Running head: Assessment practices and Reading Comprehension

Exploring the relationship between assessment for learning and students’ experiences in nonfiction reading comprehension.

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between the use of assessment for learning as an instructional methodology and students’ experiences in nonfiction reading comprehension. The participants in the study were from a convenience sample of 23 students in a grade five and six class at an elementary school on Vancouver Island. Of the 23 students, 18 consented to having their results included in the study. The mixed method research design included a quantitative pre- and post-nonfiction reading comprehension assessment (DART) and a qualitative post-survey that asked two questions. Between pre- and post-assessment tasks, an eight-week nonfiction reading comprehension instructional intervention took place, focusing on the use of clear learning intentions and success criteria, specifically targeting ‘interpreting text features’.

This study confirmed that when students are provided with clear learning intentions and success criteria, they have greater access to clarity of understanding regarding what is expected of them, what they were doing well, and how to improve. The results from the study not only showed improvement in students’ use of nonfiction reading comprehension strategies but also revealed students’ perceptions of how clear learning intentions and success criteria help them to be successful in a learning environment.
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Chapter 1: Problem to be Investigated

Purpose of the Study

The problem investigated in this study is the lack of understanding that students encounter when they are not provided clarity regarding what they are expected to learn in a given lesson. Imagine being coaxed onto an airplane to go on a journey without knowing where you are going, why you are going and how long you will be gone. Being subjected to these uncertainties would naturally feel uncomfortable. And yet this is likely what many students experience when faced with lessons that have been launched without explanation as to the intent, direction, or how to arrive at the undisclosed destination. Moss, Brookhart, and Long (2011) stated, “[t]he first thing students need to learn is what they’re supposed to be learning” (p. 66). Providing students with a clear sense of purpose is one of the most important steps to supporting learning and is often overlooked in the urgency to get the learning journey started (Moss, Brookhart, & Long, 2011).

The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between assessment for learning and students’ experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text. Assessment for learning is the use of assessment to support learning while the learning is happening (Stiggins, 2009). Assessment for learning is an instructional methodology that can be used to improve clarity of understanding for students in terms of what they are expected to learn and how to reach specific learning goals. “Assessment for learning begins when teachers share achievement targets with students, presenting those expectations in student-friendly language accompanied by examples of exemplary student work” (Stiggins, 2007, p. 22). The focus of the study was to examine and compare pre- and post-standardized reading assessment results after clear learning intentions and success criteria were used as an intervention embedded within explicit reading comprehension instruction.
Assessment for learning is promoted within the current instructional methodology in School District No. 71 (Comox Valley). Teachers in the district are increasingly aware of assessment for learning as best practice and are becoming more and more comfortable with using the strategies as a framework for assessment and instruction in their classrooms. Exploring the relationship between assessment for learning strategies and students’ experiences in nonfiction reading comprehension was a relevant study within the context of current district-wide initiatives to support student achievement in reading comprehension. All elementary schools in the district routinely administer a standardized reading assessment called DART (District Assessment of Reading Team), to grades 3 through to grade 7, as a data collection instrument used to determine nonfiction reading comprehension and fluency levels. In the current study, the DART assessment was conducted with a grade 5 and 6 convenience sample in two forms: as a pre-assessment for learning (formative) in September and as a mid-year assessment of learning (summative) in December. Once the results of the pre-DART were coded in the fall using the BC Reading for Information Performance Standards Quick Scale, the findings were used as an assessment for learning tool to inform instruction and as a pre-assessment for the purposes of comparison in the research. The post-DART was used as a summative assessment and results were compared to the pre-DART to explore evidence of student achievement.

The goal of the current study was to explore the effectiveness of assessment for learning as an instructional methodology; to advocate for its increased use, particularly in reading comprehension instruction, and ultimately, to empower students with an awareness of what they can expect to learn and what success looks like at the outset of a learning journey (Stiggins, 2009).
Justification of the Study

Low achievement is often the result of students not having a clear understanding of what is required of them (Black & Wiliam, 1998). What can teachers do differently to ensure that their students have a clear sense of what they are being asked to do? They can involve their students in using assessment information to guide their own learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) reviewed more than 250 articles by researchers from around the world, seeking empirical evidence regarding the link between assessment practices and student achievement. Their extensive research concluded that assessment practices must change. Traditionally the role of assessment has been to sort or rank students in terms of their achievement. Black and Wiliam (1998) used the phrase “poverty of practice” (p. 141) to describe long-established approaches to assessment and instruction such as marking, rote learning, and an emphasis on quantity over quality in relation to learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) identified that in an environment where work completion and marking carry a greater emphasis than the actual learning process, students typically have an impatience for getting to the right answer quickly and avoid tasks that appear difficult. Black and Wiliam (1998) further described that in classrooms where the focus is on summative test scores and grading, students spend most of their time trying to figure out how to get the best marks rather than focusing on learning. Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, and Wiliam (2005) described traditional approaches to instruction and assessment as teaching a concept for a period of time, and then, at the end of the unit of study, determining who has learned the concept and who has not. Merely sorting or ranking students according to achievement is no longer good enough. Assessment practices must support students in knowing what they are doing well, and how to improve.
Stiggins (2009) warned, from their first experiences at school, students begin to define themselves as learners. Those students who have an accumulation of positive experiences begin to see themselves as able learners, while those students who have recurrent difficulties begin to determine that they are incapable of learning. What can teachers do to help their students feel capable of learning? Leahy et al. (2005) declared “a shift from quality control in learning to quality assurance” (p. 19) is necessary. Rather than merely using assessment to verify learning, teachers must use assessment to support learning and help all learners succeed. Stiggins (2007) recognized “the mission of schools has changed” (p. 22).

Students have an important role in the assessment environment and are better equipped to be successful when they know what success looks like (Stiggins, 2009). Assessment for learning is not merely a one-time event but an ongoing process where assessment evidence informs instruction. Considering evidence from assessment for learning practices, teachers adjust their ongoing lessons and activities to ultimately improve student learning. Within the assessment for learning process students also examine assessment evidence and learn how to use it to adjust or change what they are doing to move their learning forward. Using assessment practices to inform instruction and support the specific learning needs of all students “is at the heart of effective teaching” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p.140).

While the purpose of comprehension instruction is to help students acquire meaning from text and be able to communicate their understanding; how can teachers best support this? To become competent readers, proficient in constructing meaning from text and expressing understanding, students require explicit instruction (Ness, 2011). Assessment for learning as an instructional methodology may help to improve student achievement in nonfiction reading comprehension. The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between the
use of clear learning intentions and success criteria and students’ experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text.

Research Question and Hypothesis

What is the relationship between the use of assessment for learning and students’ experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text?

The current study intended to seek evidence that the use of assessment for learning strategies might positively impact students’ experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text. It was hypothesized that when teachers frame reading comprehension instruction with clear learning intentions and success criteria, students might have greater access to clarity regarding what is expected of them, what they are doing well, and how to improve, which may result in positive learning experiences and improvement for students in nonfiction reading comprehension.

Definition of Terms

Assessment for learning is the use of assessment practices to support learning. Leahy et al. (2005) outlined five strategies that encompass assessment for learning: clarifying and sharing learning intentions and success criteria with students, engineering effective classroom discussions through questioning, providing descriptive feedback that moves learning forward, activating students as the owners of their own learning and activating students as instructional resources for one another. Specifically, the use of clear learning intentions, and success criteria were the focus of this study. Providing a clear learning intention in student-friendly language can help students have a better understanding of the purpose behind what they are learning. Offering students explicit criteria or having them participate in developing criteria can lead to a greater sense of awareness and direction for students to achieve the learning goal.
Achievement can be defined as reaching or attaining a desired objective. In this study, student achievement in reading comprehension of nonfiction text was measured using DART (District Assessment of Reading Team, Brownlie, 2003) a standardized whole class performance based reading assessment. The assessment was administered in two forms: 1) a pre-test as an assessment for learning (formative) in September and 2) a post-test as an assessment of learning (summative) eight weeks later. DART results were coded using the BC Reading for Information Performance Standards.

Non-fiction reading comprehension was measured using the DART. Reading comprehension can be defined as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (Snow, 2002, p. 11). Capable readers are able to make connections between prior knowledge and new information. They can distinguish main ideas from supporting details in text, summarize, ask questions, visualize and draw inferences. Specifically, identifying main ideas and details, interpreting text features (graphs, maps, pictures), presenting information in a different way, making connections or inferences, and explaining the use of reading strategies were the focus of this study. These reading comprehension strategies are encompassed by the criteria in the BC Reading for Information Performance Standards.

Nonfiction text is written work that is understood to be fact, based in truth about events, people or things, as opposed to fiction writing, which describes imaginary or invented ideas about events, people or things.

**Brief Overview of the Study**

This action research project explored the relationship between assessment for learning and students’ experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text. The specific focus of the
investigation was to examine grade 5 and 6 pre- and post-standardized reading assessment results after clear learning intentions and success criteria were used as an intervention embedded within explicit reading comprehension instruction. The pre-assessment was administered in September 2012. Results from the pre-assessment were used as formative assessment and informed nonfiction reading comprehension instruction. An instructional intervention focusing on the use of clear learning intentions and success criteria, specifically targeting ‘interpreting text features’ followed and took place for eight weeks, with a post-assessment occurring in December 2012. Both the pre- and post-assessments were coded using the grade 5 and 6 Reading for Information Performance Standards Quick Scales, from the BC English Language Arts grade 5 and 6 Integrated Resource Packages. Pre- and post-assessment results were analyzed and compared to explore the relationship between assessment for learning as an instructional intervention and student experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text. To investigate how the use of clear learning intentions and success criteria affected the individual participants’ perceptions of learning targets and criteria, two anonymous paper based survey questions were administered at the conclusion of the study.
Chapter 2: Background and Review of Related Literature

Assessment for Learning: Building a Culture of Success

Assessment for learning is driven by what teachers and students do and how they interact. Teachers and students are partners in the learning process (Stiggins, 2007). As recognized by Senge et al. (2000) “learning does not occur in any enduring fashion unless it is sparked by the learner’s own ardent interest and curiosity- which in turn means that learners need to see where they want to go and assess where they are” (p. 59). Kaser and Halbert (2009) outlined specific assessment for learning strategies teachers can incorporate into their classroom practice to provide students with the skills they need to assess where they are in their own learning, and see where they want to go. Establishing a sense of ownership is pivotal. Including students in decision-making and offering choice has a significant and favorable impact on work ethic and responsibility. Having a clear learning intention can help students understand the purpose behind what they are being asked to do. The learning intention answers the questions “What are we doing?” and “Why is this important?” Providing students with success criteria or having them participate in developing success criteria can lead to a greater sense of awareness and direction. The success criteria, serving as a road map, answers “What does quality work look like?” “How do I get there?” and “What do I need to improve?” Further, offering personalized descriptive feedback to individual learners on a regular basis moves their learning forward.

Over time, students develop confidence in recognizing their own strengths and what they need to improve. Asking thoughtful questions to reveal evidence of learning and having expectations that stimulate individual responsibility for thinking further activates learner engagement. Empowering students to work as partners, to coach each other and offer feedback also contributes to a sense of ownership and commitment. Black and Wiliam (1998) recognized
the importance of cultivating a classroom “culture of success” (p. 142), beginning with the belief that all students can achieve. Assessment for learning can be the framework for establishing a classroom culture of success. Students can benefit from the use of assessment for learning strategies in many ways. By knowing what success looks like, and by experiencing success, students can begin to experience increased confidence. This increased confidence can contribute to a willingness to take risks and accept new learning challenges. Having a clear sense of purpose, students take greater responsibility for their schoolwork and own their own learning (Stiggins, 2002). Thus the current study sought to explore how assessment for learning practices were contributing to a culture of success, specifically in the area of nonfiction reading comprehension.

Assessment Practices, Motivation, and Achievement

Research has found that the use of assessment for learning increases student achievement. Wiliam et al. (2004) conducted an experimental study investigating the impact of assessment for learning practices on student achievement. The researchers acknowledged that although the use of assessment for learning practices leads to increased quality of learning, it is often said to be burdensome for teachers to incorporate assessment for learning into their classroom practice while still meeting the demands of curriculum, mandated testing and reporting. “[I]t appears as if there is a widespread belief that teaching well is incompatible with raising test scores” (Wiliam et al., 2004, p. 50). The focus of the Wiliam et al. study was to have selected teachers incorporate assessment for learning into their instructional practice and compare the performance of their students with that of students in classes where teachers had not included the intervention in their classroom instruction. It was important to the research design that assessment tasks administered to classes during the study were instruments that were already familiar to teachers
and students. The researchers were interested in finding out if students from the experiment groups would score higher on mandated tests than students who were in comparison groups.

The majority of the teachers involved in the Wiliam et al. (2004) study found that their teaching practices were fundamentally changed by the experience. Test scores of students in the experiment groups were found to exceed those of students in comparison groups. The strength of the relationship found between the intervention and student achievement was 0.32. The researchers were convinced that these findings “provided firm evidence that improving formative assessment does produce tangible benefits in terms of externally mandated assessments” (Wiliam et al., 2004, p. 63). Connecting to the current study, a standardized district reading assessment (DART) was administered both before and after an assessment for learning intervention to a convenience sample of grade 5 and 6 students. It was interesting to consider if results similar to Wiliam et al. (2004) might be found when assessment for learning strategies were used as an intervention between pre- and post-DART assessment events, to explore students’ experiences and achievement in reading comprehension of nonfiction text.

Klem and Connell (2004) conducted a study investigating the relationship between teacher support, student engagement, and academic success. Their research revealed that students who perceived their classes as having clear learning goals and expectations for success, reported higher levels of engagement. Higher levels of engagement were associated with increased student achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004). In a similar study Seidel, Rimmle, and Prenzel (2005) examined the foundational role of goal clarity and coherence in student learning. Their study revealed that students in classes with clear and consistent expectations for success progressed more quickly than students in classes without the intervention. (Seidel, Rimmle, & Prenzel, 2005). Over the course of the one-year study, the researchers also found that having
clear learning goals and explicit expectations for success had a positive effect on student achievement. In an earlier study, Fuchs et al. (1997) investigated the effects of “task-focused goals” (p. 514) on low-achieving students. Their findings revealed that students who participated in the intervention demonstrated increased effort, which in turn led to increased achievement. What these studies have in common is goal clarity. Students are better able to succeed in their learning when they have a clear understanding of the learning destination and how to get there (Moss, Brookhart, & Long, 2011). The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between the use of clear learning intentions and success criteria and students’ experiences and achievement in reading comprehension of nonfiction text.

Brookhart and DeVoge (1999) conducted a study investigating the effects of classroom assessment on student effort and achievement. The researchers set out to examine the relationship between how teachers communicate assessment and instruction with what students perceive as important to learn and how they perceive themselves as learners. The investigation was expected to reveal positive correlations among the variables which were defined as perceived task characteristics, perceived self-efficacy, effort, and achievement. The research design involved using observation, survey, and interview techniques. The quantitative and qualitative data collected from this study support the hypothesis that the classroom assessment environment and the assessment tasks themselves impact student effort and achievement. The researchers were able to draw two generalizations from their interviews with students: first, students’ perceptions of their ability to complete assessment tasks were based on previous experience with similar assessment tasks; and second, the relationship between student perceived self-efficacy and effort is complex. Results from some of the assessments revealed that perceived self-efficacy was not correlated with effort. Interview data illustrated that students
who did not expect a challenge from the assessment task typically would not expend much effort during the assessment task.

Although Brookhart and DeVoge (1999) found evidence that assessment practices can affect students’ attitudes and effort toward assessment, it is also important to further investigate the relationship between assessment practices and student achievement. The current study proposed to examine the use of assessment for learning strategies as an intervention within the assessment environment of nonfiction reading comprehension instruction. Using a standardized district reading assessment (DART) as a pre- and post-assessment tool, the current study explored the relationship between assessment for learning strategies and student experiences and achievement in reading comprehension of nonfiction text. Because the DART is an assessment task that is administered routinely at the school, from grades 3 to 7, the researcher wondered if student performance in completing the assessment tasks would in any way be influenced by previous experience with the assessment task. The researcher also wondered how the use of assessment for learning strategies affected students’ attitudes and effort toward nonfiction reading comprehension.

**Explicit Reading Comprehension Instruction**

To be able to comprehend written language, a child must be able to decode it, which means to be able to distinguish the discrete sounds in language and recognize them in print. Further, that child must be able to engage in these processes fluently enough that cognitive resources can be dedicated to comprehension rather than decoding (Lyon, 1998). Clearly, learning to read is a complex undertaking; teaching reading is equally complex. Block, Gambrell, and Pressley (2002) declared that when it comes to reading, comprehension is the most important thing. What exactly is reading comprehension? Harvey and Goudvis (2007) described reading
comprehension as the ability to construct meaning from written language, and outlined specific strategies that teachers can use, such as making connections, inferring, interpreting text features, and determining importance to support students in understanding what they read and expressing their understanding. Making connections to text was described as encouraging students to tap into their background knowledge while they read, and connect what they read to their own experience. To infer from text, students examine the evidence, such as words or pictures, connect the evidence to background knowledge and their own experience and pass judgment. Interpreting text features was described as gathering meaning from all the attributes in a piece of writing that support the main idea; the title, sub-titles, pictures, captions, and sidebar text. Determining importance is the process of identifying the main idea in a piece of text and distinguishing it from the supporting details. In the current study, clear learning intentions and success criteria were used to support students in interpreting text features while they read and in communicating a deeper understanding about what they read.

Schorzman and Cheek (2004) pointed out that although there are countless instructional resources available to support teaching reading comprehension strategies, “an investigation into the empirical support of these various strategies yielded an alarming lack of research” (p. 41). Schorzman and Cheek (2004) conducted their own study, which investigated the reading comprehension abilities of grade 6 students. Participants in the study included students from two different schools. Students at one school received an instructional strategy intervention in reading comprehension while students at the other school continued to receive the traditional district reading curriculum. Although the quantitative data collected from pre- and post-tests administered to each group were difficult to interpret, the results did suggest that student reading comprehension abilities were increased by the intervention (Schorzman & Cheek, 2004).
Ness (2011) conducted a study investigating the amount of instructional time teachers allocate to explicit reading comprehension instruction in elementary school. Upon considering the instructional practices of elementary teachers, three strands of inquiry were investigated: the degree to which elementary teachers in grades 1 through 5 include reading comprehension in their language arts programs, the percentage of instructional time allotted to reading comprehension instruction, and the specific reading comprehension strategies most regularly used by elementary teachers. In this study, two researchers, the author and a doctoral student, observed 3,000 minutes of classroom instruction over seven months. The intent of the observations was to document instructional choices made by individual teachers during their language arts instruction. The researchers were investigating how frequently explicit reading comprehension instruction was included in the language arts program. The data collected from this study revealed that explicit reading comprehension instruction made up 25% of language arts instruction. The findings also indicated that reading comprehension instruction occurred most frequently at grade 4 and that predicting, connecting to prior knowledge, answering questions and summarizing were the strategies most used by teachers.

Overall, the results of this study provide encouraging evidence that reading comprehension instruction in elementary school has increased since the research findings of Durkin (1978), whose study indicated less than one percent of classroom instruction was allotted to reading comprehension. This study relates to the current study in that it explored the frequency of explicit reading comprehension instruction in elementary school and “[b]y understanding the degree to which reading comprehension instruction occurs in elementary classrooms, we can begin to rethink the quantity and quality of explicit reading comprehension strategy instruction” (Ness, 2011, p. 112).
The purpose of reading comprehension instruction is to help students acquire meaning from text and be able to communicate their understanding. To become competent readers, proficient in constructing meaning from text and expressing understanding, students require explicit instruction (Ness, 2011). Assessment for learning as an instructional methodology may help to improve student experiences and achievement in nonfiction reading comprehension. The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between the use of clear learning intentions and success criteria and students’ experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text.
Chapter 3: Procedures and Methods

Description of the Research Design

This mixed methods action research study explored the relationship between assessment for learning and students’ experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text. The specific focus of the investigation was to examine grade 5 and 6 pre- and post-standardized reading assessment results after clear learning intentions and success criteria were used as an intervention embedded within explicit reading comprehension instruction. The pre-assessment was administered in September 2012. Results from the standardized reading assessment were used as an assessment *for* learning tool to inform nonfiction reading comprehension instruction and as a pre-assessment for the purposes of comparison in the research. An instructional intervention specifically targeting ‘interpreting text features’ followed and took place for eight weeks. Within this eight-week time span, students participated in two 60-minute nonfiction reading comprehension lessons per week. The post-assessment took place in December 2012. Both the pre- and post-assessments were coded using the grade 5 and 6 BC Reading for Information Performance Standards Quick Scales. The quantitative findings were analyzed and compared to seek evidence of the relationship between assessment for learning as an instructional intervention and students’ experiences and achievement in reading comprehension of nonfiction text. To further investigate how clear learning intentions and success criteria affected the individual participants’ perceptions of clear learning targets and criteria, two anonymous paper based survey questions were administered at the conclusion of the study.

Description of the Sample

The current study took place at an elementary school on central Vancouver Island. The school was an inner-city school with approximately 460 full time students which offers French
immersion kindergarten to grade 7, late French immersion grades 5 and 6, English kindergarten to grade 6, and an Aboriginal kindergarten/grade 1 program. 25% of the student population at the school is of Aboriginal descent. While all 23 grade 5 and 6 students enrolled in the researcher’s class were invited to participate in the study, the convenience sample resulted in 18 grade 5 and 6 students who had consent to participate anonymously in the study. A convenience sample is the appropriate type of sampling for an action research study where the researcher is interested in examining his classroom practices. Of the 18 participants, 10 were female and eight were male. The age range of the participants was 10-11 years old. Four of the participants included in the study were designated and therefore had Individual Education Plans to meet their specific learning needs; one was identified as learning disabled, one was identified as having moderate behavior and two were identified as having chronic health concerns. Knowing the complexity of learning needs in the convenience sample prior to launching the study helped minimize subject characteristics as a threat to internal validity (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Adaptations were put in place to support the unique learning needs of individual participants. For example, Kurzweil, a reading and writing software that assists learners who have disabilities, was made available to participants who required this support. The remaining 14 participants in the sample represented a wide range of academic ability. The population was considered vulnerable, thus free and informed consent was sought from parents/guardians of participants and the participants themselves before their data were included in the study.

**Description of the Instruments Used**

In this study, student achievement in reading comprehension of nonfiction text was measured using DART (District Assessment of Reading Team), a standardized whole class performance-based reading assessment (Brownlie, 2011). The DART assessment is a data
collection instrument regularly used in BC to determine nonfiction reading comprehension and fluency levels. It is an effective assessment tool because it corresponds directly with the BC Reading for Information Performance Standards. In this study the DART assessment was administered in two forms: as a pre-assessment for learning in September and a mid-year assessment of learning in December. To minimize the effect of testing as a threat to internal validity (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009), the nonfiction reading passages used for the pre-and post-assessments were different while the design of the assessment tasks was kept consistent. Both the pre- and post-assessment tasks (Appendices A and B) involved participants reading a nonfiction passage and completing written responses that targeted five specific reading comprehension skills: identifying main ideas and details (Question #1), interpreting text features (Question #2), presenting information in a different way (Question #3), making connections and inferences (Question #4), and explaining the use of reading strategies (Question #5).

Pre- and post-assessment results were coded using the grade 5 and 6 BC Reading For Information Performance Standards Quick Scale (Appendix C). The performance standards reflect the prescribed learning outcomes from grade 5 and 6 of the English Language Arts Integrated Resource Package and are a valid tool because they enable teachers to compare student performance to provincial standards. Further, the performance standards emphasize criterion-referenced assessment in which student work is compared to explicit criteria that can be used to support instructional decision-making. As such, instructional decisions during the intervention of the current study were based on what the performance standards identified as a common area of instructional need. Based on the pre-assessment findings, ‘interpreting text features’ was chosen as the targeted area of nonfiction reading comprehension instruction during the eight week intervention. In addition to the pre- and post-DART assessments, two
anonymous paper based survey questions (Appendix D) were administered to participants at the conclusion of the study. The purpose of the survey was to explore what this convenience sample of grade 5 and 6 students thought about having learning targets and criteria while learning to read nonfiction text. The survey enabled the researcher to examine the perceptions of individual participants regarding the use of these assessment for learning strategies and its perceived impact on their learning. The survey questions stated: "Does having a learning target help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?" and "Does having criteria (specific expectations), either provided to you or co-created by you and your classmates, help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?"

**Explanation of the Procedures Followed**

Permission to use DART as an assessment tool in the current study was obtained from Faye Brownlie, its principal designer, in February 2012. Permission to complete the study was obtained from the Vancouver Island University Ethics Board in September 2012. Approval from School District No. 71 (Comox Valley) to conduct the study was granted in September 2012. An information session inviting students to participate in this study was be held by a teacher independent of the study with grade 5 and 6 students from the researcher’s class during the last week of September 2012. The meeting took place during Language Arts class time. An invitation to participate, describing the intent of this study, was shared with students following a written script (Appendix E). It was made clear to students that assenting to participate in the study was completely voluntary, that participation would be kept anonymous and whether or not they chose to participate would not influence how they would be taught or graded. Students were also informed that even if their parent/guardian gave consent for them to participate, students could still choose not to.
Two copies of each of the letters requesting student assent and parental/guardian consent for participation in the study (Appendices F and G) went home with students at the end of the meeting with a postage-paid envelope addressed to the school. Two copies of the letters were for parents to keep for their own records and the other copies were for signing and returning to the school. Consent letters were received and collected in a drop box at the school office. To ensure anonymity, a teacher independent of the study sorted the returned consent forms to determine which students had consent to have their data included in the study and which students did not. Returned consent letters were kept in a locked filing cabinet in the school administrator’s office.

On September 17, 2012, all 23 grade 5 and 6 students in the researcher’s class participated in the DART pre-assessment as part of district assessment practices; 18 of the grade 5 and 6 students had consent for their results to be included in this study as data. Administering the assessment took approximately one hour and required two teachers. Participants with Individual Education Plans had appropriate adaptations in place during the assessment. Explaining the intent of the assessment task and giving directions for completion took approximately 15 minutes. During this time a teacher, independent of the study, followed a written protocol (Appendix H) and described the purpose of the assessment: to gain information regarding how well participants are reading and how well they understand what they read. Participants were informed that the findings revealed from the assessment would not be for marks but would be used to inform and guide nonfiction reading comprehension instruction. Participants were also informed that responses to the assessment tasks that were used as the data set would be kept anonymous. To ensure anonymity, a teacher, independent of the study, who had a list of the names of students with and without consent to participate in the study, sorted the assessments.
and removed or concealed names at the conclusion of the assessment task. Responses for each of the assessment tasks were labeled with student identification numbers only.

Next, the teacher distributed the question and answer sheets (Appendix A) and previewed the questions with participants to further establish the purpose for reading. Participants were each given their own copy of the nonfiction passage they would be reading for the assessment and were encouraged to examine the text. Participants were provided 45 minutes to complete the assessment task. After reading the nonfiction passage, the participants had five questions to respond to in writing. The five questions focused on specific reading comprehension skills: identifying main ideas and details, interpreting text features (graphs, maps, pictures), presenting information in a different way, making connections or inferences, and explaining the use of reading strategies.

Pre-assessment results were coded using the grade 5 and 6 BC Reading For Information Performance Standards (Appendix C). Intended as an assessment for learning tool, findings from the pre-assessment tasks were examined and used to inform reading comprehension instruction. Based on the pre-assessment findings, ‘interpreting text features’ was the targeted skill area of reading comprehension instruction during the intervention. Why? Firstly, the pre-assessment findings revealed this as a common area of instructional need, and secondly research indicates that other reading comprehension skills like questioning and inferring, determining importance, connecting and synthesizing come easier for learners when they are confident with interpreting text features (Gear, 2008).

The use of clear learning intentions, and success criteria were the focus of the assessment for learning intervention that followed. The Nelson Literacy 6 comprehensive literacy resource (MacKenzie, 2008) and Nonfiction Reading Power (Gear, 2008) were used to support nonfiction
reading comprehension instruction, specifically targeting ‘interpreting text features’. Lessons were consistently launched with clear learning intentions and success criteria to provide clarity of understanding for participants in terms of what they were expected to learn and how to reach specific learning goals. Eight weeks later, a post-DART assessment was administered and coded in exactly the same way as the pre-assessment. At the conclusion of the study, a teacher, independent of the study, separated the participant responses with consent from the student responses that did not have consent to be included in the study and removed or concealed names. Pre- and post-DART assessment findings were analyzed and compared to identify changes in student achievement in nonfiction reading comprehension.

Two anonymous paper-based survey questions were also administered at the conclusion of the study (Appendix D). The survey questions were open-ended and qualitative in nature, asking: "Does having a learning target help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?" and "Does having criteria (specific expectations), either provided to you or co-created by you and your classmates, help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?"

**Discussion of Validity**

To minimize threats to the internal validity of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009), several factors were taken into consideration. Regarding the threat of location, conditions of the pre-and post-assessment environment were kept as consistent as possible; assessment tasks were administered in the same classroom, at the same time of day by the same teachers. Data collector bias was reduced by several standardized procedures. The teachers who administered the assessments were independent of the study and had no direct relationship with the sample group. Administering the pre- and post-assessments was kept consistent by following specific guidelines from a written protocol (Appendices H and I). Further, using the grade 5 and 6 BC
Reading for Information Performance Standards Quick Scale (Appendix C) ensured reliability; scoring procedures were kept as objective and consistent as possible. To ensure anonymity, the names of the participants were concealed or removed from the assessments prior to being returned to the researcher.

The DART assessment is a written response instrument implemented for the purpose of measuring student achievement in nonfiction reading comprehension. To ensure that the assessment measured what it was intended to, the researcher considered content related evidence of validity (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The DART assessment questions are designed to target specific nonfiction reading comprehension skills that relate directly to the BC Reading for Information Performance Standards. The grade 5 and 6 BC Reading for Information Performance Standards Quick Scale (Appendix C), used for coding the DART assessment, reflect the prescribed learning outcomes from grade 5 and 6 of the English Language Arts kindergarten to grade 7 Integrated Resource Package. Thorough field-testing with both forms of the DART assessment occurred in 14 school districts across BC in 2003 when the DART assessment was first designed. Since that time, improvements have been made to the reading passages and questions based on feedback from more than 30 school districts who participate as a consortium to review and update the assessment tools annually (Brownlie, 2011).

The design of the current study, a single group participating in a pre-assessment, followed by an intervention based on the findings from the pre-assessment, and ending with a post-assessment, had its limitations. A randomized pretest-posttest design with a comparison group would have been a stronger experimental design but was not feasible within the confines of an elementary school program. The researcher had to consider and find ways to minimize several possible threats to internal validity that could otherwise explain the post-assessment results.
Implementation was considered a potential threat, which was mitigated by using a written protocol as a guideline for administering the assessments. Subject characteristics of the convenience sample were taken into consideration and necessary adaptations were made available to support participants during the assessment tasks. Maturation was considered as a possible limitation of this study. Participant improvement in nonfiction reading comprehension might have been influenced by activities and learning that occurred outside of the intervention. Keeping the study relatively short, eight weeks, helped minimize this threat. Data collector bias was reduced by having teachers independent of the study administer the assessments and the post-survey question. The use of a standardized assessment tool, and the grade 5 and 6 BC Reading for Information Performance Standards Quick Scale, minimized researcher bias.

Triangulation was considered as a method to strengthen the quantitative design of the current study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Including two qualitative post-survey questions, for participants to respond to, helped validate the quantitative data that resulted from the DART assessments. Asking participants to describe how the use of clear learning intentions and success criteria did or did not support their understanding were used to inform the interpretation of the quantitative results. The nature of action research makes the external validity of the current study weak (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009); it would be difficult to generalize results from this study to other grade 5 and 6 classes but this work does inform the work of the researcher in his classroom and could perhaps inform the work of other teachers in the district who use these assessment practices as part of their regular teaching.

**Analysis Techniques**

Written responses from pre- and post-DART assessments were coded using a nominal scale of measurement that coincided with the rubric for the grade 5 and 6 BC Reading for Information
Performance Standards; not yet within expectations was coded as one, meeting expectations (minimal level) was coded as two, fully meeting expectations was coded as three and exceeding expectations was coded as four. Because each question targeted a specific reading comprehension skill, the five pre- and post-DART assessment questions were coded and analyzed on a separate item basis. Scores for all pre- and post-assessment questions were entered on an Excel spreadsheet. A separate column chart was created for each question to examine and compare pre- and post-assessment scores. Pre- and post-assessment results for each question were displayed on a single graphic to illustrate changes in student achievement for each aspect of non-fiction reading comprehension. For each aspect of reading comprehension individual student pre- and post-assessment results were plotted to illustrate the range of improvement among students.

Participant responses to the qualitative post-survey questions were coded for themes related to clear learning intentions and success criteria. During the analysis four themes emerged for each of the two post-survey questions and the frequency of student responses within each themes was recorded. Frequency tables were created to summarize the categorical data. The number of responses in each category was changed to percentages, and pie charts were created to illustrate the differences in proportion.
Chapter 4: Findings and Results

The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between the use of assessment for learning as an instructional methodology and students’ experiences in nonfiction reading comprehension. The research took place in the fall of 2012. The participants were from a convenience sample of 23 students in a grade 5 and 6 class at an elementary school on Vancouver Island. Of the 23 students, 18 consented to having their results included in the study. The mixed method research design included a quantitative pre- and post-nonfiction reading comprehension assessment (DART) and a qualitative post-survey that asked two questions. Between pre- and post-assessment tasks, an eight-week nonfiction reading comprehension instructional intervention took place, focusing on the use of clear learning intentions and success criteria, specifically targeting ‘interpreting text features’.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Participants’ written responses from pre-and post-DART assessments were coded using a nominal scale of measurement that coincided with the rubric from the grade 5 and 6 BC Reading for Information Performance Standards; not yet within expectations was coded as one, meeting expectations (minimal level) was coded as two, fully meeting expectations was coded as three and exceeding expectations was coded as four. Because each question targeted a specific reading comprehension skill, the five pre- and post- DART assessment questions were coded and analyzed on a separate item basis. The mean and mode pre- and post-assessment scores and the shift between pre- and post- assessments were calculated for all participants. Pre- and post-assessment results for each participant were displayed on one graph to illustrate changes in student achievement for each reading comprehension skill.
Table 4.1 illustrates the mean scores from each of the five pre- and post-DART assessment questions. Results from the pre-DART assessment informed the decision to target ‘interpreting text features’ during the instructional intervention. Although the fall mean score for ‘identifying main ideas and details’ was the lowest score, it was decided that ‘interpreting text features’ would be the targeted nonfiction reading comprehension strategy for the instructional intervention. Once learners are confident with interpreting text features they may be better equipped to identify main ideas and details, present their understanding in a different way, make connections and inferences and explain their use of reading strategies (Gear, 2008). After the intervention, the mean score findings for Question 2, interpreting text features, showed the highest shift in achievement from the pre-DART assessment to the post-DART assessment.

Table 4.1

Mean scores from each of the five DART questions for all participants (n = 18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DART Question</th>
<th>Pre-DART mean</th>
<th>Post-DART mean</th>
<th>Shift in mean scores from pre- to post-DART</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.  Identifying main ideas and details</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.  Interpreting text features</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.  Presenting information in a different way</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.  Making connections and/or inferences</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.  Explaining the use of reading strategies</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2 illustrates the mode scores for each of the five pre- and post-DART assessment questions. The mode for ‘identifying main ideas and details’ increased from a score of one to two from the pre- to post-assessment. In both ‘interpreting text features’ and ‘explaining the use of reading strategies’, the mode increased from a score of two to three. There was no change in mode scores for both ‘presenting information in a different way’ and ‘making connections and/or inferences’.

Table 4.2

Mode scores for each of the five DART questions for all participants (n = 18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DART Question</th>
<th>Pre-DART mode</th>
<th>Post-DART mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identifying main ideas and details</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interpreting text features</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Presenting information in a different way</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Making connections and/or inferences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Explaining the use of reading strategies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures 4.1-4.5 illustrate each of the participants’ scores on the pre- and post-assessments for each DART question. Although not directly targeted by the instructional intervention, the post-assessment revealed an increase in scores for ten participants in identifying main ideas and details (DART Question 1). See Figure 4.1. After the eight-week intervention two participants were still not yet within expectations in this skill area while seven participants increased from
not yet within to minimally meeting expectations. Further, six participants showed no change in this skill area, sustaining a minimally meeting level.

**Figure 4.1.** Individual participant assessment scores on DART Question 1 - Identifying main ideas and details

Interpreting text features (DART Question 2) was the targeted strategy for nonfiction reading comprehension instruction during the intervention. Figure 4.2 illustrates the participants’ achievement on DART Question 2. The pre-assessment in September 2012 (fall DART) found eight participants to be not yet within expectations (scored as 1). The post assessment in December (mid-year DART) found that four participants increased from not yet within expectations (scored as a 1) to fully meeting expectations (scored as a 3). Eight participants went from minimally meeting expectations (scored as a 2) to fully meeting expectations (scored as a 3) by the end of the eight weeks. Of the 18 participants, 14 were found to be fully meeting expectations in interpreting text features on the post-DART assessment.
Figure 4.2. Individual participant assessment scores on DART Question 2 - Interpreting text features

Figure 4.3 illustrates results for DART Question 3, presenting information in a different way. One participant stayed at not yet within expectations while another participant regressed from minimally meeting to not yet within expectations. Six participants showed improvement, moving from not yet within to minimally meeting expectations, while 10 participants sustained a minimally meeting expectations assessment score.
Figure 4.3. Individual participant assessment scores on DART Question 3 - Presenting information in a different way

Figure 4.4 illustrates that five participants showed improvement in making connections or inferences while 10 participants sustained their score of minimally meeting expectations. One participant remained at not yet within expectations in this skill area.
Figure 4.4. Individual participant assessment scores on DART Question 4 - Making connections or inferences.

Figure 4.5 illustrates pre- and post-DART assessment scores in explaining the use of reading strategies. 11 participants showed improvement in this skill area. Three participants moved from not yet within expectations to meeting expectations (minimally). Seven participants increased from minimally meeting to fully meeting expectations.
Figure 4.5. Individual participant assessment scores on DART Question 5 - Explaining the use of reading strategies

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Participant responses to the qualitative post-survey questions were coded for themes related to clear learning intentions and success criteria. From the analysis of participant responses to each question, four themes emerged. All 18 participants responded to both of the post-survey questions. Frequency tables were created to summarize the frequency of statements categorized within each theme. The number of responses in each category was changed to a percentage using the number of participants, and pie charts were created to illustrate the differences in proportion. Participant responses to post-survey Question 1, “Does having a clear learning target help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?” were coded into four themes based on the appearance of key phrases such as ‘the learning target tells what to do’, ‘it helps you know where you are going’ and ‘it make things clear’ and ‘sometimes the learning target helps’. Table 4.3 illustrates the frequency of participant responses for each code. 17 participants answered
yes, that having a clear learning target helps them when they are reading nonfiction text. Half of the participants stated that the learning target helps them know what to do. See Figure 4.6.

Table 4.3

*Categorical data in response to Post-survey Question 1 (n =18 participants)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Data</th>
<th>Tally</th>
<th>Example Student Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The learning target tells what to do</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, because it tells you what to do. Because if there was no learning target then you don’t know what to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, having a learning target does help me learn because it makes me know what to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning target helps you know where you are going / how you’re going to get there</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, it does help me because if you don’t know how you’re going to get there, how do you know where you’re going? It’s like your friend giving you a birthday invitation without putting her street or street number. How are you supposed to get there?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning target makes things clear</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, it helps me by making what I’m supposed to do in class clear and not confusing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes. I think it helps me by giving me a clear understanding for the thing that we are doing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes the learning target helps</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, most of the time it helps.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Sometimes the learning target helps.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant responses to post-survey Question 2, “Does having criteria (specific expectations), either provided to you or co-created by you and your classmates, help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?” were coded into four themes based on the appearance of key phrases such as ‘the criteria helps you understand what to do’, ‘shows what to aim for’, ‘helps you know how to do it’ and ‘sometimes criteria can be helpful’. Table 4.4 illustrates the frequency of participant responses for each theme. All participants indicated that having criteria helps them when they are reading nonfiction text. While 10 of the participants stated that having criteria helps them understand what to do, three participants described that the criteria shows what to aim for and three other participants indicated that the criteria help them know how to do a given task.
Categorical data in response to post-survey Question 2 (n = 18 participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Data</th>
<th>Tally</th>
<th>Example Student Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The criteria helps you understand what to do</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes it helps me because it helps me understand and I know what to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes because it makes things clear so things aren’t all scattered in my brain. It makes things easier.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The criteria shows what to aim for / next steps</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, having criteria helps me because it shows what to aim for.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“It does help because I can look at the board and see the next steps.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The criteria helps you know how to do it</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, it helps me know how to do it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, having criteria tells me how to do what we are doing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes the criteria can be helpful</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Sometimes, because sometimes it can be helpful and sometimes it can get confusing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“It kind of helps because it tells me what to find.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.7. Individual participant responses to post-survey Question 2
For each of the qualitative post-survey questions, half of the participants indicated that clear learning intentions and success criteria provide clarity regarding what they can expect during a given lesson (see Figures 4.6 and 4.7). Further, in response to both questions, at least 17% of the participants indicated that the learning target and criteria help them know where they are going in their learning, how to get there, what to aim for and next steps. Two of the study participants communicated that only sometimes the learning intention and success criteria help them when they are reading nonfiction text.
Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, and Suggestions for further Research

Summary of the Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between assessment for learning and students’ experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text. The focus of the investigation was to examine grade 5 and 6 pre- and post-standardized reading assessment results and qualitative post-survey responses after clear learning intentions and success criteria were used as an intervention embedded within explicit nonfiction reading comprehension instruction. There were 18 participants in the study from a convenience sample of 23 students in a grade 5 and 6 class at an elementary school on central Vancouver Island. The pre-DART assessment occurred in September 2012. Results from the pre-assessment were used to inform nonfiction reading comprehension instruction. An instructional intervention focusing on the use of clear learning intentions and success criteria, specifically targeting ‘interpreting text features’ was chosen, and followed for eight weeks.

The study concluded in December 2012 with a post-DART assessment and two anonymous paper-based survey questions. The pre- and post-DART assessments were coded using the grade 5 and 6 Reading for Information Performance Standards Quick Scales, from the BC English Language Arts Grade 5 and 6 Integrated Resource Packages. Assessment results and qualitative survey responses were then analyzed and compared to explore the relationship between assessment for learning as an instructional intervention and student experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text.
Discussion

In the current study, the mean score findings in ‘interpreting text features’ revealed the highest shift in achievement from the pre- to post-DART assessments, compared to the other nonfiction reading comprehension skills not targeted by the intervention (see Table 4.1). Of the 18 participants, the pre-DART assessment results showed two participants fully meeting expectations in ‘interpreting text features’ whereas after the intervention the post-DART assessment results revealed 14 participants fully meeting expectations in the targeted skill area. Thus, the assessment for learning intervention, which was targeted ‘interpreting text features’, was likely to have improved participants’ DART assessment scores in this area. Research into the importance of shared learning targets and success criteria can be used to understand the results.

In their pivotal paper, Black and Wiliam (1998) identified that students not having a clear understanding of what they are being asked to do often causes low achievement. Black and Wiliam (1998) argued that improved assessment practices, which include shared learning targets and criteria, descriptive feedback, and peer and self assessment, helps all learners but especially low achievers and “reduces the range of achievement while raising achievement overall” (p.141).

In the current study, the shift in mean scores from the pre-DART to post-DART assessments in ‘interpreting text features’ strongly aligns with research that indicates that providing students with clear learning intentions and success criteria leads to improvement (Wiliam et al., 2004). Further, the qualitative responses to both post-survey questions in this study strongly support the notion that when students are provided with clear learning goals and expectations for success, they have greater access to clarity of understanding regarding what is expected of them, what they are doing well and how to improve, which can result in positive learning experiences. The
post-survey responses provided the researcher with insightful commentary from the students’ perspective regarding the effectiveness of learning targets and success criteria. Participant responses corroborate the research that indicates when “students know where they are going, they are more motivated to do the work to get there” (Moss, Brookhart, & Long, 2011, p. 69).

Figure 5.1. An example of a learning intention (top left) and success criteria (top right)

What does this look like in the classroom? Figure 5.1 illustrates a lesson from Nonfiction Reading Power (Gear, 2008). In this lesson, students were invited to create and add text features to paragraphs from a nonfiction science book, to help the author, Seymour Simon, organize his information and make it easier for readers to find great facts. Moss, Brookhart, and Long (2011) described using ‘I can’ statements as an effective way to share learning intentions and success criteria. They also recommended giving students the opportunity to examine completed work samples, helping students recognize what quality work looks like and inviting them to take part in co-creating the criteria for success.
Two of the reading comprehension skills not targeted by the intervention, ‘identifying main ideas and details’ and ‘explaining the use of reading strategies’, each showed an increase of 0.61 in mean scores after the intervention. The researcher wondered if these results were a by-product of the instructional intervention. When students can confidently interpret text features, they are better equipped to apply other reading comprehension strategies. Nonfiction texts require that readers are able to interpret and use the text features, thereby helping them find information for a specific purpose (Gear, 2008). Perhaps participant achievement scores increased in identifying main ideas and details and explaining the use of reading strategies because of their increased confidence in interpreting text features.

In each of their papers, Black and Wiliam (1998), Moss, Brookhart, and Long (2011) and Stiggins (2009) discussed the central role that students should have in the assessment environment, stating that students must be empowered as the critical users of assessment information to move their learning forward. In the current study, participants were invited to respond to two qualitative post-survey questions, the intent being to gather information regarding their perceptions of clear learning intentions and success criteria. From the analysis of responses to each of the two survey questions, four themes emerged. In response to both post-survey questions, 89% of the participants (n=18) answered yes, that having a clear learning target and success criteria helps them when they are reading nonfiction text. The participants’ comments affirmed that when students know what they are doing, why they are doing it and how to go about doing it, they are better able to focus on their learning. Thus, it can be inferred that students who do not have a clear sense of the learning target and criteria at the outset of a lesson put their time and energy not toward learning, but toward trying to figure out what is expected of them or they quickly lose interest and give up (Moss, Brookhart, & Long, 2011). Further, Black
and Wiliam (1998) identified that students are able to assess themselves only when they have a clear picture of where their learning is going and how to get there. However, the authors explained that many students “do not have such a picture and they appear to have become accustomed to receiving classroom teaching as an arbitrary sequence of exercises with no overarching rationale” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 143). The current study provided some evidence that providing clear learning intentions and success criteria can help learners have a better sense what they are learning and what is expected of them.

**Implications**

The results from the current study not only showed improvement in students’ use of nonfiction reading comprehension strategies but also revealed students’ perceptions of how clear learning intentions and success criteria help them to be successful in a learning environment. Reflecting on these results allowed the researcher to change his practice; he is being more deliberate about consistently starting lessons with a shared vision of the learning targets and criteria, not only in reading comprehension instruction, but in all curriculum areas.

Responses to the post-survey questions revealed that participants perceive a greater sense of meaning, purpose, and direction when provided learning targets and criteria, which might contribute to an increase in motivation and engagement. Further, the researcher has found that when his students know where they are going with their learning and how to get there, there appear to be fewer classroom management issues. Students appear more competent and less helpless, less frustrated. Providing students with access to clarity regarding what is expected of them, what they are doing well, and how to improve can result in positive learning experiences.

As a result of this study the researcher is motivated to begin to implement other assessment for learning strategies into his practice: engineering effective classroom discussions through
questioning, providing descriptive feedback, activating students as the owners of their own learning and activating students as instructional resources for one another. How? The researcher wants to begin to put into practice new routines and structures that will provide greater opportunities for his students to work as learning partners, coaching one another, giving and receiving feedback while the learning is happening. Establishing a culture of questioning and deep thinking, where students have the opportunity to learn through shared discussion is an important next step. The researcher is also curious about having students use ‘turn and talk’ as an established routine instead of merely having one student answer a question that is posed. The researcher wonders how these changes will contribute to learner accountability, motivation, and engagement.

**Recommendations**

Stiggins (2009) asked the critical question, “What can educators do to be sure students interpret their own assessment results in a manner that leads them to infer that learning success is within reach if they keep trying?” (p. 420). Educators can empower students to recognize that they have a critical role in the assessment environment and use assessment strategies to support their own learning while the learning is happening (Stiggins, 2009). Students need to understand what success looks like and have support in using assessment information to discover what they are doing well and guide them in how to improve. As students progress through the elementary grades, if their learning experiences are continually unsuccessful, students can begin to believe that they are incapable of learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) asserted “[w]hat is needed is a culture of success, backed by a belief that all pupils can achieve” (p. 142).

Significant learning gains are possible when teachers introduce assessment for learning strategies into their classroom practice but this is “by no means straight forward” (Wiliam et al.,
Teachers need to be encouraged to find their own ways of implementing these assessment strategies into their existing classroom practice. While students benefit from having clear learning intentions and success criteria at the outset of their lessons, Wiliam et al. (2004) emphasized that changing and improving assessment practices is not a simple matter. To improve the likelihood of increased academic achievement by adjusting assessment practices, these adjustments would ideally be included as common practice throughout a school, throughout a district. Teachers must be supported in developing their assessment practices and incorporating new strategies and ideas. A goal would be to have all classrooms within a school share common language and practices around assessment for learning; and further, share assessment for learning as common practice across schools in a school district.

**Limitations**

The design of this study, with one group participating in a pre-assessment, followed by an intervention based on the findings from the pre-assessment, and ending with a post-assessment, had its limitations. A randomized pretest-posttest design with a comparison group, similar to the Wiliam et al. (2004) study, would have been a stronger experimental design but was not feasible within the limitations of an elementary school program. By collecting quantitative data with a well-validated tool that was closely related to the teaching intervention, and collecting qualitative data from students' experiences, the current study was able to provide information about the relationship between assessment for learning and students’ experiences in reading comprehension. However, the researcher acknowledged that it would be difficult to generalize results from this study to other grade 5 and 6 classes, but also recognized that this action research project informed practice in his classroom and could perhaps inform the work of other teachers.
in their classrooms in the school district who also use assessment for learning as part of their regular teaching.

The duration of the study was also considered as a possible limitation. With only two 60-minute lessons per week over the course of the eight-week intervention, the researcher wondered if or how the study results might have been different had the intervention been longer. Typically the mid-year DART is used not as a post-assessment but as an assessment as a learning tool to inform instructional decisions and actively involve students in moving their learning forward.

A limitation of this study might also be that participant performance in completing the DART was influenced by previous experience with the assessment task. The DART assessment is administered routinely at the school and across the district from grades three to seven. In a similar study, Brookhart and DeVoge (1999) found that students’ perceptions of their ability to complete assessment tasks were based on previous experience with similar assessment tasks. Which begs the question, does the DART assessment become too familiar for students as they progress to the higher elementary grades? Does this familiarity affect their motivation to complete the assessment task in a way that accurately reflects their level of comprehension?

Finally, it could be perceived that in this study the researcher was merely teaching to the DART assessment, but this was not so. The DART is a formative assessment instrument specifically designed to inform nonfiction reading comprehension instruction. The researcher emphasized that the pre-DART assessment was used in this study to identify common areas of instructional need in nonfiction reading comprehension among learners. Further, the DART assessment corresponds directly to the BC Reading for Information Performance Standards. Instructional decisions during the intervention were based on what the performance standards
identified as a common area of instructional need. The performance standards rubric is a well-validated instrument that provides specific criteria and indicators for student achievement in nonfiction reading comprehension. Using the performance standards enabled the researcher to compare student performance to provincial standards. The performance standards emphasize criterion-referenced assessment in which student work is compared to explicit criteria.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between assessment for learning and students’ experiences in reading comprehension of nonfiction text. The current study utilized a mixed-methods design relying on quantitative pre- and post-standardized reading assessment results and a qualitative paper-based post-survey asking two questions to investigate how the use of clear learning intentions and success criteria affected students’ experiences and achievement in nonfiction reading comprehension.

Further research might explore the use of other assessment for learning strategies that are said to increase student engagement and motivate students to take active responsibility for their own learning. These strategies include engineering effective classroom discussions through questioning and deep thinking, providing descriptive feedback that moves learning forward, and activating students as instructional resources for one another (Leahy et al., 2005).

Black and Wiliam (1998) described that “what is needed is a classroom culture of questioning and deep thinking, in which pupils learn from shared discussion with teachers and peers” (p.146). It would be interesting to explore the relationship between questioning as a deliberate instructional practice and levels of student engagement. Would students describe feeling more connected to, responsible for, and engaged in their learning? Would student achievement improve?
Black and Wiliam (1998) described the negative impact on student motivation and learning that marking and letter grades can have. Wiliam et al. (2004) identified “comment-only marking” as a strategy that teachers used in their study (p. 55). As part of their action plans some of the teachers involved in the Wiliam et al. (2004) study wanted to reduce the use of marks and letter grades. It would be intriguing to design a study where students are given only descriptive feedback, not marks or letter grades, and investigate students’ motivation and achievement.

Finally, exploring the relationship between the use self- and peer-assessment strategies and students’ perceived levels of ownership and shared responsibility for learning would be a worthwhile investigation. Black and Wiliam (1998) identified self- and peer-assessment as an essential component to the assessment environment, describing that when students’ own assessments are the focus of discussion with their teachers and peers, it promotes ownership, responsibility and reflection on one’s own progress.
References


DISTRICT ASSESSMENT OF READING TEAM (DART)  
QUESTION AND ANSWER SHEET

Storm Chasers  (Ed Stanley)

Name: __________________  School: ______________  Date: __________

1. Use the Venn diagram on the back of this page to show the similarities and differences between tornadoes and hurricanes.

2. Explain, in your own words, the diagram on page 6, 'How a Tornado Forms'. Use information from the diagram, from the reading, and from your background knowledge in your explanation.

3. Sketch, with labels, the "dropping of a dropsonde". Include as much detail as you can. Please use the space provided on the back of this page for your sketch.

4. "Only the experts should chase storms. When a storm warning is in effect, all others should follow safety guidelines." Why is this important advice? Support your answer with at least three good reasons.

5. When you come to a part in your reading that is more difficult to understand, what do you do to help yourself?
1. Use the Venn diagram below to show the similarities and differences between tornadoes and hurricanes.

Tornadoes

Hurricanes

3. Sketch and label the "dropping of a dropsonde" below.
# The Amazing Potato

**Name:** ____________________  
**Date:** ____________________

1. Make a web to show what this article is about. Use the blank paper provided.

2. Write a newspaper headline for each of the events that are described in "The Amazing Potato".

   **In 1536, the potato is introduced to Europe**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes in Ireland get a disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Potato War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potato chips are invented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Imagine you are an Inca living in Peru in 1535 when Spanish explorers come to your country. Write a brief dialogue you might have had explaining what a potato is:

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
4. Throughout history, potatoes have been important to many people. Explain how potatoes have been important to at least 3 different groups mentioned in the selection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>How and why potatoes were important to them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. When you come to a part in your reading that is more difficult to understand, what do you do to help yourself?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C: BC Reading for Information Performance Standards Quick Scale

### Quick Scale: Grade 6 Reading for Information

This quick scale is a summary of the rating scale that follows. It describes student achievement in June and at the end of the school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Meets Expectations (Minimum Level)</th>
<th>Fully Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SNAPSHOT</strong></td>
<td>With support, the student may be able to read short, simple, and direct material with familiar language and simple graphics. Work is often vague, incomplete, or inaccurate. May require consistent support to complete task.</td>
<td>The student is able to read generally straightforward information and procedures, including illustrations and other graphics. Work is often consistent; parts are accurate and complete; others are vague, incomplete, and lack detail.</td>
<td>The student is able to read complicated information and procedures, including illustrations and other graphics, with some specialized language and complex ideas. Work is generally accurate and complete; gives specific references.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRATEGIES</strong></td>
<td>* does not check for understanding * needs to sound out new words, often gives up * has difficulty predicting content/picture cues * needs assistance to use text features * often guesses rather than reading to locate specific details</td>
<td>* checks for understanding may need help choosing strategies * relies on sounding out and context for new words * makes logical predictions about content * may need prompting to use text features * tends to be inefficient in locating details</td>
<td>* checks for understanding draws on range of strategies * uses range of effective word skills * identifies content/structure * uses text features effectively to preview and facilitate information * skims, reads for details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPREHENSION</strong></td>
<td>* often inaccurate, vague, incomplete * confuses main and supporting ideas * may identify some relevant supporting details but not a great deal * has difficulty making notes, even with a template * misinterprets literal information</td>
<td>* partially accurate, but may be vague, incomplete * identifies most main ideas; has trouble restating in own words; identifies some relevant supporting details * makes simple notes if given a template * makes some inferences, but these may be biological</td>
<td>* clear, complete, accurate * accurately identifies main ideas * identifies relevant supporting details * makes accurate notes using simple, logical categories * makes some simple inferences; may be unsupported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANALYSIS</strong></td>
<td>* has difficulty connecting new information to prior knowledge (may have little prior knowledge) * responses or judgments are often vague or unsupported</td>
<td>* makes some simple, obvious connections between new information and prior knowledge * offers some simple reactions; judgments reasons are often vague</td>
<td>* considers new information to prior knowledge and beliefs; may show insight * offers reactions or judgments with reasons that may be unsupported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dart Question</th>
<th>#1 e.g. main ideas &amp; details</th>
<th>#2 e.g. text features</th>
<th>#3 e.g. predictions; skim text</th>
<th>#4 e.g. connections; inferences</th>
<th>#5 e.g. reading strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

To be used as a guideline only. Rich conversations occur as teachers work through subtasks together.
Appendix D: Post-assessment Survey Questions.

Respond anonymously to the following survey questions in your own words.

1. Does having a clear learning target help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________


2. Does having criteria (specific expectations), either provided to you or co-created by you and your classmates, help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?
Appendix E: Student Invitation to Participate and Request for Consent Script

Exploring the relationship between assessment for learning and student experiences in reading comprehension

September 2012

Doug David
Masters of Educational Leadership Student
Vancouver Island University
doug.david@sd71.bc.ca

Rachel Moll, Ph.D., Supervisor
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Vancouver Island University
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(250) -753-3245 (ext: 2161)

An information session regarding the purpose of this study will be held by a teacher independent of the study with grade 5 and 6 students in the researcher’s class during the third week of October, 2012. The session will occur during Language Arts class time. The following Invitation to Participate Script outlines information that will be shared with students at the session. The intent of this session will be to inform students with background information, the purpose of this action research study, and to seek consent to include their assessment data in the study. The following italicized information will be shared and students will be given the Invitation to Participate in writing.

Background and Purpose of the study:

In addition to being your teacher, Mr. David is currently a student at Vancouver Island University working to complete his Masters degree in Educational Leadership. As part of the program he is required to gain experience in designing and conducting educational research.

Mr. David has designed a research project, using DART, the reading assessment tool that we use at our school to help identify how well students are reading and how well they understand what they have read. The purpose of Mr. David’s study is to explore the relationship between his teaching practices and student experiences in reading comprehension. Mr. David would like you to consider participating in his study.
Request for Participation:

Your permission is being requested to include your DART results in this study. While participation in the DART is required as part of school-wide assessment practices, offering to have your reading results included in this study is completely voluntary. As part of the study, you will also be asked to respond anonymously to two survey questions that are separate from the DART. The survey asks questions about Mr. David’s teaching practices. The questions will state: "Does having a clear learning target help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?" and “Does having criteria (specific expectations), either provided to you or co-created by you and your classmates, help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?” The survey will take approximately 20 minutes and will take place in the classroom.

All records of your participation in the study will be kept confidential and as anonymous as possible. Your responses will be labelled with your student identification number only, and will not include your name. If you agree to participate in the study, there will be a time in which you will complete the survey (as described above) while your classmates are doing another task. The identity of participants completing the survey will be obvious to non-participants and as such anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

There are no known harms associated with participating in this study. Whether you participate in this study or not will not influence how Mr. David teaches or grades you. You may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason without explanation. Even if your parent/guardian provides written consent for you to participate in this study, you can still choose not to participate.

Please read the invitation to participate and consider signing your name to indicate your approval. Mr. David also requires consent from your parents for you to participate in the study. Please consider bringing the invitation to participate and the parent/guardian consent form home to your parents and ask them to consider your participation in this study.
Appendix F: Student Invitation to Participate and Request for Assent

Exploring the relationship between assessment for learning and student experiences in reading comprehension

September 2012

Doug David
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Vancouver Island University
doug.david@sd71.bc.ca

Rachel Moll, Ph.D., Supervisor
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Vancouver Island University
rachel.moll@viu.ca

(250) -753-3245 (ext: 2161)

In addition to being your teacher, I am currently a student at Vancouver Island University working to complete my Masters degree in Educational Leadership. As part of the program I am required to gain experience in designing and conducting educational research.

I have designed a research project, using DART, the reading assessment tool that we use at our school to help identify how well students are reading and how well they understand what they have read. The purpose of my study is to explore the relationship between my teaching practices and student experiences in reading comprehension. I would like you to consider participating in my study.

Your permission is being requested to include your DART results in this study. While participation in the DART is required as part of school-wide assessment practices, offering to have your reading results included in this study is completely voluntary. As part of the study, you will also be asked to respond anonymously to two survey questions that are separate from the DART. The survey asks questions about my teaching practices. The questions will state:
"Does having a clear learning target help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?" and “Does having criteria (specific expectations), either provided to you or co-created by you and your classmates, help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?” The survey will take approximately 20 minutes and will take place in the classroom.

All records of your participation in the study will be kept confidential and as anonymous as possible. Your responses will be labelled with your student number only, and will not include your name. If you agree to participate in the study, there will be a time in which you will complete the survey (as described above) while your classmates are doing another task. Because it will be obvious to non-participants that you are completing the survey, your anonymity in the research cannot be guaranteed.

There are no known harms associated with participating in this study. Whether you participate in this study or not will not influence how I teach or grade you. You may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason without explanation. Even if your parent/guardian provides written consent for you to participate in this study, you can still choose not to participate.

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this research, your parents can contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext. 2665), or by email at reb@viu.ca.

Thank you for considering participating in my research. If you agree to allow me to include your DART assessment results in my study and you agree to participate by answering my research questions, please sign on the line below.

_________________________________ ______________________________
Student Signature Date
Appendix G: Letter seeking Parental Consent to use DART results as data

Exploring the relationship between assessment for learning and student experiences in reading comprehension

September 2012

Doug David
Masters of Educational Leadership Student
Vancouver Island University
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Rachel Moll, Ph.D., Supervisor
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
rachel.moll@viu.ca

(250) -753-3245 (ext: 2161)

In addition to being your child’s teacher, I am also currently a student at Vancouver Island University working to complete a Masters degree in Educational Leadership. As part of the program I am required to gain experience in designing and conducting educational research.

I have designed a research project using DART (District Assessment of Reading Team), a standardized nonfiction reading comprehension assessment tool that is routinely administered in the Comox Valley School District to gain information regarding how well students are reading and how well they understand what they have read. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between my teaching practices and student experiences in reading comprehension. You are being asked to consider giving consent for your child’s participation in this study because he or she is a student in my class.

As part of routine assessment practice at XXX Elementary, your child will be assessed for nonfiction reading comprehension on two occasions, once in September and once in December.
using the DART assessment. The assessment tasks will involve your child reading a nonfiction passage and responding in writing to five questions focusing on specific reading comprehension skills: identifying main ideas and details, interpreting text features (graphs, maps, pictures), presenting information in a different way, making connections or inferences, and explaining the use of reading strategies. As part of the assessments, your child will also read a passage out loud and answer questions about the text.

Results from the September assessment will be used to inform and guide classroom nonfiction reading comprehension instruction. Clear learning intentions and success criteria will be the assessment for learning strategies used to support reading comprehension instruction. Reading comprehension lessons will take place for eight weeks, and a post-assessment will occur in December 2012. Current district-wide assessment practices are such that students across the district from grades three to seven routinely participate in the DART two times per year.

Your consent is being requested to include your child’s assessment results as data in this study. While participation in the DART assessment is required as part of district-wide assessment practices, including your child’s assessment data in this study is completely voluntary. The only task that will occur as part of this study that goes beyond routine assessment practices at the school is, at the end of the study (in December) students will be asked to respond anonymously to two survey questions that are separate from the DART. The survey asks questions about my teaching practices. The questions will state: "Does having a clear learning target help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?" and “Does having criteria (specific expectations), either provided to you or co-created by you and your classmates, help you when you are reading nonfiction text? If so, how?” The survey will take approximately 20 minutes and will take place in the classroom.

All records of participation in the study will be kept confidential and as anonymous as possible. Participant responses will be labelled with their student identification number only, and will not include names. I will not be present during the administration of assessment tasks. Two teachers independent of the study, will administer and evaluate the assessments and will transcribe the survey responses. The identity of participants completing the survey (at the end of the study) will be obvious to non-participants and as such anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
Only the assessment results from students with parental consent will be included in the research. Your signed consent can be mailed to the school in the postage paid envelope addressed to the school that has been provided. Please also include your child’s signed invitation to participate letter. Returned consent letters will be collected in a drop box at the school office. To ensure anonymity, a teacher independent of the study will sort the returned consent letters to determine which students have consent to have their data included in the study and which students do not. You may withdraw your child from this study at any time for any reason without explanation. Your child may also withdraw from the study at any time and without explanation or consequence.

There are no known harms associated with your child participating in this study. Whether your child participates in the study or not will not influence how I teach or grade your child. If you would like more information about this research project, or have any questions, please contact me at doug.david@sd71.bc.ca.

If you have any concerns about your child’s treatment as a participant in this research, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext. 2665), or by email at reb@viu.ca.

If you consent to allow your child’s DART assessment results and survey responses to be included in this study and for your child to complete the research survey, please sign below and return this form in the envelope provided.

______________________________  ________________________________
Parent Signature                  Date

______________________________
Child/Student name
Appendix H: Pre-DART Protocol

District Assessment of Reading Team (DART)

Fall Reading Assessment FOR Learning

PROTOCOL for Grade 6 Storm Chasers

In this Fall Grade 6 DART Assessment students read all of Storm Chasers. Some students may recognize the text because they read the first 5 pages of Storm Chasers in Grade 5 as their DART Spring Assessment.

Setting the stage for the DART Assessment takes approximately 15 minutes. Students will need 45 minutes to complete the reading and Question and Answer Sheet. This assessment will take 2 teachers one hour to administer. If a second teacher is not available additional time will be necessary for a teacher to complete the Oral Reading and Conference components.

Teacher materials required:
1. Copy for each teacher of the Oral Reading Sheet.
2. (Optional) Overhead of the front page of the article.
3. Oral Reading/Conference Sheet for each student.

Student materials required
1. class set of Question and Answer sheets.
2. class set of Storm Chasers booklets.

Assessments should allow students to exhibit their strengths. With this in mind, review the following purposes and processes with the students. The following script is provided for your use. Please ensure students on an TFP have the appropriate adaptations in place and that these adaptations are noted on your class list template. A scribe can be provided for developing writers.

Please note: Students can be reminded of directions throughout this assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Points to Consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important that students understand the purpose of the assessment and how the information is going to be used.</td>
<td>&quot;The purpose of this reading assessment is to gain information about how well you are independently reading and understanding at this time of the year, using a particular sample. I will use what I learn from this assessment to guide my planning. It is not an assessment for marks.&quot;</td>
<td>Make sure the students know what you want them to do after they have finished, and that they have the necessary materials in their desks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;You will be asked to read silently and to answer a few questions.&quot;</td>
<td>Silent reading is easy to organize and appropriate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | "This is an independent reading sample."
| | "At anytime, you can look at the text to answer the questions." | |

- © Feve Dougville. Mar., 2005; Updated June, 2010

Updated June, 2010
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Points to Consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proficient readers <strong>access background knowledge (schema)</strong> before they read to increase their understanding.</td>
<td>“It is important to think about the title and the picture on the cover before you read. Look at the cover of this text entitled <strong>Storm Chasers</strong>. How many of you remember reading this in the Spring? We are going to read the whole booklet today. The questions are based on information in the last half of the booklet.” What do you think the rest of this text is going to be about? What do you already know about storm chasers?” Ask class to share predictions and facts they know about the topic so everyone hears the same information. After students have shared with the whole class, encourage individual student accountability. “Close your eyes, think about what you have heard and already know about <strong>storms and storm chasers</strong>. Make a fist and raise a finger with each fact you recall.”</td>
<td>You could show a colour overhead of the booklet cover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient readers read with a <strong>purpose</strong>.</td>
<td>Distribute Student Assessment Packages. “Let’s read the questions over BEFORE you begin reading, to help establish your purpose for reading.” “I will read the questions aloud while you follow.”</td>
<td>The questions are not discussed. If a student requires support with a question during the assessment and if support is given, record this information for use in planning for instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient readers <strong>interact with the text</strong> during reading to deepen their understanding.</td>
<td>Encourage your students to use strategies to <strong>hold their thinking</strong> as they read. “I can give you stickies, acetate or scrap paper to hold your thinking because you cannot write on your text.”</td>
<td>Use these if you feel they will be helpful to your students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- McTahar and Bjorkson, March, 2005.
### Rationale
The oral reading provides a great deal of information about the strategies that students use when decoding and comprehending text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Behaviour</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insertion</td>
<td>old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounding Out</td>
<td>SO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Correction</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told student the word</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pause</td>
<td>he</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Steps

- "You now know what your part is in this assessment. I also have a part to do. My part is to listen to you read, make notes and ask you a few questions."

- "Reading orally provides a window into what goes on in your mind when you read. I glimpse your reading patterns, how you make sense of unknown words, your phrasing, the flow of your language. This information helps me support you in your development as a reader."

- "You will be asked to read something in the passage that you have already practiced. All students will read the same passage. I will mark down what I notice about your reading. What I am marking is my observations, not necessarily errors. I will show you my recording, once we have finished."

Students will read from their copy of the article. Record your observations on the Oral Reading Sheet. Circle the appropriate descriptor(s) at the bottom of the page eg. careful and confident.

- "After I listen to you read I will conference with you. I will ask you about the strategies you used, what you learned from your reading and what connections you made as you read."

### Points to Consider

- It is important that all students read aloud.
- One to one time is valuable.
- Struggling readers are not centered out.
- If students are unfamiliar with the coding system you may wish to explain it to the class before you begin the assessment.
- Most students are comfortable with reading aloud in the classroom, while others may wish to go to another setting.
- It is helpful to copy the Conference Sheet and the Oral Reading Sheet back to back.

- When you ask the questions about strategy use do not show students the potential answers. Either tick, number or record their answers.
- If you notice a huge discrepancy between a student’s oral answers and their written responses ask the comprehension questions.

---

* Brownlee: DART Protocol  
* © Faye Brownlie: Mar, 2006: Updated June, 2010  
* Updated June, 2010
### Rationale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Points to Consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distribute booklets.</td>
<td>Give the students about 5 minutes to settle before you start the Oral Reading and Interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind students to be thoughtful in answering the comprehension questions and remind them that they can look back at the text as they need to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind the students to read the whole booklet, <em>Storm Chasers</em>, even though most of the information to answer the questions will be in the last half.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessments should allow students to exhibit their strengths. Give students the time they need to finish the assessment. It usually takes most students between 45 and 60 minutes.

---

- Brownlie: DART Protocol
- McMahon and Bjornson: March, 2005.

© Paye Brownlie: Mar, 2006; Updated June, 2010

Updated June, 2010
READ Team Mid-Year Assessment OF and FOR Learning Based on District Assessment of Reading Team (DART) PROTOCOL for Grade 6 The Amazing Potato

In this mid-year Grade 6 Assessment students read selection entitled The Amazing Potato from the Quick Comprehension Assessment series.

Setting the stage for the Assessment takes approximately 15 minutes. Students will need 45 minutes to complete the reading and Question and Answer Sheet. This assessment will take 2 teachers one hour to administer. If a second teacher is not available additional time will be necessary for a teacher to complete the Oral Reading and Conference components.

Teacher materials required:
1. Copy for each teacher of the Oral Reading Sheet.
2. Oral Reading/Conference Sheet for each student.

Student materials required
1. class set of Question and Answer Sheets
2. class set of selection entitled The Amazing Potato

Assessments should allow students to exhibit their strengths. With this in mind, review the following purposes and processes with the students. The following script is provided for your use.

There may be some students in your class on modified programs who will not be able to read this text. If so, in accordance with their I.E.P., the text may be read to them and they could respond to the best of their ability. A scribe can be provided for developing writers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Steps</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important that students understand the purpose of the assessment and how the information is going to be used.</td>
<td>&quot;The purpose of this reading assessment is to gain information about how you are independently reading and understanding at this time of the year, using a particular sample. It is not an assessment for marks.&quot;</td>
<td>Make sure the students know what you want them to do after they have finished, and that they have the necessary materials in their desks.</td>
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<td>&quot;You will be asked to read silently and to answer a few questions.&quot;</td>
<td>Silent reading is easy to organize and appropriate.</td>
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<td>&quot;This is an independent reading sample.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;At anytime, you can look at the text to answer the questions.&quot;</td>
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### Rationale

| Proficient readers access background knowledge (schema) before they read to increase their understanding. |

"It is important to think about the title and the pictures on the selection you read. Look at what you will be reading. It is called 'The Amazing Potato'. What do you think this text is going to be about? What do you already know about the history of potatoes?"

Ask class to share predictions and facts they know about the topic so everyone hears the same information.

After students have shared with the whole class, encourage individual student accountability.

"Close your eyes, think about what you have heard and already know about the history of potatoes. Make a fist and raise a finger with each fact you recall."

| Proficient readers read with a purpose. |

Distribute Question and Answer Sheets.

"Let's read the questions together BEFORE you begin reading, to help establish your purpose for reading."

"Put your finger on question one and we will start."

| Proficient readers interact with the text during reading to deepen their understanding. |

Encourage your students to use strategies to hold their thinking as they read.

"I can give you stickies, acetate or scrap paper to hold your thinking because you cannot write on your text."

| Points to Consider |

You could show a colour overhead of the booklet cover.

If you have ESL students make sure they know what potatoes are.

The questions are not discussed. If a student requires support with a question during the assessment and if support is given, record this information for use in planning for instruction.

Use these if you feel they will be helpful to your students.

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### Rationale

The oral reading provides a great deal of information about the strategies that students use when decoding and comprehending text.

### Steps

- **You now know what your part is in this assessment. I also have a part to do. My part is to listen to you read, make notes and ask you a few questions.**

- **Reading orally** provides a window into what goes on in your mind when you read. I glimpse your reading patterns, how you make sense of unknown words, your phrasing, the flow of your language. This information helps me support you in your development as a reader.

- **You will be asked to read something in the passage that you have already practiced. All students will read the same passage. I will mark down what I notice about your reading. What I am marking is my observations, not necessarily errors. I will show you my recording, once we have finished.**

- Students will read from their copy of the article. Record your observations on the Oral Reading Sheet. Circle the appropriate descriptor(s) at the bottom of the page eg. careful and confident.

- **After I listen to you read I will interview you.** I will ask you about the strategies you used, what you learned from your reading and what connections you made as you read.

### Points to Consider

- It is important that all students read aloud.
- One to one time is valuable.
- Struggling readers are not centered out.
- If students are unfamiliar with the coding system you may wish to explain it to the class before you begin the assessment.
- Most students are comfortable with reading aloud in the classroom, while others may wish to go to another setting.
- It is helpful to copy the Conference Sheet and the Oral Reading Sheet back to back.
- When you ask the questions about strategy use do not show students the potential answers. Either tick, number or record their answers.
- If you notice a huge discrepancy between a student's oral answers and their written responses ask the comprehension questions.

### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Behaviour</th>
<th>Code</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insertion</td>
<td>old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>R</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sounding Out</td>
<td>SO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Correction</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told student the word</td>
<td>T</td>
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</tbody>
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<td>Assessments should allow students to exhibit their strengths.</td>
<td>Distribute selection entitled <em>The Amazing Potato</em>. Remind students to be thoughtful in answering the comprehension questions and remind them that they can look back at the text as they need to.</td>
<td>Give the students about 5 minutes to settle before you start the Oral Reading and Interviews.</td>
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<td>Give students the time they need to finish the assessment.</td>
<td>It usually takes most students between 45 and 60 minutes.</td>
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