How Formative Assessments can be Utilized to Respond to Student Needs Within a Balanced Literacy Framework

Amber Ann Steinmeyer
Hamline University, amueller06@hamline.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all
Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Steinmeyer, Amber Ann, "How Formative Assessments can be Utilized to Respond to Student Needs Within a Balanced Literacy Framework" (2016). School of Education Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations. 4103.
https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all/4103
HOW FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS CAN BE UTILIZED TO RESPOND TO
STUDENT NEEDS WITHIN A BALANCED LITERACY FRAMEWORK

by

Amber A. Steinmeyer

A capstone submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Literacy Education

Hamline University
Saint Paul, Minnesota
May 16, 2016

Primary Advisor: Stephanie Reid
Secondary Advisor: Wendy Schmalz
Peer Reviewer: Megan Bauer
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my husband, Isaac, for the constant love and support throughout this process—thank you for always believing in me. To my committee members, Stephanie, Wendy, and Megan—thank you for the guidance, wisdom, and encouragement. Finally, thank you to all of my family and friends.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Background of the Researcher………………………………………………7
  Introduction……………………………………………………………………….7
  Personal Experiences with Assessments………………………………………….10
  Background of the Researcher…………………………………………………..12
  Summary…………………………………………………………………………17

Chapter Two: Literature Review……………………………………………………19
  Introduction……………………………………………………………………19
  Formative Assessments…………………………………………………………20
    Formative assessments as a process………………………………………..21
    The importance of data……………………………………………………23
    The importance of feedback………………………………………………25
    The relationship between formative and summative assessments……30
    Common formative assessment tools……………………………………31
    Arguments to increase formative assessments in the classroom……33
  Balanced Literacy Framework………………………………………………35
    Defining balanced literacy………………………………………………35
    The key components of a balanced literacy framework………………36
    The reading workshop model……………………………………………38
    Rationale for this model…………………………………………………40
  Formative Assessments within the Balanced Literacy Framework………40
    Overview of commonly used formative assessment tools………………44
    Responding to student needs………………………………………………44
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1- The Reading Workshop Block…………………………………………………………39
Table 3.1- 5th Grade Expected Independent Reading Levels……………………………………52
Table 4.1- Participants Instructional Reading Levels………………………………………………73
Table 4.2- 5th Grade Expected Independent Reading Levels……………………………………74
Table 4.3- Student Profile Sheet-Adam…………………………………………………………78
Table 4.4- Student Profile Sheet- Bailey…………………………………………………………78
Table 4.5- Student Profile Sheet- Carly…………………………………………………………79
Table 4.6- Student Profile Sheet- Dan…………………………………………………………79
Table 4.7- Student Profile Sheet- Emily…………………………………………………………80
Table 4.8- Student Profile Sheet- Felix…………………………………………………………80
Table 4.9- Planning Guide- Week 1…………………………………………………………85
Table 4.10- Planning Guide- Week 2…………………………………………………………85
Table 4.11- Feedback Template…………………………………………………………………87
CHAPTER ONE

Background of the Researcher

Introduction

As a new teacher, you step out of your student teaching position with this sense of hope and determination for the teaching career that awaits. With limited experience, you begin to see repeated bursts of frustration, felt by both yourself and your students. One particular circumstance that elicits immediate frustration is the day the lesson that appeared to be nothing short of legendary on paper, is turned into a disaster. Amidst the chaos you stand puzzled, wondering why problems like this were never addressed in your undergraduate work. This sense of failure and uncertainty is something I have come to know as a new teacher. Regardless of where students appear to be, academically speaking, I have come to realize that teaching is just not that simple. A classroom is an extremely complicated and intricate system, with many variables to account for.

Black & Wiliam, leading researchers on the topic of formative assessments, noted this complexity when they stated the importance of teachers coming to know their students’ individual needs, “needs that are often unpredictable and that vary from one pupil to another” (1998b, p. 82). They go on to acknowledge that the push for raising academic standards and accountability through standardized testing leads to a competitive educational environment which can prove to be harmful (Black & Wiliam, 1998b, p. 82).
I have found this idea to be true within my 5th grade classroom. For reasons unknown to me at the time, a past student refused to participate in any school activities. The hours that I spent hours in preparation for one reading lesson, or that they were reading well below grade level, were not what they were concerned with. The fact that they needed the skills covered in the lesson to prepare for the upcoming district assessment was not a motivation for them. All they were concerned with was knowing that their teacher truly cared about them, regardless of their behavior, and getting something to eat at snack time. This student later qualified for special education services, but the situation speaks to some of the diverse needs of the students I have worked with and the variety of factors that can impact achievement.

Though this student had other variables influencing their achievement at school, the fact remains that they were still reading well below grade level and had been for a few years. Unfortunately, they are not alone in their feeling of frustration with reading. What happens to a reader who is given a text about fly fishing, but has never experienced this activity? Or a reader who is reading at a level Y, well above grade level, and isn’t feeling challenged? As a reading teacher, I don’t want to make assumptions about what my students know or degrade their confidence in their reading abilities. I want them all to find success, and eventually a love for reading. But how is this possible with such an overwhelmingly diverse group of readers? Too often my classroom has been filled with readers full of potential, yet I lacked the ability to identify what pieces of the puzzle they were missing. Students need a teacher who truly knows them, not just their deficits or that they are below grade level.
With classroom time being consumed with covering such a wide range of standards and preparing for high-stakes standardized tests, effective formative assessments that can provide teachers with this pertinent information are too often implemented inconsistently. As a side effect of using formative assessments inconsistently, students are rarely given meaningful feedback throughout the learning process. Instead students are given feedback as an afterthought regarding achievement on an assignment. What is worse is this; teachers simply lack the training or time to fully understand the fairly ambiguous process of formative assessments. This means they will be unable to provide meaningful feedback that will help students raise their level of achievement.

Realizing the reality that every classroom comes with a diverse set of learners, and that academic standards must be met, I set out to clarify what is meant by the term formative assessments and figure out how I could utilize this tool in a powerful way. I had hoped to find a better way to get to know who my students were, what their strengths were, what areas were still in need of development, and determine how to utilize that knowledge when planning future lessons. The end goal was to find a structure where I could identify and respond to my individual student needs, in a sustainable manner. Thus I came to form the following research question, how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students?

The following chapter addresses the current educational setting and common misconceptions related to assessments, and explores a few factors that influence teaching
at the elementary level. Chapter one will also analyze my struggle with the current assessment structure, as well as my personal connection to formative assessments and the balanced literacy model.

Personal Experiences with Assessments

Over a decade has passed since No Child Left Behind was signed into existence, yet public schools continue to ride the wake of standardized testing, educational reform, increased academic standards and reading first initiatives (US Department of Education, 2010). With the new era of standardized testing, students as young as third grade are subjected to annual academic testing, which will continue until the completion of their academic career. A major component of the legislation sought to increase “effective ways to help all children achieve literacy (Allington &Walmsley, 2007)” (Vogt & Shearer, 2011, p.17). Vogt noted a significant change was a push for “scientifically-based reading instruction” as well as “systematic instruction and assessment of children’s phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension” (Vogt & Shearer, 2011, p.17). After hearing about the reform movement in college, I was often reassured by veteran teachers that this too shall pass. “Don’t worry,” they’d say “the pendulum has to swing back the other way at some point.” Five years later I found myself faced with the same struggles, and wondering if things would ever change. All I have noticed at this point is a continued pressure to ensure students’ test scores are rising. I feel this pressure is connected to the national push for the standardization of public education and the fact
that data from standardized assessments is used to determine if schools are making adequate progress.

Due to the nature of this type of assessment, it is difficult to utilize the data that is generated to improve instructional practices within the classroom. I have sat through many data meetings and wondered how this could possibly help me become a better teacher. What was I supposed to do now? I already knew which students were reading below grade level, but looking at the numbers on a screen did little to better my teaching practice.

In discussing student growth with colleagues, I have also noticed huge discrepancies and misconceptions about the topic of assessments. Just speaking about assessments can spur up intense emotional reactions, because there seems to be a connection between assessments and standardized testing, which is typically viewed negatively. However, there are two classifications of assessments, summative and formative. Summative assessments are defined as assessments that “are used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period—typically at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). According to the definition, standardized testing would be classified as a summative assessment, where a student is evaluated on their progress towards meeting the standard.

From personal teaching experiences I have come to find that, due to the nature of the federal standardized testing, in conjunction with district standardized assessments, the data provided gives little insight into where the child is developmentally and which
teaching strategies to employ moving forward. Another downfall is the amount of time between when students take the standardized tests, typically in April, and when results are received and interpreted, typically in August. Though district assessment data is received instantly, both assessments are summative by nature and thus serve a different purpose other than providing immediate feedback to teacher and student. It didn’t take long to realize why educators responded negatively when the topic of assessments arose. So if summative assessments would not allow me to monitor and adjust instruction to meet my students’ needs, I wondered what would. There seemed to be a great deal of pressure for students to succeed on a test that would provide little feedback to the people responsible for teaching them.

I came to discover that formative assessments would provide the essential information needed to make instructional decisions. The following section outlines my personal background to better understand the formation of my research question.

**Background of the Researcher**

Going back in time to my experiences as a pre-service teacher, I envisioned a cheerful classroom that, with the right amount of preparation, would have all students actively engaged. I thought that if I worked hard enough, naturally sustaining that environment would prove to be easy once a routine was established. Time exposed a variety of factors I had yet to even realize in my inexperience. Factors such as diversity in student background and experiences, environmental issues, varied developmental stages, diverse student needs, sprawling academic levels and changes in curriculum began to
expose the true teaching climate in which I would be working. I would quickly discover how difficult it could be to determine which literacy strategies to utilize and how to consistently know where students were at in progressing towards meeting academic standards.

Upon entering a 5th grade teaching position, within a suburban school district in central Minnesota, I had two options for teaching literacy. Option one was to follow the basal reading program, which was out of date and currently in review. Option two was to create my own curriculum. At that time I realized that the methodologies portrayed within the basal program did not correlate with my style of teaching. Having a minor in mathematics gave me little confidence in crafting my own literacy program, so I resorted to the only other way of teaching literacy that I had experience with and that was whole-group novel studies.

As I began to experiment with novel studies, I could feel students disengage and struggled knowing which literacy strategies I should use. As each activity I planned proved to be more frustrating for students, and with little evidence that students were making progress, I contemplated if there was a method of teaching literacy where all students could experience success. I began to think that I didn’t want to teach a novel study, knowing that one text would not fit all of my student’s needs and for the sole purpose of teaching something. As I began to investigate the Daily 5, I sensed a glimmer of hope. The Daily 5 workshop was a way to teach students specific literacy skills, while allowing students multiple choices during independent work time. Student choices included read to self, read to someone, work on writing, listen to reading, and finally
spelling/word work. However, as I started to implement this new strategy, gaps began to emerge. With a lack of management in place on my end, I could sense that students were given too many opportunities to avoid content they felt insecure in. Again, I noticed that students were not making the progress I had hoped they would and I had little evidence that what I was doing had an impact on their reading ability. But what else was there?

It wasn’t until my second year of teaching where I truly began to explore what an authentic literacy workshop could entail. The joy that accompanied each small victory, such as a reluctant reader finishing their first book of the year, made it that much more desirable to attain for every student regardless of the obstacles. Though I still felt as if I lacked a solid foundation in the teaching of literacy, I began to see small moments of victory as readers and nonreaders alike began selecting books on their own. Now that I had a model that was starting to work, I wondered how I could teach each individual student if they were reading different things and working at different levels. Though I didn’t realize it at the time, this is where I truly started to seek the use of formative assessments to inform my teaching practice. I didn’t want some complicated test to tell me they were performing below grade level, I wanted data that I could use when I was planning lessons for the week. I wanted information about who my students were, what they cared about, what they had already mastered, and what they needed to continue working on.

It was around this same time that our district began to move towards a balanced literacy framework and started the process of creating curriculum maps aligned to state standards. Though the format of a balanced literacy program strengthened my confidence
in my efforts towards a workshop approach, it also came with a new set of challenges. After the completion of the curriculum maps, the district implemented new assessments that were to be given at the completion of each unit. This was in conjunction with the district standardized assessments that students took three times a year and the fluency benchmark testing that occurred twice a year.

In addition to the assessments mentioned, a new component of the balanced literacy framework was introduced. Teachers were trained in and expected to conduct running records a minimum of two times a year to aid in helping students identify books at their independent reading level. Though all of the components they were training us on could fit within a balanced literacy framework, all of the new assessments just ended up feeling like more of the same. I now had more data on the students than I could possibly need, but felt unable to utilize much of it. In looking back teachers were taught how to administer the assessments, but not how to utilize the data. This only added to the current misconceptions surrounding assessments.

Within my classroom, I continued to wonder how I could get to the point where I knew my students well enough that I could select instructional strategies that I could confidently say would help them grow as a reader. At this point in time I was utilizing the minilesson, or beginning of the reading workshop, to teach various skills outlined in the state standards to the whole class. Once students transitioned to independent reading time, all I knew to look for was that they were on task and reading silently. But my understanding of the workshop approach suggested that this time was meant to serve a greater purpose. When I would join a student during independent reading and listen in on
what they were doing, I fumbled with knowing what to say in response to their success or their struggles. I knew that telling a gifted reader “good work” was not doing any good, but what else was I supposed to say? How was I supposed to help a student that was already far above grade level? I must acknowledge here that I struggled with knowing how to teach struggling and gifted readers alike.

Despite the fact that many negative feelings and misconceptions arose during the district implementation of balanced literacy elements, exploring running records ended up being an extremely beneficial part of my reading workshop. This was the first assessment that I truly felt helped me understand more about who my students were as readers. I could begin to see what they were already doing as a reader, along with what they were unable to do. After identifying my students’ independent reading level, I could then use that information to see if readers were selecting appropriate texts. To my surprise, many of them were not. Though I had suspected that my lower leveled readers were choosing books that were too difficult, the biggest surprise was in seeing my gifted readers select books significantly below their independent reading level. Simply listening to students read their books provided limited information regarding if the book as a whole was the right fit. This was the first time I could remember identifying a problem and then planning future minilessons to support students. After teaching a minilesson on selecting just right books, I had a conversation starter when I sat down beside a student during independent reading time. What a powerful experience! This experience exposed the flexibility that the reading workshop could provide because I was able to select what I felt was best for my students.
When asked to reflect on my personal journey to formulate a topic for this research study, I began to remember the struggle I had in knowing how to balance the expectations set by the state and the district, while still teach reading in a meaningful way. Classroom teachers already have enough on their plate, and formative assessments should not be just one more thing to occupy their time. What’s even more important is that classrooms are filled with students each and every day who deserve to be known, and deserve to have the opportunity to make growth from where they currently are.

Despite years of struggles and frustrations, small moments with students taught me that formative assessments had the power to drive instruction. The balanced literacy framework that was implemented by my district and the concept of formative assessments were key components in formulating my research question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students?* Though the district initiated a balanced literacy framework, I had stumbled upon the reading workshop model within a very similar timeframe. It was encouraging to see that the instructional choices I was beginning to make coincided with the district expectations.

**Summary**

With an educational climate centered on standardized testing, higher literacy expectations, and a plethora of content standards it can be easy to lose focus. Students deserve a teacher whose focus is unshaken by the clutter or political jargon and one that endures through difficult circumstances. In reflecting on the educational experiences I have had, and areas of need that have been exposed within my own teaching practice, I
now move forward to investigate how to effectively utilize formative assessments. Through this research, I will be able to identify which formative assessments have proven to be the most effective. In realizing the current educational climate, I also look to determine how to consistently utilize assessment data to inform my teaching practice. Finally, I look to find how feedback can be utilized to empower critical conversations with students and colleagues to create a school culture focused on learning.

Chapter one established my background as a researcher and the premise for my research question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond the reading needs of 5th grade students?* Chapter two moves into analyzing the current knowledge base and research on formative assessments, various perspectives on defining the term, and the potential impact it can have on student learning when utilized within a balanced literacy framework.

Chapter three outlines the research methods that were utilized as well as a description of the participants, the location of the study, the data collection methods, and how data was analyzed. Chapter four synthesizes the results of the research study. The chapter begins by outlining the data collected and provide what I interpreted based on the results. Chapter five concludes this capstone with a reflection on the research. This final chapter also discusses conclusions and future implications based on the results of the research study.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The concept of meeting students where they are at is not a new phenomenon
(Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Heritage & Bailey, 2006). Both teachers and researchers alike
have emphasized this point for decades. Though I have witnessed educational fads come
and go, even in the short amount of time I have been in education, the idea that teachers
need to be aware of where their students are in the learning process seems to be a
reoccurring theme in achieving quality instruction. An increased emphasis on high-
stakes testing, new state standards, and new district initiatives to close the gap has made
it difficult to maintain a sense of balance.

I wish I could say that in three easy steps I have figured out how to achieve that
sense of balance. Unfortunately that just isn’t the case. Year in and year out I struggle. I
struggle knowing that some kids are going to do well, despite what I do, while others
trudge along. It is from that sense of struggle that this study has been developed. Not only
do I feel literacy is of the utmost importance, but I also feel that all students deserve to
feel a sense of success when it comes to literacy. Despite the political policies that are put
in place or the new district initiatives, one truth remains: I am fortunate enough to be able
to come alongside my students during their educational journey. So, it’s time to make the most of the days we have together. The purpose of this study is rooted in finding the best way to instruct a diverse group of students and answer the following question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students?*

The following chapter outlines the current literature on the use of formative assessments within the classroom. I begin by exploring what the term formative assessment means for the purposes of this study, and the process that accompanies formative assessments. From there, I will take a close look at the balanced literacy workshop and the rationale for this model. The chapter concludes with how formative assessments fit within the balanced literacy workshop model.

**Formative Assessments**

Before we can begin to meet the diverse set of student needs that are apparent within the classroom, we must first identify what it is that students have mastered and what skills they are currently working towards. Within the text *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction*, Gambrell & Morrow, expressed that “the goal of assessment is to obtain useful and timely information about desired goals as literacy learning evolves” (2015, p. 8). With data driven instruction being a catch phrase in the current education climate, it can be easy to dismiss the idea of identifying new ways to assess students. However, it is critically important to establish what is meant when using the term formative assessments
to clarify misconceptions. This must be accomplished before beginning to look at ways formative assessments can become a practical component of the classroom environment.

The first section begins by exploring the current research related to formative assessments and begins to establish a definition. Formative assessments, in the context of this study, is defined in terms of a process rather than a concrete definition. After outlining the current definition, the section then describes the importance of utilizing data and feedback within the formative assessment process. In realizing the importance of clarifying misconceptions, this section also provides an overview of the significant differences between summative and formative assessments. This section concludes by analyzing current formative assessment tools and explores arguments to implement the process within the classroom.

Formative assessments as a process. The research studies and literature review completed by Black & Wiliam has been referenced quite frequently in formative assessment studies, especially when discussing its effectiveness. Though much of their preliminary work was done in 1998, they provide substantial information on the topic and so it is the natural starting point for this literature review. Black & Wiliam (1998a) clarified what is meant by formative assessments early within the introduction to justify how their study would be structured. In this case they went on to outline that formative assessments include any activity used by teachers, or students, to provide feedback or used to adjust the learning activity. This implies that there are many different options or variations when looking at implementing formative assessments. In their article Inside the
*Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment*, which was recently republished (2010), Black & Wiliam added to this idea when they stated that if information gained through an assessment is used to adjust teaching to accommodate what the student needs, then it is classified as formative (1998b). Both of their articles go on to acknowledge that a sound definition, that has been adopted globally, has yet to be created. To further complicate the issue, they acknowledged that formative assessments are currently referenced using a variety of terms, from assessments to evaluations, depending on the author and context (Black & Wiliam, 1998b).

Though the definition provided by Black and Wiliam acknowledged what is meant by the term formative assessment and is still rather open-ended, Clark (2010) refrained from crafting any concrete definition. Instead, Clark referenced the work done by Black & Wiliam (1998) as a means of suggesting that educators should resist the urge to create any standardized definition and view it rather as an art form that is adaptive by nature (2010, p. 342). Clark even went on to note that attempting to formulate a strict definition is “counterintuitive and unrealistic” based on the dynamic environments that are unique to each classroom (2010, p. 342).

Though a definition is not provided within the article, Clark does go on to state the principles of implementing formative assessments as a process to better understand its implications within the classroom. Hudesman et al. (2013) also referenced the work of Black & Wiliam (2009) as a means of putting a definition to the term, formative assessment, where it was again described as being more of a process. Because a process is continual and ongoing, they noted that it is this quality that makes formative
assessments even more effective in increasing student achievement (Hudesman et al., 2013). Regardless of technicalities in the definition of the term, this idea that effective formative assessments are process oriented has been established.

Specific qualities also arose throughout the literature review that help to better understand this rather ambiguous concept. One important characteristic is that a formative assessment is data oriented. Not only is it important for formative assessments to be used over time, but it is extremely important that data gathered from students is utilized to drive instruction (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Chan, Konrad, Gonzalez, Peters, & Ressa, 2014; Clark, 2010; Cornelius, 2014; Hattie, 2009; Hudesman et al., 2013; Roskos & Neuman, 2012). Setting clear and attainable learning targets, using a variety of teaching strategies, having diversity in the type of assessments used, explicit instruction on how to provide feedback to peers, teaching students how to be self-aware, and helping students take ownership over their learning are other recommended components of the formative assessment process (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Chan et al., 2014; Clark, 2010; Hattie, 2012). In honoring the current educational climate, the following section will outline data collection and consistency.

The importance of data. Recorded achievement gained through the use of formative assessments is note-worthy. However, significant issues arise due to a lack of understanding created by an unclear definition and can lead to a lack of consistency in terms of large scale implementation (Dorn, 2010). Other external factors, such as the pressures from standardized testing requirements, continue to complicate matters (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Black, 2015; Heritage & Bailey, 2006; Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, &
Black, 2004). In the case of standardized testing, data is being used as an evaluation rather than a vehicle to promote effective teaching (Black, 2015). Standardized testing also provides teachers with data that is difficult to utilize when making instructional decisions (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). Though many other variables exist within the scope of education that could explain the lack of consistency with implementing formative assessments, the following looks at the importance of utilizing data in a consistent manner.

In staying true to the purpose of formative assessments, information gathered should be used to identify if students are making progress towards the learning targets and plan future lessons (Cornelius, 2014). However, formative assessments can have a greater impact when you expand the viewpoint outside the classroom walls. Calkins (2001) noted that gathering data across grade levels, in a systematic manner, can aid in important decision making in regards to intervention and curricular design. When looking at specific interventions through the response-to-intervention (RTI) structure, information gained through formative assessments can be used to make decisions as to which services would be the most beneficial for each student (Dorn, 2010). In both systems, formative assessments and RTI, it is recommended that multiple methods are used to monitor student progress over time (Serravallo, 2014). As an educational system, all professionals involved can work together to provide the most effective supports to help students make growth and continue to monitor their progress over time.

Since the definition of formative assessment incorporates a process of teaching and learning, it is realistic to suggest that more than one variation of a formative assessment
should be used on a regular basis. To have the greatest impact on learning, it is important to use a variety of assessments not only to assess student progress but to monitor the effectiveness of instruction (Black, 2015).

Currently there are a great deal of misconceptions about the amount of time that would be needed to implement formative assessments, and rightfully so when looking at the current educational climate (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Heritage & Bailey, 2006). Each school day is full of choices. Some choices are decided by external factors, such as what to teach and when students need to have mastered the information, whereas other choices are left to the individual teacher to decide. However, when the choice is made to cover a certain topic or give an assessment, time is inadvertently taken away from something else. This is important to note because the nature of formative assessments allows for a great deal of flexibility and teacher autonomy. We must carefully analyze the purpose of each assessment and the consequences of giving it, whether positive or negative. Begin by recognizing the learning goals and ensure the assessment will be an efficient, yet effective tool to measure student progress. From there, steps can be taken as to the specifics of how the data is utilized. The following section takes a more in-depth look at how information gained through the use of formative assessments can be converted into effective feedback.

The importance of feedback. Feedback has the capacity to be a powerful tool within the classroom. One reason is that it can be implemented immediately in response to information gained through formative assessments (Chan et al., 2014). Chan et al.
stressed the importance of feedback when declaring it as the “vehicle” that connects all other aspects of formative instruction (2014, p. 96). Hattie (2012) emphasized that formative assessments “can lead to feedback during the process of learning (Wiliam, 2011)” implying that the two can be interconnected within the classroom (p.142).

Due to the emphasis placed on feedback as it relates to the formative assessment process, it is important to define what feedback is and how it can be used. In a broad sense, feedback can be defined as “information provided by an agent regarding one’s performance or understanding” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Within a classroom context, feedback can be defined as the “information provided to the student or teacher about his or her performance that is intended to lead to improved performance (Chappuis, Stiggins, Chappuis, & Arter, 2010)” (Chan et al., 2014). In viewing feedback in this manner, information from assessments can be used in a variety of ways. Teachers can utilize the information to reflect on the effectiveness of their instruction and make adjustments as needed, or results can be used to help students gain an awareness of where they are in the learning process (Hudesman et al., 2013). In either situation decisions are made as to what needs to be changed, either by the student or the teacher, with the goal of increasing student learning (Hattie, 2009; Hattie, 2012; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Feedback can be considered formative “when students are provided with scaffolded instruction or thoughtful questioning that served as a prompt for further inquiry, which then closes the gap between their current level of understanding and the desired learning goal” (Clark, 2010, p. 344). Clark goes on to describe the circumstances in which
feedback becomes formative, including when students participating in activities that promote self-reflection and a deep awareness of their own understanding and how feedback fits into the formative assessment process (2010, p. 344). It is important to note that when looking at assessments, feedback can be considered formative, and can increase student achievement when teachers reflect on the results and “modify, enhance, or change their strategies” in comparison to giving students a score (Hattie, p.151, 2012).

In a meta-analyses conducted in 1999, Hattie found the effect size of feedback to be 0.79 in comparison to 0.40 which represents one year’s growth (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

To fully understand the implications of this research, it is important to clarify the scale Hattie utilized in this study, as well as in his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses. He noted that “an effect size of $d = 1.0$ indicates an increase of one standard deviation on the outcome” which is associated with increasing student “achievement by two to three years” (Hattie, 2009). An effect size of $d = 0.40$ was noted as a level where “we can notice real-world differences” in student achievement. This means that if the variable, example feedback, falls within the range of 0.40 to 1.0 then it is classified as a high level of influence on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). To summarize the barometer of influence Hattie uses throughout his book, if a variable is around 0.40, then it is classified as medium influence, around 0.1 it is considered low influence, and a negative number has a negative influence on achievement. To summarize Hattie’s (2009) findings, feedback has a high level of influence on student achievement.
In connection to the reference of the process of formative assessments being an art, feedback could be viewed similarly. Hattie (2009) described feedback as an art, but explained “the art is to provide the right form of feedback at, or just above, the level where the student is working” (p. 177). It is all about knowing who needs what and when, as well as what will be the most beneficial in helping them move forward. In looking at how feedback is utilized with students, not all feedback is created equal. If feedback is too general, such as praise or comments like ‘work harder’ (Clark, 2010, p. 344) or is related to rewards or punishments (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 85), the feedback can have a negative effect on achievement. However, high effect sizes were noted when feedback is related directly to the learning task or what changes could be made to complete a task more effectively (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 85).

Black & Wiliam also noted that research revealed feedback will not have a positive impact on students if they are “given only marks or grades” and we run the risk of students lowering their expectations of themselves if they continually receive low grades (1998b, p.86). Instead, teachers should focus their feedback on clarifying areas where students had difficulties or make suggestions in regards to areas they could improve on in the future (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie, 2012). Another finding was in regards to the nature of the feedback. It was found that “feedback needs to be focused, specific, and clear” (Hattie, 2012, p.151). In working to create focused feedback, Hattie (2012) crafted three main questions as a means to help students better understand where they are in the learning process (p. 143). The three questions include: Where am I going? How am I going there? Where to next?
Feedback can take various forms. For example, feedback can be given to both to the teacher and the student. In regards to feedback to the student, they can receive feedback from both teachers and peers. Though it can be leveraged in a powerful way, there are many instances where feedback is not beneficial or can even be harmful to the student. Hattie’s meta-analyses found the most beneficial forms of feedback are those that “provide cues or reinforcement to the learner, are in the form of video, audio or computer-assisted instruction feedback, or relate feedback to learning goals” (2009, p. 174). It is not enough to be satisfied with providing feedback to students. Teachers need to ensure that students are able to comprehend the feedback and know what to do with the information they have been given (Hattie, 2009, p.174).

There were key differences noted as far as how teachers view feedback in comparison to the type of feedback student would rather receive. Hattie (2012) noted that teachers are more likely to view feedback in the following forms “comments, criticism, and correctives” whereas students would rather have feedback that helps them be successful in meeting the standards of the lesson, is given in time to do something about what needs to be changed, and addresses how to move forward (p. 146-147). However, feedback from teacher to student is not the only form that can have a positive impact on student learning. It is important to acknowledge the potential impact, both positive and negative, that feedback from peers can have on a student’s self-perception and confidence (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2012). In review of the work done by Mark Gan (2011), Hattie referenced the frequency of incorrect feedback given by peers and recommended
that students be taught how to provide feedback possibly with the use of coaching, rubrics, or prompts (2012, p. 147).

As implied, feedback is complicated. Hattie (2012) noted “on the one hand, feedback is among the most powerful influences on achievement on the other hand, it is among the most variable of influences” (p. 151). As outlined earlier feedback can either have a positive or negative affect on learning. Because of this, it is important to have a clear understanding of what constitutes effective feedback and how it can be used with students. Qualities that can lead to feedback having a positive effect include “transparent and challenging goals, transparent and understood criteria of success, and commitment and skills by both teachers and students in investing and implementing strategies” (Hattie, 2012, p. 151). The following section moves into the relationship between formative and summative assessments as a means to clarify misconceptions.

The relationship between formative and summative assessments. Due to the common comparison of the two types of assessment in attempts to define each term, it can seem as if formative assessments and summative assessments are opposites or conflicting ideas. This conflict might seem to imply that one should be used over the other. However, due to the fact that each type of assessment is meant to serve a different purpose, the nature of each assessment is going to vary depending on that purpose (Black, G., 2015; Chan et al., 2014). The purpose of the assessment, once established, will then dictate when it is administered, in regards to the learning cycle (Black, 2015). In recognizing this, Clark
(2010) suggests both types of assessments could be used in conjunction if they are oriented to the same goal, meaning they are not opposing forces.

Global high-stakes testing has been found to dominate teaching and assessments (Black & Wiliam, 1998b) and is a possible factor in the inconsistent implementation of authentic assessments (Black, 2015; Heritage & Bailey, 2006; Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004). This review will move forward looking at the effectiveness and recommended components of formative assessments, while recognizing the current educational climate as it relates to assessments.

To conclude the definition of formative assessments, the purpose of this process is to gauge where students are at, adjust teaching, and provide any necessary feedback to help the student find success as they move forward (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Chan et al., 2014; Clark, 2010; Cornelius, 2014; Hattie, 2009; Hudesman et al., 2013; Roskos & Neuman, 2012; Wiliam et al., 2004). The following section will outline tools, such as self-awareness, that were commonly found as being a part of the formative assessment process.

**Common formative assessment tools.** Metacognition, thinking about one’s thinking, and being self-aware are ways to describe the same concept. Regardless of how it’s referred to, helping students gain self-awareness is a crucial component to helping them understand how to be a learner. It is also important when thinking about helping students reach higher levels of independence. Andrade & Valtcheva noted its importance when stating it is “a key element in formative assessment because it involves students in
thinking about the quality of their own work” and moves students away from depending on their teacher telling them how they are doing (2009, p. 13).

It is important to note the difference between self-assessment and self-evaluation, in regards to formative assessments in this context. A self-assessment is where students assess a piece that is still in progress, whereas a self-evaluation is an evaluation of their final product (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009, p. 14). In staying true to the definition of formative assessments, it is recommended that students assess writing drafts or pieces they are continuing to work on so that they can make the necessary adjustments without feeling that their final grade will be affected (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009, p.15). But even when the fear of a final grade is taken off the table, self-assessing one’s work is a skill that many students may be unfamiliar with.

Before this strategy can be effective, Hattie (2012) suggests that students be taught how to assess their own work. All too often adults are making decisions for the student and so “all students should be educated in ways that develop their capability to assess” what knowledge they have gained (Hattie, 2012, p. 140). This is a critical shift in responsibility that can have many positive effects. For example, “students who have developed their assessment capabilities are more able and motivated to access, interpret, and use information from quality assessments in ways that affirm or further their learning” (Hattie, 2012, p.142). Tools such as checklists and rubrics are just a few of the tools that can be used to help students effectively assess themselves or the work of a peer (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Black, 2015). The key is that the tool outlines the expectations for meeting the learning target. Students can self-assess their learning “only
when they have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets that their learning is meant to attain” or what they are expected to learn from the lesson (Black & Wiliam, 1998b, p.86). Along with the research done by Black & Wiliam, others have noted the significance of establishing clear learning targets or student expectations as a first step to successfully implementing formative assessments (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998b).

Not only is there a visible link between self-regulation and academic achievement, but self-assessment can lead to an increase in self-regulations and achievement (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009, p.13). Hattie (200) reported in his meta-analysis the effect size of meta-cognitive strategies to be equal to 0.69, falling into the ‘high’ category. Being self-aware, prompted by the use of self-assessments or other external tools, is an important aspect to consider when implementing formative assessments. Black & Wiliam noted self-assessment isn’t just important, it “is in fact an essential component” of the formative assessment process (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009, p.14). Self-awareness, is not exclusive to formative assessments, it is also fundamental when looking at students reading success (Underwood, 1997).

**Arguments to increase formative assessment use in the classroom.** Now that an understanding of formative assessments has been established, for the purposes of this research study, this section will conclude by looking into the correlation between formative assessments and increased student achievement. A correlation would create an argument for increasing the use of formative assessments within the classroom, because increasing student achievement is after all the overarching goal. It has been found that
significant learning gains can occur as a result of integrating formative assessments (Wiliam et al., 2004, p.49). In their research study, in which teachers were given the opportunity to choose which activities they would integrate into their teaching practice, Wiliam et al. found solid evidence indicating that improving formative assessments leads to increased achievement on standardized assessments (2004, p.63). A key component to this research study was to train teachers in various formative assessment methods, and then let them choose which they thought would be effective to implement (Wiliam et al., 2004, p. 51).

In his meta-analysis, Hattie (2012) noted significant learning gains of 70 to 80 percent “when formative assessment practices are integrated into the minute-to-minute and day-by-day” classroom routines (p. 143). Both studies noted not only significant gains in achievement, but also that this increase was consistent on student’s standardized test scores. This suggests that when formative assessments are used to inform instruction, what students are able to achieve increases (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Hattie, 2012; Wiliam et al., 2004). As an educator, it is important to know that what you are about to endure will eventually lead to increased student achievement and that the effort needed up front will pay off in the long run. If formative assessments are utilized correctly, which includes communication to students, they can be a powerful learning tool (Black & Wiliam, 1998b, p. 82). While formative assessments can help all students, “it yields particularly good results with low achievers” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p.83). To expand, populations who experience significant gains included “students who struggle with learning, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners when formative
assessments were implemented as a systematic and continual process (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991; Learning Point Associates, 2009; Madison-Harris & Muoneke, 2012)” (Cornelius, 2014, p. 112).

This section explored formative assessments as a process, rather than a static tool used once a year. Following the formation of a working definition of formative assessments, data and feedback were explored as important components. The following section outlines more specifics on balanced literacy and formative assessments.

**Balanced Literacy Framework**

After clarifying what is meant by the term formative assessments, as it relates to the purpose of this research study, attention will now turn to exploring a balanced literacy framework which is a significant component of the research question. Similar to the previous section on formative assessments, this section will begin by solidifying a definition for the term balanced literacy. Though the context of this research study is structured around a balanced literacy framework because that is what the current district expectations are, having a working knowledge base on the model is what creates teacher buy in and hopefully increases student achievement. Once a clear definition has been established, the key components of the framework will be explored. This will be essential to identify before moving into one of the components- the reading workshop. This section will conclude with a justification for utilizing this model.

**Defining balanced literacy.** Balanced literacy is a framework to teaching literacy that focuses on a balance between teaching literacy skills, such as phonics and comprehension
strategies, and holistic teaching approaches (Houck, 2013; Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael & Dolezal, 2002; Willows, 2008). Willows (2008) refers to a balanced literacy diet where the basic food groups are used as a metaphor to describe the relationship between each literacy component. This approach to teaching literacy “is designed to foster the gradual release of responsibility from teachers to students, moving from structured modeling to scaffolded support to independence of individual work” (Bitter, O’Day, Gubbins & Socias, 2009). Structuring instruction so that students have explicit instruction, but are then provided the support and opportunities to gain independence, previously referred to as scaffolding, is a critical component to balanced literacy (Bitter, O’Day, Gubbins & Socias, 2009; Houck, 2013). Within the text *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction*, authors Gambrell & Morrow describe this idea as “the degree of teacher control” (p.51). They express the gradual release model through five distinct, yet separate teacher roles including explicit instruction, modeling, scaffolding, facilitating, and participating. They clarified that this process is not linear, where you would do step one and then proceed to step two. Instead the teacher “cycles back and forth between these roles in response to student performance and understanding” (p. 52). The key is that the teacher has both a solid understanding of where each student is currently functioning and what method would be the best fit.

The key components of a balanced literacy framework. Multiple methods of instruction fit within this framework for teaching the skills students are in need of developing. Methods could include individual conferences, strategy groups or direct instruction in a whole group setting. Despite the method chosen, the purpose is to find
and support where a student is currently functioning or what Vygotsky (1978) referred to as a student’s Zone of Proximal Development (as cited in Houck, 2013, p. 2). The teacher structures materials that appropriately challenges the student so that learning can occur. Though the framework focuses on a balance of instruction, it is similar to the definition of formative assessments in considering that there are no magic formulas for implementation. Leaving the concept more abstract and complex by nature.

However, when it comes to individual implementation, this framework allows for more flexibility because teachers are able to decide which specific strategies or tools work best. Willows (2008) noted the importance of flexibility, in relation to either a balanced diet or literacy program, when he stated “flexibility is necessary to satisfy personal preferences” (p. 23). He went on to note that it is important that teachers include a balanced literacy ‘diet’ where each ‘food group’ is used on a daily basis. For intermediate levels, Willows goes on to suggest the following components as being essential in a balanced diet: real reading, real writing, vocabulary, composition strategies, comprehension strategies, and schema development. In order to determine which component needs more emphasis, assessments and observations are used to determine student needs and guide instruction (Houck, 2013). Each component of the literacy diet can be accomplished using a variety of instructional methods. Some examples include: reading and writing workshop, daily 5 and café (Boushey & Moser, 2009), or the basal structure (Houck, 2013).

Though the term ‘balanced literacy’ is not referenced in Guiding Readers and Writers: Grades 3-6, Fountas & Pinnell reference the components of effective literacy instruction
similarly (2001). The structure they recommend consists of reading workshop, writing workshop, and language and word study. An emphasis is also on finding a balance when incorporating each component and on the gradual release of responsibility over to students. The following will explore one method, the reading workshop model, which can be used as a means to organize instruction within a balanced literacy framework.

The reading workshop model. As mentioned earlier, one key component to a balanced literacy diet is the teaching of real reading. The reading workshop model is one method that can be used to help students develop their reading skills in an authentic and predictable manner (Calkins, 2001; Foutas & Pinnell, 2001). In the book *The Art of Teaching Reading*, Calkins (2001) describes the key components of a reading workshop include the minilesson, independent reading time, and group share. The minilesson is the beginning portion of the workshop where all students are taught a strategy that they can apply to their own texts (Calkins, 2001, p.67). Within that structure, students can participate in partner work, individual conferences, guided reading groups, strategy lessons, literature study, and book talks (Calkins, 2001; Foutas & Pinnell, 2001). Calkins (2001) stresses that it doesn’t matter what structure each teacher settles on, rather we should focus on creating a structure with predictability so that real, authentic work can take place (p. 67). Table 2.1 illustrates the elements of the reading workshop that is included in *Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6* (Foutas & Pinnell, 2001).
The following outlines three key components of the workshop including the minilesson, independent reading, and share. A minilesson should be consolidated to content that a majority of the students could benefit from and short, about 5-10 minutes (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 45). Independent reading time is an opportunity for students to practice skills at their own independent reading level, with books that they have chosen, for 30-40 minutes. During this time students are reading silently and the teacher can provide individualized instruction in the form of individual conferences, in small guided reading groups, or strategy lessons. Independent reading differs from silent reading because it is structured around instruction and “provides an opportunity to assess and document the reading progress of individual students” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001,
Rationale for this model. There are many advantages for implementing a reading workshop model. Advantages include teaching students a variety of strategies that they can then apply to a wide range of challenging texts, it increases the amount of time they spend reading, active collaboration, and increases ownership of reading (Foutas & Pinnell, 2001, p.44-45). Of these advantages, collaboration has been outlined as an evidence based practice to motivate students to read (Gambrell & Morrow, 2015, p.73). A reading workshop model allows opportunities for students to collaborate throughout the entire block by having partners read together, share ideas, exchange questions, participate in book talks, and peer edit.

Because of the natural emphasis on utilizing assessments to drive instruction and track student progress, formative assessments are a key component of the reading workshop approach. The following section will outline more specifics as to how formative assessments fit within a balanced literacy workshop.

Formative Assessment within the Balanced Literacy Framework

In speaking to the complexity of this framework, it is important for teachers to have a strong foundation in literacy education and a “working knowledge” of various methods to assess students because it is “a key component of a balanced literacy classroom” (Houck, 2013, p.1). Though formative assessments are referred to using a variety of terms, the following synthesizes recommendations as to how assessments can
be used within a balanced literacy framework to increase student achievement. The following includes common assessments tools, that when utilized in the appropriate manner, would fit the definition of formative assessment. Following this section will be common ways to organize and analyze the data gathered from formative assessments. The purpose of analyzing data is to determine what instructional strategies should be utilized. Because of this, the next section will be dedicated to responding to student needs. This section will conclude with a rational for utilizing formative assessments within a balanced literacy framework.

**Overview of commonly used formative assessment tools.** Throughout the literature review process, gathering a variety of assessment data was recommended to reflect on where students are at in the learning process on a daily basis, provide feedback to both teacher and the student, and help plan instructional strategies to help them progress as readers and writers (Atwell, 2007; Calkins, 2001; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Roskos, 2012; Serafini, 2010). Another reason to collect a variety of data points is the fact that the area of literacy is rather complex and if we are to believe that then assessments we utilize should reflect that complexity (Gambrell & Morrow, 2015, p.23).

Specific literacy related tools could include observation checklists, surveys, reading logs, response notebooks, running records, conferences observations, informal reading inventories, status of the class, self-evaluations. Whichever items are selected, it was recommended that we listen to our students, read their work, confer, listen in on peer conversations, observe behavior, chart responses, and keep anecdotal records of
conversations, as a means to guide future instruction. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Serravallo (2014) confirms this idea within her book *The Literacy Teacher’s Playbook Grades 3-6: Four Steps for Turning Assessment Data into Goal-Direct Instruction*. Step one, of four, encompasses the collection of data across contexts and with multiple data points. She suggested comparing data from assessments such as running record assessments, reading logs, interest inventories, observations from conversations, and student writing samples.

One common formative assessment tool mentioned was the running record. Running records can be defined as “a tool for coding and analyzing behaviors” (Calkins, 2001, p. 145) and originated from the work of Marie Clay (as cited in Calkins, 2001, p. 145). The purpose of the assessment is to help understand the diverse nature of reading development by exploring a student’s fluency, accuracy, and level of comprehension. While listening to students read a text aloud, one component of the running record, one looks for areas that do not match the text, otherwise known as a miscue (Calkins, 2001; Serravallo, 2014). The miscue provides a window into what the reader is doing and how they use the information provided (Calkins, 2001). This is also a flexible tool that can be used with a wide variety of texts and can be as simple as coding the students reading on a blank piece of paper (Serravallo, 2014, p.11).

Similar to the results found in regards to metacognition, self-evaluation was a valued authentic assessment tool within a balanced literacy framework. Questionnaires also referred to as surveys, and interviews or inventories were suggested as one method
teachers could implement that would promote self-evaluation. These tools could be used as a way to gather valuable information about students, in getting to know them in the beginning of the year and their opinions about themselves as readers and writers, or as a way to evaluate their progress (Atwell, 2007; Calkins, 2001; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Serafini, 2010; Serravallo, 2014).

In looking at the structure and ambiguous nature of balanced literacy, it is clear that formative assessments are a powerful and essential component. It takes a great deal of insight to be able to determine what level of support students are in need of, to know when they are ready to move on to the next phase of independence, and when the objective has been reached. Powerful insight can be gained through the effective implementation of formative assessments. The following section outlines specific tools that can be utilized to help organize and analyze data gathered through formative assessments.

Once data has been gathered through multiple formative assessments, it is time to begin organizing and analyzing the data. Serravallo (2014) outlines this process within step two- analyzing data and step three- interpreting data and establishing a goal (p.27). With such a wide range of data on each student, it can be difficult to draw conclusions and establish a future goal. It is important to begin to triangulate the data, and look for patterns, both within their areas of strength and possible growth areas (Serravallo, 2014, p.97). Essentially you are looking to identify a student’s Zone of Proximal Development (Houck, 2013), where they can be challenged yet find success, as mentioned within the
key components of a balanced literacy framework. Hattie (2012) summarized this when he stated that prior to planning the lesson “the teacher must know what a student already knows and can do” (p. 42). It is important to note that data was collected based on both what the student is able to do and what they are not yet able to do. Therefore, when data is being analyzed, the teacher is looking for areas they have mastered in order to tailor instruction to both the strengths and growth areas (Calkins, 2001; Serravallo, 2014). A simple table or profile sheet for each student can be used to aid in analyzing data (Serravallo, 2014, p.97).

Responding to student needs. As an educator implementing a balanced literacy framework, it would be wise to not implement assessments for the sake of collecting data (Calkins, 2001). Instead, if we stay true to the research found within the formative assessments section, what is gathered from the assessments should be utilized to plan future instruction and monitor if they have made progress toward the learning targets identified within the lesson (Cornelius, 2014). This would be considered step four, create an action plan, from the work of Serravallo (2014). A planning guide can be used to ensure that students have multiple opportunities to practice a given skill or until they have developed automaticity (Serravallo, 2014, p. 140). This is significant to supporting struggling readers who typically benefit from explicit instruction that is driving by multiple assessments, and multiple opportunities to experience a text (Gambrell & Morrow, 2015, p. 113).
A planning guide is a simple grid that is organized by week day and components of the reading workshop, which could include minilesson, strategy groups, individual conferences, and share. It is a space to make note of who the teacher will meet with, the strategy that will be worked on, and possible groupings of students. A group could be made from students who are working towards a similar strategy (Calkins, 2001; Serravallo, 2014). A planning guide helps respond to student needs while planning future instruction.

Summary

Formative assessments have been proven to increase student achievement on multiple measures, can be used to generate quality feedback to students, and can be completed within the day to day activities. Though it seems to be implied that all schools should be training their teachers on how to generate authentic, formative assessments to inform their instruction, the harsh reality is that it’s just not happening. This literature review revealed that despite decades of research studies, the educational climate today simply does not support the effective utilization of formative assessments. In order for formative assessments to be effective, a clear purpose must exist, data must be used intentionally, and components like feedback or metacognition need to be utilized appropriately. In regards to teacher autonomy, the process of formative assessments can be used to allow more flexibility within the curriculum because teachers can make decisions based on their students’ needs rather than relying on a curriculum map (Cornelius, 2014).
Though positive effects have been noted, a significant number of studies also outlined circumstances where negative affects occurred. This led to the realization that formative assessments cannot be left to trial and error, or worse yet, chance. The proposed research question seems to hold even more weight when considering the impact formative assessments could have on the teaching and learning process.

Chapter two analyzed the current research as it relates to my research question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond the reading needs of 5th grade students?* The chapter began with an in-depth look at how to define formative assessments, as well as the research that suggests the correlation between effective implementation and increased student achievement. Effective components of the formative assessment process included utilizing both data and feedback. The first section concluded by looking at common formative assessment tools and reasons to support increasing their use within the classroom.

From there I examined the current research surrounding a balanced literacy framework. This section began by outlining a current definition and then proceeded to describing the key components of the framework, including the reading workshop. With the definitions of both formative assessments and balanced literacy clarified, the final section of the literature review spoke to how formative assessments can be utilized within a balanced literacy framework, specifically the reading workshop. Common tools to collect data, how to analyze data, and ways to respond to student needs were explored.
In response to the literature review, chapter three elaborates on the specific research methods used to answer the research question. This chapter described the setting of the research study, as well as the participants involved in the study and how they were selected to mirror the diversity within the classroom. Chapter four explicitly reviews the results of the research study. Within Chapter five conclusions are drawn, limitations are discussed, and research results are used to suggest future research.
CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods

Introduction

After four years of muddling through my literacy block, I had grown tired of attempting to recreate the wheel each year, only to end up exhausted and feeling as if I hadn’t accomplished much. My struggling readers were still struggling, and my gifted readers were still reading above grade level. Chapter one described how I began the capstone process determined to figure out a better, more sustainable way to meet the individual needs of my students. I also wanted something that I could apply to any reading unit, during any school year. This desire led me to design the following research question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students?*

The literature review in chapter two established that formative assessments are not something you give students once and then check it off the day’s to-do list. Rather, it is an intentional process that transforms one’s teaching practice. Chapter two explored how formative assessments can be utilized by the classroom teacher to monitor the effectiveness of one’s teaching, and then provide any necessary feedback to students to help them move forward. The chapter began by defining the current definition of formative assessments and moved into exploring balanced literacy and its key
components. The chapter concluded with ways formative assessments can be utilized within a balanced literacy framework.

During the implementation of the research project, I analyzed the overall effectiveness of utilizing formative assessments within my teaching practice. Due to the findings in the literature review, I was not seeking the most effective example or form of a formative assessments. Rather, I was looking at the effectiveness of implementing formative assessments as a process and the impact it had on the planning process. Because of this I included multiple tools that are considered formative by nature, and a personal reflection as to how each informed my teaching practice. Since balanced literacy is the framework that has been implemented throughout the district, I was looking at how formative assessments fit into the workshop model specifically within my reading block.

In the following chapter I describe the specific research methods I utilized, the setting of the research study including the participants involved and how they were selected, the overall vision of the project, and finally how the data was gathered. Within the data gathering process I describe the various tools I utilized to gather and analyze information, and then plan future lessons. Due to the findings in the literature review, specifically the section on utilizing formative assessments within a balanced literacy model, I found it important to incorporate multiple assessment tools to get an accurate picture of who each student was as a reader prior to planning future instruction. Chapter three concludes with the data analysis process that drove the research study.
Research Paradigm

In this action research study I used the qualitative research method to determine how formative assessments can be used on a daily basis to increase the effectiveness of my classroom practice. During the research study, I was looking for ways I could utilize data specifically within a balanced literacy framework. A quantitative approach was not used due to the fact that it would have been unrealistic to expect academic gains in such a short time frame, especially considering that it takes multiple months for students to increase reading levels (Mills, 2011, p. 74). Since expecting 5th grade students to increase their reading level in such a short time frame was not plausible, I focused on utilizing multiple formative assessments to gather data and then actively planned instruction to meet the needs of my students.

Multiple data sources were also used as a means to determine a goal for each participant, if they made progress towards those goals, and the effectiveness of instructional strategies. A reflection log was used to describe the process of utilizing formative assessment data and then planning instruction, and to comment on how well each decision went or the impact it had on students. The research study took place from February 22, 2016 to March 4, 2016. Specific data collection methods, as well as the justification for its use will be described later within the data collection section. The following section will outline the setting and participants of the study.

Setting

Research took place within a K-6 suburban school located in central Minnesota. Within the district there are a total of ten elementary schools. The district has a 71.9
percent proficiency rate and the school has a 67.2 percent proficiency rate in the area of reading, as reported during the 2015 school year on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCAs) on the Minnesota Department of Education Website (2015). The school has a student population of 445 students, a free and reduced lunch population of 24 percent, a special education population of 16.4 percent, an English Learner population of 2 percent, and is classified as a Title 1 school. Demographics include 84 percent White, 7 percent Black, 3 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2 percent American Indian.

During the study our school had three sections of 6th grade, three sections of 5th grade, two sections of 4th grade, one multi-age section of 3rd and 4th grade, two sections of 3rd grade, two sections of 2nd grade, two sections of 1st grade, one multi-age section of 1st and 2nd grade, and three kindergarten classrooms. Multi-age classrooms were a result of budget cuts during the 2014-2015 school year. Specific class assignments were made by the building principal prior to the school year starting, teacher and parent requests are not permitted. Because the classrooms are pre-determined by administration, the selection of the student group will classify this as a “quasi-experiment” (Creswell, p.168, 2014). This study was conducted within one of the three 5th grade classrooms. Within my classroom, research was conducted during my literacy block and focused only on reading.

The district followed a balanced literacy framework to teach reading and writing. In order to meet the common core standards, curriculum maps had been developed. Readers and writers workshop is one method that can be utilized to teach all of the required ELOs. A second option, that was not utilized within this study, would be to use
the Journeys curriculum which is a basal reading program published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Within the school there was a great deal of diversity as to which methods were utilized. This research study encompassed a workshop approach where instruction typically included the following components: minilesson, independent reading, conferring and coaching, and share (Calkins, 2001; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Within my classroom, there were a total of 23 students, 12 boys and 11 girls. Demographics included one African American student, one American Indian student, and the remaining twenty-one students were Caucasian. Four students had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and received special education services. During the study one student was assessed for an Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD) and qualified for special education services. One student was being considered for evaluation for a Learning Disability (LD). Five students were identified as Gifted and Talented (GT) and part of the gifted cluster program. Within the district students have the option to participate within the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program, which is located within one of the elementary buildings, or stay at their building and be a part of the cluster program.

As a school, running records were used as the reading benchmarks during the fall, winter, and spring. For the fall benchmark assessment the following categories were used: 4- level U and higher, 3- level T, 2- level Q, R, or S, and 1- level P or below. For this ranking system a level 4 would be comparable to above grade-level expectations, level 3 would be on grade level expectations, level 2 is slightly below, and a level 1
would be far below expectation. Based on the results from the fall benchmark assessment, student levels ranged from a level L to a level Z. Four students were at a level 1 (L-P), five at a level 2 (Q, R, S), four at a level 3 (T), and ten at a level 4 (U+). The expectation is that students will be at a level U by the end of the year. Table 3.1 outlines expected reading levels, as described above.

Table 3.1

5th Grade Expected Independent Reading Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level Description</th>
<th>Beginning of the Year</th>
<th>Fall Benchmark</th>
<th>Mid-Year Benchmark</th>
<th>End of the Year Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Far below</td>
<td>P or below</td>
<td>P or below</td>
<td>Q or below</td>
<td>Q or below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Slightly below</td>
<td>Q/R</td>
<td>Q/R/S</td>
<td>R/S/T</td>
<td>R/S/T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- At grade level</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Above grade level</td>
<td>T or above</td>
<td>U or above</td>
<td>V or above</td>
<td>V or above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Expected instructional reading levels are based on district expectations. Levels are based on the current Teachers College Reading and Writing Project: Benchmark Reading Levels and Marking Period Assessment.*

Due to the fact that our school is a Title I school, we had funding for reading and math intervention, as well as math corp. These programs were only available to students who qualified. Students qualified based on standardized test scores, which included the MCAs and fall benchmark data. Seven students qualified for reading intervention. They were pulled out of the classroom four times a week for a half an hour to work within a small group setting. Two students qualified for math intervention where they were pulled out four times a week for a half an hour each. Five students received services from math corp where they were pulled out five times per week for twenty minutes, only in groups
of two. Seven students qualified for Title 1 reading intervention where they were pulled out four times a week for a half an hour each and two students qualified for reading intervention where they were pulled out two times a week for a half of an hour each.

Participants

The findings in the literature review suggested that students with disabilities or those who struggle academically showed substantial learning gains when formative assessments were implemented over time (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991; Cornelius, 2014; Learning Point Associates, 2009; Madison-Harris & Muoneke, 2012). Since this study was based in a general education classroom, which clearly encompassed a variety of academic levels from those who qualified for special education services to those classified as GT and everything in between, I assembled a group of students that portrayed this same diversity.

To ensure that the students selected for participation in this study represented the range of academic levels within the class, running record data was used as a pre-assessment. One student was at a level 1, one student was at a level 2, one student was at a level 3, and three students were at a level 4. This resulted in a total of six participants. Of the six participants, there were three boys and three girls. Consent from a parent or guardian was received prior to the study. A sample letter is included in Appendix A. The following describes the participants in the study. A pseudonym was created for each participant to organize the data collected while refraining from using pronouns, to maintain student privacy.
Adam. Sports were an area of interest for Adam. They enjoyed reading books about football or baseball. When they read books about sports, at their level, they finished books fairly quickly. However, we have spent a great deal of time discussing book choice, and its importance. When working one-on-one they were eager to do their best, and very willing to try new strategies. Overall, they got along well with their classmates and enjoyed playing class games. During academic content areas, they were fairly reserved and had a hard time participating in discussions.

Adam has been involved in the reading intervention for the majority of their elementary school career. They began the year at reading level N, which is a level 1 and comparable to a 3rd grade reading level. This qualified them for the reading intervention program during the fall, and this student met with a small group for 30 minutes, four times per week. By the time the study began in February they had progressed to a level O. They have a long history of struggling with reading, and at times lost focus. Often this was due to reading texts that were too difficult or needing to rebuild their reading stamina. Their writing skills matched their reading level, when looking at structure, grammar, punctuation, thought development, etc.

Bailey. Bailey had a natural love of reading, and eagerly gravitated towards books, especially fantasy or those that had animals as the main characters. They were open to working one-on-one or in groups. They enjoyed discussing their books with others, especially an adult. Overall, they had a positive attitude towards learning and school. Though they were slightly below grade level, they were always willing to try their best. They actively participated in class discussions and worked with others.
Bailey began the year at a reading level R, level 2, where they left off the year before. During the running record assessment at the beginning of this study, mid-February, they maintained a level R. They have been in and out of reading intervention throughout their elementary career. Because of their lack of progress and low fluency scores, they requalified for reading intervention at the beginning of January where they met with a small group for 30 minutes, two times per week. Their writing skills correlated to their reading ability. In writing they needed to continue working on grammar and punctuation, but were able to develop a plot line or idea throughout a piece. In reading, similarly, they were able to comprehend the overall message of the story, yet accuracy is a growth area.

Carly. Carly had a strong passion to learn new things, especially when reading nonfiction. They enjoyed sharing what they were reading or learning, especially with an adult. Since the beginning of the year we had worked on writing down ideas, and waiting to share until after independent reading time. They were a very active community member. They enjoyed a variety of sports and engaging with their peers during morning meeting.

Carly concluded 4th grade at a reading level S, a level 2 for 5th grade. They progressed to a reading level T, which is a level 3 or at grade level, by October. The student enjoyed reading at school and routinely had their reading log completed. They had a love for sports and typically read a blend of fiction and nonfiction. They continued to work on developing ideas about a text, as texts increased in complexity and tended to write about more surface level details about the books they were reading. Their writing skills were
developing nicely, but similarly to Adam and Bailey, needed to edit for structural components such as grammar and punctuation.

**Dan.** This student made great gains academically when they were allowed choice over what they were reading or writing. However, if they encountered an assignment they were not as fond of, they continued to do only the minimum amount. Concerns were expressed that they would rush through things, rather than doing their very best. To truly understand where this participant was functioning academically, it was crucial that assessments were taken over multiple settings. They enjoyed reading fantasy and writing fictional stories. Their stories typically incorporated their interest and knowledge of battles, wars, weaponry, and video games. They eagerly took book recommendations from other students and enjoyed sharing what they learned.

Dan began the year at a reading level U, a level 4, and continued to progress rapidly. By the beginning of this study they had progressed to a level X. Due to the rapid pace they were progressing through the levels, I was concerned that there was an error somewhere in the assessment process. This concern stemmed from knowing that as a student progresses to higher reading levels, they will typically need more time to move up to the next level because texts become increasingly more complex. Early on I was concerned that I did not begin at a high enough level at the beginning of the year to get a truly accurate picture of who they were as a reader, because I based my starting point off of last year’s findings. Their literacy card reported that they were reading at a level S at the end of fourth grade.
A second concern emerged as they continued to have success at higher levels. Seeing their skills progress and knowing they could comprehend the basic message of a text, I was more concerned over whether they would be able to develop ideas at a deeper level and if my assessments were an accurate representation of their independent reading level. Because of these very real concerns that I had encountered throughout my career, I took steps at the beginning of this study to ensure I wasn’t basing my instruction on any one assessment. I also knew that other variables were hiding under the surface outside of just the assessment. For example, I knew that running records were still a relatively new form of assessment for our building and that the student struggled academically last year.

Emily. Emily always tried their best, regardless of the content or the task. They had established strong work habits and sought help when needed. They constantly had books to read and wrote in their notebook regularly. One observation from their notebook was that they often wrote about predictions they had about the book or small details, versus developing deeper ideas. This became a crucial turning point as texts became more complex. Though they constantly had books to read, I had wondered if the books they chose were challenging them as a reader. This was an area to continue developing.

Emily entered 5th grade at a reading level S, but the fall assessment indicated that they were reading at a level V. By the beginning of the study they were at a reading level X, level 4. My concerns for rapid progression were similar to those I had for Dan. However, this student qualified for the gifted and talented (GT) cluster and was eager to do well in school. They had strong writing skills, which mirrored their reading skills, and were able to write across multiple genres.
Felix. The final participant, Felix, was a strong student. This was based on both their academic functioning and their behaviors. They routinely wrote in their reader’s notebook and attempted new strategies taught during whole group lessons. They had the ability to set reasonable personal reading and writing goals, yet they were receptive to feedback. They had a positive attitude towards learning and working with others. Ensuring that they were being challenged, or that they were selecting texts that would challenge their reading skills, was something that needed to be worked on.

Felix began the year at a level W, as indicated by the fall assessment. They progressed to a level X by the beginning of the study. They are an avid reader, had routinely high fluency scores, always had a book to read, were interested in books, and qualified for the GT cluster. Their reading log was always completed on time and very thorough. As alluded to, they had developed strong writing skills that coincided with their reading development.

Ethics

In designing this study, steps were taken to protect the rights of the participants involved, their families, and others involved in the school community. Names were not included to protect student identity. Rather, a pseudonym was used if it seemed necessary to provide a name as a way for the reader to distinguish between participants. Consent from a legal guardian was obtained prior to the beginning of the research study. Participation was not mandatory, and refusing to participate did not have a negative consequence on student academic achievement in any way. If a student chose to remove themselves from the study, or if a parent requested that their child no longer participate,
they would have been removed from the study and data gathered would not have been used. All information gained remained confidential and secure throughout the duration of the study. Also, consent through the Hamline University was obtained before the research study was conducted. This concludes the ethics portion. The following section outlines the specific tools used to collect data.

**Data-Gathering Process**

The research study took place during the final two weeks of February during the 2015-2016 school year. Prior to beginning the study, I used the fall running record data and assembled a group of students I felt portrayed the group as a whole. Then, I sent out parent permission letters. Examples of the permission letter are provided in Appendix A. Once permission was granted I used the first two days of the study to re-assess each of the participants. I did this using running records, which was the first data collection method and is provided in Appendix B. The running records served many purposes. First, I wanted to ensure that the participant group accurately represented the class as a whole and to determine their current independent reading level. Second, I wanted to see what the readers naturally did on their own, what skills they had mastered, and determine areas they needed to continue working on.

Once this was completed I used the student profile sheet, in Appendix C, to record my findings from the running records on each of the six participants. Other forms of initial formative assessments that were included in the student profile sheet were the analysis of their current reading logs, reader’s notebook entries, and oral reading during whole-group lessons. During this time I also used the student observation form, in
Appendix D, to observe students in multiple settings. Observations included listening to students read during whole-group lessons, independent reading time, and the conversations they had with their reading partners.

After all of the data had been compiled onto the student observation sheet, I planned goals for each of the participants. For the remaining three days of the week, I met with each participant individually to set goals and introduce the feedback form, which is in Appendix F. Throughout the entire two weeks I used data from the formative assessments to plan instruction using the planning guide in Appendix E. After initial assessment data had been collected, I continued to utilize these tools to monitor student progress and growth towards the goals set. Who I met with each day and the content covered was dictated by the results of the formative assessments. I also used data from multiple formative assessments to ensure I was getting a clear picture of each student and where they were truly functioning.

The following section specifically outlines the data collection tools that I used throughout the study including running records, student profile sheet, direct observations, planning guide, feedback template, and reflection journal. Because my research question is focused on specifically responding to student needs in the area of reading, yet within a balanced literacy framework, each tool was specifically built around the essential components of the workshop approach. The following data collection methods allowed me to use data that I collected from the students to make decisions about instructional practices and monitor student progress.
Data-Collection Tools

As mentioned, a running record was used in order to determine if the students selected accurately represented the class as a whole and what areas each student needed to continue developing. As explored within the literature review, specifically in the section dedicated to commonly used formative assessment tools, a running record can be defined as a method used to analyze a student’s reading behavior (Calkins, 2001). The concept originated from the work of Marie Clay (Calkins, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001) to look at what students are currently doing and note the processing strategies they are utilizing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). One running record provides a look at a student’s current fluency, accuracy, and level of comprehension by looking at both a retell and variety of follow-up questions (Calkins, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Another benefit of using this method is that students were familiar with this process as it had been implemented across grade-levels in previous school years. Though there are a variety of reading passages at each level to use, this method is also adaptable. A basic template can be used to complete a running record using any text available (Serravallo, 2014). An example of a basic template has been provided in Appendix B. This multi-dimensional assessment was used to assess what the students were able to do and identify growth areas that were in need of further instruction.

The student profile sheet, provided in Appendix C, was created based on the concept of being able to triangulate data, or compare evidence from three separate settings possibly across the literacy block (Serravallo, 2014, p. 97). In his book *Research Design*, Creswell (2014) describes triangulation as comparing data from different
sources, as a means of identifying themes and is a way to ensure a valid study (p. 201). The idea of triangulation can be applied to studying the participants in this study. Before I could answer the research question and respond to students’ needs, I first needed to gather data from formative assessments to determine a valid goal for the student. The profile sheet allowed me to gather information for each student, across multiple settings, and then decide what action step to take. Within the literature review, many commonly used formative assessment tools arose that could be adapted to use within a balanced literacy model. After evaluating the research, I concluded that one perfect formative assessment tool does not exist. Rather educators should focus on integrating formative assessments within the daily lesson plans (Hattie, 2012). The student profile sheet was adapted to provide a template to organize, analyze, and apply information gathered from utilizing a variety of tools. Action steps, based on the data gathered from the formative assessments, might include planning a whole group lesson on making inferences if it was a skill many students struggled with, or planning an individual conference if it was something only one student struggled with. Either way, the final planning decision was recorded on the planning guide provided in Appendix E.

Observation and teaching are interconnected by nature. Mills (2011) acknowledged that teachers naturally monitor and adjust their instruction based on their observations (p.74). In relation to this research study, observations are considered to be a qualitative research technique because it is a technique that is more descriptive (Mills, 2011, p. 74). Direct observations provided flexibility within the study and allowed me, as the researcher, to analyze students across the literacy block. This basic form included the
student name, date, and the observation. It could be used either to track one student across multiple settings or to observe multiple students at one time. I chose to have one observation form for each student on a clipboard throughout the study as a way to stay organized and watch for patterns. This technique was utilized as one of the multiple data collection points that were then triangulated to ensure valid instructional decisions were being made. Not only did direct observations build a qualitative research study, but observations were found within the literature review to be a formative assessment approach. The observation form is provided in Appendix D.

The planning guide allowed me to gather information and then translate that into instruction. Referencing the research conducted by Hattie, an important part of the formative assessment process was translating data into effective instruction (2012). I could compare all of the information gathered from each participant and then decide what type of instruction would best meet the needs of my students. Within a balanced literacy framework, students are able to read texts that are at their instructional level. With such diversity in reading levels, each student was working on skills that were unique to who they were as readers, at this particular moment in time. Providing explicit instruction within this model has proven to be extremely difficult when such diversity in levels exists. The literature revealed that simply administering a formative assessment for the sake of gathering data is just a waste of time. Rather, as an instructor, we should focus our efforts on effectively utilizing the data, which was outlined within the section defining formative assessments within the literature review. When it came to planning instruction, the planning guide was separated based on the components of a reader’s
workshop that entail direct instruction, as a means of utilizing data within a balanced literacy framework. This form was adapted from the week-at-a-glance sheet in *The Literacy Teacher’s Playbook* (Serravallo, 2014, p. 142).

To help plan across the research project the planning guide, listed in Appendix E, included enough rows for each day in a five day week or a six day rotation. The six day rotation would follow our district specialist schedule, which is on a six day rotation. This was important for planning due to the fact that activities, such as choir, are organized on the six day rotation and could interfere with the literacy block. For this research study I chose to use two planning guides since it was conducted over two, five day weeks. Another purpose of the planning guide was to intentionally organize and plan instruction throughout the week. This was because the purpose of my study was to utilize formative assessment data to respond to students’ needs. Covering one skill on any given day wasn’t going to ensure that students’ needs were being met, and so the planning guide was a key tool used within the study. The literature review revealed the importance of utilizing formative assessments to drive daily instruction (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Chan, Konrad, Gonzalez, Peters, & Ressa, 2014; Clark, 2010; Cornelius, 2014; Hattie, 2009; Hudesman et al., 2013; Roskos & Neuman, 2012).

Feedback was also found to be a crucial component to helping students make progress (Chan et al., 2014; Hattie, 2012; Hattie & Temperley, 2007). The feedback template was created based on the three questions formed by Hattie (2012), discussed in the importance of feedback section of the literature review. Questions included: “‘Where am I going?’; ‘How am I going there?’; ‘Where to next?’” (Hattie, 2012, p. 143). The
The purpose of the feedback form was to help students better understand what they had accomplished as a learner and what they should continue working towards. It also helped both the student and myself to be accountable for the goals set by monitoring progress, and acknowledging when their goal had been achieved. Another purpose of this study was to help move away from the endless goal setting that I tend to end up doing with students, and move toward being intentional with my feedback and instruction by articulating action steps for each student (Hattie, 2009; Hattie, 2012; Hattie & Temperley, 2007). The feedback template is listed in Appendix F.

The final qualitative research method that was utilized was the reflection journal. Under the umbrella of using observations for data collection, my role in the study was primarily as an active participant observer because I was teaching, monitoring, and recording observations in real time (Mills, 2011). I also alternated to being a passive observer. This role allowed me to take time to focus solely on collecting data, rather than being the teacher and researcher. Field notes were the primary tool that I used to describe observations and unintended consequences of the decisions made. The completed reflection journal is provided in Appendix G. Observations took place before, during, and after the instructional decisions have been made. Specific dates and results are reported in chapter four.

Data Analysis

This action research study took a qualitative approach, where formative assessment data was collected and analyzed to help answer my research question, how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the
reading needs of 5th grade students? As mentioned in the previous section, data was collected using a variety of methods as a means to create a valid study. This particular strategy, where multiple methods are used to gather and compare data is referred to as triangulation (Creswell, 2014, p.201).

Throughout the study three phases were used to describe how formative assessments were utilized in attempts to answer the research question:

1- Identifying student needs
2- Responding to student needs, specifically within a balanced literacy classroom
3- Monitoring progress

Phase one, identifying student needs, must take place in order to successfully adapt instruction. Formative assessments were used to better understand each participant as an individual reader. Specific assessments included the running record assessment, the direct observation sheet where observations were taken in multiple settings, and the profile sheet where multiple data points were compared.

In phase two, formative assessments were used to help respond to student needs in a reading workshop, which is one balanced literacy component. Based on the data compiled in phase one, the planning guide was used to structure future instruction. Since the planning guide was built around the essential workshop components, it helped to address the research question which was formulated around a balanced literacy framework. The planning guide was also used to determine what type of instruction would best serve each participant and the group as a whole. For example, if all students struggled with accuracy, a whole group lesson could be created. If only one student needed to work on accuracy, an
individual conference could be planned. A formative assessment tool that was used in phase two was the feedback template. The feedback template allowed me to work with each participant to set goals based on the data in phase one and respond to student needs by implementing instructional strategies to work towards the set goals.

In phase three, monitoring progress, the formative assessment tools that were used included the student profile sheet, the direct observation sheet, and the feedback template. Each tool was used to monitor individual student progress throughout the two week study. If it was apparent that a participant had mastered their goal, as indicated on the student profile sheet or direct observation sheet, then the ‘Where to Next?’ column would be used to plan future goals for the student.

Summary

This chapter aimed to establish the research methods and the paradigm that was utilized to answer the research question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students?* The chapter continued by describing the participants involved in the study and the setting of the study. I specifically described the scale used to select participants for the research study and the tools used to confirm that the student group mirrored the diversity of the class as a whole. The chapter concluded by describing the specific data collection methods that were used and how data was analyzed.

The following chapter describes the results found after implementing the specific data collection methods and analyzes the results of the research study as they relate to each individual participant. Chapter five expresses conclusions that were drawn based on
the research results, discuss limitations, and then provide what suggestions I have for future research.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

A classroom is a dynamic environment. As expressed in chapter one, my own personal frustration continued to grow as I realized my struggling readers were still struggling and my gifted readers were still reading above grade level. I sought to find a method to teaching literacy that would help me address the diverse needs of my students. Chapter one described how my personal capstone process began and what led to the following research question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students?*

The literature review in chapter two examined the formative assessment process and the impact this process can have if implemented appropriately. Chapter two also elaborated on the variety of ways formative assessments can be utilized by the classroom teacher. It was found that formative assessments can be used to monitor the effectiveness of one’s teaching and provide necessary feedback to students to help them move forward. The chapter began by defining the current definition of formative assessments and moved into exploring balanced literacy and its key components. The chapter concluded with ways formative assessments can be utilized within a balanced literacy framework.
In chapter three I explained the research methods used throughout the study in an effort to answer the question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students?* I began by explaining my research paradigm where I explained that the research study would rely upon the qualitative research method. I went on to describe the six participants and the setting of the study, a 5th grade classroom in a suburban school district. After explaining the participants and ensuring that they were an accurate representation of the class as a whole, I moved into my specific data collection methods and described how they were used throughout the study. Though this research study was qualitative by nature, I focused specifically on using multiple data points to ensure that I could triangulate the data prior to making instructional decisions. Finding multiple data points allowed me to identify common themes, which then resulted in the articulation of a goal for each participant. Once goals were identified I worked to adjust my instruction to meet the needs of the participants through intentional instructional planning. The purpose of the study was to explore how formative assessments could be utilized to plan instruction based on the needs of my students.

Chapter four outlines the findings of the study based on the data collection methods and then instructional decisions that were made as a result. The chapter begins by describing each of the participants selected for the study, as well as a justification for why they were chosen. Then, the chapter moves into the specific results gained from each of the data collection methods and my interpretations along the way.
Participants

As outlined in chapter three, the participants being selected for the study were a part of a 5th grade classroom that included 23 students. In crafting the research question, it was clear that a focus would remain on how to utilize formative assessments within a balanced literacy framework, specifically in the area of reading. Information gathered for each participant pertained to their development within the area of literacy.

Adam and Bailey were a part of the reading intervention program. Adam was a part of a small group that met four times a week, where Bailey was a part of a small group that only met two times per week. Carly was being monitored for the reading intervention based on their low fluency scores, however their comprehension was progressing nicely. Emily and Felix qualified for the GT cluster. Dan did not qualify for the GT program, yet was performing at reading levels similar to Emily and Felix.

Based on the fall benchmark assessment, four students were far below grade level expectations or considered a level 1 (L-P), five slightly below grade level expectations or considered a level 2 (Q, R, S), four were at grade level expectations or at a level 3 (T), and ten were above grade level expectations or at a level 4 (U+). Again, the expectation is that students will be at a level U by the end of the year. Due to the fact that student reading level expanded from a level L to a level X, it was important that the students selected for the study be an accurate representation of the class as a whole.

Before beginning the research study six participants were selected, based on reading level, to be an accurate representation of the class as a whole. Of the six participants, the ratio of boys to girls was 1:1. Using the fall benchmark, one student was
selected from a level 1, one from a level 2, one from a level 3, and three students were at a level 4. I began by conducting the running record assessment with each participant. Again, this was to ensure that the group accurately represented the diverse range of reading levels within the class as a whole. The following section outlines the specific data collected from the initial running record assessment, as well as knowledge that was gained from the assessment about each student.

**Running Record**

A running record is an assessment that allows a teacher to see multiple components of a student’s reading abilities including their current fluency, accuracy, and level of comprehension (Calkins, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). In this study the running record assessment served multiple purposes. A sample is provided in Appendix B. First, it was used to determine each participant’s independent reading level to ensure the group resembled the class as a whole. Another reason this tool proved to be a valuable component of the research study was because it provided insight into current reading behaviors that I could then analyze and determine possible next steps. This allowed me to understand the participants and their individual needs. Getting to know the reader was phase one in the data analysis section in chapter three. A final reason for using the running record was that all students have had exposure to the assessment and knew what to expect when it came time to administer the assessment.

For each participant I administered a running record assessment one level higher than their last recorded independent reading level. Each running record allowed me to
record and analyze miscues, analyze reading behaviors, record current fluency rates, and assess their level of comprehension through a retell, literal questions, and inferential questions. In order for a level to be considered a student’s independent reading level they needed to have an accuracy rate of 100%-96%, or 0-4 miscues. If they self-correct an error it is not considered a miscue. They also needed to complete an accurate retell that encompassed the main components of the passage. Table 4.1 outlines the data collected from the running record assessments for each participant. Table 4.2 outlines what the expected reading levels, for 5th grade students, at various intervals throughout the year.

Table 4.1

*Participant Instructional Reading Levels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Fall Independent Level</th>
<th>Mid-Year Independent Level</th>
<th>February Independent Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carly</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2

5th Grade Expected Independent Reading Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Beginning of the Year</th>
<th>Fall Benchmark</th>
<th>Mid-Year Benchmark</th>
<th>End of the Year Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5- Far below</td>
<td>P or below</td>
<td>P or below</td>
<td>Q or below</td>
<td>Q or below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- Slightly below</td>
<td>Q/R</td>
<td>Q/R/S</td>
<td>R/S/T</td>
<td>R/S/T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7- At grade level</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8- Above grade level</td>
<td>T or above</td>
<td>U or above</td>
<td>V or above</td>
<td>V or above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Expected instructional reading levels are based on district expectations. Levels are based on the current Teachers College Reading and Writing Project: Benchmark Reading Levels and Marking Period Assessment.

The following outlines specific data about each participant and what I learned about them based on the running record assessment. When indicating miscues, I will put the word the student read first followed by a backslash and then the word in the passage. For example, state/statement would represent that the reader said state and the word in the passage was statement. If they omitted the word it will be represented with a -. For example, -/there would represent that the student did not read the work ‘there.’ If they added a word it will be indicated with a ^. For example, the/^ would mean that they added in the word ‘the’ to the passage.

Adam read a level P passage with 97% accuracy. The three miscues included a/I, the/my, and Steve, Stevie. The miscues were mostly transition words, and not all of the words fit the syntax or structure of the sentence. They self-corrected three times. When they self-corrected they sounded out the word based on the first letter. They read at a rate of 92 words per minute, and primarily in two-word phrases which broke up phrasing.
They retold a few of the big events, but only part of the story as a whole. Though they read at a higher rate of accuracy than 96%, they did not read the passage fluently or complete an accurate retell. Based on this information I concluded that fluency could be a possible growth area, and a lack of fluency might have contributed to lower comprehension levels. Though they read with 97% accuracy I noted that this is an area I would need to continue making observations on. Inferences made based on future goals will be recorded on the student profile sheet.

Bailey read a level S passage with 90% accuracy, which would automatically mean this level was not an appropriate independent reading level. Miscues included -/of, wind/intertwined, -/that, -/radiant, gloomly/glumly, fritzler/fertilizer, bough/brought, cumbly/crummy, neg./neglected, a/an. In many of the miscues they were able to read the beginning of the word correctly or a word part, but they did not pause to see if it made sense with the sentence. They self-corrected once, and repeated words in four different places. The significant number of miscues had a large effect on their fluency because they only read at a rate of 97 words per minute. The retell included minor details that they could remember from the passage, but did not summarize the overall meaning or include key details. With all of this information in mind, this would not be an appropriate independent reading level. Because they read with 90% accuracy I noted that accuracy was a growth area. I also noted that their fluency rate was negatively affected by their accuracy level.
Carly read a level U passage with 95% accuracy. Their miscues included the/\^, the/this, forgrin/foreign, humlock/hemlock, and -/one. They self-corrected five times and repeated a word one time. This showed that they would stop, pause, and self-correct 50% of the time since there were five miscues and five self-corrections. However, when there was a miscue it was often because the strategies they were using did not help them determine what the word was so they sounded it out using the word parts. Though their accuracy was very close to 96%, they only read at a rate of 79 words per minute. Their retell included the main characters in the passage, but only included small details from the beginning of the passage. They were unable to infer and then summarize the overall meaning of the story. Based on this information, this would not be an appropriate independent reading level. The number of miscues and self-corrections seemed to negatively influence their fluency. Fluency was noted as a growth area for this participant. I also noted that though their accuracy rate was 95%, it would be an area to continue observing.

Dan read a level Y passage with 95% accuracy and at a rate of 104 words per minute. Miscues included and/\^, thinks/think, am/was, Hattie/Hattie, and tiny/\^. They self-corrected one time and reread a word two times in the passage. Their retell included some key details and some minor details. They were leaning towards the overall message of the passage, but didn’t hit all of the key ideas. They answered two out of the four comprehension questions correctly. Based on the fact that their accuracy rate was below 96%, the components of their retell, and that they did not answer three of the
comprehension questions correctly this was not their independent reading level. Based on this information, a growth area would be comprehension at higher levels.

Emily read a level X passage with 96% accuracy at a rate of 109 words per minute. Their miscues included soraty/sorority, he’s/his, -/too, and fairy/fairly. They self-corrected once and reread once. Their retell included most of the key details and they were asking questions about the text to increase understanding. They answered two of the four comprehension questions correctly. Of the four comprehension questions they answered both of the inferential questions incorrectly. Because of that, this would not be their independent reading level. A growth area would be comprehension specifically making inferences at higher text levels. Making inferences at this level seemed to be difficult because the text referred to experiences that the participant might not have had the background knowledge to support. Activating background knowledge might be key to supporting comprehension.

Felix read a level Y passage with 98% accuracy at a rate of 150 words per minute. Miscues included -/after and Hatie/Hattie. They self-corrected three times. Their retell was very complete and included the key details. They answered the two literal questions correctly, but the inferential questions incorrectly. Because of this, a level Y would not be their independent reading level. A growth area would be comprehension.
## Table 4.3
### Student Profile Sheet - Adam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adam</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Assessment/Date</th>
<th>Skills Mastered</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C-comprehension</td>
<td>W- whole group lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A-accuracy</td>
<td>S-strategy group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-fluency</td>
<td>I-individual conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V-vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>2-22-16</td>
<td>Pausing to think, self-correcting A- 97%</td>
<td>F- 92 w/m, phrasing C- main idea in retell</td>
<td>I- Read like a storyteller, use punctuation W- read aloud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Log</td>
<td>2-24-16</td>
<td>Completing at school</td>
<td>Complete at home, stamina</td>
<td>I- setting goals, building stamina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader's notebook</td>
<td>2-24-16</td>
<td>C- summarizing using key details, completing daily</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>2-24-16</td>
<td>A- tracking with finger, sounding out, repeating. Trying multiple strategies</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I- Increasing fluency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 4.4
### Student Profile Sheet - Bailey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bailey</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Assessment/Date</th>
<th>Skills Mastered</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C-comprehension</td>
<td>W- whole group lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A-accuracy</td>
<td>S-strategy group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-fluency</td>
<td>I-individual conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V-vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>2-22-16</td>
<td>Engagement, Miscues look similar Rereads</td>
<td>A- 90% C- Main Idea</td>
<td>I- Word parts/ clues W- Read aloud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading to Partner</td>
<td>2-24-16</td>
<td>Skips, points, rereads</td>
<td>A- knowing what to do when strategies don’t work</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Log</td>
<td>2-24-16</td>
<td>Reading every day</td>
<td>Filling out reading log every day</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader's Notebook</td>
<td>2-24-16</td>
<td>Identified character traits</td>
<td>Sentence structure</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Profile Sheet - Carly</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carly</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Assessment/ Date</th>
<th>Skills Mastered</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C- comprehension</td>
<td>W-whole group lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A- accuracy</td>
<td>S-strategy group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F- fluency</td>
<td>I-individual conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V- vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C- expression</td>
<td>A- 95%</td>
<td>I- Word parts/ clues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F- 79 w/m</td>
<td>W- Read aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C- noticing the level, if it's a good fit</td>
<td>I-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Reading Log | 2-23-16 | Engagement reading every day | C- noticing the level, if it's a good fit | I- |

| Reader’s Notebook | 2-23-16 | Compare and contrast character traits | C- writing about reading | I- infer theme / big ideas |

| Reading to Partner | 2-29-16 | Self-correcting | A- asking if it makes sense | I- multiple strategies |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Profile Sheet - Dan</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dan</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Assessment/ Date</th>
<th>Skills Mastered</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C- comprehension</td>
<td>W-whole group lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A- accuracy</td>
<td>S-strategy group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F- fluency</td>
<td>I-individual conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V- vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2-22-16</td>
<td>A- 95%</td>
<td>C- infer deeper meaning</td>
<td>I- noticing symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F- 104 w/m</td>
<td></td>
<td>Accurate retell</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Reading Log | 2-23-16 | Engagement finding level, reading every day | C- Track reading and home, stick with one book that challenges | I- setting goals, selecting texts |

| Reader’s Notebook | 2-23-16 | C- sticking with Charlie Bone series | C- writing about big ideas not just small details | I- summarizing using key details |

| Observation | 2-23-16 | C- identifies details such as setting and characters | C- pull ideas together to show a bigger theme | I- summarizing key details and tie into theme |
## Table 4.7
**Student Profile Sheet - Emily**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emily</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Assessment/ Date</th>
<th>Skills Mastered</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C-comprehension</td>
<td>W-whole group lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A-accuracy</td>
<td>S-strategy group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-fluency</td>
<td>I-individual conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V-vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>2-22-16</td>
<td>A- 96%</td>
<td>C-deeper themes, make inferences</td>
<td>I- Identify symbolism, connect to characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F- 109 w/m</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Log</td>
<td>2-23-16</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>C- notice the level, read one book</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reader’s Notebook</td>
<td>2-23-16</td>
<td>Writing about reading</td>
<td>C- move from predictions to key details</td>
<td>I- writing about bigger themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>2-23-16</td>
<td>Writing about reading on post-it</td>
<td>C- move from predictions to theme</td>
<td>I- strategies to notice theme and key details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 4.8
**Student Profile Sheet - Felix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Felix</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Assessment/ Date</th>
<th>Skills Mastered</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C-comprehension</td>
<td>W-whole group lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A-accuracy</td>
<td>S-strategy group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-fluency</td>
<td>I-individual conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V-vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2-23-16</td>
<td>A- 98%</td>
<td>V C- Infer</td>
<td>I- making inferences about bigger themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F- 105 w/m</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Log</td>
<td>2-23-16</td>
<td>Very complete, organized</td>
<td>C- track levels</td>
<td>Consider reading same book series as home and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reader’s Notebook</td>
<td>2-23-16</td>
<td>Writing about thinking, not just small details</td>
<td>C- deeper levels</td>
<td>I- Look for symbolism, theme, notice what strategies to use when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>2-23-16</td>
<td>A C- gets tone of character</td>
<td>F- expression / phrasing</td>
<td>C- themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The previous section, tables 4.3 - 4.8, outlines the student profile sheet used throughout the research study. I chose to use one student profile sheet per participant to track information for this research study. This template allows for other options, such as using one sheet to record results for all students. The justification for using one sheet per student is that the purpose of this research study was to respond to the reading needs of the participants throughout the study, and not responding based on one assessment. The difference is that my focus was on each student and not on the individual assessment results.

As mentioned in chapter three, this tool was used to triangulate data. Triangulation is a validity strategy, where the researcher ensures valid findings by utilizing multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2014, p.201). According to Mills (2011) “comparing multiple sources of data is referred to as triangulation” and is a component of the action research process that ensures that I did not rely on only one data source to make instructional decisions (p. 92).

For each participant, the profile sheet was used to compare the results of the running record assessment, direct observations, and artifacts such as reading logs and reader’s notebook entries. Being able to compare data across contexts allowed me to formulate a goal that would best meet the individual needs of each participant because it is difficult to know a reader after listening to them read one text. Comparing multiple data points was a critical part of the action research. In this context, the profile sheet was part of phase one, identifying student needs. However, the profile sheet was also used to monitor student progress throughout the research study which was phase three. It was
important to monitor if students were making progress and the effectiveness of the instructional strategies.

**Direct Observations**

Direct observations were taken throughout the action research study, and is considered a qualitative data collection technique (Mills, 2011, p.75). Based on the definitions provided by Mills (2011), I took the role of an active participant observer because I was actively involved in teaching and then responded to students based on my observations throughout the teaching (p. 75).

As mentioned in chapter three, the direct observation sheet allowed me to observe students throughout our literacy block and collect multiple data points. In order to do this effectively, I chose to have the observations sheets on a clipboard that I could carry with me throughout the morning. Observations were taken during all of the components of the reader’s and writer’s workshop, including whole group lesson, independent work, partner work, and share as a way to get to know each participant. Getting to know each participant was part of phase one, identifying student needs. A full transcript of the direct observation form for each participant is included in Appendix H.

For many of the participants the observations confirmed the results of the running record assessment and helped me formulate goals. Throughout the study participants Adam, Bailey, and Carly continued to work towards their goals of increasing their accuracy. I also noted that those same students needed to work on their writing structure, such as grammar and punctuation. Another observation was that Adam and Carly had higher accuracy rates at text levels closer to their independent reading level, yet had
difficulty with accuracy with a variety of grade level texts. Participants Dan, Emily, and Felix had mastered the basic structure of writing and were working to develop deeper ideas in their writing, which matched their comprehension goals of identifying deeper themes.

The observation form also helped me monitor students’ progress towards their goals and if changes needed to be made. Throughout the study most students needed to switch strategies either because they had mastered the one they were working on or because the strategy wasn’t working for them. The strategies I chose for students working on accuracy seemed to apply to any text they were reading, but for those that were working on comprehension the strategies didn’t always transfer as easily.

Planning Guide- Adjusting Instruction

The planning guide allowed me, as an active observer, to teach and then respond to observations I made by monitoring and adjusting my instruction. This was phase two, responding to student needs. The curriculum chosen for the whole-group lesson was predetermined prior to the study based on state standards and district expectations. However, instruction was tailored throughout the study based on how students were progressing. For example, a lesson could be extended if it was clear more time was needed to master the strategy. The planning guide also helped me to stay organized and make adjustments if participants were absent. I found that staying organized was a crucial component of the action research process because as research was being conducted I was still responsible for teaching the 17 students that were not a part of the research project.
After goals were set for each participant it became easier and less time consuming to plan future instruction.

As the study went on, I began to meet with participants Adam, Bailey, and Carly on the same day because they were working towards similar goals. Similarly, I began working with participants Dan, Emily, and Felix the following day because they were also working towards the same goal. Though they were working on different strategies, this helped me as their teacher prepare for our conferences. It also helped me utilize whole group time because I knew who I would meet with during the lesson and what I needed to look for or help them with. Helping students on the spot, throughout the lesson can be a difficult thing because you have a very small amount of time to work with and the whole class is waiting to move on. Table 4.9 outlines the planning guide for week 1 of the study. Table 4.10 concludes the section with week 2 of the study.
### Table 4.9
**Planning Guide - Week 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whole Group Lesson</strong></td>
<td>Independent reading expectations- observe participants</td>
<td>Infer meaning of unknown words- observe participants</td>
<td>Inference= Background knowledge + text clues. Observe participants</td>
<td>Continue day 3 Comprehension -no longer just about plot line- noticing themes- multi-dimensions</td>
<td>Infer- fact and inference t-chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Conferences</strong></td>
<td>Running Records- Adam, Bailey, Dan, Emily</td>
<td>Running Records- Carly, Felix</td>
<td>Feedback chart- participants Dan, Bailey, Carly Strategy- A</td>
<td>Feedback chart- participants Dan, Bailey, Carly Strategy- Comprehension</td>
<td>Adam, Bailey, Carly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notes</strong></td>
<td>Adam &amp; Bailey absent</td>
<td>Carly absent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future Lessons: Accuracy Comprehension- symbolism</td>
<td>Collected notebooks and logs</td>
<td>Collected those that were absent band/orchestra day</td>
<td>Comprehension- Understanding themes and ideas. Check in on notebooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whole Group Lesson</strong></td>
<td>Infer- know when to use word char or fact and inference chart</td>
<td>Infer- use subtitles</td>
<td>Infer- question in mind</td>
<td>Infer- big ideas by question</td>
<td>Continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Conferences</strong></td>
<td>Carly, Dan, Emily, Felix</td>
<td>Adam, Bailey, Carly</td>
<td>Adam, Emily, Felix</td>
<td>Adam, Bailey Carly-absent</td>
<td>Final check in on goal with all participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notes</strong></td>
<td>Observations in social studies. Organized binder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not finished with books- continue strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feedback Template

As explored in the literature review, feedback is a powerful component of the formative assessment process because it can be used immediately based on the information gained through formative assessments (Chan et al., 2014). The feedback template was designed to ensure that both the teacher and the student were aware of what was being worked on and promote self-reflection with the hopes of increasing student achievement (Clark, 2010, p.344). Both the student and the teacher had a copy of the feedback form to utilize throughout the research study, to ensure the participant knew what to work on during independent work time, thus holding the student accountable for that time. However, I also assumed accountability by utilizing the feedback template to determine the effectiveness of prior instructional strategies (Hudesman et al., 2013). In this respect the feedback template was part of phase two, responding to student needs, because it was used to set goals and provide specific instruction. However, it was also used to monitor student progress, phase three, throughout the study.

Though this technique took more time up front to get put in place, due to the fact that students did not have previous experience with this technique, it provided an increased efficiency later in the study. As a teacher, I value the time that I have available with my students and it can be daunting to try something new knowing how much time it will take. This technique saved time throughout the study because both teacher and student were aware of what we would be working on. I did not need to spend precious instructional minutes sifting through documents to determine where we had left off. It also provided flexibility because if a strategy was not working, we could easily adjust.
In looking at the results on the feedback template, as listed in table 4.11, despite the fact that specific strategies changed throughout the study all six participants continued to work towards the goal set in week one. In knowing that I used multiple data sources to determine the goal, and that I continued observing them throughout the study, this information proved to be positive and exciting! This confirmed that the goals set were accurate and fit the reader.

Table 4.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Template</th>
<th>Where Are They Going? What Are their Goals?</th>
<th>How Are They Going? What Progress is Being Made Towards the Goal?</th>
<th>Where to Next?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>F- 92 w/m A- unknown words Goal: Increase Accuracy Strategy: knowing what to do when coming to unknown words, focus on accuracy and then fluency.</td>
<td>Has progressed to level O, 97% A at level P Strategies: chunk it, reread sentence-think does it make sense</td>
<td>Continue goal of increasing A When accomplished move to F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey</td>
<td>A- 90% at level S, MC look similar, they reread. Goal: increase accuracy Strategy: pause and ask does it make sense.</td>
<td>-rereads, but needs to continue to ask does it make sense 2-29: noticing and questioning!</td>
<td>3-1 moved to using multiple strategies 1-skip 2-think 3-look 4-return 3-3 continue to increase A by using multiple strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carly</td>
<td>A- 95% at level U, F- 79 w/m Goal: work to increase accuracy at higher levels Strategy: stop, reread, chunk</td>
<td>3-1 stops, rereads, chunks on own</td>
<td>3-1 Strategy: moved to using multiple strategies 1-skip 2-think 3-look 4-return</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Reflection Journal

The reflection journal was the final qualitative data collection technique utilized in this action research study. The journal was a way for me to organize my observations, reflect on teaching practices or strategies, make observations over a two week time period, make interpretations of events, and make conclusions that might impact future teaching (Mills, 2011, p. 86). The full reflection journal is provided in Appendix G.
After analyzing the reflection journal I began to see the action research cycle, as described by Mills (2011), take shape because throughout the study I collected information from the participants, I reflected on that information, and then acted by either gathering more information through research or implementing instruction (p.17). Using the data collection techniques described in chapter three and described in the previous sections, I collected data on each participant. Before I could respond by planning future instruction, I had to consult the literature review in chapter two or conduct new research.

The reflection journal included basic observations that at first seemed obvious to me, but had an inherent effect on the research process. For example, on any given day the schedule would change or students would be absent, all changes you come to anticipate. However, because of those changes I had to make adjustments to my initial instructional plan. Other observations included the number of students I was able to meet with during independent reading or what I accomplished that day.

Aside from basic observations, the reflection log exposed patterns and themes that proved to be a valuable resource when looking to answer the research question. One theme is that learning is complicated and affected by many different factors. For example, a student that is working on accuracy cannot accomplish that goal if they are not reading, and they are likely not to be reading if they have a book that is too challenging for them or if their environment is too distracting. Another theme included that learning takes time, for both the student and the teacher. A final theme that emerged was that in order to effectively monitor and adjust instruction it was crucial that I got to
know each student’s strengths and growth areas. More details will be included within the research reflection section of chapter five.

**Overall Research Reflections**

All students are not created equal. Though half of the participants were working on accuracy and half were working on comprehension that did not mean that they were working at the same pace. Nor did it mean that they were necessarily working on the same thing. Though I referenced the diversity of student needs at the beginning of my research study, and formulated the research question around it, the action research exposed the diversity in the day-to-day learning process.

The fact that three of the participants were working towards the same skill, but progressed at very different rates continues to build on the idea that not all students are created equal. This idea is supported by the work of Gambrell & Morrow (2015) who revealed that students reading well below grade level required multiple exposures to a text, explicit instruction, and repeated practice with a skill (2015, p. 113). When looking at the participants in this study, Adam was reading far below grade-level whereas Carly was reading right around grade-level. Though they were both working to improve their reading accuracy, Carly was able to quickly move from using one strategy to alternating between multiple strategies. Adam needed continued, explicit instruction on strategies to increase their accuracy. Adam also required significantly more opportunities to practice pausing while reading to question if what they read made sense. By the end of the short two-week study, Carly had already made significant improvements in their accuracy and Adam needed more repeated practice.
The importance of utilizing data to drive instruction was found as a key component of the formative assessment process and coincided with the results of the action research (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Chan, Konrad, Gonzalez, Peters, & Ressa, 2014; Clark, 2010; Cornelius, 2014; Hattie, 2009; Hudesman et al., 2013; Roskos & Neuman, 2012). The participants in this research study ranged from a reading level O to a level X. Due to this diversity, each student had their own individual goal and worked at their own pace. As mentioned earlier, no two students progressed at the same rate. This required me, as the researcher and teacher, to utilize the data gained from each assessment to plan future instruction. It was necessary to utilize the student profile sheet to get to know each student and their individual needs, as well as the planning guide to plan out each component of the workshop. The work of Cornelius (2014) also supported the idea that data from formative assessments, as shown on the student profile sheet, should drive future instruction, as shown on the planning guide.

A final idea that emerged from the action research was the importance of utilizing multiple formative assessment sources. This is an important idea to note, especially after identifying that data from formative assessments should be utilized to drive instruction and the fact that no two students are created equal. As explained in the participant section of chapter three, Dan showed significantly higher functioning when given a choice over the learning task. Dan also required multiple assessments, over multiple settings, to secure an accurate learning goal. As Gambrell & Marrow explained, literacy is complicated (2015). Dan was simply one example where getting to know the student well was critical to the study, because where he was functioning as a reader wasn’t
immediately apparent. Serravallo (2014) also supported this idea when stating the importance of triangulating data prior to setting specific learning goals. This research study utilized multiple assessments, such as the running record assessment, direct observations, student notebook entries, and student reading logs, to gather identify a learning goal. I found this to be extremely effective in identifying accurate goals.

**Summary**

Chapter four began by describing the specific participants that were involved in the research study and how they accurately represented the class. In looking to answer my research question, I reviewed the data collection techniques that were described in the research plan in chapter three. The chapter concluded by outlining the specific results of the research study accompanied by my interpretations of the data.

Chapter five outlines the conclusions drawn after conducting the research study by reflecting back to my research question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students?* Along with outlining conclusions from the research study, chapter five discusses specific implications for classroom teachers and district leaders. The final component segment of chapter five explores suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

Within this research study I set out to answer the question, how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students? In chapter one I stated my personal experiences with the topic and how I came to formulate the research question. Chapter two explored the current research on formative assessments, the balanced literacy model, and how formative assessments fit within that framework. Chapter three outlined the action research plan, including the participants and data collection methods I used with the goal of answering my research question. Chapter four outlined the data collected and the research results. Within the final segment, chapter five, I reflect on the action research process including the literature review and the research results. Based on the research results, I then move into what the implications are for educators. Finally, I outline limitations the research study faced and suggestions for future research.

Research Reflections

When I began the literature review process, I set out to find a way to meet the diverse needs of my students and to learn more about formative assessments. At that time
I viewed formative assessments in terms of specific tools, such as analyzing reading logs or post-it notes. The literature revealed that a large variety of research exists supporting the fact that formative assessments can be defined as a process and not just one individual assessment. Though there was a great deal of research surrounding the topic of formative assessments, no one definition was agreed upon by experts in the field. Both Clark (2010) and Hudesman et al. (2013) referenced the work of Black & Wiliam (1998) when attempting to define formative assessments, yet they refrained from forming one concrete definition. Clark (2010) even went on to say that attempting to formulate one definition is unrealistic. The only thing that was agreed upon, in terms of defining formative assessments, was that it should be viewed as a process. The ambiguity of the definition and common misconceptions about formative assessments added a new layer of complexity to the research study.

One thing that I discovered while researching more about formative assessments was how important both data and feedback are in the learning process. With such a negative connotation surrounding the term ‘data’ it can sometimes be difficult to move past preconceived notions of state standardized test scores and political slogans surrounding accountability for schools. However, I had to overcome my previous experiences with analyzing test data and begin to see the powerful effect that it can have when it comes to meeting the needs of my students on a daily basis. As stated in chapter two, there are multiple ways that data can be used. Data can be used to drive instruction, monitor if students are making progress towards the learning targets, and monitor the effectiveness of instruction (Black, 2015). Data can also be used to make decisions within
the RTI process, specifically which interventions would best meet student needs (Dorn, 2010). This was an interesting finding due to the fact that most of the data used to qualify students for interventions in our district are summative assessments, such as state test scores or district standard assessments.

I was intrigued by the large amount of research that pointed to the significance of using feedback within the formative assessment process. As an educator, I have realized that there are significant time constraints that I need to take into account when attempting to implement something new. However, knowing that feedback is both effective and can be used immediately (Chan et al., 2014) made it an interesting area to pursue, especially when it was described as the “vehicle” to connecting all other components of formative instruction (2014, p. 96). This section of the literature review also clarified what type of feedback is the most effective, which was important to me because I realized my personal educational experiences have shaped how I used feedback within my classroom. Instead of focusing on giving feedback at the end of a task, I discovered it is important to provide on-going feedback that can be applied throughout the learning process. Because of this Hattie’s (2012) three main feedback questions, “‘Where am I going?’; ‘How am I going there?’; ‘Where to next?’ became a significant part of the research study.

While researching formative assessments, there were a wide variety of tools that could be used. Since my focus was on the area of literacy in a 5th grade classroom, this provided a way to condense some of the options. I came to realize that it isn’t just the tool, but how the information is used that matters. Texts like *The Art of Teaching*
Reading (Calkins, 2001) and The Literacy Teacher’s Playbook (Serravallo; 2014) strengthened the idea that I could leverage many of the current tools and practices that I have already put in place. Running records, reading logs, and reader’s notebooks are all examples of tools that have already been implemented and also identified as formative assessment tools.

A final discovery that arose from the literature review was how to move from identifying formative assessments, to implementing the process within a balanced literacy framework. Since both the term formative assessments and a balanced literacy approach are ambiguous by nature, it was very difficult to formulate how my research might go. In studying both formative assessments and a balanced literacy framework I was working to identify how the process could realistically function within my classroom. I discovered that before I can provide feedback to students or adapt instruction to meet student needs, I first needed to get to know students and what their needs are. Atwell (2007), Calkins (2001) and Fletcher & Portalupi (2001), leading researchers in the field of literacy, all recommended gathering a variety of assessment data to support learning on a daily basis. Through my research, I discovered that utilizing multiple assessments provided powerful data that could be analyzed to determine future goals and adjust future instruction.

Though the literature review provided many important discoveries, other themes emerged as a result of the research process. Within chapter three I outlined the specifics of the research study and the tools that would be utilized. Chapter four discussed the
results of the research process and alluded to themes that could be instrumental in refining my future practice, which will be covered in the following sections.

**Major Learnings**

The first theme is that learning takes time. When I began this research study it was clear that I could not use running records as a pre and post assessment due to the fact that many 5th graders will not, and should not, increase reading level in a two week time frame. This is the reason I moved away from a quantitative or mixed methods approach, and instead focused solely on qualitative research methods. Though I realized the amount of time that would be needed to move reading levels, I was surprised at the amount of time needed to evaluate student data and set meaningful goals. For example, when we set goals in week one all of the participants were continuing to work towards their goal by the end of week two. However, they may have mastered a strategy or made progress towards their goal. So this is not to say that implementing formative assessments was not effective, instead that it takes time to put this type of learning process in place. Outside of the research study, the goals set with each participant are goals that we will continue to work towards until future assessments prove that they have been mastered.

In looking back on the reading levels of each of the participants, some of the goals might be things they continue to work on for the remainder of the year. Others might progress to a point where they are ready to move on to a new skill. To build on the idea of learning taking time, many of the participants needed prompting throughout the study to utilize their reader’s notebook. Their notebook was a place to practice the skill discussed during conferences and use the feedback chart as a reference. Since not all
students had made this a habit prior to the study, some participants took considerably more prompting and time to complete their notebook entries. This might mean that in the future a better routine or system needs to be in place. This exposed that formative assessment data can be utilized to reflect on the success of current teaching practices.

Though the two week time frame provided constraints, there were areas of the study that seemed to be extremely efficient. Implementing the feedback template was one tool that helped me to utilize class time. One reason I believe it helped to save time was the fact that both the teacher and the student had a record of what was being worked on. Personally I felt the feedback template helped me stay organized and allowed me to prepare for individual conferences quickly. In previous workshops I would spend time flipping through my notes about the student to remind myself what it was that we had covered and what we needed to continue working on. In looking back to the literature review, self-evaluation was found to be a significant component of the formative assessment process. I can see how, if utilized over a longer time frame, this template would promote self-reflection and increase student accountability.

Continued learning on the part of the teacher was just as important to the study. As mentioned in the literature study, both the art of formative assessments and the balanced literacy framework require a considerable amount of knowledge to implement properly (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Clark, 2010; Gambrell & Morrow, 2015; Houck, 2013). Though this is still an area I will need to continue developing, it became clear that continued learning is part of the process. For example, in order to respond to the needs of
my students I could not rely solely on the knowledge base that I had built throughout the literature review process. Throughout the entire study the reflection journal revealed that I was constantly referencing texts, authors, or other resources provided through professional development opportunities. I believe this is in part due to the fact that all students have a unique set of skills that they bring to the classroom, and it takes time to learn about them and the appropriate instructional strategy.

Another powerful theme that emerged was the importance of the minilesson. The work done by Foutas & Pinnell (2001) strengthened the idea of what the minilesson should entail and the flexibility that it provides to educators. The research study was the first time I felt as if I was utilizing the whole group lesson to continue the work started in individual conferences. Before the study it felt as if they were two separate components, where the whole group lesson covered one thing and individual conferences did another. As expressed in chapter four, I not only set goals with each participant but I also looked for ways I could tie that into our minilesson. One example is that I realized what I should be listening for when students are reading with their partner. Before the research study I used to focus mostly on making sure all students were actively engaged in the task.

Organization also played a huge role in responding to students’ needs and utilizing time. If materials were not readily available, I found myself flipping through a binder of materials trying to prepare for conferences or to record observations. Though I had an organizational system in mind prior to the study, small adjustments needed to be made. This was more of a trial and error type process to see what would work. I came to
find that I could merge the new tools, such as the feedback template, with the current systems I had in place. For example, each student already has a section within my conference notes binder and there is a space for the calendar. Throughout the study I added the feedback template, observation forms, and student profile sheet to each students section of the binder. I also added the planning guide to the calendar section so that all materials could be in one, easy to access location.

There was one final theme that emerged as I began formulating the specific data collection methods and the data analysis sections. As mentioned in chapter three, three major phases arose throughout the research study which included identifying student needs, responding to student needs within a balanced literacy classroom, and monitoring student progress. These three phases allowed me to see how formative assessment data could be implemented, and answer my research question, *how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students?* I moved from thinking about formative assessments as one specific tool at the beginning of the study, to realizing what the process realistically could look like within my classroom.

I witnessed the powerful ways various formative assessment tools helped me better understand my students and what their needs were (Serravallo, 2014). Tools in phase one included running records (Calkins, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), observation forms, and the student profile sheet. Once student needs were identified, I moved to phase two—responding to student needs. Within this phase I used the planning guide to identify areas of the reading workshop that could be leveraged to provide explicit instruction for each
student. I also met with students during a goal setting conference, where the feedback template was implemented (Hattie, 2012). The final stage, monitoring student progress, allowed me to evaluate the effectiveness of my instruction and the techniques I had utilized. In most cases, I had to adjust what strategies I utilized with each student either because they clearly were able to apply the strategy on their own or because it was not a good fit with the book they were reading. Each phase allowed me to see how powerful the formative assessment process is to learning, and how interconnected it is when it comes to effectively implementing the balanced literacy framework. In my mind, I can’t see how you can implement a balanced literacy framework without utilizing the formative assessment process because the framework hinges on being able to identify and respond to individual student’s needs.

Implications for Education

The literature review revealed that the purpose of the formative assessment process is to gain an awareness of students’ current knowledge base, based on where students are at, adjust instruction, and then provide feedback to students to continue to help them make progress (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Chan et al., 2014; Clark, 2010; Cornelius, 2014; Hattie, 2009; Hudesman et al., 2013; Roskos & Neuman, 2012; Wiliam et al., 2004). The review also exposed how this process fits within a balanced literacy framework.

After exploring possible tools that could be used in both the formative assessment process and within a balanced literacy framework in the literature review, the specific
data collection methods of chapter three were selected and then implemented with students. While implementing the research methods throughout the study, I realized how the formative assessment process could realistically be utilized within a balanced literacy classroom. Both the findings of the literature review and the reflections of the research study have implications for classroom teachers, building teams including the building administrator, and district administrators.

Implications for classroom teachers. Based on the recommendations of the literature review and attempts to create a valid qualitative research study, multiple formative assessments were used to collect data and identify student needs. Having multiple data points was found to be an important part of the study to ensure realistic and achievable goals were set. The student profile sheet proved to be an effective tool to gather and analyze the data, and look for patterns or themes for each student. In looking back on classroom teaching experience, I have not always triangulated the data before setting goals for students. If teachers are to utilize data to drive their instruction, it would be wise to include multiple data points to gain a true picture of the reader.

The beginning of the literature review was dedicated to defining formative assessments and exposed that educators would be wise to view it as a process. A process inadvertently takes more time to implement than one new assessment technique. Due to the amount of time it took throughout the study to identify and establish goals for six participants, and knowing classroom teachers have a much larger student population to work with, it would also be wise to give the process time. Ideally, the formative
assessment process should continue throughout the school year and be applied to any unit of study. Earlier in the chapter I expressed that all students progressed at different paces, and so the amount of time needed to master a various skill will be different for each student.

Monitoring and adjusting instruction, differentiating instruction, and meeting student needs are all concepts that are currently being promoted within the educational field. In order to begin to adjust instruction it is important to identify what students’ needs are. The study exposed that a variety of tools must first be used to identify what needs are. Once that was accomplished, future instruction could be planned. It is also important to utilize the components of the workshop to allow multiple opportunities to practice new skills. After implementing new instruction, formative assessment data can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the techniques used. Without formative assessments monitoring and adjusting instruction would not have been effective.

Providing feedback to students was a major component of effectively implementing the formative assessment process. The literature review revealed that feedback has been proven to have a significant impact on student learning, if implemented properly. It is important that classroom teachers develop a clear understanding of what type of feedback is effective and then move into applying it within the classroom. Within the research study I found the feedback template conserved classroom time and held students accountable for their goals. Feedback should also be ongoing and help students make progress from where they currently are. I found feedback to be helpful when it was
specific and helped the student move forward. Progress was limited if the feedback was too ambiguous or just focused on what they had done.

**Implications outside of the classroom.** Though the research study focused primarily on implementing concepts in a 5th grade classroom, implications also exist for the teams working together at the building level. The literature review exposed the idea that data can be utilized within the RTI process to make crucial decisions about what services, or interventions, would best meet student needs (Dorn, 2010). This is critically important, especially when we think about the student population, typically those performing significantly below grade level, who are being serviced by intervention programs outside of the classroom. For interventionists or RTI teams, it is important that multiple assessments be utilized to determine which services would best match what the students’ needs are. It is also important to collaborate with the classroom teacher to ensure the students they are servicing have the opportunity to practice skills both within the classroom, and with the intervention specialist.

Another concern exists outside of the classroom, specifically concerning administrators in charge of making decisions about curriculum or programing. Since implementing a balanced literacy framework was outside of my control, and established by the district, I feel it is important that administrators recognize the need for professional development or training in this area. When implementing a balanced literacy framework, it is critical to extend teacher knowledge base of literacy skills and its essential components. This is especially important when considering the fact that how it is
implemented can be ambiguous and tailored to the individual instructor. Another area of
development would be how the formative assessment process can be utilized to
effectively implement the balanced literacy model. The reason for this is because both
rely upon having an acute understanding of what students’ needs are in order to plan
future instruction. Another reason is that the independent reading portion of the reading
workshop, one area within the balanced literacy framework, relies upon adapting
instruction to meet the individual needs of students. The literature review discussed ways
the independent reading time varies from sustained silent reading, included the fact that
explicit instruction is provided to readers through conferences, strategy groups, or guided
reading groups. These items need to be addressed if we expect the model to have a
positive impact on student learning.

Aside from the initial implementation and continued professional development,
district leaders should advocate for the evaluation of more than just summative
assessment data. Too often teachers are left to analyze standardized test scores, which are
difficult to translate into effective classroom practices. There is a time and place to
evaluate summative test scores, and the objective of this section is not to launch into an
educational debate on high-stakes testing. Rather, it is to advocate that leaders facilitate
discussions around the formative assessments process and how formative assessment data
can be utilized. This could be done through professional development days, staff
meetings, professional learning communities (PLCs), or individual teacher evaluations. I
believe a powerful method would be through the use of PLCs because the purpose is to
utilize data and respond by adjusting future instruction.
Limitations

Though there were many positive implications to this research study, they were accompanied by a number of limitations. Limitations are not unique to this study alone, but simply are a reality when conducting an action research study. The following section will outline what the key limitations were.

This specific research study was conducted within a 5th grade classroom, specifically within the area of reading, and conducted over a two week time frame. It included six participants, and relied on qualitative research methods, with the researcher taking the role of an active participant observer. Since I was taking an active role within the research model, I did not have an opportunity to participate in being a passive observer. Taking on the role of a passive observer, and not being responsible for teaching the entire day, might have exposed patterns or themes within the current classroom model that I was unaware of in the active participant role. This might have provided an opportunity to reflect upon my current teaching practice and expose areas of improvement (Mills, 2011, p. 75). Being a passive observer might have given me the opportunity to gather field notes in real time, versus the reflection journal that I conducted at the end of each day. Again, this might have exposed information or patterns that I did not pick up on since I had this study to conduct and other content areas to teach for the day. Due to the reality of my classroom situation I chose to take an active observer role so that I could carry out all of my teaching responsibilities.
This study took a qualitative research approach, due to the timeframe and nature of the research question. The following limitations relate to the nature of the research study, such as length of time, participants, and research paradigm. If the time frame were extended, other quantitative methods could have been utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing formative assessments. This would have changed the study to a mixed methods approach and helped to validate the study. Because no quantitative data was collected, conclusions needed to be drawn based on my observations.

Another limitation was the limited timeframe of the study. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the study did not allow enough time for participants to master a skill once it was selected as their goal. More time could have provided students with opportunities to master their goal and would have shown how future instruction would have been modified in response. More time would have also allowed for students to adapt to the new instructional tools, such as utilizing the feedback chart in their reader’s notebook. Throughout the research study I found myself focusing primarily on the minilesson and individual conferences, two of the reading workshop components. If more time were available I could have worked to incorporate other components, such as strategy groups or peer feedback.

A final limitation was the nature of the group selected. Because my focus was on meeting the diverse needs of the readers within my classroom I selected six participants that mirrored the range of reading levels for the class as a whole. Working exclusively with one sub-group of students, such as students below grade level or those classified as
gifted and talented, might have provided more insight into working with specific student populations. For example, if the group of participants was exclusively composed of GT students the focus would have been on challenging readers. Common strategies might have emerged as being effective for challenging those readers that are already above grade level or ways to help maintain growth.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Based on the limitations presented in the previous section, one suggestion for future research would be to extend the timeframe for the research study. This would have allowed more time for phase three, monitor student progress. While monitoring student progress I would have had more opportunities to adjust instruction. The majority of the study was dedicated to observing, recording data, analyzing data, setting goals with students, and beginning instruction towards meeting those goals.

Another suggestion would be to utilize metacognition and self-evaluation throughout the research study. During the literature review metacognition arose as a key component of the formative assessment process. In extending the timeframe of the research study, I could have utilized the feedback template to increase students’ self-awareness and evaluation. Ultimately, the goal would have been to increase student accountability and achievement. Another area to incorporate metacognition would have been in the strategies implemented during individual conferences, or even the minilesson. This would have been an ideal strategy to teach to a larger group, and then continue to work on individually.
A final suggestion would be to incorporate other components of the reading workshop. This was addressed when discussing how the two week timeframe limited the research study. With more time to work with, patterns could have been evaluated to see which students would benefit from a strategy lesson. I could have then worked to craft a strategy lesson and use formative assessment data to evaluate its effectiveness.

Summary

Throughout the five years that I have been teaching fifth grade I have worked with students from a wide range of student reading levels, from struggling readers to those classified as gifted and talented, and everything in between. It has occurred enough to realize that it is not a fluke, or the result of chance. Instead, this situation has become a reality. I have also come to learn that I can attempt to recreate the wheel each year, looking for the next best thing or I can find a more sustainable approach to meeting the needs of all my students.

This research study was formulated around the idea that within my classroom there will be a diverse set of readers, yet all deserve the opportunity to find success throughout the school year. I have come to realize how powerful formative assessments can be as I worked to answer my research question, how can formative assessments be utilized within a balanced literacy framework in order to respond to the reading needs of 5th grade students? Both the literature review and the action research redefined formative assessments as a process that can be used to meet the diverse needs of students because they allowed me to get to know students, respond to student needs by setting goals and
planning future instruction, and monitor progress. With how lost I felt at the beginning of the research study, I am amazed at the clarity this research study brought. I am walking away with a process that is not only grounded in current research, but one that I know I can continue to implement as a part of my current teaching practice within a balanced literacy framework.
APPENDIX A

Parent Consent Letter
February 15, 2016

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently a graduate student at Hamline University, St. Paul, MN, working on an advanced degree in literacy education. As part of my graduate work, I will be conducting research in my classroom from February 19 to March 11, 2016. The purpose of this letter is to ask permission for your child to take part in this research study. It is important to note that this research is public scholarship. The abstract and the final product will be cataloged in the Hamline Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. It may be published and used in other ways. In all cases, your child’s identity will remain confidential. The research study will be looking at how I can utilize formative assessment data to respond to individual student needs, within the area of reading. As part of a balanced literacy framework, formative assessments are one assessment tool that provides data which can then be used to plan future instruction or provide feedback to the student. The goal of this study is to increase student achievement in the area of reading, as well as increase my effectiveness as a reading teacher by responding to individual student needs.

As part of the research study, I will collect data from running records to assess what students are doing well as a reader and the skills they need to continue working on. From there, I will use that information to plan future lessons, in the form of large group lessons, small group lessons, or individual conferences. Observations from large group, small group, individual conferences, and reader’s notebook entries will also be included within the study. I will be making observations on the specific skill each student is working towards mastering and if progress is being made towards mastering the skill. Student work from large group, small group, individual conferences, and reader’s notebook entries will be collected and analyzed. Work samples, such as notebook entries, may be excerpted and included in the capstone project. It is important to note that running records, small group, and individual conferences will be used with the entire class.

There is little to no risk for your child to participate. Slight risks could include a decline in academic gains due to the fact that they will be trying something new, however the potential benefits far outweigh the risks. All results will be confidential and anonymous. I will not publish information about individual students, such as their name, school, district or other characteristics that could be used to identify them.

Participation is completely voluntary. There are no negative consequences for not participating. You may withdraw your child from the project at any time without negative consequence.

I have received approval for my study from the School of Education at Hamline University and from the school principal, to conduct this study. The capstone will be catalogued in Hamline Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. My results might be included in an article, professional journal or a professional conference. In all cases your child’s identity will remain confidential.

If you agree to have your child participate, keep the first two pages of this document. Fill out the agreement page and return by mail, by copying and then emailing me, or by returning to no later than______________.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email or call me.

Amber Steinmeyer
Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Keep this full page for your records.

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be observing students and collecting data. I understand there is little to no risk involved for my child, that his/her confidentiality will be protected, and that I may withdraw or my child may withdraw from the project at any time.

I also understand that work samples belonging to my child will be collected, analyzed, and possibly excerpted in the capstone project.

Parent/Guardian Signature______________________________________________________

Date________________________________________________________________________

Participant Copy
Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Return this portion to Mrs. Steinmeyer by [date]

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be observing students and collecting data. I understand there is little to no risk involved for my child, that his/her confidentiality will be protected, and that I may withdraw or my child may withdraw from the project at any time.

I also understand that work samples belonging to my child will be collected, analyzed, and possibly excerpted in the capstone project.

Parent/Guardian Signature____________________________________________________

Date_______________________________________________________________________

Researcher Copy
APPENDIX B

Running Record
Running Record Sample

Book Title:_________________ Level:_____________ Date:__________________

Number of Words:_____________ Source:_____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>SC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Strategies Used:
Retell:

Comprehension Questions:

Next Steps:

Adapted from running records found in: *The Literacy Teacher’s Playbook* (Serravallo, 2014), *Guiding Readers and Writers* (Fountas & Pinnel, 2000)
APPENDIX C

Student Profile Sheet
# Student Profile Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Assessment/Date</th>
<th>Skills Mastered</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C-comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td>W-whole group lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A-accuracy</td>
<td></td>
<td>S-strategy group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td>I-individual conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V-vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from class profile sheet found in: The Literacy Teacher’s Playbook (Serravallo, 2014)*
APPENDIX D

Student Observation Form
Student Observation Form

Name:__________________________________________________________

Date:_______________                      Comments:___________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Date:_______________                      Comments:___________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Date:_______________                      Comments:___________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

APPENDIX E

Planning Guide
### Planning Guide Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(week day)</td>
<td>(week day)</td>
<td>(week day)</td>
<td>(week day)</td>
<td>(week day)</td>
<td>(week day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group Lesson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Group Lesson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from ‘Planning Your Week’ found in: *The Literacy Teacher’s Playbook* (Serravallo, 2014)
APPENDIX F

Feedback Template
Feedback- Teacher Copy Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Where Are They Going? What Are Their Goals?</th>
<th>How Are They Going? What Progress is Being Made Towards the Goal?</th>
<th>Where to Next?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback- Student Copy Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Where am I Going? What Are My Goals?</th>
<th>How am I Going? What Progress is Being Made Towards the Goal?</th>
<th>Where to Next?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Feedback Questions found in: Visible Learning: Maximizing Impact on Learning (Hattie, 2012)
APPENDIX G

Reflection Journal
Reflection Journal

Day 1-

Today I began the research phase for my capstone project. My research started with collecting data through the form of running records during the independent reading portion of our reader’s workshop. During that time, I was able to meet with four out of the six participants. Overall, I feel the assessments went well. As with any workshop, it felt as if I were juggling 23 balls in the air, hoping one didn’t come crashing to the ground and sending the whole cycle into a tail spin. I knew in the back of my mind that in order to do these assessments well I would need all other students to be successfully reading independently. We spent the whole group time reviewing our independent reading expectations. Once started, the assessment did take up a large portion of my time since students needed to read the passage, create a retell, and then answer questions. After analyzing the results that I have on the student profile sheet, I am noticing some have common goals even though they may not be at the same independent reading level. In the future, I would like to listen to students talk with their reading partners and analyze their reader’s notebook entries. This will give me a better view as to the type of instruction I need to plan.

Day 2-

Today students had to participate in the MN survey, which took up a portion of our literacy block. Also, two of the six students were absent. Today’s lesson was on what makes a solid inference and how to infer the meaning of unknown words. During the whole group lesson the strategy was modeled, but with time constraints will need to be continued tomorrow. During independent reading time I continued compiling my formative assessment data. This included finishing running records, listening to students read, and collecting reader’s notebook entries and reading logs. While I was analyzing their reader’s notebooks I started to see patterns emerging. Some of the goals identified in the running records held true across multiple settings. Some students have multiple goal areas, so I needed to identify which one I felt would be the most beneficial. This is the most difficult part—identifying what area would be the most efficient and beneficial use of students time and effort. Now that I have identified a goal area, I am planning to hold individual conferences with each student to go over what they are doing well and what goal we are going to continue working on. This is where the feedback sheet will come into play. I am thinking that I will have students glue this into their notebook. In looking forward to future whole-group lessons, I would like to try to make more observations while students are working with a partner. I am going to try to have a clipboard with the student observation form ready and with me while I am teaching. I would like to improve on utilizing this time to gather formative assessment data. I also am going to use the Reading Strategies Book: Your Everything Guide to Developing Skilled Readers to identify the specific strategies that I will use with each student.

Day 3-

I continued to gather formative assessment data on those students identified as needing to work on accuracy. To do this, I used part of our whole-group time to listen to what they were sharing with their partners. I wanted to ensure that I had multiple opportunities to assess their area of need. During the whole group lesson students practiced making inferences using an
informational text about the Titanic. Since the other assessments included listening to students read fictional texts, I thought it was nice to have an opportunity to listen to them read an informational piece. As expected, the students that I observed that needed to continue working on accuracy were the same students that showed they were in need of working on accuracy during the running record.

During our independent reading time, I worked with three of the six students to articulate what goal we would be working on. I started by identifying what they were doing well as a reader. Then, I had them identify a place in their reader’s notebook to glue in the feedback chart. I showed them areas where they needed to work on accuracy in the informational text, and then had them write in their own words what they needed to work on. From there I did a quick model of a strategy we would be working on. I will check in with these students on day five to further model this strategy and have them practice. I will use future running records to assess if they have met their goal and are ready to move on. I noticed that these specific students are those reading below grade level and seemed to benefit from the individual conference because we could look specifically at their miscues and go at their pace. I also noticed that many of the accuracy strategies listed in the resources books I have available are geared towards lower reading levels, in the primary grades. By the time they get to fifth grade, they know many of them but have yet to find success. This further supports the idea that the individual conference will benefit these students, versus always being in a strategy group, because if they are using a strategy that isn’t working I can monitor and adjust accordingly.

Tomorrow, I need to work with the other three students. It seems to work well if I focus on half of the students during the whole-group time and then confer with them during independent reading time. This allows me to have information from as recently as that day to use during our conference. I also notice that I have a difficult time keeping track, by taking notes or in more detail than simple observation, of how they all are doing, the whole workshop time. Because of this, I will try this same strategy again tomorrow. Since the other three students will need a similar strategy I’m thinking I will observe during the whole group time and then meet to set goals. With how much time it took me to confer with the three today, I might only have time to check in with the others.

Another thing I would like to change for the future, is to organize the profile sheet by student in my conferring binder. This is the organizational system I used prior to beginning my research. I will continue to keep the planning guide and observation sheets on my clipboard. Being organized helps me prepare for each conference and utilize our independent time efficiently.

As mentioned earlier, I have been using The Reading Strategies Book to plan individual lessons around student goals. At a workshop on conferring with readers, the following blog was brought up that gives examples of how others have used this tool:


Day 4-

Today I observed students during both independent reading and independent writing time. I noticed that the students who struggle with accuracy while reading also struggle with structural components of writing, such as adding in punctuation, capital letters, and spelling. Those that were working on higher level comprehension skills were more so working towards developing a big idea or theme in their memoir. I thought it was interesting to use information
across our literacy block and how that adds to what I already know about them. This also showed me what goals we could work on during independent writing time.

During our reading lesson I observed the other three students. They were mostly able to read the text without problems, and able to apply the strategy that we were working on for the day. I did notice that all six participants would benefit from more instruction on how to make inferences, not just about words they encounter, but to identify big ideas in the text. Because of this, I will incorporate that into tomorrow’s whole group lesson where we will take facts from the text and make inferences.

In planning for tomorrow’s individual conference time, I feel that the three students working on accuracy would benefit from an individual conference. They need repetition and practice, and though they are working on a similar skill, they are moving through that skill at different paces. It could be that I have more experience with individual conferences, but I feel I am better able to help individual students one-on-one because I can monitor and adjust based on what they are doing on the spot.

In our individual conferences today, I met with the other three students who are working towards deeper comprehension in fiction stories. We focused on articulating what their goals is and started with one strategy to use. For this I put the strategy on a post-it note and then had them make a reader’s notebook entry using that strategy. We talked through an example, and then I sent them off to practice on their own. I plan to check in with them tomorrow to see how their entries are going.

In preparing for this week’s individual conferences, I felt I needed more help structuring our time. I spoke with our literacy coach and borrowed the book *Conferring with Readers*, which is by the same author as *The Reading Strategies Book*. I wanted to ensure that I’m not jumping from strategy to strategy, but allowing students time to work towards their goal. Here I found great follow-up questions that I would like to use with my groups tomorrow:

- Can you show me some places where you (last teaching point)?
- How is (_) going?
- What has been tricky for you with (_)?

(Conferring with Readers, p.105)

Day 5

Today I met with two of the three students I planned to meet with for individual conferences. The third was absent from school. I used data from the previous days to plan how the conference would begin. I started with follow-up questions regarding the strategy discussed on day three. I thought this was an important first step to help students be accountable for what they are working on. Then, I had students read from the book they were in and look for places to practice. I noticed that one student attempted the strategy on their own, and with guidance, was able to pick up on it quickly. The other needed more prompting and modeling. For this particular student I noticed they need help noticing when they are not pronouncing the words correctly, where the other is ready to start alternating between strategies. This confirms that I will continue to work individually with these students, rather than in a strategy group for the time being.

I also checking in with the other three students who are working on deeper levels of comprehension. This was a very brief check in, where I asked how the strategy was going and clarified if needed. I also stated that I would meet with them on the following day.
In our whole group lesson, I decided to focus using details or facts from the text, to make inferences. It is clear that many of the participants can identify details from the text, but need to continue making inferences to understand the text at deeper levels.

The plan for day six is to check in with the two students I conferred with on day five, and have a more in-depth conference with the other four.

Day 6-

Today I structured the whole group lesson around helping readers determine which strategy to use and how to determine which one to use. After conferring with the six participants during the first week of research it was clear many need help articulating which strategy they are using and why. After modeling I had students read the remainder of the article with their partner where I listened in on their conversations. I was looking to see if they were able to apply the strategies. Some were able to do it on their own, others needed constant prompting. I have noticed that since I started this research project I have a better idea of what I am looking for when I listen in to partner conversations. Before, I was making sure everyone was on task. Now, I listen to see if they are practicing the strategy taught while also looking for opportunities to add onto or practice their individual goals. This seems to be beneficial especially for those who are reading below grade level. Overall, those participants seem more alert and engaged than before.

During independent reading time I worked with four out of the six participants due to the fact that one was gone on day 5. This time mostly consisted of reviewing their goal, and strategies discussed to meet that goal. Three of the four needed more time to complete their reader’s notebook entry or assistance with that. The conferences went well and we were able to build momentum off of the previous week.

I also spent time organizing my materials. I ended up putting documents in a binder, categorized by the student. However, I left the observation sheets on my clipboard so I could carry them around throughout the lesson and jot down observations on the spot. I organized them by student and placed a post-it note with their name so they would be easy to find.

Day 7-

I noticed today that the organization done on day 6 was beneficial to how today went. It was easy to find documents when I needed them, and I could easily remind students of what they had accomplished or what they need to continue working on. This organization also helped me make observations during other content areas.

During independent reading time I met with three of the participants. As with day 6, we continued working towards their goals. Two students were ready to build onto the strategy started in week one. However, their overarching goal of improving their accuracy remained the same. The other student still needs reminders, but I did notice that they selected a book that was at their level. This significantly improved their accuracy. I made sure to touch on this skill, selecting a good-fit book, and had them reflect on what they noticed. They mentioned it was easier for them to read and understand because it was at their level. We took time to celebrate this!

In looking ahead to planning the remainder of the research project, all participants will more than likely need to continue working towards the goals set at the beginning. However, in the future I might add a summative assessment in the form of a whole book assessment to assess their understanding of their independent book.
I also noticed that students have been more active and intentional in their reader’s notebook responses. This has been a place where I can tailor the instruction to their individual needs, and they know we will continue to work towards these goals. I have noticed growth in this area when you compare it to the observations I made at the beginning of this study.

Day 8-

Today I analyzed students’ responses to a passage, as part of a whole group lesson, to see if they would be able to identify the overarching theme. I especially wanted to use this information to see how my group that is working on comprehension are doing. One student was absent and will need to complete this at a later time. The others were able to identify the overall theme.

I met with three of the six participants, those that are working on deeper levels of comprehension. At this point in the study, all were in need of keeping the overall goal. However, I did notice the same strategy wasn’t as effective once students started switching books. One student continued to develop two strategies- a setting web and the character mistake/lesson t-chart and was very successful with it. One student had just switched back to a previous book, and was unable to apply the strategy without prompting. They did not go back to the start of the book, but continued where they left off. I’m wondering if this will impact their comprehension. I also felt that the previous strategy that worked in the other book wasn’t as effective. After class I researched the book and other strategies that might be more effective. I plan to use this on day 10.

Day 9-

Today two of the six students were absent. I was able to meet with two of the three that I had planned to work with. With changes to our daily schedule, I only had time to begin the whole group lesson. Since I will need to continue this on day 10, I was unable to make observations outside of independent reading time.

The two students I met with continue to make progress towards the goals set in week one. From my observations, they will need to continue this strategy. The strategies used with this group seem to be effective regardless of the text they are reading. With students having been gone throughout the week, I will use day 10 to check in with all of them and decide if they have met their goal and what would be best moving forward. I am thinking that all students will continue to work towards the goals set at the beginning of week one, since the formative assessment data has not shown that they have mastered their goal. This matches what I initially anticipated. Though they may need a new strategy, two weeks in not enough time to fully master the goals we set.

This was a more difficult day, and I felt as though we didn’t make as much progress due to time constraints and major changes in our schedule. However, it is a reality at the elementary level that happens quite often.

Day 10-

Since it was the last day of the study I spent time meeting with each of the participants to go over what they thought they were doing well and what to work on moving forward. Some student continued using the strategies we had discussed. For others, it was clear that the strategy they were using was not effective. This occurred because either it didn’t fit with them as a reader, or because it was difficult to apply to the book they were reading. I noticed with my
lower level readers, the strategy I recommended was beneficial and they continued with it. Those that were reading at a higher level either used a different strategy in conjunction, chose a new strategy from our class lessons, or needed something different entirely that they could better apply to the book they were reading. This supports my understanding of working with struggling readers, that they need more explicit instruction, and consistency and repetition. I was excited to see that one of the students chose a strategy from a whole group lesson, and applied it to their book.

I found it difficult to meet with all six participants during the 30 minute reading block. This was because of interruptions or needing to check in with other students, and needed more time to meet with each of the participants than I did throughout the week. I think this was because I needed more time to recap what they have been working on, monitor what was going well or what they thought they should work on, and then decide how to move forward. Though I had a plan going into each of the conferences, many changed once the reader was in front of me. I am thinking that this type of conference took more time when I had to do this with all of the participants, versus doing it as an as needed basis throughout the year.

Final Thoughts

In looking at the lessons throughout the two week study, I noticed that I went in with an overall idea of what the class would need instruction on. The formative assessments I used at the beginning of the study really helped me alter my instruction, either by synthesizing or expanding instruction. It also helped me know what to look for when as I listened to students discussing or reading with their partner. In this way I was able to move past monitoring for on task behavior, and providing instruction. I also felt that a two week time period was a good start, but not enough time for students to fully make progress. In this time, I could monitor what goals they should work on and if a strategy was working well. However, all participants will need continued instruction throughout the year to fully master the goals set. I also noticed that I put a great deal of emphasis on the mini-lesson and independent work time, and sacrificed the share at the end. This is an area I need to continue working on, and I think it would create more follow through.
APPENDIX H

Direct Observations
Comments: After reading the text aloud for a bit, starts tracking the text with finger. When comes to an unknown word attempts to sound out. Then repeats the word. Later chunks. Attempting multiple strategies, but unsure what to do if that doesn’t work. Miscues included: unreliable, unsanitary, conditions, translation. Possible goals: accuracy, knowing what to do if it doesn’t work. Looking at word parts.

Date: 2-25-16
Comments: While observing during independent writing time, noticed improvement in writing stamina. Writing more and getting started with less prompting. Noticed that they need to stop and add in punctuation and capital letters.

Date: 2-26-16
Comments: During independent reading, easily distracted by people around. Eyes wandering around the room, not in the book. Prompt and after more focused. Reading ‘Double Dog Dare’

Date: 2-26-16
Comments: ‘Double Dog Dare’ pg 143, couldn’t find notebook page. When asking how the strategies are going said ‘Good. Getting sentences, rereading and made more sense.’ Miscues included: pilled/piled asked what would make sense- maybe piled in front would make sense, of/off, stared/starting. Miscues look close to the word, but don’t always make sense.

Date: 2-29-16
Comments: During partner work with a grade-level text- miscue included expanse, retire. Asked to go back and say what they think retire means- ‘he quit for the night.’ Needed prompting to go back and look at word parts to determine a word. Not always questioning if miscues make sense.

Date: 3-1-16
Comments: Turned in ‘Double Dog Dare’, the book they were reading, back into the library. They did not finish it. Started reading ‘Batter Up’ by Jake Maddox which was a level P. Noticed this was a much better fit. When asked why they chose the book they said they used to play. They had read other books by the same author earlier in the year. Their accuracy was much higher. Self-correcting. Needed help with authentication. Prompted to skip, come back, and look at parts. Told them their accuracy was doing really well and curious why there was such a change, they said it was closer to their level. Had them articulate what they did.
Date: 3-3-16  
Comments: Finished previous book, reading ‘Linebacker Block’ a level M. Prompted to use notebook. No entries. While reading they self-corrected. When asked about it they said they thought it was another, but it was others so they went back and reread. Noticed an improvement— they were questioning to see if it made sense and self-correcting more often. Miscue included defensive/defense.

Date: 3-4-16  
Comments: Reading ‘Linebacker Block’ pg 54 with 100% accuracy. Noted goal and wanted to keep working towards that goal. Noticed they needed a new book. With success at a level M, prompted to select a independent reading book at a level O, their independent reading level.

Bailey

Date: 2-24-16  
Comments: Reading aloud with partner. Miscue: unrevieled/unveiled- first they skipped, then pointed and reread. Sometimes moves on even if it doesn’t make sense. Miscue: driving/dividing then went back and self-corrected. Miscue: selected. When asked what it meant, they inferred.

Date: 2-25-16  
Comments: Independent writing. Revising and editing draft. Still missing punctuation, many run on sentences. Writing is similar to how they read.

Date: 2-29-16  
Comments: Self-corrects area/arena, when asked said because it has an ‘n’ and doesn’t look right. Miscue- ease. Questions, not sure what it is, looks like easy. Self-corrects swish/single.

Date: 3-1-16  
Comments: Reading ‘Rump’ pg 58. When asked can you show me places you practiced strategy- wrote down ‘gold, gold, gold.’ Prompted to write page number in the future since it was hard to find the page and context. They continued to say that though it did not make sense, they continued reading unit it did. When asked how the strategy was going they said ‘good, when I don’t think it makes sense, I see if I can find what would.’ While listening to reading, reading strange-led instead of strangled. Practiced alternating between strategies- reread, look at word parts, reread, read on, go back and question.

Date: 3-1-16  

Date: 3-1-16  
Comments: Reading during social studies- ‘Science and Medicine.’ Miscues: was/were, -/conveniences, -/curable, needs more prompting to go back and correct. Practicing writing down facts and inferences.
| Date: 3-2-16 | Comments: Reading ‘Rump’ and accuracy getting better. Self-correcting more on own. Few miscues. Miscues look similar to word- stuck/sucked. Had to prompt to question. Used chart in notebook to put where going next. |
| Date: 2-23-16 | Comments: Whole group lesson, possible goals accuracy and fluency. Independent reading- ‘The Elementia Chronicles’ didn’t know the title, but said it looked interesting. When asked why said that the cover looks fun and it was a Minecraft story. When asked to listen to them read they started in the middle of the sentence. Rereads. Miscues include: sectionized/sectioned, filled/filling, sigh houted/silhouetted. Often changes the endings of the word. Needs to work on accuracy. Prologue- beginning to play Minecraft. Writing a word into inference chart used in whole group lesson. |
| Date: 2-24-16 | Comments: During independent reading they were reading a nonfiction article about the titanic, topic we were reading about during whole group. Tone was flat versus when they were reading fiction. |
| Date: 2-25-16 | Comments: Independent writing- they lost their story, then started and recycled, changed from sports to writing about dog. Noticed they were missing the punctuation but were using capital letters. |
| Date: 2-29-16 | Comments: Whole group lesson- miscues included message/messages, telegraphy, passenger, spawn/ span, and play/paid. They self-corrected twice. Noticed need to work on accuracy. |
| Date: 3-1-16 | Comments: Notebook checking- continuing to alternate between all. Miscue: spawn/span. When I wrote down spawn and then span, they said ‘Oh there’s no W before’ and then self-corrected. When got to ‘skeptically’ they pointed to the word. When got to ‘irritable’ prompted to continue reading on, asking what would make sense there and they said ‘crabby.’ I noted to keep working on this strategy. |
| Date: 3-4-16 | Comments: Independent reading- when got to ‘corridor’ tried to sound out, then skips, when I didn’t tell what it was they looked at the post-it note with the strategies covered which included –chunk, skip, reread, question. Then said ‘I think it means middle’ then reread. |
Noticed they are doing much of this on their own without prompting. I noticed that if I did not provide the strategy they used the resources they had. As we continued reading, the character came to a hallway. They wrote the word in their reader’s notebook and what they think it is. Practiced using text clues to confirm or change idea.

Dan

Date: 2-23-16
Comments: Independent reading- Charlie Bone Series. Able to explain little details that have happened throughout the story. Unable to pull all together to show a greater theme.

Date: 2-25-16
Comments: Independent writing- using mentor text ‘Eleven’ to help draft memoir. Needed to redraft to add in punctuation and paragraphs. Overall, had a bigger theme. Referred to self in 3rd person.

Date: 2-25-16
Comments: Whole group lesson- reread sentence, able to use context to determine ‘society’ in a nonfiction text. Talking with partner. Willing to share to the group what they found after recording in graphic organizer.

Date 2-26-16
Comments: Needed time to complete their reader’s notebook entry on ‘The Hero Two Doors Down.’ Noticed they switched books. They said they were taking a break from the other series because a friend had recommended it. They had not finished the book before switching.

Date: 3-1-16
Comments: Independent reading- While finishing ‘Hero Two Doors Down’ asked ‘what’s an epilogue?’ Talked through what thought it meant based on content, location, etc. Noticed no notebook entries. Prompt to take out. Working on theme. Said ‘don’t judge people, accept them for who they are. Went back to ‘Charlie Bone.’

Date: 3-3-16
Comments: Checking in on strategy. Reading ‘Charlie Bone’ Ask questions while reading-why did they tell the story? What lessons did the character learn? While checking in, noticed that they lost momentum from reading a different story. Will check in the following day after they had a chance to reread. Strategy- record the character’s mistakes and possible lessons.

Date: 3-4-16
Comments: Checking in on ‘Charlie Bone.’ They said there was not a mistake the character was making. Wrote down time twister as a theme. Moved to making a character web and list themes. Still continue to work on strategy. Noticed needed to find a strategy that worked for them and the book they were reading.
Emily

Date: 2-23-16
Comments: Independent reading- ‘Mr. Lemocello’s Library.’ Had a hard time picking a book, asked a friend and this is what they recommended. Their post-it notes held many predictions. Lots of thinking and predicting.

Date: 2-25-16
Comments: Independent writing- they questioned if they should add in more narrative into their memoir. They were focusing on redrafting. Good structure, included life lessons, and accurate punctuation.

Date: 2-25-16
Comments: Whole group- able to determine ‘society’ in article as ‘a group of people based on that it said different classes.’ Talked with partner and recorded thoughts in graphic organizer.

Date: 2-26-16
Comments: Needed more time to complete their reader’s notebook entry practicing the strategy.

Date: 2-29-16
Comments: When asked how the strategy was going the said they would like to keep working on it. In their book they noted that it was tricky to find mistakes the character made. For example, it might not have been the right decision but it helped them in the game. Read a little together. Able to see characters would do anything to win no matter who he put down. Talked about what that meant. Needed more prompting to talk about a lesson by asking questions.

Date: 3-1-16
Comments: Writing many mistakes under lesson side. Prompt to look deeper for lesson. Like how she overreacted and made assumptions that turned out to be wrong. Needs help relating to write a deeper lesson or thoughts. Like do you think that was ok, or is that a choice you would make or what do you think they should have done? Successfully moved past predictions with prompting.

Date: 3-4-16
Comments: Notebook entries very literal details instead of lessons. Instead, moving to a Question-Answer-Theme chart.

Felix

Date: 2-23-16
Comments: Independent reading- ‘Anne of Green Gables.’ Noticed that they were able to select a text that was at a higher, more challenging level for them. This was a strategy that we had been working on prior. When asked why they chose this book they said the main character talks a lot and they liked that. They understand the tone of the text. While listening to them
read, few places phrasing was a bit off. Instead of reading a statement they changed it to a question.

Date: 2-25-16
Comments: Independent writing- lots of great ideas, structure is good. They have a good start to the essay. In the narrative portion there is good dialogue and punctuation. Missing theme or life lesson- tie into reading goal.

Date: 2-25-16
Comments: Whole group lesson- offered to read aloud to class. Repeats the same spot- ‘among other things…position in society.’

Date: 2-26-16
Comments: Check in on how strategy was going- character chart with mistakes and lifelessons. Had two entries written. They noted that it was tricky, sometimes it was hard when they’ve never experienced what is happening in the book so they weren’t sure what a life lesson would be. Worked through an example together.

Date: 2-29-16
Comments: What is going well? ‘It’s helping me react to the book.’ What’s tricky? ‘Finding life lessons.’ Noticed words like slate, scholars, and aisle were tricky. They could read them, but needed to use the context to determine what they were referring to. Gave the option to use a setting web to help with understanding the time. Went through examples together- like how they speak or what they wear.

Date: 3-1-16
Comments: Moved to a setting web to help better understand the decade. They went to the about the author section and noticed the date 1874. Thought that maybe the author wrote it about what life was like then. They noticed many great setting clues- tie into larger theme next time.

Date: 3-3-16
Comments: Strategy- setting web. When asked how it was going they stated ‘the setting web really helped me to use clues to see what it was like back then.’ Then talked about larger theme or lesson. This strategy seemed to help them learn more about the character Anne. Wants to move on to using a Venn Diagram because they finished the first book and want to compare theme across texts.
REFERENCES


http://ezproxy.hamline.edu:5025/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=142164d2-34b4-493f-879e-55a9e69a8a1e%40sessionmgr115&vid=1&hid=110


http://ezproxy.hamline.edu:5025/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=1ccf749a-7cee-4bd8-8db0-baa960d595c4%40sessionmgr110&vid=36&hid=110


http://ey9tu4hr4b.search.serialssolutions.com/?sid=36520&genre=article&title=Educational%20Assessment&atitle=Assessing%20to%20Teach%20%20F&author=Heritage%20Margaret&authors=Heritage%20Margaret%20Margaret%20Alison%20&date=20060901&volume=11&issue=3%2F4&spage=145&issn=10627197


http://ezproxy.hamline.edu:5025/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=07206a85-ea7d-4046-b8c0-2cb8101a7d90%40sessionmgr114&vid=4&hid=125


