



HIBERNIA COLLEGE

An examination of teacher perception and education on the implementation of formative
assessment strategies in post-primary education

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List of Acronyms

ILR:	Integrative Literature Review
FA:	Formative Assessment
NCCA:	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

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Abstract

This study examined the factors affecting the successful implementation of FA strategies in post-primary education in Ireland. The integrative review carefully selected 12 papers which facilitated the discussion pertaining to the three research questions posed. The project has highlighted the effect assessment reform has had on both teachers and students in terms of education and adoption. It has also highlighted that there is a disconnect between education and understanding of the FA process. It was found that even though teachers feel that they are not supported in the implementation of these strategies; this is down to the continued dominance of final summative assessments. However, when teachers engage in the FA process and embrace its strategies, the positive impact on students is evident. The study found that students preferred the use of learning intentions and success criteria and as a result, believe their learning had a positive impact over time. Finally, the study findings have highlighted that more support is required from policymakers in order to ensure that important information is being filtered through to teachers and schools. This in turn, will benefit the FA strategies that occur in the classroom. The overall themes are discussed in light of the wider literature with reference to the Irish education system.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale for conducting this integrative literature review (ILR) on the impact of teachers on formative assessment (FA) practices in post-primary educational setting including material relevant to the Irish context. This chapter also provides definitions of FA as well as the history of assessment in Ireland including national policy formation and teachers perceptions of this form of teaching strategy. In doing so, the chapter addresses the background to the study, its location within the literature and the associated research question.

1.2 Origin of the Dissertation

The idea for this study came from my experience of teachers perceptions of FA practices during my first school placement. During this time I observed that the teachers I was collaborating with were disconcerted with the new Junior Cycle reform and the inclusion of continuous based assessment as part of the learning cycle for students in the classroom. It was found that the extra work was hampering teachers. This posed the question to me, do teachers have the necessary skills and support to implement FA strategies in the classroom? Is the history of assessment practice in the Irish educational context a contributing factor to teachers currently held views? Is teacher education the reason for the less than positive attitude amongst teachers? The problem that is resonating from papers that I have reviewed is that teachers feel that they were not involved in the decision in curriculum change and the use of FA. The dissatisfaction stems from the lack of engagement and inclusion in teaching and learning at a national level.

1.3 Aim of the Dissertation

The experience and idea generation stated above and initial reading around the topic of FA practices in the Irish Education system particularly in post-primary has resulted in the following aim for this research project. The aim of this integrative review shall be expressed as follows: to explore the relationship between FA adoption and teacher perception in the post-primary setting.

1.4 Education reform in Ireland: A contextual note

As Hogan (1996) rightly put it in his summary of the Irish education system, now is the time to let go of systems that do not put the students interests at heart and to adopt a standpoint that has the best chance of harnessing change. In Ireland, the first three years of post-primary education are known as the Junior Cycle while the final two years are known as the Senior Cycle. In 1989, a new Junior Certificate programme was introduced with the aim of achieving greater balance and relevance to the curriculum. Its purpose was to deepen the teaching and learning experience of junior students and in doing so prepare them for the senior cycle of post-primary education (DES, 1995). It also sought to encourage students in their development of critical thinking skills for their role in the growing knowledge society.

A review of the junior cycle ten years later found that the changes that were envisaged were not being realised. The evidence suggested that the dominance of the final exam at Junior Cycle level was resulting in students being subjected to a classroom enveloped in rote learning and teaching to the final exam (Smyth et al., 2006). As a result of these findings a drive towards Junior Cycle reform in Ireland began. A momentum began with the publication of discussion documents from the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) culminating in the publication of the Revised Framework for Junior Cycle (Curriculum and Assessment, 2015). MacPhail et al. (2018) made a convincing argument that Junior Cycle assessment reform in Ireland was strongly influenced by the traditional views of what examinations were and therefore, was undermined by the dominance of final summative assessment. The authors recommended that further exploration was needed into how policy implications impacted on the areas they were trying to improve.

It is interesting to note that teaching is a paradoxical profession (Hargreaves, 2003); it is the only profession that is expected to create the human skills and capacities that will enable individuals to survive and succeed in the knowledge society. Teachers are expected to do so much so that our students will have every benefit in order to develop innovative skills and capacities. It must be hard given the history of education in the state. According to Looney and Klenowski (2008), employers are increasingly seeking graduates who have developed thinking skills, the ability to problem-solve and be creative. That being said many researchers are aware of the need for teachers and students to understand the importance of teaching and learning, particularly the influence of effective teaching on the development of future critical thinkers (Broadfoot and Black, 2004, Hargreaves, 2003).

Claxton (2002), in his discussion paper into educational reform, suggested that learning is learnable and consequently, a more complex situation than the traditional school curriculum assumes. Claxton believed that the acceptance of this reality will help formulate curriculum and educational reform in the future. Claxton also believed, as did the other researchers mentioned above, that the narrow focus on summative assessment as a means to effective teaching resulted in a very limited way of preparing students for the knowledge society they are expected to play a part in.

1.5 What is Formative Assessment?

Since the publication of Black and Wiliam (1998)'s famous article on FA and its importance to learning in the classroom, FA has become a popular and major focal point of educational reform (Gu and Yu, 2020). Since then and particularly now in the face of the knowledge society demands on students, teachers are now being asked to implement FA strategies in their classrooms. Gu and Yu (2020) stated that successful FA aims to close the gap between the learners current state of knowledge and the target to which they are attaining. According to Davison and Leung (2009) the basic functions of FA are to inform and form. Inform relates to the feedback to the student while the latter states the importance of following up on the teaching and learning to make sure learning is actually taking place. The fathers of FA in their updated research in 2012 believed that the essence of FA involves establishing a number of things; 1. where the learners are going and 2. where the learners are currently are in their learning and finally, what needs to be done to get them there (Black and Wiliam, 2012, Ramaprasad, 1983, Sadler, 1989).

FA has become renowned and famed internationally for its unique ability to raise student achievement while also promoting self-directed learning and the mastery of critical thinking (Cowie and Bell, 1999, Leahy et al., 2005, McDonald and Boud, 2003, Shepard, 2005). It is now evident that this form of assessment and student engagement is becoming a critical part of curriculum and education policy worldwide. As a result, Ireland has now come under increasing pressure and scrutiny as regards its adoption of assessment as a way to truly understand and encourage students and the direction they are going with their learning.

1.6 Teachers belief and role of assessment

Teachers, as leaders of change, possess an inner drive to change education and the learning of their students through the use of new and active teaching methods in their classroom (Fullan, 1993, Lukacs and Galluzzo, 2014). Barth (1991) stated, within a school, nothing has more impact on students learning than the personal and professional growth of their teachers; however, they must be supported in this effort by their learning organisations (Hattie, 2012). That being the case, it is interesting to note that the role of assessment in the Irish education system has not been met with a much enthusiasm as one would expect (Burke, 2016, Darmody et al., 2020, Looney et al., 2018, Looney and Klenowski, 2008, Lysaght and O’Leary, 2017, MacPhail et al., 2018).

When looking at the education system that exists in Ireland it is important to understand the role that the teacher plays in the relationship between teaching, learning, assessment and the student. As mentioned above, the NCCA announced the new Junior Cycle Framework in 2015. The Framework stressed the importance of integration of assessment into the classroom. MacPhail et al. (2018) stated that the concern was not that teachers were not engaging in assessment practices in their classrooms; but rather that they had not been effectively educated or supported in their effective implementation by the policymakers that write the strategies. Looney and Klenowski (2008) argued that the primary focus of the Irish education system had been on teaching the curriculum. This therefore, made it difficult to change the mindset of teachers that effective teaching and learning can be made even better through the proper adoption of FA. This change in mindset would be the true driver of change in education.

Teachers, who inspire change in student learning, work to ensure that there is cognitive change in the student. They work to obtain sufficient understanding of the student’s prior knowledge through the use of FA strategies and knowing enough about the content to provide meaningful and challenging experiences so that there is some sort of progressive development (Black et al., 2004, Hattie, 2012). Black et al. (2004) emphasised that teachers who displayed leadership qualities in their classroom had one striking feature and that was the courage to utilise active assessment strategies to ensure positive learning experiences for their students. This notion agrees with Fullan and Hattie, who believed that teachers who possessed leadership qualities were life-long learners who constantly sought to improve student learning and enhance their teaching skills and methodologies.

There are however, some preconceptions amongst post-primary teachers that FA can be irrelevant. Brown (2011) stated that teachers have been reported as having multiple and conflicting conceptions of assessment. It is important to note that the teachers in Browns study did note the importance of assessment in improving learning yet stressed that they treat assessment as irrelevant. Brown further suggests that the views which a teacher has towards assessment frames the way that they interpret and interact with the learning environment. Therein lies the situation where such beliefs may not be consistent with national policy expectations or even with classroom practice.

Linked in with teachers beliefs about assessment, Smith et al. (2014) explored the assessment beliefs of pre-service teachers. In their study, the authors found that these teachers brought their previous held beliefs and attitudes towards assessment with them to their profession. These teachers brought their “experience of formal summative assessment, such as those they have experienced in gaining qualifications” and this “dominated their thinking and emotions’ (p. 313). The teachers conceptions about assessment were dominated by their past experiences of assessment in school and college and not by anything that they had been taught about FA theories or the requirements of national policy.

Devine et al. (2013), in their study on teachers perceptions about their teaching discussed that teachers often have a very strong belief about what constitutes effective teaching and how learning should occur. Teaching needed passion for learning, reflective practice and planning in order to effective. What is interesting to note is that these good teaching traits are very similar to what Gleeson (2012) signifies as qualities which Irish teachers lack. It would seem, at that time, that teachers are very much aware of what constitutes effective teaching including FA, but the challenge seems to be practicalities of utilising this in the classroom. Devine et al. (2013) believed that understanding the thoughts of teachers on assessment and the impact that this has on its adoption in the classroom was important and needed to be studied in order to effectively improve students learning.

Literature states that if teachers are to engage in effective FA strategies in their classroom and as Xu and Brown (2016) put it, re-construct their identities as assessors, then they must be supported to reflect on their beliefs and assumptions on assessment (Darmody et al., 2020). Furthermore, the literature states that the relationship between teachers and assessment is more than just focussing on what teachers do in the classroom but rather, on who the teachers are and their beliefs (Looney et al., 2018, Xu and Brown, 2016).

1.7 Methodological Outline

This dissertation utilised an ILR to explore and synthesise literature assessment in the Irish post-primary setting and teachers perceptions and feelings towards the top-down approach to new curriculum reform. While there are varying approaches to conducting a literature review, ILRs are particularly useful for bringing together broader research that employs differing methodologies and approaches (Noble and Smith, 2018). The fundamental purpose of the ILR is to synthesise carefully selected material that has met specific inclusion criteria. Careful analysis of this material can serve to answer posed research questions, and point toward a future research agenda that identifies further areas for research and exploration (Spooner-Lane, 2017). It is also envisaged that closer reading and analysis of the research literature on assessment and teacher engagement will have a potentially profound impact on my own ability to engage in authentic reflection, and understand the problems that post-primary teachers are faced with on a day-to-day basis.

1.8 Outline of the dissertation

Chapter One of the dissertation offers some background discussion on the national policy towards assessment and curriculum reform. This chapter also discusses what constitutes FA and how the history of the Irish education system has had an impact on teacher engagement and perceptions of any changes in curriculum reform i.e. junior cycle reform.

Chapter Two discusses the methodological approach taken with this research study, as well as the search strategy for the ILR, including inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Chapter Three of this integrative review produces the findings of this research project, including a brief synopsis of the selected papers for investigation and then a synthesis following thematic analysis, and discusses these in light of the wider literature.

The final chapter presents recommendations for further research as well as a personal reflection on the implications for practice.

1.9 Conclusion

From reviewing the literature it can be seen that FA is a process that is viewed as important in the teaching and learning process albeit with varying degrees of acceptance by post-primary teachers. Its inclusion in Junior Cycle reform has changed the outlook and reliance on summative assessment as a means of determining a student's understanding of material. There

can be no doubt as to its importance to the development of critical thinking skills in students however, its adoption and acceptance by teachers is often influenced by their perceptions and previous experience. As a result of reviewing the literature, both Irish and international, the following questions are posed;

1. Is teacher education a factor in their beliefs of FA?
2. How important is support and education from policy makers in the adoption and effectiveness of FA in the classroom?
3. Is assessment reform a positive or negative factor on the adoption of teaching and learning strategies?

The following chapter will describe the methodological outline of the thesis and the steps taken in identifying the key papers associated with this ILR.

Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter details the philosophical research approach and direction for the study. The systematic process used for the selection of the papers utilised for the study will be addressed. This chapter also discusses the factors used to ensure the credibility of the ILR while also ensuring the bias is limited in both the selection and reporting of the findings of the literature review.

2.2 Paradigm and Methodology

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), the concept of research paradigm is one that many researchers find challenging to comprehend and apply to their research proposals. Kuhn (1962) referred to it as a philosophical way of thinking with Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) describing it as the worldview of the researcher. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) explain that a researcher's worldview constitutes the abstract beliefs and principles that shape how the researcher looks at the world. The leaders in the field of paradigms, Guba and Lincoln (1994) define it as a basic set of beliefs that guides research action with Denzin and Lincoln (2008) adding that it is a human construction, which deals with first principles signifying where the researcher is coming from so as to construct meaning from research data.

Paradigms are therefore important because they provide beliefs and dictates, which, for scholars in a particular discipline, influence what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how the results of the study should be interpreted. Brannick et al. (1997) observed that what academic researchers note as scientific knowledge fully depends on their chosen epistemology, with Balnaves and Caputi (2001) stating that the philosophical and theoretical underpinning of the research can affect what the researcher counts as evidence. There are two main paradigms associated with the epistemology stance; positivism and anti-positivism. According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998) positivism is a complex phenomenon and also a controversial set of ideas; therefore, it is not just a theory of knowledge but a cultural and political orientation. The basic tenets of anti-positivism are virtually the opposite of those that

characterise positivism (Burrell and Morgan, 2006, Jankowicz, 2005, Lee, 1991). It is an approach that is committed to studying meaning and human phenomena in context.

So, in essence, positivism relates to experimental and descriptive techniques, while anti-positivism relates to qualitative and exploratory approaches. The anti-positivist paradigm lends itself to a methodology that is qualitative where the data is interpreted by the researcher in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the area that is explored. In this case, as this research is involved in the ILR area, it will rely on both qualitative and quantitative approaches with the 12 papers chosen being from either a qualitative or quantitative methodological background.

As can be seen, the overall aim of the dissertation is to explore the relationship between FA adoption and teacher beliefs in the post-primary setting and gain a richer and more profound understanding of the topic being examined. Therefore, it can be argued that this methodological approach is anti-positivist in nature. This approach is further supported through the use of thematic analysis in the examination of critical papers related to the topic, which is also in keeping with the anti-positivism methodological approach.

2.3 Research Design- Documentary Research

The next phase of philosophical and methodological process is choosing the most appropriate research design to answer the research question and achieve the study's research objectives. The purpose of the research design of a study is to frame the research being carried out and strengthen the subsequent steps in sampling, data gathering and analysis while also taking into account the components of rigour and credibility of the study (Collins, 2018). The choice of research design influences subsequent research activities, and the research problem must be understood if irrelevant research design choices are to be avoided (Ghauri et al., 2020).

According to Scott (2014) a document must be studied as socially situated products with Guba and Lincoln (1981) adding that it is any written material that has not been prepared as a result of a request from an investigator. Bailey (1994) referred to this research method as the analysis of documents that contain important information about the topic we wish to study with Payne and Payne (2004) adding that it investigates and categorises physical sources, whether in the public or private domain.

According to Denscombe (2014), there are advantages and disadvantages to using this method of research design in a study. This research method is just as good as and sometimes, even more, cost-effective than social surveys, in-depth interview or participant observation.

Furthermore, the access to and permanence of the documents is an advantage to the researcher as access to the source can be achieved easily with the data also being open to public scrutiny. The disadvantages of this type of research design include areas such as the credibility of the source, which could include the possibility of selection bias on the part of the researcher (Appleton and Cowley, 1997).

Consequently, it rests on the researcher to ensure the credibility, authenticity and comprehensibility remains dominant throughout the research process (Denscombe, 2014). Documentary research was deemed the most appropriate research design for this dissertation as the Boolean library search provided many articles that could be reviewed in order to gain insightful perceptions of FA and the impact of teacher beliefs on this teaching methodology.

2.4 The ILR and its Process

Researchers have stated that the ILR can be looked upon as the most common and also the most overlooked form of documentary research (Jesson, 2011, Tight, 2019). According to Christmals and Gross (2017), an ILR is a non-experimental design in which the researcher makes critiques, summarises and makes conclusions in an objective fashion through systematic search and thematic analysis of both quantitative and qualitative papers on the subject area (LoBiondo-Wood and Haber, 2010, Sparbel and Anderson, 2000, Torraco, 2005). According to Russell (2005), an ILR possesses many benefits to the researcher. These include evaluating the strength of the scientific evidence, identifying gaps in the literature as well as the direction of future research. This method of research design also aids in the identification of a conceptual framework and exploring which methods of research have been used effectively (Cooper, 1982, De Souza et al., 2010, Ganong, 1987, Russell, 2005, Torraco, 2005, Whittemore and Knafl, 2005).

The ILR requires a systematic approach that is transparent and rigorous (Toronto and Remington, 2020). Cooper theorises the ILR as occurring in 5 stages: (1) problem formulation stage; (2) data collection or literature search stage; (3) evaluation of data stage; (4) data analysis stage; and (5) interpretation and presentation of results stage (Cooper, 1984). Cooper's five stages have been revisited, and numerous variations have been proposed (Souza et al., 2010, Whittemore and Knafl, 2005). Toronto and Remington (2020) added a sixth stage which took into account the dissemination of findings. The ILR process, as applied in this study, is outlined below:

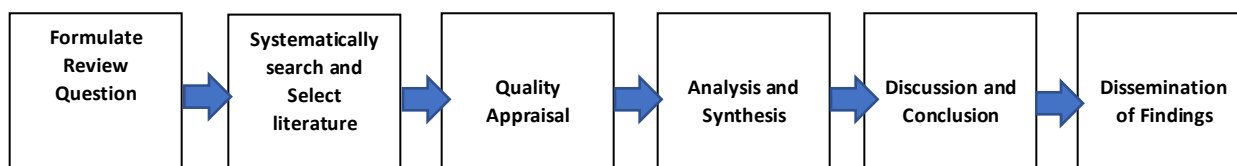


Figure 2.1: The six steps of the ILR

2.4.1 Step One: Problem Formation

The ILR process in this research study began with the selecting of the study theme. Through engagement with the thesis supervisor, the research problem was finalised. It is important that the review purpose and questions are broad and well defined as it informs the search criteria and data collection procedures that will be used in the literature review (Oermann and Hays, 2015, Whitemore and Knafl, 2005). This initial stage was followed by exploratory reading and reflection on material relevant to the research problem formed.

2.4.2 Step Two: Search and Select Literature Systematically and Step Three- Quality Appraisal

As stated by Toronto and Remington (2020) it takes a significant amount of time to conduct an ILR. Organisation is critical to the success of the ILR; proper documentation is essential with reviewers describing their search methods in such a way that it will allow other researchers to be able to replicate or evaluate their research (Toronto and Remington, 2020).

As a result of the initial reading of peer-reviewed journals relating to the study's research question, some terms were deemed critical to the literature search such as FA, assessment for learning, post-primary, secondary school, Ireland, teacher perceptions, beliefs, training and teachers. Using Boolean logic, these terms were searched in both the journal abstracts and titles. The exact search terms used were as follows: *"FA" OR "assessment for learning" AND "post-primary OR secondary school" AND "Ireland OR republic of Ireland" AND "teachers OR post-primary teacher" AND "Beliefs OR perceptions"*. This Boolean search yielded some results which were deemed appropriate for the study. Another search was then completed as follows: *"FA" OR "assessment for learning" OR AFL OR "self-assessment" OR "peer-assessment" AND "post-primary" OR "secondary school" OR "secondary education" OR "second-level education" OR "Junior cycle" AND Teacher* OR educator* AND Belief* OR perception* OR conception* OR attitude** which yielded extra results that were deemed worthwhile for the study. An essential step in the study selection process is screening.

Screening involves reviewing the citations resulting from a search and selecting those that are relevant to the research question and requesting the full journal article and determining its inclusion in the full study (Moher et al., 2009).

Four electronic databases were used to search for articles relevant to this research proposal. In order to meet the selection criteria for this study, the selected paper had to be published within the last 15 years and be peer-reviewed. These criteria were chosen to ensure that the study consisted of up-to-date, insightful research. From the initial search criteria, 461 results were yielded. 141 abstracts were read/screened, followed by 55 full articles, leaving 12 papers included in the final selection. Table 2.1 illustrates the screening process.

Database/Source	Records Screened	Abstracts Read	Articles Read/Evaluated	Included
Education Source	64	20	7	1
Academic Search Complete	46	15	8	0
ERIC	220	56	10	1
Taylor and Francis	131	50	30	10
Total	461	141	55	12

Table 2.1: ILR Article Screening Process

2.4.3 Step Four: Analysis and Synthesis and Step Five: Discussion and Findings

ILRs require the integration of a large amount of existing data to generate a new perspective on the research area that is being researched (Torraco, 2016) with Whitemore and Knafl (2005) adding that it is a complex process that requires transparent and credible research methods. According to Toronto and Remington (2020) in order to properly analyse the data at hand, the researcher will need to extract the data and analyse it for similarities or differences that will answer the study research question. In order for this level of analysis to occur the researcher will need to move from a level of knowledge of basic facts to a deep understanding of the knowledge needed to understand and answer the research question. The discussion section of the ILR is where the researcher interprets the findings of their analysis. Comparisons and contrasts are made with the findings that have been found with literature as a back up to the discussions being made. If applicable, recommendations are then made.

2.4.4 Step Six: Dissemination

The final step of the review is dissemination and is described as the ability of the researcher to communicate the results of the study to the wider world (Cooper, 1984). The dissemination of the material is essential both to the expansion of the theme/topic being researched but more importantly, to the author performing the research for their personal and academic advancement.

2.5 Rigour in Documentary Research

Research reviews are considered an important method of research and therefore, should meet the same standards as primary research in methodological rigour in the studies they summarise (Cooper, 1984, Hawker et al., 2002, Whitemore and Knafl, 2005). Since the 1980s four important papers (Cooper, 1989, Ganong, 1987, Jackson, 1980, Whitemore and Knafl, 2005), stated that ILRs need to evaluate the quality of data included in them; however they continue to be published without addressing this important step (Toronto et al., 2018). Jackson (1980) emphasized the importance of the reviewers knowledge in making conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of papers being included in the study before making assumptions in order to achieve rigour.

A number of measures were employed to ensure the final selection of documents were appropriate and the analysis process was thorough. This research study used the methods guided by Whitemore (2007) to ensure rigour. Systematic analysis was used in both the collection, analysis and appraisal of the selected documents. The researcher was constantly aware that their own bias and values could impact on the study and therefore to remain reflective, the researcher engaged in conversations with their research supervisor every week throughout the course of the dissertation process.

2.6 Ethical Issues and Bias

Whitemore and Knafl (2005) state that ILRs are not without their capacity for selectivity bias. Suri (2020) posited that researchers engaging in the systematic review process should be concerned with the variety of ethical issues that can cause potential conflicts of interest and issues of voice and representation. Dunkin (1996) was of the opinion that researchers performing systematic reviews must be mindful of the ethical considerations of their study, which are particularly relevant to their review's epistemological orientation. Dunkin stated that researchers should be wary of a number of errors when utilising this research design:

unexplained selectivity, not discriminating between evidence of varying quality, inaccurate coding of contextual factors, exaggerating claims made in the review beyond what can be justified by the evidence reported in primary studies and not paying adequate attention to the findings that are at odds with the generalisations made in the review (Braun and Clarke, 2006, Dunkin, 1996).

In this study, the documents included in the research design were carefully chosen through a meticulous selection criteria process. A specific evaluation process was used in order to address any lack of prejudice that may have unintentionally crept into the study. In this study, only documents that offered adequate and appropriate detail on the context and sampling used were included in the data analysis.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter explained the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of this study. The research has demonstrated an anti-positivist stance in conjunction with a documentary research design, as well as the specific steps undertaken in the ILR process. The chapter also described the validity and reliability measures undertaken to ensure that the research process was rigorous and free of bias. Chapter three presents a summary of the documents chosen for this review and the subsequent results of the thematic analysis.

Chapter Three

Findings and Discussion

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a summary and synopsis of each of the papers selected for further analysis in this ILR. The chapter also presents the themes chosen for the study pertaining to the research questions posed. A thematic analysis will be used to discuss the themes presented in the papers selected as well as the wider body of literature in the area.

3.2 Summary and Critique of Selected Papers

When performing the data analysis and synthesis of the selected papers for this ILR it is important to understand the primary goal of the review (Torraco, 2016). The primary goal is to create a better understanding of the impact of teacher beliefs and education on the FA process and their attitude towards government policy on the issue. Torraco defines data analysis as a creative process that generates new knowledge and other unique connections which is informed by the researchers intimate knowledge of the topic (Torraco, 2005). The goal of this chapter is to develop new facets of information through the process of integrating smaller pieces of data from the carefully selected peer-reviewed papers in this study (Booth et al., 2012).

The final selection of papers spanned 15 years from 2005-2020. The papers selected include both qualitative, quantitative and mixed method studies. All the studies selected had FA as the basis of the research. Fifty percent of the papers included Irish teachers/schools as their subject. The selected studies investigated areas such as assessment policy in Ireland, adoption of FA practices and student and teacher perspectives. Using Braun and Clarke (2006)'s study as a model, a thematic analysis process was used. Through a rigorous method of data analysis, the researcher was able to combine and integrate concepts and themes across a multitude of literature to provide answers to the research question posed (Torraco, 2016). Table 3.1 offers a summary of the selected documents.

Author	Purpose	Sample	Methodology	Findings/Summary
MacPhail and Halbert (2010)	the need for teacher support in the use of assessment for learning in physical education	20 post-primary schools nominated one physical education teacher	Qualitative approach using teacher focus groups and interviews	It was found by both teachers and students that the quality of assessment in PE has improved. Students appreciated being given more responsibility for their own learning while teachers believed that the use of questioning and feedback increased engagement among students. Preparation time for teachers for AfL was a concern but it decreased over time.
Cahill et al (2020)	An investigation into the perspectives of teachers on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in education	A purposive sample of ten teachers from a voluntary education centre, youth reach centre and a post-primary special school	A qualitative investigation using 10 in depth semi-structured interviews. The Sample chosen was purposive	Many teachers expressed that continuous assessment was a far better way to assess students knowledge. Teachers welcomed less formal assessment as a method for students to learn more skills.
Ni Chronin and Cosgrave (2014)	To explore the impact of incorporating assessment into primary education teachers practices and their perspectives on assessment	5 teachers participated in focus groups and interviews from Limerick and Dublin schools	Qualitative approach using focus groups and follow up interviews	The use of assessment strategies was a positive experience for both teachers and students as it allowed learning to be structured. Teachers felt that by using assessment strategies the students learned more and they became better teachers. The study also found that teachers need to be supported more in their adoption of assessment strategies.

MacPhail, Halbert and O'Neill (2018)	Paper sets out to map assessment policy and its adoption in Ireland from 1999 to the 2015 Junior Cycle Framework Document	This paper mapped out the assessment policy in the Republic of Ireland.	The paper creates a narrative on the story of assessment reform in the Junior Cycle. The paper documents the decision to move away from pure summative assessment as a means to support teaching and learning	The study found that while strides were made in the reform of the junior cycle, more exploration of the reform and its impact is needed such as system readiness and the teacher perspectives. In essence, teachers need more support when exploring the use of formative assessment in the classroom.
Lysaght and O'Leary (2013)	The development of assessment practices in Ireland and teachers understanding of AfL teaching and their implementation in their teaching practices	476 teachers in primary education in Ireland	The paper describes the design, development and trialing of the Assessment for Learning Audit Instrument (AfLAI). The audit was given to 476 teachers.	The study found that there is still work to be done to engage students fully in the assessment process. The paper also stressed that teachers required some adaptive expertise to implement AfL successfully in the classroom.
Looney (2007)	This paper assesses the education system in Ireland and the reformation of the assessment profile in primary and post-primary	This is a review paper which looks at the schooling and assessment profiles	This paper conducted a literature review on the education system in Ireland and the use of assessment as a teaching and learning methodology.	The paper concluded that the two state examinations that take over the post-primary curriculum make it challenging to implement new assessment changes.
DeLuca et al (2017)	To focus on student perspectives on their use and value of AfL approaches in the classroom	12 purposefully selected students in the K-12 classroom	Student surveys from ages 4-18 with teachers participating in the research. Portfolio based interviews with 12 students from six participating teachers classrooms.	This paper found that there had been limited research done on students perspectives on AfL. The research found that Senior students did not value AfL and preferred direct teacher feedback. It also found that students needed to be taught about the positives about AfL and how it can help them. Students believed that

				teachers were the driving force behind AfL adoption and relied on them to guide the process.
Crichton and McDaid (2015)	To investigate pupils and teachers perceptions of AfL strategies	Small-scale exploratory study in two schools in Scotland	Quantitative approach using questionnaire and 40 semi-structure interviews	Teachers and students were aware of the benefits of AfL. Teachers believed that students become more confident as a result of AfL. However, teachers understanding of the strategy does not appear to be fully recognised. Teachers stated that they required more training in the proper use of AfL and using it in the most effective way possible.
Halbert and MacPhail (2010)	This paper draws on insights provided by principals and PE teachers into the effective implementation of syllabuses within in Irish post-primary schools	Baseline survey, containing three different questionnaires, sent to 763 post-primary schools. Structured interviews conducted with 13 principals and 12 PE teachers	Mixed method approach using surveys and structured interviews.	The study found that the support structures needed for teachers needed to be implemented more effectively. Curriculum development and teacher development are linked.
Darmody et al (2020)	The paper provides an overview of the literature on teacher's beliefs on assessment	The implementation of Brown's "Teachers conceptions of Assessment Inventory" with 489 teachers.	Quantitative method using assessment inventory questionnaire	The teachers in this study displayed broad conceptions of assessment which corresponded to the diverse assessment landscape in post-primary. The study found that teachers viewed summative assessment as the best way to give proper feedback to students but were open to the use of formative assessment. This paper also recognised that teachers needed to be made

				aware of the qualities of formative assessment and reflect on their own assumptions of the process.
DeLuca and Klinger (2010)	This study examines assessment education at one pre-service education centre	288 teacher candidates at a pre-service education centre	Quantitative approach using a questionnaire	The study found that there needed to be a better understanding of the assessment needs of teacher candidates. Pre-service teacher education needs to provide fundamental knowledge and skills in assessment.
Young and Jackman (2014)	To explore the perceptions, attitudes and frequency of the use of formative assessment by teachers in Grenada secondary schools	252 lower secondary school teachers	Quantitative approach using a questionnaire	The study found that the Grenada classroom needed to employ a wider range of student-centered approaches. The education of teachers in formative assessment practices has been successful but their adoption has not been as positive. It was suggested that teachers were facing challenges implementing the practice and these challenges needed to be understood more.

Table 3.1: Summary of Selected Papers

3.3 Themes and Discussion

This review had the purpose of investigating the adoption of FA practices amongst teachers, while also focussing on teachers perceptions of the process. Following the analysis of the selected peer-reviewed papers a number of topics emerged i.e. teacher inclusion and education on new assessment policies adopted by the government; teacher and student beliefs and attitudes of the FA process and the impact of FA on teaching and learning. Each of these themes will be discussed and presented in the below sections within the context of the selected papers and literature review material.

3.3.1 Assessment reform in Ireland- support

As mentioned in Chapter One, the curriculum in Ireland has had a reformation in terms of how assessment is viewed and executed in the classroom. MacPhail et al. (2018) contended that learning and assessment within the post-primary school have always been treated as separate and not always related processes. The education system attempted to tackle this issue through assessment reform. It was noted however, by the authors that the focus on this reform was undermined by the dominance of final summative assessment and the reflection of grades on a teachers ability. This point of view strongly correlates with Hargreaves (2003) and Looney and Klenowski (2008) who emphasised that so much is expected of teachers to create students who can function in the knowledge society yet are constrained with an education system that is archaic in its execution. Interestingly, this research found that while the government was intent on developing assessment reform in schools, the information that was shared with the school was either not supportive enough or not being fed from the school management to the teachers themselves. Halbert and MacPhail (2010)'s study of teacher support in assessment reform, found that principals did not share important policy document information with their staff. In effect the gatekeeper of this knowledge (the principal) was not communicating effectively with staff. In turn the principals in this study were of the opinion that they were busy people and did not have time to read lengthy policy documents that were sent out to schools.

So while Halbert and MacPhail (2010) found that the support was not freely available for schools that wanted to fully support and implement assessment reform, it seems that this situation did not change significantly when reading Crichton and McDaid (2016)'s research into the perceptions of assessment. They stated that teachers endeavoured to comply with school policy in the application of learning intentions and success criteria but were not properly supported by management to do so. Here the argument was made that support was not given

to schools and the leaders within them to communicate important information to their staff members. The principals were strongly of the opinion that support in this manner from the policy makers would have prompted them to engage with the rest of the staff in a more timely manner.

As mentioned in Chapter One, if teachers are to engage in FA practices then they must be supported to reflect on their perceptions, assumptions and adoption of assessment strategies (Darmody et al., 2020, Xu and Brown, 2016). The lack of communication from government to the school leaders and gatekeepers of knowledge can again be seen in Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave (2013). Their study of teachers found that the lack of support and support material to aid in the proper design of assessment strategies was the biggest obstacle to the complete adoption of FA in schools. This notion was also supported by the NCCA 2008. Even though the authors research was focussed on primary education, their interviews with teachers found that the level of commitment expected of them by the policy makers and schools was not achievable given the high volume of paperwork that was attached to its successful implementation.

Interestingly, this notion of achievable goals was mentioned by Looney (2006) in her overview of assessment in Ireland. She was of the opinion that despite the NCCAs publication on the benefits of assessment for learning, the existence of two formal examinations makes it very difficult to introduce change. Darmody et al. (2020) further emphasised this point where their study found experienced teachers believed that final summative assessments were the best way to assess learning; this by default is how teachers believe they are judged, by their students results and not by student understanding. The introduction of assessment reform in the Junior Cycle, in particular, has resulted in many studies being completed on teachers and students perceptions of assessment, its impact on learning and the preparation that is required for its success.

3.3.2 Teacher perceptions of assessment

In Chapter One, it was stated that the introduction of assessment reform into the Irish education system was not met with as much interest or support by teachers and schools as policymakers expected (Burke, 2016, Darmody et al., 2020, Looney et al., 2018, Looney and Klenowski, 2008, Lysaght and O'Leary, 2017, MacPhail et al., 2018). This attitude towards FA and the pressures put on teachers to conform was a feature in the papers selected for this study. Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave (2013) found that teachers felt lot of pressure was put on them to

introduce FA practices in their classroom. Their study also found that teachers acknowledged that the level of commitment required was not reasonable as they believed that there is so much paperwork being imposed on them now. It made doing their normal job extremely difficult. Interestingly, the teachers did believe in the merits of using assessment in their subject. However, the study did agree with Crichton and McDaid (2016) and Halbert and MacPhail (2010) that the policy makers did need to create a “magic book” to help teachers and principals to introduce assessment correctly in the classroom (Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave, 2013).

From reading the selected studies it became clear that while teachers believed there was much work to do with regards to proper information and support documents to support teachers and leaders in utilising FA in the classroom, the positives of assessment practices (in most cases) outweighed the negatives. In Young and Jackman (2014)’s, study into perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards FA, they found that teachers generally had positive attitudes towards using assessment in their classroom. They believed it enabled more understanding amongst students within the lesson and teachers were able to correct any misunderstandings that were occurring more efficiently. Darmody et al. (2020) agreed with this finding where the teachers in their study believed that assessment was a key element of their work as educators. They were 90% in agreement that assessment provided feedback to students about their performance. Student performance was also a key element of MacPhail and Halbert (2010)’s study where their teachers viewed assessment strategies as an important practice to increasing students involvement in class and increasing their ability to reflect on their learning. The teachers in this study believed by being more effective in planning their lessons resulted in students achieving their goals. The FA approach was a pathway for more meaningful teaching and learning. Similarly, the teachers in Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave (2013) study believed that using more formal assessment strategies in physical education (PE) would help students to take PE more seriously as an examinable subject. The researchers found that their commitment to engaging in FA led them to using a greater variety of methodologies and showed them how they ensure their lessons are student-centred. The use of structured assessment strategies allowed them reflect on their teaching and how they could improve on their own pedagogical practice.

As mentioned in the previous section, the dominance of the final state exams is still a issue with regards to implementing FA strategies in the classroom. Brown (2011) found that teachers can have conflicting attitudes towards assessment inclusion in their classroom. The teachers in his study noted the importance of assessment but also found it irrelevant while Looney and Klenowski (2008) stated that it would be hard to change the mindset of some teachers towards

assessment reform. Interestingly, Cahill et al. (2020) found that some teachers wanted to disrupt this thinking. While teachers viewed their role as nourishing the competitive nature within students for their final exams; they wanted to change this mindset and believed FA would enable a more student-centred process-based view of education. Teachers felt they were teaching to the exam rather than encouraging students to be self-critical and reflective in their learning as stated by Halbert and MacPhail (2010). The dominance of final exams was a great dilemma for teachers where they found it hard to balance authentic and important learning for life with the demands of the external world as represented by the state examination system. Whereas, the teachers in Cahill's study believed there needed to be a greater balance between developing student-centred learning whilst also remaining true to the final exam.

Trying to change this mindset of teaching to the exam was also evident in the preconceived ideas of experienced teachers. Smith et al. (2014) and Devine et al. (2013) stated that experienced teachers brought their preconceived ideas of assessment with them into the classroom. Their own experience of the final summative assessment impacted on their beliefs on effective teaching and learning. Crichton and McDaid (2016)'s study on teacher perceptions, also found that there was a difference between newly qualified teachers and teachers who had been in the profession for five years or more. The study found that all teachers except those qualified in the last five years were not confident in using FA strategies such as learning intentions and success criteria. It again comes back to Halbert and MacPhail (2010)'s point that teachers and schools needed to be supported more with regards to the effective implementation of FA strategies. Young and Jackman (2014) also found that newly trained teachers were more accepting of assessment practices; they viewed the strategies as benefiting students with being self-critical and monitoring their own learning.

This view corresponds with Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave (2013) whose research found that teachers' awareness and knowledge of assessment was improved by their use of assessment strategies. They saw first-hand how their use of strategies impacted positively on the students' learning and recognised the value of doing this. An interesting point that was made in this study was that in some cases teachers were trying to do too much FA strategies in the class and therefore were running out of time. In some cases students were growing tired of the constant assessment type tasks; which relates to the point made above by the same authors that teachers can get overwhelmed with the amount of resources and work that can occur. It is important to have a balance. The teachers in Young and Jackman (2014), as the teachers in Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave (2013)'s research, rather than seeing assessment strategies as an investment in

students learning, found them to be time consuming and taking up valuable time that could be spent teaching content. These teachers did admit however that assessment strategies did give learners greater confidence while this was overshadowed by the time involved in implementing it.

Interestingly, Young and Jackman (2014) highlighted that teachers did not believe that assessment gave students a better chance at passing their exams but as Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave (2013) found, teachers were aware of the educational value of assessment and the sense of ownership it gave students of their learning. What was interesting to note in this instance with regards to PE, was that the teachers believed it impacted positively on the subject by giving less academic students the chance to achieve acknowledgement of their learning achievement.

3.3.3 Student perceptions of assessment

The lack of support and information on FA strategies and their implementation in the classroom followed through to students perception of the process. The students in Crichton and McDaid (2016)'s study stated that that only some of their teachers used FA preferring, instead, to just get on with the class. This was particularly relevant with Senior Cycle students. In terms of Junior Cycle, students stated that while their teacher did try and implement the strategies they were not always explained properly. This correlates with Halbert and MacPhail (2010) who found that teachers did not understand what was being asked of them regarding implementing FA strategies; they lacked support which resulted in students also being confused as to how these strategies were meant to assist them in their learning. Finally, the students in Crichton and McDaid (2016) believed that if they were given more time for discussion they would have made better sense of their learning.

Black et al. (2004) and Hattie (2012) stated that teachers who work to understand their students prior knowledge through the use of FA were more capable in developing their learning. This belief was also displayed in MacPhail and Halbert (2010)'s paper on assessment development and its benefits. They found that in situations where teachers understood the benefit and use of FA in the classroom, the students saw their teachers as better organised. They found that the teacher included more time for discussion which is what Crichton and McDaid (2016) believed was lacking in their teachers. The students in MacPhail and Halbert's study found that the inclusion of more discussion, groupwork and proper explanations was a direct result of the teachers understanding of FA and their organisation. The students liked when the teacher

approached the class in this way and preferred having targets to aim towards and recording their progress. DeLuca et al. (2018)'s study eight years later showed that the students experience of and opinion on FA strategies had not changed; the students interviewed in their study stated that they benefited immensely from the process and that their teachers were essential to it. Students in this case agreed that goals in terms of their progress helped them to achieve their current and future learning efforts.

In the previous section, the teachers spoke about the dominance of final exams and teaching to the exam impacted on their ability to implement FA strategies in the most effective way. They found that they did not have enough time in the class to use FA and preferred to get to the teaching of the course. In MacPhail et al. (2018), when students were asked directly about their assessment preferences, they preferred a more hands-on practical approach to assessment rather than a final written exam. The use of FA strategies involved less pressure, allowed more time for them to reflect and complete assignments and the development of a large range of skills. When asked about their preference, it was interesting to note that students had a preference for continuous assessment rather than a final examination.

MacPhail et al. (2018) did note that the NCCA were reviewing this preference and trying to make the syllabus more balanced. The Junior Cycle is strongly influenced by the traditional view of examinations. The intention for assessment reforms is to allow more of a reliance on FA however the presence of the high states summative assessment is undermining the inclusion of FA. While MacPhail et al. (2018) mentioned the intention of the policymakers to move away from summative assessment as the main means of assessing students, it was noted that teachers, principals and schools still need further support as also stated by Halbert and MacPhail (2010) and Crichton and McDaid (2016). In some cases, the lack of education amongst teachers in the effectiveness and benefits of FA results in the misunderstanding and lack of adoption of these strategies.

3.3.4 Teacher education in FA

When looking at teacher education, understanding and training in FA strategies, MacPhail and Halbert (2010), through their teacher interviews, found that there was a variance in the rate to which teachers adopted the strategies in their classroom. This adoption led back to the understanding and support which they received from policy makers and the school (Crichton and McDaid, 2016, Halbert and MacPhail, 2010). MacPhail and Halbert (2010) did note that there was evidence that while their experience was challenging it was also rewarding with one

teacher adding that it made them want to continue their education and understanding around the topic.

Education around FA resulted in teachers experiencing a shift in their role from one that simply administered learning to being able to make adjustments to their classroom with regards to students teaching and learning. However, MacPhail and Halbert (2010) did notice the benefits to using FA strategies. They found that using these strategies were not complicated but different to what they were used to. They also found that teachers were realising its potential for learning as opposed to of learning. It is about adapting to a new way of teaching and learning for students. Similarly, Young and Jackman (2014) found that trained teachers had significantly stronger perceptions of using FA as a means of helping them to plan and adapt their lessons more effectively. This is compared to untrained teachers who were not of this opinion.

Research from DeLuca and Klinger (2010) on assessment education in pre-service teachers found that they were able to identify their educational needs and willingness/readiness to use assessment strategies in their classroom. The researchers found that the level of confidence in using assessment strategies was directly related to their practicum experience rather than any direct and compulsory educational course. Furthermore, the authors stated that the education in assessment practices of these teachers by associate teachers were really dependant on the knowledge and skills attributed to them. It was deducted that education in FA was lacking and therefore substandard knowledge was being imparted on pre-service teachers. DeLuca and Klinger did find that practicing teachers identified their need to update their professional learning in assessment as their understandings might have been outdated, incomplete and biased. It is apparent from DeLuca and Klinger, Halbert and MacPhail (2010) and Crichton and McDaid (2016) that the lack of education of teachers was having an impact on the understanding of the benefits and utilisation of FA in the classroom. The reliance on mentor teachers to educate pre-service teachers on the strategies of FA did not lead to an overall and consistent improvement in the understanding of FA practices. Lysaght and O'Leary (2013) also found that there was difficulty in getting teachers to implement learning strategies in their classroom and it was related to teachers mental models on teaching and learning

Teachers mis-information and lack of education on FA was again witnessed by Darmody et al. (2020) who stated that teachers had the mis-conception that classroom based assessment showed students performance in class but did not show teachers where students were with their learning. Darmody et al found that teachers accepted the value of using FA in the classroom

which is good for the new Junior Cycle reform however, the point still remains that teacher beliefs and their actual practice do not always align well as found by the authors. Lysaght and O'Leary (2013) further emphasised this point where they found that teachers in their study did not fully understand all the terms related to FA strategies and therefore felt they needed further education in the area. This research further supported the point that the proper implementation of FA practices requires an understanding of the process. So while teachers stated that they used these processes in their classroom it is the case that some lack the confidence and knowledge to do so effectively. For the teachers that do adopt FA practices in their classrooms, there are many impacts that can be seen.

3.3.5 Impact of FA adoption on teaching and learning strategies

It can be seen from the themes discussed so far that assessment reform in Ireland has not been met with as much enthusiasm or acceptance as the policymakers would have liked or perceived. Furthermore, the teachers to whom this reform has been tasked, feel that the education and support they have received thus far has not been sufficient enough for them to implement FA in their classroom. Added to this, the leaders within the school setting believe that they do not have enough time or the support to lead their staff in the implementation and inclusion of FA strategies in the classroom. That being said it is interesting to note that the teachers that did implement these strategies with their students found that it benefited learning.

In Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave (2013), their research found that teachers who used assessment strategies resulted in their own knowledge of their subject improving through the construction of assessments for their students. In fact, one particular teacher believed that their skill, learning and development had progressed further so that they were better able to understand the areas in their students learning which needed attention. This finding also corresponds to MacPhail and Halbert (2010) who found that content knowledge had a key role in supporting assessment practices and development. Ni Chroinin and Cosgrave also reported that without utilising FA practices the teachers in their study would not have been able to give their attention to students who were struggling. Teachers also reported that it made them have a clear plan which is also stated by Darmody et al. (2020), Halbert and MacPhail (2010), Young and Jackman (2014).

Through teachers use of strategies such as learning intentions and success criteria Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave (2013) found that it provided a focus and a structure for teachers at the planning stage of their lessons. These findings were also noted by Crichton and McDaid (2016) and Halbert and MacPhail (2010). The teachers in these studies found that through education and

acceptance of FA practices in their classroom it enhanced student learning and gave them a clear focus on what was expected of them. Students in these studies preferred having learning targets to aim towards and a benchmark to evaluate their performance. This provides further evidence of the positive impact of FA on teachers and students and the value of having a clear focus and sharing this appropriately with students. It also highlights the effectiveness of assessment strategies on teachers ability to assess students learning needs and impacts positively on their subject knowledge.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the themes associated with the key papers identified as connected to this research. The themes identified included assessment reform in Ireland; teacher perceptions of assessment; student perceptions of assessment; teacher education in assessment strategies and the impact of FA on teaching and learning strategies. The following chapter offers a summary of the main findings as well as implications for further research and practice.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4, the final chapter of this ILR, provides a summary of the main findings that have been discovered from the selected research papers. The chapter also investigates the limitations of an ILR, considers the impact on future teaching practice as well as recommendations for future research.

4.2 Addressing the Research Questions

This ILR highlighted three specific research questions.

1. Is teacher education a factor in their beliefs of FA?
2. How important is support and education from policy makers in the adoption and effectiveness of FA in the classroom?
3. Is assessment reform a positive or negative factor on the adoption of teaching and learning strategies?

The findings illustrate that while the inclusion of FA strategies has many benefits to students and teachers there are some implications to its effective inclusion in schools. The first research question asked if teachers' education had an impact on their beliefs and adoption of FA in the classroom. From chapter 3 it is clear that teacher education and government support was a major factor in its adoption. The overarching dominance of the final exam still has an impact on the way that teachers view the effectiveness of FA. The inclusion of assessment strategies in the classroom was different to what teachers were used to particularly if they were teaching for a number of years. Teachers had the burden of being judged on student results rather than on how they were learning. Interestingly, teachers in some of the studies selected, also saw the benefits to FA strategies with some wanting to further their education into the topic to deepen their learning. They found that they were more organised while it also had a positive impact on their subject knowledge. The students also saw the benefit of this approach to teaching in the classroom. They were of the opinion that their teachers were more organised and better able to develop and progress their own learning and understanding. While many teachers

acknowledged the benefits of these strategies to students it was evident that mis-communication and mis-education was an issue. Teachers, particularly those that were experienced, did not understand fully the implications of FA and as a result imparted their own beliefs and opinions on un-trained teachers. This was related to the lack of support teachers felt they received from school management and policymakers.

The second research question asked whether support and education from policy makers was sufficient. A familiar theme which was found in the selected papers was that teachers did feel that FA strategies were a very good idea for student learning and indeed their learning. However, these teachers, particularly the more experienced teachers felt that the support from management and policymakers needed to be better. The understanding of the benefits of FA were not communicated effectively or indeed how a teacher was to fit this extra work in on an already busy teaching day. Teachers' believed that if there was a "magic book" which explained FA, how to implement it effectively and how it could benefit themselves and students would encourage them to be more accepting and adaptive to assessment reform. As it was, the teachers in the selected studies did not feel supported through this process.

The third research question sought to investigate the impact of using FA strategies on teaching and learning. While it was mentioned in other themes explored in this research that teachers and students perceived FA enabled them to structure their learning and focus on the development of their content knowledge; it has been seen in the papers however, that the assessment reform in Ireland has not been met with as much enthusiasm as the policymakers would have liked. The added work being placed on teachers has not made their view on FA a positive one. In some instances, however, teachers found that making the time to use FA in their lessons resulted in their own knowledge of their subject improving as a result. Most importantly, they felt that using the strategies allowed them to better understand their students needs which is interesting as the students that were reviewed in the papers had similar opinions. They believed that when their teacher utilised FA in their lessons, they were more organised, more in tune with the students needs and most importantly had more time for discussion and listened to the student rather than just teaching to the exam. It could be said here that the teacher-student relationship was strengthened as a result and the mutual respect between the two increased.

4.3 Limitations

As with any research study there are limitations to documentary research that relies solely on published research. While every effort was made to include research papers that pertained to the research questions being asked, there is always a limit to the research due to the small time scale to which the papers were drawn and the small number of papers selected to form discussion. Another limitation to the study was the findings not included that could have been gleaned from speaking to teachers and students in person. While COVID restricted the type of research study that could be conducted for this topic (even though the 12 papers included in this study were a wealth of information) nothing compares to be able to interview teachers and policymakers about how FA is being introduced in schools and if they concur. Finally, while much information and research was gathered from the findings of peer-reviewed journals in this research, there are many very informative conference proceedings and magazine articles that highlight implications of FA strategies on teachers and schools. I found information written by Dylan Wiliam and John Hattie in these non-peer-reviewed magazines to have very insightful statistics that were not included in my research study.

4.4 Implications for Practice and Research

There are a number of interesting findings that have emanated from this ILR. The literature review has noted that while some teachers have not totally engaged with FA in the classroom; it is mainly due to the perceived lack of support from policymakers and the amount of work they feel has been imparted on them (Crichton and McDaid, 2016, Darmody et al., 2020, Halbert and MacPhail, 2010, Looney, 2006). From these findings, there is potential for national policymakers to increase teacher and principal engagement in FA strategies through the formulation of more intricate support documents and communication material. The publication of such documents would be of benefit to both educators and the government.

Staying on the recommendation of more support for teachers, the findings have pointed towards the benefit of such support. The more teachers and principals that are supported in the area of FA inclusion in the classroom will have an impact on the education and adoption of these strategies on other educators. The findings suggested that when alternative information was shared by older teachers and their beliefs domineering the actions of younger teachers, resulted in a less than favourable view in such strategies (Devine et al., 2013, Smith et al., 2014). Future research and adoption of FA in the classroom relies on positive affirmation from teachers who have seen the benefits and to share them with others (Cahill et al., 2020, Ní Chróinín and

Cosgrave, 2013), particularly in the Irish context. By making the conversation more approachable and welcoming will result in better engagement. Policymakers should take note of this and use the positive affirmations from these teachers as a tool to encourage more positivity towards curriculum reform.

The dominance of the final exams was also mentioned by teachers as an area that was hampering their total acceptance of FA strategies. Teachers mentioned that they were judged on their students grades and not their learning and engagement in the classroom (Darmody et al., 2020, Looney, 2006). If this belief is to be changed, policymakers need to engage teachers in the making of policies and curriculum changes so as to ensure total understanding, acceptance and support. To take this implication further, policymakers and higher education institutions also need to assess the points system that is centre to university access. The focus on points and the final examination in post-primary results in teachers being judged on students points score rather than the learning that is occurring in the classroom. Assessment is therefore, not viewed as a means to getting excessive points and where rote learning is considered the only method to learning. It seems that there is still a way to go before FA is totally accepted in the classroom. It is up to the policymakers to learn from this and listen to the recommendations from teachers.

4.5 Implications for Future Teaching Practice

Being immersed in this literature review has allowed the researcher to understand how important FA is in the classroom. It was interesting to find that students preferred the use of learning intentions and success criteria and believed that their learning had a positive impact over time. It was also interesting to learn that even though teachers feel that they are not supported in the implementation of these strategies; this is down to the continued dominance of summative assessment. If FA strategies are to truly work in the classroom, the teacher has to not feel like they are being judged on students results. There is still a disconnect between the system we want and the one we have. This research has encouraged me to keep researching and reading on FA.

4.6 Overall Conclusion

The final chapter of this literature review has addressed the research questions posed in Chapter One. The implications of the research findings on future research are also discussed which includes a detailed contribution to the researchers teaching practice. The project has highlighted the effect that assessment reform has had on both teachers and students in terms of education

and adoption. It has also highlighted that there is a disconnect between education and understanding of the FA process. Furthermore, the study has also determined that more support is needed from policy makers to ensure that the information being passed from principals and teachers to other teachers is correct and benefiting teaching and learning in the classroom.

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Appendix A: 12 research papers

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‘We had to do intelligent thinking during recent PE’: students’ and teachers’ experiences of assessment for learning in post-primary physical education

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This study arose in response to a perceived need for additional teacher support for assessment in physical education and the limited focus in physical education pedagogy literature on the impact of Assessment for Learning (AfL), in particular the impact of formative assessment on student learning. The study involved the refinement and evaluation of a post-primary physical education planning framework with assessment instruments for use by teachers. A number of teachers were engaged in the development of assessment and planning materials, the trialling of these in school settings and their subsequent refinement based on the feedback received from the teaching and learning setting. The study was contingent on teachers cultivating a learning culture within their class. Students’ and teachers’ experiences of AfL are reported before highlighting some of the challenges that remain in investigating formative assessment.



Views from the margins: teacher perspectives on alternative education provision in Ireland

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ABSTRACT

Alternative education provision in Ireland is under-researched. This paper is a qualitative investigation of the perspectives of a purposive sample of ten teachers on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in their respective alternative settings of a voluntary education centre, a Youthreach centre and a post-primary special school. 'Funds of knowledge' ideas contribute to the theoretical framework of the study [Moll, Luis C., Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez. 1992. 'Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms.' *Theory Into Practice* 31 (2): 132–141]. The findings in this paper focus on: (1) how curriculum is enacted and mediated in alternative education settings; (2) the pedagogical decisions of teachers as they strive to connect their students to learning and (3) the tensions in assessment practices as teachers and alternative settings attempt to provide authentic and yet certified evidence of learning through the formal state assessment processes. This article is timely as it offers a view of the under-researched area of alternative settings in Ireland.

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Alternative education;
inclusive education;
disadvantaged youth;
teacher perspectives;
Youthreach; special schools;
voluntary education setting

Implementing formative assessment in primary physical education: teacher perspectives and experiences

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Background: Incorporating assessment as a regular practice can enhance teaching and learning in primary physical education. However, there is little evidence to suggest primary teachers use assessment strategies regularly in their physical education classes.

Purpose: To explore the impact of incorporating assessment into primary teachers' physical education practices on (a) their perspectives on assessment and (b) teaching and learning in primary physical education.

Methodology: Primary teachers in Limerick ($n = 2$) and Dublin ($n = 3$) participated in initial focus group interviews exploring practices and understandings of assessment in physical education. Each teacher then planned and delivered a series of lessons where assessment was considered in relation to the learning intentions. Their experiences were captured using reflective journals (Limerick) and a mid-point focus group interview (Dublin). Both groups of teachers participated in a third focus group interview after lessons were completed. Qualitative analysis by both researchers involved individual coding of the data using the constant comparison method followed by conversations on alignment of findings. Trustworthiness of the data was addressed using peer debriefing techniques.

Findings: The inclusion of assessment in physical education lessons provided structure and focus to the planning, teaching and learning processes and impacted positively on both teacher learning and the children's learning. The assessment strategies focused the learners, allowed for feedback related to assessment criteria and informed future planning. Challenges for the teachers included the amount of time needed to plan, difficulty in accessing sample assessments and differentiating assessments for different class levels and abilities.

Conclusion: The use of assessment strategies enhanced the quality of teaching and learning in physical education and impacted positively on the teachers' and learners' perceptions of physical education. The importance of supporting teachers, through provision of information on assessment strategies and samples of assessment strategies aligned with content in physical education to enhance their everyday practice, is highlighted.

Keywords: primary/elementary; physical education; assessment; formative



The development of assessment policy in Ireland: a story of junior cycle reform

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ABSTRACT

The more recent discussion in Ireland around post-primary teachers being responsible for assessing their own students' work continues. The new junior cycle reform (covering the first three years of post-primary education) is concerned with making fundamental changes in approaches to learning, teaching, curriculum and assessment, with school-based assessment as an important element of the reform. This paper sets out to map assessment policy in a changing and contested assessment environment in the Republic of Ireland. The paper tells the story of assessment in junior cycle from the first progress report in 1999 on a review of the curriculum that had been introduced for students in the junior cycle of post-primary schools in 1989 to the 2015 *Framework for Junior Cycle*. We document the intention to move away from assessment as solely a means of making summative judgements towards assessment as a support of learning and teaching.

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School-based assessment;
junior cycle; Ireland;
assessment policy;
examinations

An instrument to audit teachers' use of assessment for learning

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This paper traces the design, development and trialling of an assessment for learning audit instrument (AfLAI) in use currently in the Republic of Ireland to gauge teachers' baseline understanding of assessment for learning (AfL) practices and the extent to which AfL is embedded in their teaching. As described in the paper, the AfLAI consists of 58 items distributed across four scales based on the following key AfL strategies: *sharing learning intentions and success criteria, questioning and classroom discussion, feedback and peer- and self-assessment*. Preliminary data from the study provide a window into current formative assessment practices in Irish primary schools and teachers' professional needs in AfL.

Keywords: assessment for learning; formative assessment; audit instrument; teacher professional development; assessment audit instruments

PROFILES OF EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS WORLDWIDE

Assessment in the Republic of Ireland

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About the Republic of Ireland

The island of Ireland is the most westerly point of the European Union, and is divided into the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland and the 6 counties of Northern Ireland, the latter under the governance of the United Kingdom. This profile confines itself to an account of assessment in the Republic of Ireland; while there is ongoing cross-border cooperation between education systems north and south, significant differences remain, particularly in the areas of assessment and testing. Education in Northern Ireland is influenced by developments in England, although since the establishment of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly following the Belfast Agreement in 1998 to a somewhat lesser degree than previously.

The Republic of Ireland is a relatively new state. The year 2016 will mark the centenary of the uprising against British rule and the start of a war of independence followed by a civil war that resulted in the eventual establishment of the Irish state in 1922. Membership of the European Union—the European Economic Community as it was at the time—in 1972 marked something of a coming of age of the nation state, but it also marked the beginning of two decades of economic decline, emigration and economic stagnation. From the early 1990s, a series of economic and social policies including a low tax regime to support inward foreign investment, a programme for national recovery and a decision to deploy EU funding in human rather than infrastructural resources together along with some cultural coincidences—a young educated English-speaking workforce for example, resulted in the explosive period of economic growth generally referred to as the ‘Celtic tiger’. By 2004, a leader in *The Economist* referred to Ireland as the economic model causing the most excitement among emerging European states given its full employment and low public debt, noting that fifteen years ago Ireland was deemed an economic failure, a country that after years of mismanagement was suffering from an awful cocktail of

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Student perspectives on assessment for learning

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ABSTRACT

Assessment for learning (AfL) has become a widespread approach across many educational systems. To date, AfL research has emphasized teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices, with few studies examining students' responses to an AfL pedagogical approach. The purpose of this research was to focus directly on students' perspectives on their use and value of AfL approaches through a survey of 1079 K–12 students and portfolio-based interviews with 12 purposefully selected students. Survey data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics across grade levels. Interview data were analyzed using standard thematic coding processes. Students most frequently used and valued teacher feedback and success criteria to support their learning. Peer feedback was the least valued AfL approach for all students. Some significant differences between grade levels were noted. Our results suggest that using AfL approaches is a learned behaviour; students need to be explicitly taught about AfL concepts, terminology, and use over time. This study also highlights that AfL implementation requires sustained focus, research, and support in schools and classrooms for students to value and fully benefit from assessment-based teaching.

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Assessment for learning;
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student learning; classroom
assessment

Learning intentions and success criteria: learners' and teachers' views

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It is generally accepted that Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies are effective in teaching and learning. Approaches within this framework include the use of formative feedback, self and peer assessment and setting and discussion of learning intentions (LIs) and success criteria (SC). There has been a great deal of research into AfL strategies, but perhaps less into the way that the use of LIs and SC are actually perceived by teachers and their pupils. The purpose of the research described in this paper was to investigate teachers' and pupils' perceptions of AfL strategies, focusing specifically on LIs and SC within lessons. Findings showed that while both cohorts agreed on the usefulness of LIs and SC, in practice they were rarely discussed in class. Teachers displayed a variety of understandings regarding their purpose, and some learners, while appreciating their value for revision purposes, also expressed frustration at the tokenistic way in which they were implemented. The results of this study could be helpful in informing the wider education community about how LIs and SC are viewed by teachers and learners with a view to ensure understandings are consistent with research and policy through focused professional development courses.

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assessment for learning;
learning intentions; success
criteria; classroom practice

Curriculum dissemination and implementation in Ireland: principal and teacher insight

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In an effort to understand interpretations of new and revised physical education syllabuses, and conditions that appear to strengthen or weaken the desire to introduce them, this paper draws on insights provided by principals and physical education teachers into the effective implementation of syllabuses within Irish post-primary schools. Situating the discussion within the area of managing curriculum change we examine how the various elements of the Irish education system are involved in providing support for such curriculum developments. Using principals' and teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the revised junior cycle physical education syllabus we suggest how the dynamics within the education system might change to provide effective dissemination and implementation of new and revised senior cycle physical education syllabuses. We refer to the principles underpinning community of practice, some of which are evident in the Irish education landscape. We acknowledge that they offer the potential for a changing culture and context in which principals and teacher might work.

Keywords: physical education; curriculum; implementation; teacher/principal perspectives



Irish post-primary teachers' conceptions of assessment at a time of curriculum and assessment reform

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ABSTRACT

The study at the heart of this paper was conducted in 2017 to gather data on Irish post-primary teachers' conceptions of assessment at the time immediately following the introduction of a revised policy for assessment by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Central to the reform policy was an increased emphasis on formative assessment and a requirement that teachers engage in summative assessment for certification purposes – something that had never applied previously. The paper provides an overview of the literature on teachers' beliefs, including Brown's (2004, 2006) Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment Inventory. Data from an implementation of the inventory with 489 Irish teachers are used to consider how they conceive of assessment, how these conceptions compare and contrast with those held by teachers in other jurisdictions where the instrument has been used and how the data might be used to inform policy change and implementation in Ireland.

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Conceptions of assessment;
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assessment policy; post-
primary; Ireland

Assessment literacy development: identifying gaps in teacher candidates' learning

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As a result of the standards-based movement in education there is an increased need for teacher competency in the area of student assessment and evaluation. This study examines assessment education at one pre-service teacher education program in Ontario, Canada. Through a questionnaire administered to 288 teacher candidates, this study identified teacher candidates' perceived confidence levels in assessment practice, theory, and philosophy. These teacher candidates also provided their views towards assessment topics that it is important to include in a pre-service educational assessment course. Descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and analysis of variance were used to analyse questionnaire responses. In general, findings support the need for direct instruction in assessment with specific topics identified (e.g. reporting achievement, modifying assessments, developing constructed-response items, item reliability, validity, articulating a philosophy of assessment, etc.) as important to developing teacher assessment literacy.

Formative assessment in the Grenadian lower secondary school: teachers' perceptions, attitudes and practices

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The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions, attitudes and frequency of use of formative assessment strategies of teachers in the Grenadian lower secondary school (Forms 1, 2 and 3). The study, which was quantitative in nature, involved 252 lower secondary school teachers. Overall the participants had positive perceptions and attitudes towards formative assessment. Significant differences in the perceptions of formative assessment held by trained and untrained teachers ($p < .001$) as well as in the attitudes towards formative assessment ($p = .001$) were found. Trained and untrained teachers were found to have similar frequencies of practice of formative assessment strategies. About half of the teachers reported not allowing students to provide input into test construction and encouraging students to engage in journal writing. The study raises questions about the hindrances that teachers face in the integration of some formative assessment strategies and provides policy-makers with valuable information to support strengthening of teacher education efforts.

Keywords: formative assessment; assessment for learning; student-centred; trained teachers

Appendix B: Sample Thematic Analysis for Crichton (2016) using handwritten themes

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literature related to AFL, and might be considered a logical step, as many schools encourage the use of checklists as part of self-assessment within an AFL approach. The use of SC for revision purposes was not identified by teachers, whose responses are considered below.

The teachers' perspective

Although the teachers came from two schools, with a variety of experience, their responses were remarkably similar, the main differences being between the opinions of leagues. All expressed approval of the use of Lis and SC, many citing them as helpful for planning. 'You can't plan a lesson without them'. More experienced teachers did not view them as a recent development, despite the fact that their schools had introduced their use as policy only in the last three years. 'I can't remember a time when we haven't used them, just under another name'. They contrasted the less formal introductions that had formed an integral part of their lessons before and the time now taken for learners formally to note down the Lis before the class could start, although they appreciated the 'settling' effect that writing Lis in exercise books provided, particularly for younger learners. 'In junior phase, it's part of the settling routine', 'I can do the attendance, while they're writing them down'. This usage of Lis was perhaps not envisaged by researchers like Black and Willam and the ARG, who advocate involving pupils in their learning through discussion of the Lis.

Almost all the teachers, apart from those qualified in the last 5 years said they were not very confident in writing Lis and SC. 'We've never been given training about how to write them. You're just supposed to implement it. We have been told to do this and to do that. I've received no formal training. The school expects teachers to do it. It might be helpful to provide cpd'. Although the pupils had seemed very clear in their definitions of what constituted Lis and SC, perhaps because of this lack of confidence and perceived lack of support, the teachers' definitions showed a number of contradictory understandings. 'For me it's just what I'll be covering that lesson, but the same Li could be used for a week'. The topic is the Li and the SC would mention specific skills. 'Lis are specific to the skills; SC are more connected to the task'. Their confusion seems to echo some of the issues arising in other studies regarding Lis and SC as part of an AFL approach (Absolum 2010; DfES, 2007; Ofsted, 2008) and definitions within AFL (Bennett, 2011).

The need for clear guidance for teachers regarding the implementation of AFL has been underlined, not just by researchers and theorists, such as Black and Willam and the ARG, but also in policy documents across the UK (DCSF, 2008; Her Majesty's Inspectorate, education (HMIe), 2009; Northern Ireland Curriculum Partnership Management Board, 2007), to avoid the possibility that teachers will employ AFL techniques in a superficial manner (James & Pedder, 2006). The teachers' comments seemed to bear out the need for more support. 'In some ways you are spoon-feeding them, rather than work out what they are learning and tell you'. 'You feel that you can't deviate from the Li if something interesting comes up'. The comments above, from those teachers with more than 10 years' experience demonstrate a rather narrow, instrumentalist view of the purpose of Lis, which could, perhaps, be restructured with adequate training about the power of involving the learners in discussion of the Lis and setting the SC.

SC were not seen as a priority. 'If we don't fulfil the SC one day then it just gets added on the next'. 'I don't always get back to the SC at the end. Time is always too short'. The teachers' responses, rather than seeing discussion of the Lis and SC as an investment in developing pupils' greater understanding in their learning, the teachers viewed them as taking up valuable time that could be spent teaching content. However, compared to classes they had taught before the introduction of Lis and SC in the schools, all the teachers remarked on a greater confidence in the learners. 'The pupils are definitely more confident, but we are spoon feeding them in a more systematic way'. Pupils' confidence may be attributed to a greater feeling of security, through having the purpose of their lessons articulated, even if this was not always discussed.

Conclusions

It was clear that both pupils and teachers were aware of the benefits of using Lis and SC. Pupils in the Senior Phase, in particular, appreciated the organisation that SC provided when revising for national examinations. Teachers stated that they were useful for planning lessons and that learners appeared more confident than before their use became mandatory in the schools. However, learners seemed frustrated by their lack of involvement through discussion of their potential learning gains as a result of the lesson and teachers expressed frustration at the time strictures that any potential discussion of the Lis and SC appeared to impose, often designating the time learners copied the Lis as a calming technique.

The variety of definitions of Lis provided by the teachers indicates that their understanding of their purpose and how to write them had not been fully deliberated. The impression was given that in each establishment it was assumed that teachers were familiar with the terminology and what it represented. Greater engagement with the literature would seem to be an obvious solution to gain a more precise understanding. However, in the light of increasing workloads (Bailey & Kelchtermans, 2009; DfE, 2014), teachers may be reluctant to spend their free time reading relevant documents, particularly since they could articulate a definition, even if it might be considered flawed, with which they appeared satisfied. Nonetheless, all but the most recently (up to five years) qualified teachers talked of a perceived need for formal training sessions to make them more confident in the use of Lis and SC. Professional development courses could also underline the importance of discussion of the Lis and SC with the learners, in order to promote pupils' engagement in their learning, thus perhaps resolving the teachers' perceived dissatisfaction with the constraints of Lis and SC regarding time issues. A greater understanding of the role of discussion with the learners might also address the perceptive comments pupils made about the 'meaningless' nature of writing Lis, rather than being actively involved in setting and discussing them.

It seems to have been taken for granted by management teams in the participating schools that teachers' knowledge about the use of Lis and SC is sound. However, a recurring theme in the research literature is the concern that teachers may not fully understand the concepts behind the principles of AFL, thus preventing more than a superficial improvement in pupils' learning development. This study reinforces the findings from Boyle and Charles' study (2010) which found that teachers believed they were

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