, initially communicated a focus on their performance on an evaluated task over their development of sustainable learning. In our first focus group meeting, Matt began discussing assessment as formally graded assignments that gave him incentive to learn course material:

The word assessment for me is just an assignment that we have to do to get marks for now...Doing a test or something is one of those things that actually will help me for some reason...After doing a test or an assignment or assessment, it just helps me in some way. (Matt, Focus group, January 8, 2016)

Matt was unable to explain how this learning happens for him, but he did initially associate his performance on a formal assessment with learning. In a later focus group

meeting, Matt explained how he was coming to realize that the rote memorization he previously associated with learning for tests is not learning that is sustainable:

The way that I think that the teaching system is right now is feed you information, revise it, revise it, revise it, do the exam, you're done with it. It's not something you can carry over all the time. (Matt, Focus group, January 22, 2016)

The discussion of assessment that occurred throughout our focus group meetings had changed Matt's definition of the word learning from regurgitation of information on a test to learning that remained with the student for an extended period of time. During our final focus group meeting, Danielle explained how preparing for exams did not result in long-term retention of information for her either:

Danielle: Even after...exams I seriously do not remember anything...I'll go to the next semester and if I have to take the exam again as soon as second semester started, I would fail immediately. Yeah, I don't remember. (Focus group, January 22, 2016)

Exams and testing were a major point of contention with students. They discussed the lack of connection between the learning conditions they experience in day-to-day classroom assessment compared to the formal conditions experienced during tests and exams. While both forms of assessment serve a purpose (Earl, 2003), this lack of connection leads to poor performance, anxiety, and negative assessment experiences for some students. Furthermore, while students communicated varying emotional reactions to assessments that they saw as formal evaluations, there seemed to be general agreement that learning material to do well on a test or an exam did not result in learning that lasted beyond the test. Having the two lines separated in Figure 4.1 also serves to illustrate how

students first discussed the purpose of formative assessment, an increase in learning and development, in contrast to their desire for higher grades achievement. Lacking a strong sense of how continued engagement in formative assessment can result in stronger performances on evaluated tasks seemed to impact students' engagement in the process of developing with formative interactions, especially in students whose motivation to learn comes from a desire to earn a grade.

Influences on Assessment – Curriculum, Reporting, and the Grading Culture

There are many elements that impact the structure that assessments take in the classroom. Some of the external influences that Brooke discussed impacting her assessment design are curriculum policy and expectations, class time limitations, access to resources (e.g., technology), the grading culture, and professional development. Some of the external influences that students discussed as impacting their understanding of assessment include parents' and friends' conceptions of assessment, post-secondary entrance requirements, and their own previous experiences with assessment with other teachers. What is of note is that the majority of what students discussed as influencing their engagement with assessment had connection to the grading culture and structures associated with accountability and reporting in schools.

Internal influences that Brooke discussed having an impact on how she plans her assessments include the amount of personal time she has to dedicate to planning and marking, and her own pedagogical philosophies. Additional factors that Brooke discussed influencing how her assessments were carried out were student needs and students' level of engagement in class. Students also discussed their engagement impacting how assessments were carried out in the classroom. Internal influences students discussed

impacting their engagement were personal interest in the subject matter being taught and their own personal goals.

Brooke is a highly self-aware teacher. She recognized that there are differences in her approach to teaching and assessment between her two subjects, English and drama. She discussed her use of formative assessment in English being predominantly written teacher feedback, whereas in drama she utilized more student-centred assessment practices such as peer-assessment. In drama, she also found it much easier to create a culture where students felt comfortable engaging with teacher and peer constructive feedback:

Brooke: I think it's definitely subject specific but I think it's totally possible to do in different ways in different subjects...It's implemented right into the Dramatic Arts curriculum and/or the students [who elect to take drama], and we do so much community building that they are comfortable speaking and listening and hearing feedback and discussing with one another. So it's a combination of environment and curriculum that makes it easier for me to achieve that there [in the drama classroom]. (Interview, January 2, 2016)

Brooke emphasized that it is possible to be equally as effective in designing formative assessments that students engage with in classrooms where other curricula are being taught; however, she also argued that, for her, the way the drama curriculum is structured allows for this reflective, community-based learning environment to be created more naturally. Brooke introduces the idea that curriculum expectations as well as the students present in the classroom impact her ability to successfully integrate formative assessment. One idea that Brooke highlights in this statement is how the culture of the classroom,

creating a sense of community, and increasing student comfort with constructive feedback is integral to the success of her formative assessment practices.

Students echoed Brooke's sentiment that the structure of the more performance-based curricula, like drama, makes learning from assessment easier:

Matt: Drama is the most visual class, I believe. Every other class is just pencil and paper and probably the reason why we can't actually find those [transferable] skills.

Nicole: So visual in that you're learning from watching others perform, as well as learning when you're actually engaging in performing, yourself? Is that what you mean?

Matt: *(CT)* Yeah. Yep.

Rob: I agree with [Matt], that drama is visual and all that. But there are other classes, such as construction and all of these other electives that also are pretty visual and you 'monkey see, monkey do' type of thing. (Focus Group, January 22, 2016)

Both Matt and Rob agreed that the more interactive classes, which are also often elective courses, made it easier for students to benefit from formative assessment, as they had the opportunity to see their peers' engagement and the product of their learning. After prompting, students communicated that they could see that there were transferable skills and learning within other subject areas, such as English, as well; however, students emphasized that certain curriculum areas that were less "paper and pencil" based, such as drama and construction, had learning that was much easier to transfer to their experiences outside of the classroom. Students argued this was in large part because they were able to

benefit from viewing their peers' work and engagement throughout the process of learning.

One of the reasons students disengage from formative assessment tasks that both Brooke and student-participants discussed is a lack of student intrinsic motivation. As focus group discussions progressed, students communicated an increased awareness of how grades and a grading culture impact their engagement with learning and assessment in many of their classes:

Rob: I just want to say for "Extrinsic motivation," I guess I didn't realize until now, it's completely true for me where the only motivation is for marks or for the test...And often I'm not interested in learning what there is to learn, and it's just to get the mark.

Nicole: Do you think that's a good thing or a bad thing?

Rob: I think it's not a good thing at all.

Matt: *(CT)* The desire to learn is lost...

Nicole: The desire to learn is lost...Do you think that connects to why you don't remember after the test?

Matt: *(CT)* Definitely! If you want to learn something, you'll remember it. (Focus group, January 22, 2016)

In this exchange, Rob explained how he was coming to realize that his main motivation to achieve in school was to attain good grades rather than to learn and develop personally. Matt, a student who started the first focus group meeting stating that completing tests in his other classes helped to motivate him to learn his course material, agreed that his motivation to work in school was highly motivated by the reward of a

grade. Both Rob and Matt saw that this impacted not only their level of motivation and engagement, but also decreased the chances of long-term learning taking place. Through this discussion, students became aware and critical of grades as their motivation to engage in their schoolwork.

Student discussion of grades as a motivator also connected to their discussion of how grades impact the level of attention they pay to formative feedback. In the second focus group meeting, Rob highlighted the impact that grades had on students' reception of written feedback:

I think when teachers write, if you do an assignment or something and they give you a mark, most students just look at the mark and throw it away and if he or she has written a whole slew of stuff, on the bottom or wherever, about your performance, students, I don't think they really pay attention too much to that.

(Rob, Focus group, January 8, 2016)

Rob's discussion suggests that a letter or numeric grade detracts students' attention from the formative feedback a teacher provides. Brooke echoed this sentiment by discussing her struggle to get students to actively engage with the feedback she provides:

The other piece is getting them to engage. Getting them to actually care about the feedback that isn't numerical. That can be a huge problem. They don't, in general, read feedback ... in English, I try to give [a general overview lesson with the class on areas for development noticed from students' performance on an assignment].

'In general, this is what I saw from this project. We didn't read this part of the instruction, and/or we didn't understand it. We didn't include one component of

it, or there were a lot of problems with language.’ So I try to do a general [lesson with the class as feedback]. (Interview, January 2, 2016)

Here, Brooke highlighted her attempts to provide individualized feedback in writing on marked assignments; however, she felt that this effort was futile due to students’ lack of engagement with this form of feedback when a grade is present. In order to cope with students’ lack of engagement with written feedback when a mark is present, Brooke worked to reshape her lessons and provide feedback in the form of discussion or a class lesson that refocused student attention to relevant areas of development highlighted by their performance on assessment tasks. One strategy where Brooke found success for increasing student engagement with feedback was by having students redo assignments integrating feedback she provided. This strategy placed the emphasis back onto the process of learning, rather than students feeling pressure to perform perfectly on their first attempt.

Students discussed increased intrinsic motivation during assessment experiences in Brooke’s class where emphasis was placed on the process of learning, rather than the grade:

Rob: The last performance, it was supposed to be a one-minute performance using movement and voice to tell a story. And we chose a song that was three minutes long. We weren’t finished by the end of the class...if we went to the [next] class and had to perform it just like that, it wouldn’t have turned out as well as it did.

Danielle: Yeah, [Brooke] gave us extra [time]. She knew that we weren’t ready, so she’s like, “Why do it? I’ll give you more time...”

Matt: She gave us that extra support.

Alicia: An extra day, to make it better. (Focus Group, January 15, 2016)

The example that students offered here communicated that the structure of the exam, having a practice day before each evaluated performance, helped them to see how Brooke's assessment design allowed her to provide them with support when working towards a final performance. By explaining to the students that there were areas for them to develop in their performance and granting them the extra time to rehearse to implement her feedback, Brooke's emphasis shifted from the grading of the task to student development from completing the task to the best of their ability. Students communicated that they saw Brooke as a support to their learning progress, rather than as merely a grader. They communicated an understanding that the choices she made in her assessment strategies, often with their input, were made in order to support their learning, reduce their anxiety for performance, and strengthen their development.

What students communicated in the later focus group meetings was that the desire to learn was lost when grades are the motivation for performance. It seemed that even when a teacher, such as Brooke, uses a high level of formative assessment practices in the classroom in order to encourage sustained engagement and student development through multiple informal assessment strategies, student focus remained on performance tasks that are graded. This suggests that the benefits of formative assessment are impeded by the presence and necessity of grades for accountability.

Responsive Teaching

Brooke responded to what she observed in the classroom and adapted her plans to best suit her students' varying needs. This responsive teaching style emphasized to Brooke's students the need for practice to hone a performance, acknowledged the

different needs her students presented, integrated information she gathered on student understanding, and adapted to optimize learning that could occur while engaged in each assessment. Brooke described her own responsive approach to assessment:

Informal assessment in drama is almost always spontaneous. I mean, it can change with the ebb and flow of the class, and their mood, and their motivation level...I clearly explain the expectations, I give the rubric, I tell them what I want, and then I just have to just go on what I observe. And if I observe that they're on task, they'll need less. If I observe that they should be doing peer feedback, they should do that. If they need one person to be pulled from the group and spoken to, I would do it that way. So it's spontaneous. (Interview, January 30, 2016)

Brooke described key elements of being a responsive teacher as relaxing, being observant, and being adaptive. She explained that, to her, half of the purpose of formative assessment is to provide information that the teacher should use to adapt plans; if formative assessment is only used as information provided to students in the form of feedback, then it is not being used to its full potential.

An example where Brooke allowed poor student performance to impact her assessment plans was on a script annotation task, a written assignment where students were asked to notate their text analysis and plans for their presentation on their script, as all students performed below the expected level on this written task. Taking this poor performance as evidence that the students needed to revisit this skill, Brooke altered her plans for the exam tasks to accommodate re-visiting the skill of script annotation. She provided students with individualized written feedback on areas for development, delivered a mini-lesson in class to review the skill, and allowed students one class period

to work on and resubmit their script annotation task. I noted in my fieldnotes during observations of this class that: “Students appear to be focusing and taking this task seriously. There is a lot of focus in the room, as witnessed from the low level of talking, the referencing to the board [where instructions for the task are written], and writing on their scripts” (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 14, 2016). Before resubmitting their work, Brooke also encouraged students to “reflect on the difference in quality of work between [their] first attempt and the current attempt” (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 14, 2016). This self-reflection that Brooke asked for caused students to become aware of the progress they had demonstrated, but also made students aware of the quality of work she expected from them. All students except for one took the opportunity to improve and resubmit their script annotation task. Brooke communicated to me that the work completed this second time reflected the level of achievement she expected of these students and, more importantly, demonstrated that students had a deeper understanding of the skill that was taught.

During conversation interviews that followed this opportunity to resubmit, students communicated how a second opportunity to perform the same script annotation task resulted in greater engagement and stronger performance. Alex explained how doing this work again made him realize that this task was important. Due to the fact that he thought that he would be “the only one reading it,” he did not feel it was important to put effort into this written work, even though it was a marked assessment. Alex explained to me that being asked to complete this work a second time indicated to him that there was value and importance in the skill being tested, and that having this second opportunity to complete the assignment worked well for him because he was also able to learn from the

corrections and feedback provided by Brooke (Alex, Conversation interview, January 14, 2016). Rather than having the answers right the first time, Alex felt that he was able to learn better from receiving constructive feedback and being given the opportunity to improve his work. His attention was directed to areas for development, which he felt helped him to learn better. This practice of resubmission is highly aligned with the New Story in education where mistakes are looked at as learning opportunities for both the teacher and student to develop from (Drake et al., 2014).

During our conversation interview about this same annotation task, Rob communicated that his engagement with the task was different when he was given a second opportunity with feedback. Rob emphasized that he felt his higher level of engagement was a result of becoming aware of the intricacies and purpose of the skill, as it was being focused on in isolation. Rob echoed the sentiments that Alex put forward, arguing that the task was not too difficult and the poor performance by all students in the class was a result of the level of effort and engagement on the part of the students (Rob, Conversation interview, January 14, 2016). Though this task was a marked assessment in both instances, having the annotation task as a separate task, rather than as a series of tasks during a larger unit, affected Rob's level of engagement and development of detail in his annotations. In our interview discussion of this resubmission task, Brooke also argued it was student effort that impacted their performance:

Brooke: They had not put the effort into [their monologue annotations]. They had not done what I asked of them, and therefore had two different marks in my mark book that [were poor] and were far below what was most consistent. So it was most recent, but it wasn't most consistent...

Nicole: When you allow students to resubmit or when you re-visit a task giving them constructive feedback, saying ‘This wasn’t done to the standard I know you can do it,’ what do you think that communicates to the student about either the task or the skill being developed there?

Brooke: I hope it communicates that it’s a valuable skill, that it’s not something to be fluffed over, that it’s something to take and to apply to their future courses or their future studies or whatever it is [that they go on to do]. Monologue annotation is something that’s very valid in the English classroom too. But I hope it also communicates that I care about them and about their success. And that marks aren’t punitive, aren’t meant to be punitive. (Interview, January 30, 2016)

Rather than punishing students for their lack of effort, Brooke took poor student performance as feedback that this skill needed more attention, and consequently allowed students time to revisit that same task with teacher feedback to deepen student learning. Both Alex and Rob discussed how this opportunity to complete the same task a second time resulted in greater engagement, as this second chance highlighted the importance of the task, and allowed them to learn from their mistakes. Though both Alex and Rob argued that receiving feedback and the opportunity to integrate that feedback before resubmitting their assignment helped them to better understand the task, what was not clear was whether long-term learning took place. Both students’ discussions focused on the learning that took place that affected their performances on the immediate task at hand, whereas Brooke’s discussion of her reasoning behind providing feedback and an opportunity for resubmission clearly communicated a desire to create an opportunity

where long-term learning would take place for students. Furthermore, the information I was able to gather during these conversation interviews with students demonstrated how student critical reflection on their engagement in assessments that did not go as planned can result in gathering information useful to the teacher when shaping future assessment plans. Due to confidentiality issues, this information was not shared with Brooke during the class; however, it was made available to her within the final report that resulted from this study.

Part of what allowed Brooke to respond to the needs of her students was her willingness to listen to students' opinions when shaping her assessments. Receptiveness to student feedback was witnessed in Brooke's teaching right up to the final exam. In class when the exam tasks were introduced, Brooke offered choice in the structure of the final exam. Students in the Grade 11 drama class were allowed the choice between six different exam tasks spread out across the course of two weeks, or one final culminating task with three weeks of preparation time. When introducing the exam, I noted in my fieldnotes that Brooke took the time to "explain to the class that they are a great group and that she feels that they deserve choice, so she is interested in their opinion on what they would prefer to do" (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 4, 2016). Brooke communicated to the students the value of their opinion and demonstrated to them how their opinions had direct influence on her exam design. After explaining each option in detail, Brooke left it with the students to discuss the two options that she had offered for their exam and took their opinions into account when making the final decision for the structure of their exam. During our second interview, Brooke discussed how she took additional student feedback into account when she designed the final exam task:

Nicole: Did you make changes to your assessment plans, so the exam tasks or anything like that, in reaction to how students engaged?

Brooke: Yes. An example would be hearing how, in the one task, most of students found that the full group activity was the favourite thing. For that reason, I made that [final group task] worth the most [amount of marks] feeling that that was going to be their highest level of engagement, and therefore they would be successful with it. (Interview, January 30, 2016)

Brooke was aware that listening to student feedback about the assessment experiences they enjoyed was a useful way to shape future assessments that may increase chances of student success. Furthermore, Brooke used student feedback on previous assessment experiences they enjoyed to shape her plans for future assessments in order to increase the chances of student intrinsic motivation from personal interest in the assessment design.

Students were aware of the culture of caring that Brooke imbued in her teaching by integrating student opinion into her assessment designs. This was reflected in the responses students provided to questions surrounding the purpose behind Brooke's assessment design and the element of choice she offered to her students:

Nicole: Why do you think Brooke offered you the choice between having a single performance as a group, or the six different tasks? Why do you think she offered you that choice?

Danielle: Maybe she wanted to limit our stress level and see what's better for everybody. Yeah, so what they're more comfortable with. Either way, we're going to get to the exam, but which way would you like that to happen.

Rob: I think drama class is a personal class, and giving options for everybody to choose what they'd prefer is a better way to get better performances out of them.

(Focus group, January 15, 2016)

Both Danielle and Rob acknowledged their awareness that some of Brooke's assessment decisions came from a desire to create a sense of comfort for her students, as this environment is the most supportive of learning and conducive to getting the best performances from students.

In our interview, Brooke discussed her desire for a balance between opportunity for success and the requirements of the curriculum within the exam setting:

Nicole: Do you see a role for formative assessment within the exam structure?

Brooke: Yes, but less of one. Because if [the exam] had not been six tasks, if it had been one, it would have been something that they would have to do right away and there would be less opportunity for that. So already breaking it into six tasks, I feel, is giving them so many more opportunities to demonstrate [their abilities]. And, ultimately, as per the curriculum, that ability to revise, to work through the creative process, revise, refine, enhance, is just as much a part of the curriculum as 'where did theatre originate' or 'talk about kabuki theatre,' as a foundational piece. It's a skill that they must eventually, they have to eventually fly. And by the exam, it should be, 'What can they do' not "What can I hold their hand through'. (Interview, January 30, 2016)

Brooke used a careful balance of supporting students and encouraging student autonomy. While Brooke views exam tasks as a time where students are to demonstrate their ability to perform on their own, she was still responsive to student needs. During classes leading

up to the final performance, Brooke provided students with task⁸ and self-regulation feedback throughout activities to support and guide student learning and development. During students' final presentations of their performances, Brooke limited her interjections to self-feedback⁹ - with comments such as "Good," "Awesome," "I'm really impressed!" – to encourage a supportive atmosphere but not interfere with student final performances. While self-feedback is often viewed as ineffective (Brown, 2011), Brooke saw that her role during the final performance was to allow her students to show what they could do without her support. This careful balance in the style of feedback provided by Brooke at different points throughout the final exam process allowed students to continue to develop and learn during creation of their performances – yet also allowed students to demonstrate what they could do on their own during the final performance.

In Brooke's classroom, there was much alignment between the classroom learning environment and the structure of the exam. When introducing the six-task exam format to the students, Brooke took the time to explain how this structure gave them more opportunities to show a "range of skills" and did so in a more holistic manner over the span of two-weeks time, rather than the exam coming down to a single performance on one day (Observation, Grade 11 drama, January 4, 2016). In focus group meetings, students also argued that in classes where they experienced a disconnect between classroom practices and exam conditions, they felt more likely to perform poorly on the exam. Rob contributed to this argument by stating that many students prefer the structure

⁸ Task feedback involves telling students whether the work they are completing is correct or not and provides students with specific feedback on areas from improvement to best meet the expectations for the task (Brown et al., 2012).

⁹ *Self-feedback* is described as "non-specific praise" that is used to impact student affect positively, but have little to no impact on student performance (Brown, 2011).

of *culminating tasks*, a task that is also designed to assess all skills and knowledge learned across the course of the semester, to exam conditions:

And I think, most of the time, the culminating activity, people like that a little bit more than the test. Just because even the environment of writing an exam is stressful. You wake up, go to school only for the purpose of writing a test, and then you go home and you study for the next one. But with a culminating it's in class or at home. It's more comfortable. (Rob, Focus group, January 15, 2016)

Matt echoed Rob's sentiment about the stressful environment associated with exam conditions: "Also, going on the fact of the stress as well, the feel of the classroom being completely silent, everyone's just writing on paper, is also really stressful," (Matt, Focus group, January 15, 2016). Matt discussed how the disconnect between classroom learning and the environment often used for exams caused stress that could lead to poor student performance, thus resulting in potentially unreliable assessment of student ability. The impact of a disconnect between classroom atmosphere and exam conditions on performance is why Brooke attempted to create as much continuity as possible between her daily classroom practices and the exam conditions in her classes.

As discussed earlier, there was a task within the final exam that assessed students on the skill of movement in the drama curriculum, where students did not perform at the level Brooke expected of them. After a first attempt of their performances, Brooke decided it was best to provide students with formative feedback on this summative task and ask each group to take additional rehearsal time to implement that feedback before they presented their dramatic performances for evaluation. I asked Brooke why she decided to adjust her assessment plan for this movement task during our second

interview: “Because they just hadn’t, once again, read the rubric. They weren’t incorporating the rubric...they just didn’t demonstrate that they got the task. So to say ‘Okay,’ and move on, it’s not teaching them anything, right?” (Brooke, Interview, January 30, 2016). While it could be argued that moving on and assigning a poor mark might teach students the lesson of self-regulation and responsibility, what Brooke is arguing here is that to move on when students are clearly not demonstrating their understanding of curriculum content is not conducive to student learning and development. Brooke communicated that her propensity to adapt plans served the purpose of furthering student learning of the curriculum content, ensured student understanding of assessment expectations, and provided all students with every opportunity to perform as best they could on each task. Brooke also communicated that she did not see it serving any learning purpose to move on when students were not ready due to a lack of preparation, as the students would not learn the skill fully. Brooke did not use assessment or grading as a punishment, but rather as a demonstration of whether or not they were at an appropriate level of skill and understanding. Even when groups of students did not engage fully in a task nor use their rehearsal time wisely, Brooke saw this as an opportunity for her to provide additional guidance with self-regulation and process feedback¹⁰, thus developing students’ awareness of how their lack of preparation was impacting their progress, rather than punishing these students with a low grade for not rehearsing independently. For the groups who were engaged and using class time properly, Brooke explained that her decision to provide them with feedback and additional rehearsal time came from a desire to allow students to reach their full potential:

¹⁰ When providing Process feedback, a teacher shares information on processes or strategies that can be used when completing a specific task (Brown et al., 2012).

Brooke: I knew they were uncomfortable with their own bodies in developing that [performance piece], so they simply needed more time. It wasn't that they were sitting around doing nothing. It wasn't that they were unengaged. It's that they just weren't ready yet. They were working. They were halfway through the creative process, so to just stop it for no reason other than I wanted to move on doesn't make sense. (Interview, January 30, 2016)

Brooke could see that some students were on task and on the right track, and instead of stopping them and marking them at the level they had achieved in the planned time, she adjusted plans to allow students to develop further and explore their full potential in a skill they found challenging. Brooke increased the odds of students' gaining a deeper understanding of this skill by providing Task feedback and the opportunity to immediately implement that constructive feedback before presenting for evaluation.

Discussion of this movement task with students during the second focus group meeting was noticeably different from their discussions of assessment in the initial focus group meeting, where students described their understanding of assessment as evaluation of skills and knowledge. This is especially of note because the movement task was completed within the context of preparation for a summative task. When discussing this particular assessment interaction, students made clear connections between teacher feedback, additional practice time, and the increase in their learning resulting in the higher level of skill presented in the final performance:

Matt: [Receiving feedback and extra time impacted our rehearsal process] a lot... The information was very useful. We knew where our downfalls were. We

knew what we had to improve on, how to act in certain situations, what we should add that would make it better.

Rob: Yeah, we added stuff and cut out stuff that if we didn't have the extra time I don't think we would have done. (Focus group, January 15, 2016)

Matt and Rob, who were in the same performance group for the movement task, both discussed the positive impact individualized feedback had on their performance of this task. For this same movement task, Alicia and Danielle performed in a group and they offered more detail on how specific, individualized feedback and extra rehearsal time allowed their group to develop a stronger performance:

Danielle: We had to move the dividers back and forth. I don't even think we would have done that in time, because we weren't even at that point, so I don't think we would have, without her feedback, been able to do it like that. Our complete act would be a mess...

Alicia: ...And she made us realize a couple of things that we needed to do that we were missing. And I feel if she didn't have the conference with us, that we would have just went on the way that we did, and it wouldn't have given us the full potential that we had. (Focus group, January 15, 2016)

From students' responses, it is obvious that learning took place from Brooke's feedback, as they were able to recall specific feedback that she gave their group that they implemented to improve their performances. Figure 4.2 illustrates how students were beginning to see the connection between formative assessment, feedback that they received, and an increase in their performance level on an evaluated task.

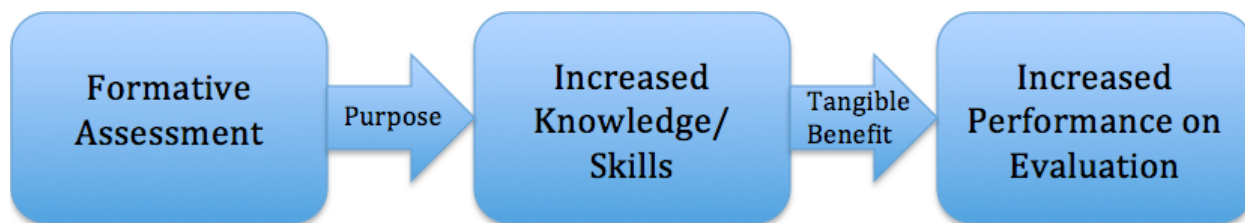


Figure 4.2. Simple diagram for increased academic success from assessment.

Students' discussion of the impacts of additional time and guidance while preparing for this movement task began to show their developing understanding of the relationship between formative assessment, implementing feedback, and their performance on an evaluated task. What is in question still is whether long-term learning occurs when performance on a graded task is the motivation, as student discussions focused on how the feedback impacted their performance on this particular task. There was no student discussion offered that highlighted long-term learning that occurred that they would take forward and apply in their future performances in this course or work beyond this class. Student focus remained on performance on this single evaluated task. What is of considerable note, however, is that reflection on specific formative assessment activities and discussion with peers in the focus group meetings seems to have helped students become more aware of the multiple purposes formative assessment may serve. Perhaps continued discussion and reflection on formative assessment would have lead these students to see how sustained engagement with formative assessment throughout classroom learning could lead to long-term, sustainable learning that could lead to academic success in the current class and beyond.

Conclusions

When taken up in the greater context of both student focus group discussions and teacher interviews, the connection between sustained engagement required with

formative assessment producing higher student achievement on evaluations can be understood to be an even more nuanced relationship than Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 suggest. Figure 4.3 combines the immediate need felt by students to perform on summative assessment with Brooke's discussion of the purpose of formative assessments. This more nuanced relationship between the purposes and benefits of both formative and summative assessment, which students seemed to see as separate, can be combined in order to develop a more holistic understanding of the relationship.

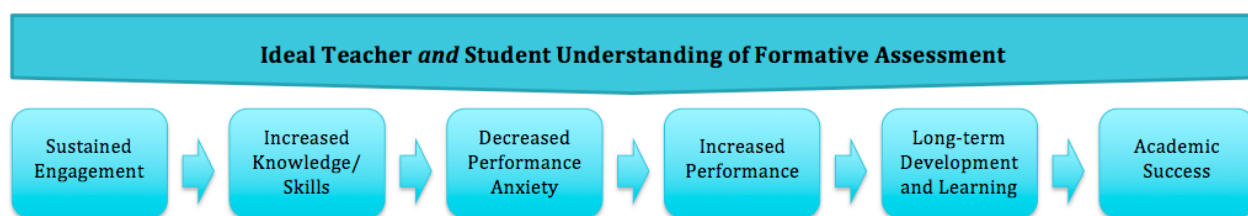


Figure 4.3. Diagram for ideal teacher *and* student understanding of formative assessment.

It is important that students see the relationship between formative and summative assessment; however, it is even more important that students see that the relationship between the increase in their knowledge and skills, their lower level of performance anxiety, and long-term development and learning all lead to academic success. An understanding of the relationship between formative assessment and summative assessment, as well as an understanding of how better academic performance *and* long-term development and learning lead to academic success are vital to a more holistic student view of the purposes that formative assessment serves in the classroom. Through engaging in critical self-reflection during conversation interviews and focus group meetings, students began to develop a deeper understanding of the purpose of formative

assessment for their learning development and an appreciation for the learning culture Brooke creates with her assessment design.

Due to confidentiality concerns, I was not able to share students' reactions to assessment with Brooke throughout the duration of this project; however, information gathered from students during informal conversation interviews and student focus group meetings produced knowledge that would be valuable to a teacher as he/she shapes future assessment designs. This information was shared with Brooke, the school, and the school board within the final report produced from this study. Brooke also found the highest success with student engagement during formative assessments that she introduced to students using an open dialogue explaining her reasoning behind the assessment methods she used. This showed how valuable engaging students in conversations on formative assessment is to both students and the teacher in order to have formative assessment designs that are tailored specifically to the unique learning needs of students present in the classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Ultimately, [assessment] influences the value that students attach to education. If assessment has this kind of impact, it deserves careful attention so that it supports learning rather than hampering it.” (Earl, 2003, p. 43)

Using a qualitative case study design, this study worked to recognize how dynamic and nuanced understandings of assessment can be and uncover the connections and disconnects between a teacher’s intentions and students’ receptions of formative assessment as it was enacted in the classroom. It is especially important to capture students’ reactions to formative assessment practices in order to address a gap in terms of including student voice in the body of current research regarding formative assessment. This knowledge can lead to deeper understanding of how formative assessment may be used to improve student learning experiences, and to create assessment practices and policies that promote both teacher and student understandings of assessment that are more aligned with the new story in education.

The remainder of Chapter Five offers a critical discussion of the findings from this study by integrating relevant theory. By situating the findings from this study within the current Ontario educational context, this final chapter allows me to reach the goal set out for this study of exploring a teacher’s plans and students’ perceptions of formative assessment practices within a time of transition within the Ontario education climate.

Summary of the Study

This study is situated in an Ontario secondary drama classroom during a point of transition within the field of education from the old story, where assessment was viewed as a final judgment and evaluation of knowledge learned, to the new story in education.

The new story in education is reflected in current Ontario curriculum assessment policy that define assessment as “the process of gathering information that accurately reflects how well a student is achieving the curriculum expectations in a subject or course. The primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 28). With a balanced understanding of the purpose of assessment to both gather information on student achievement and also to serve the purpose of moving student learning forward, assessment is no longer a mechanism for labeling student achievement, rather a tool for developing student learning.

Using a qualitative approach was most fitting for this study, as it allowed me to use the constructivist epistemology (Merriam, 2009) to explore how interactions impact the learning environment, as well as adopting the relativist ontology (Reason, 1994) to see how different individuals react to and experience the same assessment interactions differently due to their unique perspectives. Furthermore, by adopting a qualitative case study methodology, this study had the opportunity to simultaneously explore varying understandings of, intentions with, reactions to, and perspectives on assessment practices in one teacher’s classrooms through the use of a wide range of data collection techniques (Creswell, 2007). Throughout fieldwork activities, I used teacher semi-structured open-ended interviews, classroom observations, conversation interviews, and student focus group meetings to gather data. Interviews and focus group meetings were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by myself, the researcher. Fieldnotes were taken throughout my observations of classroom activities in order to note the environment of the classroom, assessments as they were enacted, and teacher-student and peer-to-peer interactions.

Through reporting my findings in Chapter Four, my goal was to communicate the complexities of classroom interactions and how multifaceted understandings of formative assessment held by both Brooke and her students shape what is carried out in classroom practices.

Discussion

Using the story model as my framework for understanding how the current educational context plays a role in impacting both a teacher's and students' perceptions of formative assessment and how these individuals may take actions to move forward particular changes they see as beneficial to the emerging new story, the purpose of Chapter Five is to offer discussion that merges my findings with Ontario's current educational context in order to highlight implications for theory, make recommendations for further study, and highlight how findings from this study may be taken into consideration for further curriculum reform.

Brooke's Formative Assessment

Practices aligned with the new story in education can be seen throughout Brooke's approach to integrating formative assessment in everyday classroom practices. Even within her exam structure, Brooke consistently utilized the benefits of formative assessment. Providing students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their skills and knowledge on different days is a form of summative evaluation that is much more aligned with the new story in education, where student demonstrations of performance should be supported by "teachers giv[ing] ongoing feedback" with "[c]olaboration and equity [as] underlying principles" (Drake et al., 2014, p. xii). Traditional approaches to exam evaluations focused on individual performance on a single, standardized task (Shepard,

2000). Having exam tasks take place on five separate days and performances that take multiple forms increases the chance of gathering reliable information on student achievement.

Brooke's practice of providing students with a rubric as they begin work on an assignment to clearly communicate success criteria and her use of criterion-based assessment is aligned with current best practices in education (Ministry of Education, 2010; Shepard, 2000). Brooke does not reduce students' grades as a penalty (e.g., taking off marks because work is not completed on time); rather, she uses grades as a marker of whether or not students are at an appropriate level of skill and understanding. As discussed in Chapter Two, *transparency* in evaluation is achieved when students understand the criteria on which they are being assessed to the point where "students can evaluate their own work in the same way that their teachers would" (Shepard, 2000, p. 11). Providing students with the rubric while they prepare to perform an assessment served to increase students' understanding of success criteria by allowing them to become familiar with this tool prior to receiving it with Brooke's written feedback and a final grade. By using the rubric as a tool for learning, rather than simply as a marking tool, Brooke was also able to increase student independence by making suggestions such as using the rubric as a checklist to complete self-assessment, or using the rubric to work with another student to complete peer-assessment. Drake et al. (2014) suggest that a way to have students further engage with the rubric is to co-create the assessment tool with student input. Brooke did have students contribute and co-design the structure of the exam, but taking the process one step further and having students create the success criteria for the rubric may have increased student understanding and engagement with the

rubric as a learning tool throughout their creative process.

While Brooke spends some class time on group instruction, the majority of her teaching is dedicated to individual student attention. Through these interactions, Brooke communicates her care for her students, as well as the knowledge she holds about them as individual students. As highlighted by Butler (1994), *constructive feedback*, individualized feedback that provides guidance on areas for development and opportunities to implement that feedback, increases student resiliency by showing the student how to work through the learning process with teacher guidance, instead of looking to the teacher to simply provide them with the correct answers. By structuring her individual formative interactions with questions such as, “How can you challenge yourself?” and “Which one of those skills will challenge you? I don’t want to tell you,” (Observation, Grade 10 drama, January 4, 2016), Brooke encouraged student independence while providing feedback on areas to focus their attention on developing their performances.

How Assessment is Understood

Assessments serve varying purposes both within and outside the classroom walls. Earl (2003) discusses some of the purposes of assessment as providing feedback to students, giving teachers diagnostic information, obtaining information for student records, using evidence for reports to administration and parents, and directing efforts for adaptation of learning and teaching plans. Both Brooke and student-participants outlined all of these purposes as reasons for assessment; however, students were initially more focused on discussions of grades and reporting, and Brooke’s discussions were

consistently centred on assessment providing information useful for student feedback and adapting future learning and teaching plans.

During the first focus group meeting, both James and Mel associated assessment with diagnostic testing, which was a cause of stress for them. The stress or anxiety that these students associated with the word *assessment* relates to the old story in education, where assessment and tests were associated with evaluating and labeling student ability (Drake et al., 2014; Earl, 2003). Mel's communicated desire to perform well on diagnostic assessment highlights how some students may still view formative assessment practices as a gauge of student ability. Her desire to appear knowledgeable shows her limited awareness of how diagnostic assessment in the new story of education serves informational purposes to teachers and students in order to put practices in place that will aide student learning. Upon further questioning, James' discussion of pre-testing signalled an awareness of the diagnostic nature of assessments and the impacts that pre-testing can serve for teaching. This further discussion is more aligned with Brown's (2011) finding that students are able to recognize assessment as a tool to help improve their future learning, and highlights the importance of engaging students in discussions about formative assessment to further their understanding of the purpose these practices serve. This development in James' thinking of assessment serving informational purposes, rather than simply labelling student ability, was the first instance where critical reflection that students were asked to complete during focus group discussions served to deepen student awareness of the learning benefits provided by formative assessment.

When students were asked what first comes to mind when they hear the word *assessment*, the most common initial response was formal testing and evaluation of skills,

which has a strong relationship to grading and reporting. This aligns with both Harris et al.'s (2009) and Hue et al.'s (2015) findings that students are most likely to associate the term assessment with testing or test-like conditions, rather than informal classroom interactions. Students' responses also show connections with Brown's (2011) finding that students often see assessment serving the purpose of evaluating elements outside of their control, such as the quality of their school or the level of their intelligence in order to report to outside authorities. For some students, such as Danielle, tests were a cause for anxiety due to poor study skills; for other students, like Matt, tests provided incentive to memorize material. Students' contradictory reactions to testing practices highlight the need for a both/and approach to teaching (Drake et al., 2014; Earl, 2003). This shows that different students have different learning needs and that no 'one size fits all' approach to assessment will be successful; however, in both Danielle's and Matt's cases, the impetus for studying was a desire to perform well on a graded test. This locates the motivation externally, either to avoid embarrassment or gain a higher mark, which students communicated does not lead to long-term learning for them.

Formative assessment is not the formal evaluations and reporting systems that first came to mind for the majority of students who participated in the focus group meetings. Formative assessments are often everyday classroom practices and interactions between teacher and student. When both teacher and student engage it with properly, formative assessment is valuable to student progress and learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Drake et al., 2014; Earl, 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2014). Students communicated an awareness of the purpose of formative assessment in classroom practices; however, they also communicate the more immediate pressure they felt to perform on evaluated tasks to

achieve a desired mark. Initially, there was very little communication from students of the connection between the two – that learning through formative assessment would allow them to perform at a higher level in order to achieve a more desirable grade. Even though Brooke clearly communicated what changes were occurring and how these changes best supported student learning and progress when she made alterations to her teaching and assessment plans, it was not until the students themselves engaged in critical reflection during focus group discussions that they realized the connection between formative assessment and better performance on an assessed task. The long-term commitment and enduring focus required for formative assessment is superseded by students' focus on the end goal of performing on a final task when grades are involved. This might explain students' lack of engagement with formative tasks throughout classroom activities (e.g., not taking up Brooke's suggestion of completing performance for another peer group for feedback instead of sitting and chatting during rehearsal time). Due to the pressure of the grading culture that still carries over from the old story, it seems that more links must be made in students' conceptions of formative assessment between the amount of practice and the level of achievement on final performances for them to truly partake in the formative elements of assessment. Furthermore, a view of achievement must go beyond the grade to encompass long-term learning goals so that students can see more easily the importance of practice and development. It seems that discussions in the focus group meetings, especially discussions that asked students to critically reflect on the impact Brooke's formative feedback had on their development of performance tasks, had a positive impact on increasing students' awareness of the multiple purposes formative assessment serves. During the second and third focus group

meetings, students demonstrated an increased ability to self-reflect on how their engagement in formative assessments impacted their performance on evaluated performances.

Influences on Assessment

The drama curriculum itself was a major influence on how Brooke designed and students engaged with formative assessment. Making learning visible to the teacher and students is an integral element of successful formative assessment that was highlighted in discussions with both Brooke and students. The collaborative nature of group work that flows from the drama curriculum helped Brooke to foster a community of learning among her students. Students also communicated that working with their peers, though at times challenging, helped them to feel supported while working through the creative process. Students felt that a contributing factor in the drama classroom was that performance expectations in the curriculum made it much easier to create an open atmosphere where students felt comfortable learning from and discussing each others' work. Having to perform and provide peer-feedback seems to be an expectation that students held when electing to take a drama credit; however, cooperative learning¹¹ is a movement in education that has been seen to have positive achievement effects in students across curriculum subjects (Slavin, 1991). There are many examples of teachers using co-operative and collaborative learning structures in classrooms where various curriculum areas are taught (Drake et al., 2014). The regularity of collaborative work,

¹¹ While co-operative and collaborative learning models take many different forms, they all involve having students work together in small groups to help each other learn course material and work towards a set learning goal (Slavin, 1991).

peer-assessment, and teacher modeling that flows naturally from the creative process taught in drama curriculum is something that can be integrated into other subject areas.

During the pilot interview, April discussed how she found success using formative assessment with the math and science curricula by using strategies that were informal so that students were more comfortable with trying even when they were unsure of the correct answer. April has found much success with activities that make learning visible not only to her, the teacher, but also the entire class. By utilizing resources, such as individual white boards where students share their answer to math problems she poses during her math lessons, and other activities that make learning visible, such as Stop Light cards and Think-Pair-Share activities, students become comfortable with each other, more comfortable engaging in the process of learning, and less apprehensive of failure. Making the process of learning visible provides valuable information to the teacher and helps students to benefit from seeing their peers' learning processes. These findings from discussion with a math and science teacher also align with findings and observations in Brooke's drama classroom. While the current study is limited in its exploration of assessment practices within the context of a single curriculum area, alignment between the findings that emerged from this pilot interview and the current study suggest that creating a culture of learning through the use of daily formative assessment practices aides student learning progress by making learning visible to both the teacher and students, and is consistent across multiple subject areas. What seems to be important is that students are learning from their own successes and failures, as well as their peers' successes and failures. Making student learning visible to everyone helps to

create a culture of learning where both the teacher and the students embrace mistakes as a part of the learning process, rather than something to fear or avoid.

While a teacher is able to have a large influence over the culture of a classroom, student mood, engagement, and attitude towards learning and the course also have a large impact on the success or failure of any assessment design. Ajzen's (1991) model of *reasoned behaviour* argues that personal goals and sense of ability to fulfill those goals will impact one's actions. Following Ajzen's (1991) model of reasoned behaviour, it can be argued that if students believe they can succeed on a task, then they are much more likely to engage in that task and seek input for improvement. What becomes important then is the definition of success – whether it is a higher grade or it is learning progress. Butler (1988) discusses how grades create an external locus of control, and that those students who struggle to attain grades in school might not find academic performance a motivator because they are unable to attain a desired grade. Furthermore, Earl (2003) argues that “External assessments and routine reporting requirements can have a demotivating effect on students” (p. 72). Feedback with a grade may help students to play the game of school more by helping them to see how they can put the least amount of effort in for the most amount of marks (Butler, 1988). Furthermore, while students who experience academic success may find grades and tests to be a motivator to work harder, those students who do not connect with the way material is being taught and assessed may disengage from a course completely. I noted throughout classroom observations that tasks emphasizing student growth and development, such as the Bump-Up Activity and resubmission of the script annotation task, had a high success rate with *all* students for increasing student performance and engagement.

Responsive Teaching

It is vital that students are listened to regarding their conceptions of assessment. Asking students to reflect on their learning and communicate how they feel they are best able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge encourages students to critically reflect on their progress, strengths, and areas for development. As was discussed in Chapter Two, asking students to engage in metacognitive reflection has the potential to increase student academic performance (Kadioglu & Kondakci, 2014; Pennequin et al., 2010; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Pintrich et al., 1993) and cognitive self-regulation (Pintrich, 2002). Therefore, it is important that students be asked to critically reflect on their conceptions of and engagement with assessment so that they uncover for themselves how their level of engagement with formative assessment can negatively *or* positively impact their learning and performance. Brooke's integration of formative assessment within her exam design, her Bump-Up Activity, and her consistent use of resubmission to encourage student integration of constructive feedback can be looked to as formative assessment practices that increased student engagement in the learning process. While having the opportunity to redo a task with teacher feedback has the potential to develop students understanding and performance on a particular skill for the immediate task at hand, what was not clear from student discussions was whether this lead to long-term learning when a grade was involved. Students communicated that learning took place for that particular task, but student conversation interviews and focus group meetings lacked discussion of how learning would apply to future tasks.

The use of formative assessment practices to aide students in their learning throughout the semester can be a cause for student discomfort when those supports are

withdrawn during formal examination tasks. The unique experience of integrating formative assessment within the context of a summative exam highlights Brooke's dedication to using responsive teaching strategies. Having an exam structure that alternates between a practice period and a performance period over the course of two weeks provides an excellent example of a more holistic exam structure, and one that allows much opportunity for formative feedback throughout the process of a summative assessment. Dunn and Mulvenon (2009) discuss the use of *formative summative assessment* to serve the purpose of providing both quantitative and qualitative feedback to students on an evaluation. The success in Brooke's approach for formative summative assessment seems to stem from providing quantitative and qualitative feedback *separately*, even when it was for the same task. Brooke did not record or provide any quantitative information to students until after all performances were completed. Keeping quantitative feedback separate from qualitative feedback seemed to keep students' focus on the formative feedback Brooke provided during rehearsals and student performances. This seemed especially important during performances where students were provided with formative feedback and then were provided with a second opportunity to perform their presentations.

Integrating formative assessment into the exam structure allowed Brooke to maintain more continuity between everyday classroom learning and the environment where students were being tested on their skill and knowledge level at the end of the semester. The six-task exam structure that was witnessed in Brooke's classroom can be used in other curriculum areas, such as alternating exam review days with test days instead of having a week of exam review lessons and only one testing day. Time is

always a limited commodity in schools, and exams that take place in class over multiple days require more time to execute; however, having shorter periods of review followed by shorter tasks is an effective way to integrate such an exam structure in an efficient manner that also takes student learning into account. Another option might be to allow students to complete a task similar to the evaluation in groups before testing students individually on the same knowledge or skill in the following class. Alternating teaching with evaluation, integrating self- and peer-assessment into the teaching days, allowing students to display their learning over multiple classes, integrating collaborative learning opportunities, and offering choice in exam format creates exams that are more valid and reliable, and increases chances for student success.

Creating a culture of learning over a culture of competition is an important shift within the new story in education (Drake et al., 2014; Shepard, 2000). Brooke created a learning culture in her classrooms. She modeled the behaviours she wanted from her students when she provided constructive feedback throughout classroom activities. By describing the feedback she was giving, she actively highlighted instances of assessment for students. Shepard (2000) argues that teacher discussion should highlight how feedback from assessments is being used to influence teaching decisions so that this behaviour is modelled for the students, and so students become more aware of how informal assessments influence learning in the classroom. Though Brooke did not use the language of assessment to define the work, task, or activity they were engaging in, she clearly articulated to the students the importance of the feedback that she was providing, communicated to them that she expected any peer-feedback to follow the same guidelines and be of the same quality as hers, and discussed how student achievement was

impacting the decisions she was making for the structure of each class. Throughout classroom observations, conversation interviews, and focus group discussions, students demonstrated and discussed their appreciation for the open dialogue Brooke provided about the structure and responsive nature of her assessment design. This open dialogue helped students to see how Brooke's assessment design was supporting their learning by directing their attention to areas for growth. More importantly, students communicated that they viewed Brooke as providing support to their learning development, rather than seeing her as an evaluator. Within the second and third focus group meetings, students were able to discuss assessments as opportunities for learning, rather than simply an evaluation of skills and knowledge, even when those assessments were integrated within the formal summative exam. It seems that the combination of Brooke's practices as well as the critical self-reflection students engaged in during conversation interviews and focus group meetings allowed their understandings of assessment to begin to align more closely with the current goals stated by the ministry for integration of assessment *as, for, and of* learning to progress student learning.

Implications for Practice

Recent research suggests that the culture created in a classroom has impact on students' metacognitive development (Kadioglu & Kondakci, 2014). Furthermore, Black and Wiliam (2009) argue,

[A]ny evidence of formative interaction must be analysed as reflecting a teacher's chosen plan to develop learning, the formative interactions which that teacher carries out contingently within the framework of that plan – as realised in the social world of the classroom and school – and the internal cognitive and

affective models of each student of which the responses and broader participation of students provide only indirect evidence. (p. 26)

What was evident throughout data collection and analysis aligns with Black and Wiliam's (2009) argument. The teacher's chosen plan and execution of that plan within the confines of the social world of the school interacted with the student's internal world (e.g., student attitudes, goals, and understanding of assessment) and that impacted classroom assessment practices. Furthermore, there were also external influences impacting the teacher's plans (e.g., curriculum policy, parental pressures) and student's internal worlds (e.g., university entrance requirements, parental pressures). While there are many influencing factors on classroom culture that participants in this study did not discuss in focus group meetings or interviews (e.g., family background, socioeconomic factors), what was clear from discussions and observations was that it was the constant interaction and renegotiation of all of these interconnected influences that created the unique culture of the classroom each day. Figure 5.1 illustrates how all of the external pressures and internal influences that participants in this study discussed came together to create the culture of the classroom:

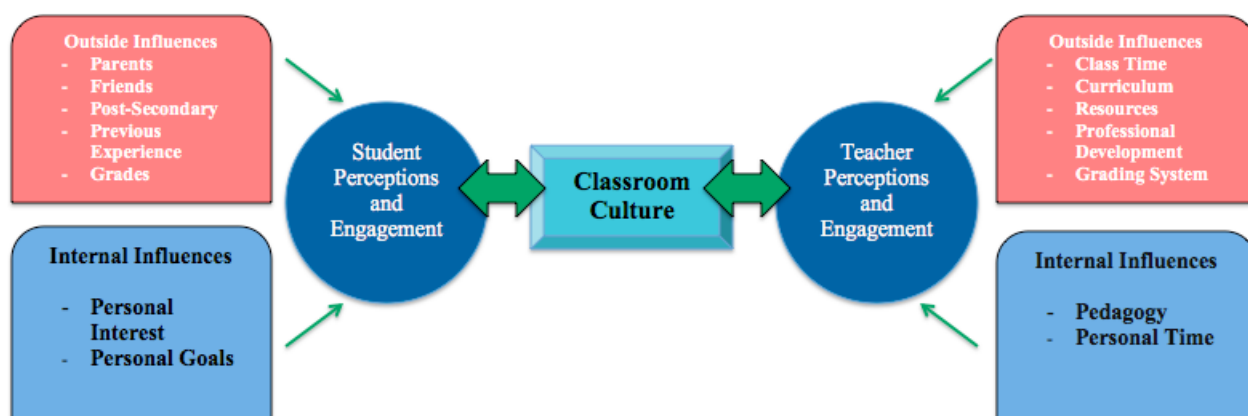


Figure 5.1. Impacts on classroom culture.

The major influences students and Brooke saw impacting engagement with formative assessment stemmed from both personal experiences and formal influences. The dialogic relationship between teacher and student engagement in assessment practices in the classroom means that all elements impacting student conceptions of assessment will in turn impact the teacher's assessment designs. Conversely, as a teacher's conception and use of assessment impact students' understanding of assessment, all elements impacting a teacher's conception of assessment will in turn impact the students' experiences and understandings of assessment as well. As Figure 5.1 suggests, both teacher's and students' conceptions of assessment are complex, varying, and play a major role in classroom culture, assessment design, and student engagement.

Where students discussed their parents' views of reporting and assessing directly impacting how they engaged with their report card, Brooke discussed how students' engagement with feedback was impacted by pressure they felt from parents which in turn impacted Brooke's assessment practices in the classroom. This all connects back to the culture of grading from the old story of assessment (Drake et al., 2014; Earl, 2003). The pressure felt for students to perform well and to *get* students to perform well impacts student engagement and teacher plans, as it ultimately comes down to the marks students achieve over the development and long-term learning they demonstrate. What was of note was Rob's discussion of how his parents' interest in the formative comments his teachers provided on report cards influenced the value he gave to those comments as well. As students benefitted from critical self-reflection undertaken throughout focus group discussions about the purpose of formative assessment, parents might also benefit

from discussions that inform them of the purpose and benefits of formative assessment and formative feedback.

Students' reflection on assessments can serve as important information to both the student and the teacher. Gathering information from students on what went well and what went poorly during an assessment delivers insights that might otherwise be overlooked. Figure 5.2 displays a new proposed teacher reflection cycle that includes student voice within teachers' planning and reflection activities.

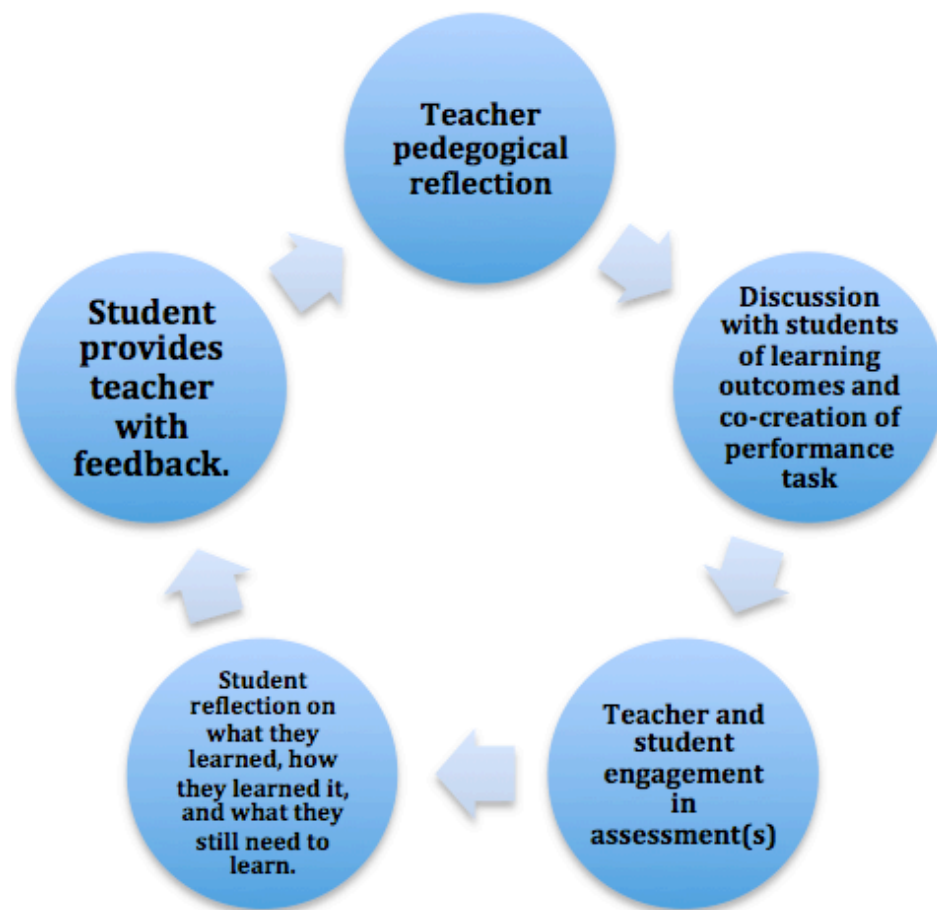


Figure 5.2. New proposed teacher and student assessment reflection model.

This proposed cycle, which includes both teacher and student reflections on assessment, has the potential to be beneficial to the student by increasing their level of metacognitive awareness, to the teacher for increasing his/her metacognitive awareness and awareness

of influences on student engagement in assessment, and can help to shape future assessment interactions in a way that align with the goals the teacher holds yet is tailored to the particular learning needs of the students present in the class. Recent research suggests that how metacognition is modeled and taught (Pintrich, 2002), the language used and type of feedback teachers provide (Dweck, 2007), and the culture created in the classroom (Kadioglu & Kondakci, 2014) all impact students' metacognitive development. As metacognition is now a part of Ontario's curriculum expectations (Ministry of Education, 2007), teachers need to be provided with effective training on how to properly incorporate metacognition into their practices in a way that encourages students to develop their own metacognitive awareness.

Implications for Theory

As argued by Drake (2010), “we are not conscious of how our cultural story and its embedded values permeate our personal stories” (p. 3). Student discussions revealed that they were not consciously aware of what motivated their engagement in classroom work prior to participating in student focus group discussions. These discussions uncovered that their motivation to complete work in school came from a desire to obtain marks. Before engaging in these focus group discussions, students had not questioned these motivations; however, when students talked about their ideal school environment, they communicated a desire to have curriculum and assessment designs that foster a desire to learn over a desire to achieve a grade. Furthermore, when students were asked to discuss their positive assessment experiences, students' discussions focused on activities that encouraged creativity, built on students' personal interests, and allowed students to grow and develop. Within their discussions of positive assessment experiences, students

did not, generally, discuss grades. The contradictory responses students offered about what motivated their engagement (grades) and what they desired to have as motivating their engagement (a desire to learn) personifies the tension Drake et al. (2014) describe between the old story of evaluation and the new story of assessment occurring in education.

As Nieto (1994) argues, when policy changes are implemented it often takes time for true *transformation* of thoughts and beliefs held by those within the education system to occur. It seems that Brooke's understanding of formative assessment was more heavily influenced by curriculum policy and professional development she had been provided by her school board, whereas student answers came from classroom experiences, their parents' engagement with report cards, and elements of the reporting system that they saw impacting their academic futures. This signals that students' perceptions are influenced by curriculum changes in a trickle-down effect from their teachers, their parents' ideologies and values, as well as the reporting system employed by the school board. Therefore, students' perceptions of formative assessment are likely to be slower to change with the implementation of curriculum reform, especially if the assessing and reporting policies are misaligned. As student engagement with assessment was seen to have impact on Brooke's assessment design, true *transformation* from reform of curriculum documents and policies is likely to go through a process of vacillation until true *transformation* occurs in the minds of teachers, administrators, parents, *and* students. While discussions in focus group meetings served to deepen students' understandings and appreciations of the purposes formative assessment practices serve to move student learning forward, students still argued that changes need to occur within the education

system, in regards to reporting and accountability regulations, so that student engagement is motivated by a desire to learn rather than grades achievement. For true *transformation* to occur, training and discussion must continue with *both* teachers *and* students to move along the previously held ideologies about assessment until they are aligned with the ideologies supporting the new reform practices in Ontario's *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Ministry of Education, 2010) policy.

Learning, as the student-participants in the final focus group argued, must be understood as the purpose of school. Peterson et al. (2010) found that holding continuous and lifelong conceptions of learning had a positive relationship to academic achievement in students, whereas students who believed learning to be a duty were found to perform lower. In our focus group discussions, students also argued that learning in school cannot be seen to be job training or mandatory work that must be completed in order to gain grades for post-secondary entrance. The work that students complete in class everyday must have purpose in and of itself, and both the teacher and students must understand that purpose to be continuous learning. As Peterson et al. (2010) argue, "we need to encourage students to see learning as part of a continuous, lifelong process that extends beyond the classroom walls and school gate" (p. 174). If work in class is seen to be steps towards a future goal, then motivation may wane if students do not see themselves as able to fulfill that future goal because of current academic standing. When continuous and lifelong learning becomes the goal, then there is a much higher chance of intrinsic motivation occurring.

Implications for Further Research

Students have valuable ideas and opinions on assessment design and how it impacts their engagement. They communicated a wish for their voice to be heard and to see changes occur:

Danielle: Yeah, it's unbelievable how true that is [that the desire to learn is lost] and I think that more teachers and more people need to know that. I don't know how they're going to fix it or if they ever will fix it, but I feel like they kind of need to find a way to fix that because the desire to learn is lost and that's horrible. *(lets out a small laugh)* (Focus group, January 22, 2016).

This exchange is key, and there is a request from the student to share this message – that the desire to learn is lost. Engaging students in critical reflection on assessment practices and their engagement allowed students to come to this conclusion: when grades are a motivating factor, the desire for long-term learning is weakened. The implication is that students want to *want* to learn. Students communicated that structures and systems in school reduce students' desire to learn as the incentive for completing work. Furthermore, engaging students in discussions about assessment appears to help them appreciate and better understand formative assessment. Students communicated that they enter particular subjects with expectations for what assessment would look like (e.g., performing for their peers in drama versus individual written work in English). These expectations, formed from previous experiences in the classroom, served to influence student participation and classroom engagement. Students' understandings of assessment impacts not only their engagement in the assessments their teachers design and carry out in class, their understandings also impact their self-regulating behaviours and the probability of them

engaging in metacognitive strategies and self- and peer- assessments on their own volition. Student discussions need to be integrated into future research to uncover the interconnected issues surrounding assessment, instructional format, curriculum, and evaluation policies that influence students' reception of and engagement with formative assessment in various classrooms.

As there are now tools, such as the SCoA survey, that quantitatively gathering student perceptions of assessment (Brown, 2011), further research needs to explore student perceptions of assessment in qualitative ways. Engaging students in conversations that increase their awareness of the benefits of formative assessment may help to increase student engagement in the process of learning and revision, and decrease strain on teachers by cultivating student independence and self-sufficiency.

A significant theme that emerged from both teacher and student conversations was the impact that the climate of the classroom had on how students engaged in formative assessment interactions. Furthermore, studies have shown that students' conceptions of learning can be influenced by their learning environment (Peterson et al., 2010). This indicates that it is important that studies that aim to explore the student voice need also explore environmental factors contributing to student perceptions and reception of formative assessment practices as they are enacted in the classroom. As argued by Peterson et al. (2010), if environment can influence student approaches to learning, it then follows that "conceptions and perceptions that align with better learning outcomes can be nurtured with appropriate scaffolding" (p. 168). More studies need to explore students' reactions within the classroom, while also engaging students in conversation about their self-perceptions on their engagement.

Ontario curriculum policies on assessment deem the primary purpose of assessment to be gathering data to “improve student learning” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 28). Some questions that need to be asked include: Are Ontario’s reporting policies aligned with the goals for assessment outlined within policy documents? If grades are the single determining factor for students’ ability to progress in schooling, and grades are only assigned to content and performance standards, then are the value of learning skills and work habits truly being communicated to students? Is there a way to balance the weighting of assessment between the content and performance standards with the assessment of the learning skills and work habits without defaulting to assigning those learning skills and work habits with a grade as well? We must continually question the assessment and reporting policies in place, and continually search for reporting practices that communicate the value of learning progress to students so that students can be taught the value of learning beyond the value of a grade.

Final Word

This study has worked to address the lack of student voice available within the existent research on formative assessment practices, and to meet the call for explorations of student experiences of formative assessment within the context of Ontario (Chapman et al., 2015) and the discrepancies between teacher expectations and student perceptions of formative assessment practices (Hue et al., 2015). With a new focus on formative assessment and assessment *as* and *for* learning in Ontario’s *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* policy (Ministry of Education, 2010), the emphasis on grades for accountability, evaluation, and reporting serves to cloud the positive effects that formative assessment can serve. This is especially true due

to the impact that grades and ministry testing (e.g., OSSLT) have in students' academic careers. Students communicated an awareness of the purpose and presence of formative assessment in Brooke's classroom practices; however, they also communicated the more immediate pressure that they feel to perform on evaluated tasks to achieve a desired mark. During the first focus group meeting, there was very little discussion from students about the connection between the two (i.e., that learning through formative assessment allows them to perform at a higher level in order to achieve a more desirable grade); however, this understanding seemed to develop as students reflected on and discussed Brooke's assessment design.

Looking to other systems for education models that are less reliant on grading for reporting and accountability may help to develop policies that reduce the pressure that students feel to perform for grades. Quest University in British Columbia is adopting a non-traditional approach to education and grading. At Quest University, students have the opportunity to apply for a "Change of Grading Option" to receive *pass* or *no pass* on their transcript, instead of a letter grade. Furthermore, students may also request, in addition to a letter grade in any course, a narrative evaluation from their course instructor. This narrative evaluation may be offered orally in person or in writing, and it becomes a part of the student's record (Quest University Canada, 2016). Some colleges in the United States are beginning to adopt no grading systems of reporting as well. Brown University in Rhode Island, New York allows its students the opportunity to choose between the traditional grading system or a "Satisfactory/No Credit" evaluation, where students gather materials within their online portfolios as "more nuanced" and "qualitative evidence" of their performance (Brown University, 2016). No failing grades are recorded

on Brown University transcripts. Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin has adopted a no grades reporting system where students receive a narrative transcript. As described by Alverno College, a narrative transcript is “documentation that showcases growth, painting a detailed picture of [the student’s] accomplishments for parents, graduate schools and employers,” which is guided by the professors’ assessments and supplemented with student self-assessment (Alverno College, n.d.). The portfolio system allows students to begin their careers with letters of recommendation that detail the work they have completed and their areas of strength for employers. These post-secondary institutions are managing to develop systems of reporting that are not reliant on grades even though the majority of schools in the United States still use grades as the system of reporting. While these systems would need to be adapted for use in the public-school setting where class sizes and time demands for teachers are much higher, looking to these schools for examples of reporting procedures that are less reliant on grades for accountability is a good starting point for discussion.

As Ontario’s education system strives to move forward and best serve students’ learning interests, it is important that *both* teacher perceptions and plans *as well as* student reactions to and understandings of assessment be explored. Assessment and reporting policies must be examined for the flaws and misalignment between the practices of formal evaluation and reporting served by assessment, and the growth and development fostered through formative assessment practices. There also needs to be more emphasis placed on the value and importance of students’ voices in order to understand how their perspectives of assessment work to shape the climate of the classroom as much as the teacher. Students, teachers, and school board members need to

see the value in student views of assessment practices, so that students value their own voice, and so that teachers, administrators and policy makers value the feedback students can provide to them.

As the students were getting ready to leave the final focus group meeting, they were discussing assessments in their other classes. Matt called to me and said that this discussion would be good material for another study. This interaction showed me that Matt appreciated and enjoyed having the opportunity to discuss his opinion on assessment, and makes me hopeful for future research projects.

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