

***Assessment in Male' Schools:
Three Maldivian Primary Teachers'
Knowledge, Beliefs, &
Typical Assessment Practices***

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.....

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.....

DEDICATION

To my dear husband, Hussain Lazzath, for his never-ending support and being there all the time.

To my loving daughter, Fathimath Thaiman Lazzath, for having bigger dreams than me. I hope you fulfil all your dreams.

To my mother, Fathimath Waheedha and to my father, Mohamed Thakurufaan for making me dream big.

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In the Name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Dreams do come true.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes a qualitative case study of assessment practices in three primary classrooms in urban schools in the Maldives. Qualitative data was obtained from semi-structured interviews, lesson observations, and school and classroom documents guided the study.

Assessment practice in Maldivian schools is undergoing change. The newly developed draft of Maldivian National Curriculum with associated documents aligns assessment, instruction, and curriculum to provide optimum learning conditions for students. The Maldivian Ministry of Education (MOE), in collaboration with UNICEF, has introduced quality indicators for the Child Friendly Baraabar School (CFBS) based on the Maldivian National Curriculum. These indicators stress the importance of maintaining a balance between *assessment for learning* (formative assessment) and *assessment of learning* (summative assessment). The dissemination and implementation of best practices in formative assessment are currently underway in Maldivian schools.

This study portrays a “snapshot in time” of assessment practices of three teachers and utilizes the findings to provide an insight into the MOE’s initiative of assessment innovations in Maldivian classrooms and schools. The study found that the three teachers have to practice formative assessment within high quality interactions based on thoughtful

questions, attend to responses, and with observation and documentation to reflect a valid picture of the whole child.

Nevertheless, the study also showed how the three teachers separated assessment from teaching and learning as well as how the teachers documented and reported this assessment data. There is a strong element of competition for academic achievement, as reported in grades and numerical scores. The competition is amongst students, teachers and parents. This competition appears to get in the way of assessment being used to support teaching and learning.

Nonetheless, when the research data was explored through a formative assessment lens, there was also evidence of formative assessment being used in the normal day-to-day happenings in the three classrooms. The teachers in this study were not always confident in their use of formative assessment, and did not necessarily recognize when they were using formative assessment strategies. They all wanted all of their students to be successful learners, and they wanted to be good teachers. The study shows some of the complexities that teachers face when implementing new approaches to assessment.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background to the study

My country, the Maldives, similar to many developing countries, is striving to improve the quality of education. Significantly, the lack of local professional teachers and the extensive employment of foreign teachers exist within the primary education system and this has led to many locals without a proper teaching qualification being employed. Almost 31 percent of teachers are expatriates and 20.3 percent of teachers are untrained local teachers (Department of National Planning, 2010).

At present the Maldivian Ministry of Education (MOE) is trying to build their capacity to provide assistance in areas such as improving students' performance, teaching strategies, revising National Curriculum and classroom assessment. The recent developments of 'Child Friendly Baraabar School' (CFBS) indicators and the new draft Maldivian National Curriculum (Education Development Centre, 2012a) highlight the importance on aligning assessment, instruction and curriculum in order to provide the most favourable learning conditions for Maldivian students. Assessment practices have been undergoing many changes in Maldivian schools. Along with the new curriculum, the Education Development Centre (EDC) has produced a document entitled 'Pedagogy

and Assessment Guide (a Working Document)' that provides guidance to teachers and schools in assessment for learning with adequate information on contemporary classroom assessment instructions. These exemplars if implemented by teachers would be highly effective in promoting quality formative assessment in the primary classes (Education Development Centre, 2012b).

Apart from these initiatives, many other factors have led my aspiration towards this study. For instance, I have worked as a teacher and was a member of the senior management team at a primary school. Later in my career I was engaged in many learning and working experiences at the Maldivian MOE as an educational supervisor. The Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division (ESQID, MOE), which is the division of MOE responsible for the evaluation and supervision of teachers, schools and National Assessment in the Maldives. At the Ministry, I was involved in conducting professional development workshops for teachers in teaching and learning strategies and also some distance-learning courses related to assessment. At the same time as a member of the National Assessment Unit, I worked collaboratively with some professionals in analyzing results of the National Diagnostic Assessment. The results of Maldivian students from the Diagnostic Assessment, National Examinations and the secondary schools' International Examinations (IGCSE and Ed-excel A- Level

Examinations) concerned the MOE and various other authorities.

The focus of this study is to report on the use of Maldivian teachers' understanding and practices of formative assessment at lower primary school grades 1, 2 and 3. To date there is a general lack of research guiding the progress of effective assessment curricula for initial teacher learning in this area in the Maldives. This study utilizes the findings to provide insight into the MOE's initiative of assessment innovations in Maldivian classrooms and schools.

The Research Setting: The Maldives

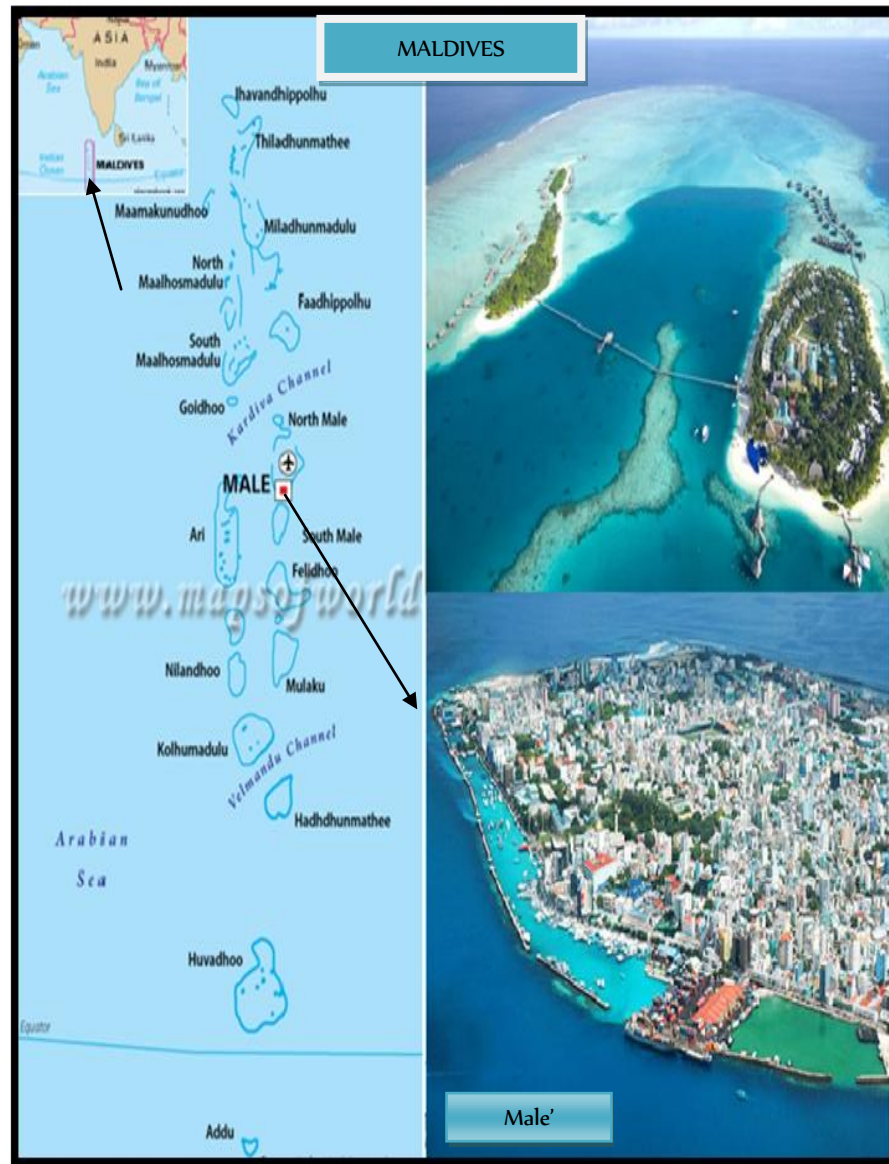


Photo: Maldives (Source: <http://www.mapsofworld.com/maldives/>)

The Republic of Maldives is a small island nation located southwest of the Indian subcontinent in the Indian Ocean and its closest neighbours are India and Sri Lanka. The archipelago of 1192 islands is made up of a

chain of small coral islands forming 26 natural atolls but for administrative purposes 20 atolls are formed. The islands of various shapes and sizes are two metres above sea level. Ninety nine percent of the Maldives covers sea while all the islands have white sandy beaches and coral palms as the main vegetation.

The capital of the Maldives is Male' and its population makes up approximately one third of the country's population. The population of the Maldives is 298,693 (March 2006 census) and the school-going age children is also one third of the population (Department of National Planning, 2008).

Historically, the Maldives has been an independent nation, although, the Portuguese occupied the Maldives for 15 years in the 16th century. In 1887, the Maldives became a British protectorate and gained independence on 26th July 1965 from British. Following that the Maldives became a republic in 1968 and the first president was elected on 11th November 1968. The first democratic multiparty election was held in 2008 and Mohamed Nasheed was elected as the president. The official language of the Maldivians is Dhivehi Bas (language) and Islam is the official religion of the Maldivians. Tourism and fishing are the major industries in the Maldives.

Educational Context



Photo: Edhuruge (Source: <http://www.visitmaldives.com>)

The earliest form of education began in the Maldives by the initiations of religious leaders and most of the teaching and learning was centred on individual tutorials based on religious teachings. Edhuruge¹, Makhtab and Madharusa were the earliest educational institutions. These self-financed traditional schools were administered and owned privately by the individuals of the island communities. These educational institutions focused mostly on basic reading and writing of the Dhivehi language, Arabic script with simple arithmetic as well. These educators mostly

¹ The *edhuruge* was a gathering of children in a private home with the intention of teaching them to recite the Holy Qur'an, to read and write Dhivehi language and basic arithmetic. The *edhuruge* style of education is still practiced today to teach Holy Qur'an to small children. The *makhtab* was more formal and offered almost the same curriculum as *edhuruge*, while in the *madhrasa* the curriculum was expanded. These schools had contributed towards reaching many educational objectives, including a high rate of literacy and the preservation of national culture and tradition.

assisted by teaching the children to memorize the Holy Qur'an, the basics of Islam and other knowledge.

In 1927 the first government school was established in Male' and this school educated boys only; however, in 1944 an extra section was established for girls and young women. By 1945, education widened and each inhabited island had a *Makhtab* providing instruction at the lower primary level. In the 1950s, the education system was remodelled to meet the requirements for trained people in a growing economy. The main subjects taught were Dhivehi Language, Islam, Arabic, and Arithmetic. In 1960 in order to prepare the citizens of the Maldives to meet the increasing developmental needs of the nation, the Maldivian government established two English medium schools in Male'. It was also an instigation to prepare Maldivians for training that they would receive overseas in order to meet the growing developmental needs of the Maldives. These western style of formal schooling began following similar patterns of British schooling system in terms of organization of curriculum and methods of instruction (Department of National Planning, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2008b)

Initially, the government, the community, and the private sector collaboratively provided schooling in the Maldives. By 1998, the community schools provided 43 percent of student enrolment in the nation basically at the primary level. In addition, the government

supported community and private schools by providing a certain percentage of teachers depending on school size, with infrastructure, facility support, and financial subsidies. A transformation of the Maldivian education system in 2005 converted all the community schools to government schools in order to minimize the differences in giving provisions to schools and as an initiation to further develop the education system of the country (Department of National Planning, 2008).

At present, there are 218 government English-medium schools, some of which are exclusively primary, some with both primary and secondary, and a few schools with higher secondary education. There are four main phases of schooling recommended by the National Curriculum: foundation, primary, lower secondary and higher secondary. Each phase targets a specific age group consisting of primary, lower-secondary and higher-secondary levels. These phases of learning are further divided into key stages. The foundation phase or pre-primary education (lower kindergarten, and upper kindergarten years) is from the ages of four to six years. The primary phase (formal primary education) begins at Key Stage 1 (grades 1 – 3), and continues till the end of Key Stage 2 (grades 4 – 6). These six years (ages of six to thirteen years) of primary education are compulsory for all the Maldivian children. Lower secondary education begins at Key Stage 3 and ends at Key Stage 4 and higher-secondary is Key Stage 5 of which the former is from the ages of fourteen to sixteen

years (grades eight to ten), and the latter is from the ages of seventeen to nineteen years (grades eleven and twelve) (see Education Development Centre, 2012a). At the end of lower and higher secondary levels, the students sit for two international examinations: the Cambridge ‘O’ levels and the Ed Excel ‘A’ levels.

Studies conducted over the years have demonstrated that student achievement and learning outcomes remain inadequately low in the Maldives. In these studies, the quality of education gap between Male’ and the other islands is significantly high, and furthermore, inter and intra-atoll quality gaps remain relatively high (Ministry of Education, 2001, 2009, 2010c). Recently, the Maldives made 10 years of universal basic education accessible with the expansion and development of early childhood care and education, and inclusive education especially for children with special needs (Ministry of Education, 2008b).

Changing Curriculum Landscape

In 1979, the Ministry of Education established the Educational Development Centre (EDC) and under this centre, the Curriculum Division initiates the responsibility of designing and formulating a curriculum that is in accordance with the Maldivian constitution and caters to the needs of Maldivian students. In addition, this Division co-ordinates curriculum materials and develops them on a regular basis. The

Curriculum developers, each responsible for a subject area, designs the syllabus, decides on the content and prepares textbooks and teacher's guides (Ministry of Education, 2008b).

The first National Curriculum for primary education was introduced in 1984 and it covered all the subject areas for the primary and middle school students. It was based on fundamental principles within an Islamic framework and these principles, derived after a number of consultations, encompass democracy, equity, nationalism, independence, innovation for development and strengthening the society of the Maldives (Mohamed & Ahmed, 1998). The curriculum also indicated that all the primary students in the Maldives are to study four compulsory subjects (Islamic Studies, Dhivehi, English and Mathematics) with some optional subjects (such as Environmental Studies, Social Studies, General Science, Practical Arts, and Physical Education, which are also offered at different grade levels). Other than these subjects, Art and Music were also offered in a few schools. Subject textbooks, workbooks, English and Dhivehi supplementary readers, and teachers' guides were produced for the primary curriculum subject areas.

In 1999, a major curriculum related consultation was carried out with key stakeholders and a complete revision of the curriculum framework and content was undertaken based on these consultations. Great emphasis was placed on socio-economically relevant themes and issues, life skills,

development of values and skill development in information technology. For these reasons, major revisions were brought to some curriculum materials in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

With the introduction of outcomes-based syllabuses, the English Language and Mathematics syllabuses have been revised to outcomes-based ones, and likewise, all the other subjects are in the process of revision. The outcomes-based syllabus states what students know and what they can do in teaching and learning. Furthermore, the outcomes-based syllabuses have clear standards which all students are expected to accomplish and will assist students to learn more efficiently in all the subject areas across the curriculum. As a result, National Curriculum for grades 1 to 7, is being revised, and a new curriculum is being implemented gradually for these grades (Ministry of Education, 2008b).

On 10th January 2012, the draft National Curriculum Framework (a working draft) was presented to the Cabinet and was discussed by cabinet Ministers in preparation for the official implementation (<http://edc.edu.mv>, 2012). This outcomes-based draft National Curriculum Framework specifies eight key competencies, which are essential for individuals to live, learn and contribute as active members of the nation and the world as a whole. Furthermore, these key competencies are designed to offer the foundation for lifelong learning and employability in a progressive and challenging world and it provides

a combination of cognitive and practical skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, and other social and behavioural components (Education Development Centre, 2012a).

The draft National Curriculum Framework identifies the learning experiences of children aged 4 – 18 in the Maldivian schools, and further describes what they should know, understand, value, and be able to do at each stage of their development (The National Curriculum Reform Blog, 2012). Although the outcomes-based National Curriculum Framework will be fully functional for all the levels in the future, at present the lower and higher secondary level follow international syllabuses for all the subjects except for Dhivehi Language and Islamic Studies.

In particular these international curriculums include subjects offered by Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) and Ed Excel International, London Examinations. For example, children study English Language, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Fisheries Science, Economics, Accounting, Commerce, History, Geography, Geometrical and Mechanical Drawing, Computing Studies, Art, English Literature and Travel, Tourism Studies and English as a Second Language. The lower secondary years are streamed as Arts, Science, and Business. However, the majority of the schools teach mainly Business stream subjects due to the availability of resources in the islands. The students have to take four subjects of their choice from the stream with English Language,

Mathematics, Dhivehi Language, and Islamic Studies as compulsory subjects.

Changing Assessment Landscape

With the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1983, schools have practiced many different assessment methods. In the earlier years of its implementation, there was emphasis on summative assessment with frequent examinations and a final exam called the Promotion Test. The results of this exam determined the progress of the students to the next grade or their retention in the same grade.

However, in 1990 with the introduction of continuous assessment, Maldivian schools started incorporating different assessment techniques (Department of National Planning, 2008). For instance, the assessments included practical work, project work, group assignments, oral assessment, written assignments, portfolios, and open book exams became common. As a result, there have been many new developments in the assessment procedures in the Maldivian schools. In lower primary years (grade 1-3), only continuous assessment proceeded as the most accepted assessment mode, with the ranking used from A - F to evaluate the students with descriptive explanations developed for these rankings while in primary grades 4 to 7, marks are given and the marks are rated in grade scales of A – F in the final report book (Ministry of Education,

2008a).

The MOE initiated various policies that included many updated assessment practices such as introducing new report cards in schools, specifying minimum learning competencies for all curriculum subjects, and instigating Child Friendly Baraabar School (CFBS) project. In 2012, the EDC produced the new 'National Curriculum Framework - Working Draft' and other related documents, such as the 'Pedagogy and Assessment Guide - a Working Document', to provide guidance with instructional applications of current practices of assessment for Maldivian teachers with an emphasis on formative assessment.

Recent developments include the MOE taking initiative in implementing innovative assessment practices in Maldivian schools. The Maldivian draft National curriculum specifies diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment to be carried out in the schools. The new curriculum shows the importance of aligning with assessment with instruction and curriculum to provide optimum conditions for learning, thus maximizing students' achievement (Education Development Centre, 2012a). In addition, the EDC has developed a guide with some of the best current teaching practices and focuses on assessment for learning as classroom instruction. This document 'Pedagogy and Assessment Guide (a Working Document)' provides guidance to teachers and schools in the best practices of assessment with adequate information.

To develop assessment techniques in the schools, the MOE with collaboration from UNICEF tried to implement formative assessment practices in primary education. For example, many professional development sessions and online learning sessions were carried out in selected schools. In addition to that, with professional assistance from experts in this field, the MOE decided to change from a three-semester year to a two-semester year (Ministry of Education, 2008a). In fact, this required the schools to minimize extensive testing or over-testing. The old student report cards in which teachers wrote only a grade or a mark changed. The new report form lists rubrics, criteria, or standards and represents the student's general progress and achievement. This format is also required to include different types of assessment and they are designed to value both the formative and summative judgments made by the teachers in classroom assessment.

Significance of the study

The assessment landscape in Maldivian schools is undergoing change. The new draft Maldivian National Curriculum (Education Development Centre, 2012a) and associated documents aim to realign assessment, instruction and curriculum in schools to better optimise learning conditions for students. To this end the Maldivian MOE in collaboration with UNICEF have produced a number of quality indicators that they hope to achieve. A key future focus involves promoting the use of

formative assessment in Maldivian classrooms. For Maldivian teachers who have traditionally placed emphasis on summative assessment, the transition towards developing a more balanced assessment approach could prove challenging. The focus of this study is to identify formative assessment practices of Maldivian teachers, which they practice intentionally or unintentionally in the lower primary grades 1, 2 and 3.

It is also anticipated that this research will make a contribution of educational assessment in the Maldives as it is an area that needs attention. Additionally, lack of research in educational assessment is a concern, particularly in contemporary assessment such as formative assessment. Therefore I hope to provide useful research in this area, the assessment for learning. I believe the findings from this study can contribute to the knowledge and insights that could be used by policymakers and teachers for future professional development needs in the field of educational assessment.

Research Question(s)

How do primary teachers in the Maldives understand and practice assessment in their classrooms?

To explore my research question further, I used the following questions

and examined the topic thoroughly. They include:

(1) How do the primary teachers practice formative assessment? and what are the different forms of class based assessment practices?

(2) What do the teachers understand by the term ‘formative assessment’? and how do they make summative judgments?

(3) What are the consequences of assessment in the primary schools? and what needs to be done to deal with the issues?

The structure and organization of the thesis

In Chapter One, I explained my interest regarding the topic of formative assessment and my reasons for wishing to explore it further. Chapter Two reviews bodies of literature relevant to my research topic. In this chapter, I focus on assessment issues and formative assessment. In Chapter Three, I look into the process of research methodology used in this study. I included the theory, nature of the research, procedure, data collection, analysis of data and ethical considerations. The findings are presented in the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters. There is a thick description of the data presented using themes that have emerged with details and justifications in these chapters. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I discuss the themes as related to the literature reviewed in the first two chapters such as implications for policies and practices.

Chapter summary

In Chapter One, I noted how the topic of assessment had grasped my attention and how relevant this topic for investigation is to the Maldives. In particular, I stated the importance of the need to reform assessment procedures in the Maldives in reference to using the few available documents. Furthermore, in this chapter I outlined different landscapes for the study and provided, in brief, the contents of all the chapters. In the next chapter, I present a review of literature, related to the study's purpose using various published studies in the field of assessment.

CHAPTER TWO

A Review of Literature

Introduction

This review begins with an explanation of assessment from a social constructivist perspective. It then shows the connections between assessment, curriculum, teaching, and learning and highlight the great bond that exists between these components. Following a review of the effect and power of assessment I indicate the assessment related pressures that exist in the Maldives. Additionally, I study the benefits of formative assessment including examples of formative assessment strategies and a review of critiques relating to formative assessment. I then examine similar studies related to my project to help provide deeper understanding and potential insights.

Assessment from a social constructivist perspective

“Adopting a social constructivist understanding of how children learn has significant consequences for assessing their learning in the classroom” (Coll & Martín, 1996, p. 138). As a result, Conner (1999b), distinguishes learning from this perspective (social constructivism) and sees learners as active constructors of their own understanding and learning. For instance, sometimes learning is influenced by what the learner currently knows and

the context in which both learning and assessment take place. More details given by Coll and Martín (1996) inform that students construct certain meanings on the contents in so far as they concurrently make sense of it and the process by which students manage to make sense of what they learn is directly linked to the affective and social contexts of learning in schools. To differentiate constructivism from social constructivism, Gipps (1994) explains that from a constructivist view, learners learn by actively making sense of new knowledge, making meaning and mapping it in to their existing knowledge map/schema, whereas the social constructivist view sees learning happening within a shared social context. For example, learning in schools takes place in a social context and the nature of this social milieu has a profound effect on the way students' learn (Earl, 2013).

Many researchers support social constructivism when developing theories for authentic assessment such as assessment for learning, as this theory puts emphasis on the role of others and all forms of social interaction in the process of constructing knowledge and understanding (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). Among these researchers who favoured social constructivism include Berry and Adamson (2011), Black and Wiliam (2009), Adams (2006), and Pryor and Torrance (2000). For example, during the process of developing 'a theory for formative assessment' Black and Wiliam (2009), adopted constructivism and meta-cognition

and they further noted the process of formative assessment reflecting very general principles of learning, particularly social. As a result, Berry and Adamson (2011) also recommend social constructivism to be integrated within the learning tasks and advise teachers not to separate assessment and learning activities.

Likewise, Adams (2006) echoes the theory, “within a social constructivist perspective, assessment seeks to consider how and why pupil positions do not successfully mediate into the social domain; that is, how and why pupil responses do not ‘fit’ with current socially agreed interpretations” (p.252). For instance, the discursive nature of social constructivism calls attention to the need for students to be given time to talk openly, where the teacher’s role is more towards listening and observing the students. Black and Wiliam (2009) further discuss the theory of social constructivism and the significance of incorporating it in educational assessment and they provide guidance on how teachers could create learning within such context.

Emphasizing this theory, Torrance and Pryor (1998) indicate classroom assessment process within a social constructivist framework is accomplished by teachers and students through social and pedagogic interactions. Likewise, in another study, Pryor and Torrance (2000) have shown how the classroom assessment is socially situated and constructed with many examples. Furthermore, Pryor and Torrance (2000) conclude

the study:

Assessment is not an activity that can be done to children but is accomplished by means of social interaction in which the practices of the participants have a critical effect on outcome. The outcomes of assessment are actively produced rather than revealed and displayed by the assessment process. (p.126)

In a social constructivist classroom teachers and students, perform different roles while regulating learning and assessment. Hence, the teacher's role is based on mostly that of a 'reflective agent' to make learning more effective (Pollard, as cited in, Gipps, 1999). As such, classroom teachers are the people responsible for setting up classroom tasks and obtaining responses from their students. Moreover, it is the teacher's duty to provide opportunities for the students to make them active in nature. In such circumstances, "this role is dependent on sensitive and accurate assessment of a child's needs and places premium on formative assessment of pupil understanding" (Gipps, 1999, p. 373). Thus, the students learn from authentic assessments where the socially situated nature of learning is for the individual child to acquire knowledge in social action (Gipps, 1999).

However, it is to be noted that the responses from the students might sometimes be difficult to interpret and they can become quite vague to

the teachers. Similarly students might also face problems in sensing the teacher's behaviours or the agenda and struggle in the classroom to make sense of what is being asked of them (Pryor & Torrance, 2000). To help students in such dilemmas Coll and Martín (1996) recommend to conduct meaningful activities and tasks so that teachers can discover the degree to which the learning has taken place.

Usually, primary teachers should have a wide knowledge of their students concerning the way they learn and issues related to assessment. For example, efficient teachers always teach from a constructive perspective, which manages to regulate the variety and intensity of help given to each individual student. Hence, through this theory, teachers' create goals and focus on individual students learning needs by helping the learners to develop deep understandings in their interested subject area. In these circumstances, it further helps teachers to build learning habits that aids the students' future learning (Coll & Martín, 1996; Richardson, 2003). Filer and Pollard (2000) also agree class assessment is based on teachers' understandings and knowledge of their students; this also includes a range of social as well as academic settings and activities. For instance, the teachers' observe students everyday interacting with peers and other adults in the classrooms or at other activities in the school. Consequently, these interactions help them to build learning habits that aids their future learning. In order to make learning more effective in such classrooms,

Adams (2006) suggests the following recommendations for teachers:

- Focus on learning not performance;
- View learners as active co-constructors of meaning and knowledge;
- Establish a teacher–pupil relationship built upon the idea of guidance not instruction;
- Seek to engage learners in tasks seen as ends in themselves and consequently as having implicit worth;
- Promote assessment as an active process of uncovering and acknowledging shared understanding. (p. 247)

Assessment: The bridge between curriculum, teaching and learning

Curriculum, instruction and assessment are central components that are woven in to the education system while the curriculum also serves as an entrance that can provide a foundation for the other two (Butler & McMunn, 2006). Researchers have identified the significance of these processes and many have linked them all and showed the great bond that exists within assessment, curriculum, teaching, and learning (Broadfoot, 2007; Butler & McMunn, 2006; Cooper, 1998; Cumming & Wyatt-Smith, 2009; Gardner, 2006; Gipps, 1994; Heritage, 2007; Lambert & Lines, 2000). Accordingly, the connections and the unbreakable strength

that each contributes in education is enormous and benefit the learners immensely. Gipps (1994) also explains how assessment is part of teaching, learning and curriculum, and the dynamic association that exists with one another. This association between assessment and learning encourages a holistic approach to the analysis of assessment in education and its impact on education (Lambert & Lines, 2000). In fact, to process a more holistic approach in the classrooms, teachers have to plan the learning activities well and students as learners engage in the assessment of their learning activities as it progresses.

To show the strength of the relationship that exists, Cumming and Wyatt-Smith (2009) write: “assessment — and its interface with curriculum, teaching and learning — has always been a significant component of classroom practice” (p. 1). Likewise, Broadfoot (2007) shows strength of curriculum and assessment by inventing a new word “curssessment.” With this innovation, she writes, “the assessment tail nearly always wags the curriculum dog” (p.8). Meaning whatever is taught and learned in schools becomes the curriculum. Thus, assessment is interwoven with teaching and it occurs through observations of students who are engaged in the process of learning. Additionally, it creates opportunities to display the products of their learning in a wide variety of formats in their classrooms that makes learning and assessment more meaningful (Conner, 1999b).

It is a fact, assessment is central to teaching, learning, and curriculum. Nevertheless, sometimes assessment is something which has been used as a device to control and drive curriculum and teaching (Gipps, 1999). For instance, Wiliam (2011b) notes that in the past the word “assessment” has been used mainly to describe the processes of evaluating and its effectiveness. In that way, the completed series of instructional activities and the actions that assisted learning was generally not regarded as any kind of assessments. Similarly, Cooper (1998) also argues assessment should not be divorced from the curriculum and everyday instructions that happen in a classroom. Likewise, Black and Wiliam (2003) believe the potential of assessment to support learning was being ignored in the past. As a result, the educational research community has started making the schools aware of the importance of the formative function of assessment.

Indeed, Cumming and Wyatt-Smith (2009) acknowledge the fact that over the past decade, the significance of the roles of assessment and accountability in education has increased. For instance, they explain that the 21st century began with high expectations in educational opportunities for all students in many areas of education that also included searching for different theoretical framings of assessment opportunities. In that case, Gipps (1994) also highlights the fact that assessment has taken on a high profile and is required to achieve a wide range of purposes.

Examples include, to support teaching and learning; to provide information about students, teachers, and schools; to act as a selection and certificating device; to act as an accountability procedure; and to drive curriculum and teaching.

Although it was quite recently that researchers began various projects in reforming assessments, Black and Wiliam (2003) remind us that even in the past educators such as Scriven and Bloom et al. had already recognized that assessment supported learning as well as measured it. Bloom et al. (as cited in Black and Wiliam, 2003) defined summative evaluation in these words. “Tests given at the end of episodes of teaching (units, courses, etc.) for the purpose of grading or certifying students, or for evaluating the effectiveness of a curriculum” (p.623). They also explained 'formative evaluation': “another type of evaluation which all who are involved-student, teacher, curriculum maker-would welcome because they find it so useful in helping them improve what they wish to do” (p.623).

In viewing assessment and the teaching process as always associated together Heritage (2007) warns teachers to be aware that one cannot happen without the other always being around. As a result, these connections between curriculum, assessment, teaching, and learning are circular and not linear. In that case, to make learning more effective all the components have to circulate regularly by supporting each other. The

circular motion of assessment and learning is also emphasized by Sutton (1995), Butler and McMunn (2006), and Earl (2013). For instance, Earl (2013) writes: “Teaching is not the filling in the sandwich between curriculum and assessment. Taken together, curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment interact in an iterative and sometimes cyclical process” (p.91).

Even though Griffin (2009) also accepts the same opinion as the others, he stresses assessment to be given explicit treatment and other additional development on the basis of learning skills. To sum up, the teacher’s focus should not be on the coverage as the curriculum as it is not what teachers put into it, but what the learners take away with them during the learning process (Sutton, 1995).

The effect and power of assessment in schools

The experiences of assessment that students encounter can lead them to have many feelings. As a result, the word ‘assessment’ brings back memories of school years. However, for many students they are not ‘sweet memories’. According to Weeden, Winter, and Broadfoot (2002) whenever any person wants to reflect on the best and worst moments at school, there is always indisputably a recount of an assessment episode. For many students, it becomes emotionally challenging and something not worth remembering because of the assessment experiences. In many

cases, these episodes are still painful after many years later (Weeden et al., 2002) making assessment a 'dirty word' for many students and teachers (Hobson, 1997). Typically both Conner (1999a) and Hobson (1997) connect such memories to rows of desks in quiet examination halls or monitored rooms working to a deadline, trying to remember the answers to obscure and seemingly irrelevant questions, filling bubble sheets using number two pencils and end-of-the-term exams.

Indeed, such memories of assessment were not sweet and these bitter memories of students were tinged with uncertainty, unhappiness, and feeling of failure. As such, Conner (1999a) urges the present generation of young learners not be treated similarly. In the same way Cooper (1998) also criticizes: "the past assessments have not provided accurate and useful information concerning students' understanding, mastery, and use of their knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p.12). In fact, assessment has always been a way of comparing students against each other, while teachers used different methods, procedures and values concerning what students should know and be able to do in their lessons. As a result, Cooper (1998) argues how in these circumstances, the data collected by teachers is confined to one symbol such as grades on report cards.

In fact, these summative judgements of a grade showing on the report cards, confused parents and students many times. As a result, the parents might not be able to understand what is happening with their children's

performances at the end of the term. At the same time, many students are also left out without knowing their strengths and weaknesses in their tests and examinations (Cooper, 1998). Cooper argues that they also deserve a proper explanation of their hard work, detailing what they did right, and what aspects they needed to work on. Similarly, Fisher and Frey (2007) also argue how this makes the students divide the world into ‘right and wrong answers’ and learning is equated with the aptitude to memorize, recall, and regurgitate.

These things reflect how the traditional assessments narrow characterization of testing functions, where student learning is routinely measured with a summative measure. As such, students view these events with anxiety, knowing that they need to perform well in order to earn a good grade or mark (Fisher & Frey, 2007). According to Weeden, et al. (2002) any inferences and the judgements made about the students could have a huge impact. In such circumstances, when students are being labelled as high or low achievers after an assessment, what the teacher does is to compare students’ achievements and abilities against a relatively narrow set of academic learning objectives. As such, Gipps (1999) believes assessment is a powerful device and testing is a measure to control curriculum and teaching. Hobson (1997) also argues how these two discourses have been mixed wrongly. For instance, Hobson states: “...American public discourse continually conflates assessment with

testing, the only paradigm that most stakeholders in American education are familiar with ...” (p. 68).

In fact, many researchers articulate dissatisfaction with traditional psychometrics approaches (Broadfoot, 1996; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Gipps, 1994, 1999). Gipps (1999) explains that psychometric theory developed from work on intelligence and intelligence testing that regard the intelligence as innate and fixed; that measured on the basis of the outcome, where individuals are assigned to streams, groups, or schools that are believed appropriate to their intelligence. Thus, Broadfoot (1996) criticizes psychometric testing as the main function involves comparing students’ achievement rather than describing specific skills or changing levels of attainment. In addition, the frequent mismatch between curriculum and test content is relatively high with the pressure to test in a moderately limited number of aspects of a programme of instruction. Another assumption is that the students learn in a linear fashion and they must learn and be assessed on the ‘basics’ before going on to more complex intellectual processes (Broadfoot, 1996).

For instance, such undesirable ‘wash- back’ effect on instruction gives concerns for the educators to be more discontented with traditional assessment approaches. In fact, this makes the students who are at the initial stages excited to learn at the beginning of their education, become more oriented towards grades and marks than towards learning.

Brookhart, Moss and Long (2008) identified the reason for students to develop that behaviour. Furthermore, they blamed the teachers, for example, the teachers enforce and encourage competition in the classroom making students compete with each other. As such, Gipps (1994) reviewed the impact of testing and these detailed accounts have shown the impact of testing on curriculum, teaching, school systems, pupil motivation, and teachers' practice (see pages 31-57). She notes an expression: "the practice of teaching to the test, in order to raise test scores, is generally called in the US "test score pollution" (p.46).

In the same way, Broadfoot (2007) also argues that there is powerful evidence that the traditional practices of assessment damage the learning careers of many students. Furthermore, she accuses educators for missing many tricks and doing things that they were not supposed to do, and failing to do things that they were supposed to do. For instance, she argues that traditional assessment consisted of only reading and writing tests. These are mostly 'paper and pencil traditional tests' or 'exams' covering a very small portion of the potential range of skills, competencies, and aptitudes. Gipps (1999) agrees that in order to increase learning, in the past teachers believed in increasing students' anxiety. According to Stiggins (2005) teachers used assessment as a great intimidator and students were constantly under pressure to get high test scores and good grades. This methodology led teachers to believe

students only achieved success when they were threatened with low or failing report cards, unannounced pop quizzes and pending final exams.

These threatening learning environments made students question their abilities or disabilities and pushed many to refrain from studying completely. These unfortunate circumstances caused students to have low self-esteem and hindered their efforts and abilities in trying to learn, and hindered any chance of future effort and getting success. In fact assessment not only gives anxiety to students, Gipps (1994) notes how it stressed teachers.

Stress was due not just to the added pressure of having to do the assessment but also to the enormously high level of publicity that the assessments received, hitherto unheard of at primary level, and to many teachers' anxiety about formally assessing children as young as this with assessments which they felt could be used for labelling children. (p.114)

Filer and Pollard (2000) also note how teachers have experienced increased pressure to produce 'evidence' and general expectations of formality and transparency in assessment practices with the introduction of national assessment in primary schools in the UK. In a study by Osborn, McNess, Broadfoot, Pollard and Triggs (2000), the participant head teachers reported a strategy of 'teaching to test' by their teachers,

while they also recognized an overall reduction in teaching time, the superficial coverage of some topics and the marginalization of some subject areas, notably art and music. In addition, Osborn et al. (2000) found that pressure of testing led to a noticeable decrease in the use of more formative approaches to assessment, like listening and observing.

Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2003) argue that when external tests are involved, the process of teaching and learning shifts from the status of developing students' understanding to teaching to the test. In general, they further note the pressures exerted by the external testing as these typical tests are not completely consistent with good formative assessment practices. They also advise that summative tests should be, and should be seen to be, an encouraging factor of the learning process and should be used to find the progress of learning occasionally rather than to dominate or control the assessment picture for both teachers and students (Black, et al., 2003).

Showing concern over such factors, Ronald (2005) recommends to minimize the pressure of assessment as when the students feel pressurized by evaluative surveillance, monitoring, and other significant features of assessment, their willingness to express creativity will suffer. Many situations of this nature have led researchers to look for and find effective assessment procedures to encourage students to continue learning in schools and achieve success (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie,

Hipkins, & Reid, 2009; Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Black et al., 2003; Crooks, 1988).

The existing assessment pressure in the Maldives

In this section, the focus will be to provide evidence of existing pressure regarding assessment from the available literature.

Nazeer (2006) explored a cooperative learning approach to teaching and learning Economics in secondary schools and investigated teachers' perception of cooperative learning. In his study, the nature of the teachers' exam-oriented teaching reflected on the way they were pressured to produce good results. He highlighted the importance of private tuition, which is an effect of the race of competition between students and among parents. For instance, he found out many parents believed that they needed to send their children to private tuition in order to get good results from schools. As a result, some parents started sending their young children to these classes as soon as their children start primary schooling. Further, he also pointed out the competitive nature of the Maldivian students against each other. "Although we encourage our children to learn Islamic cooperative values at home, in schools we teach them to be individualistic or competitive against fellow students to get high marks" (Nazeer, 2006, p. 102).

Didi (2007) who investigated a case study on school improvement,

explored, “the route taken by an urban primary school in the Republic of Maldives”. During his study, he discovered assessment of student learning was given a high accord by staff at all levels, particularly by the head of the school. Therefore, the principal personally monitored the performance of the students by reviewing weekly results of the assessments given to students in the presence of all the teachers and supervisors.

In another study carried out in three schools by Shareef (2010) on Environmental education in the Maldives at the primary level, found out that in the Maldivian education system, a lot of pressure is imposed on the schools to prepare students for the external examination they sit at the end of secondary schooling. Therefore, attaining good results in the Cambridge IGCSE is a highly regarded achievement. Additionally, there was a lot of competition between parents, even at the primary level and that parents took exam results very seriously. He also reported that in the island school parents put a lot of pressure on teachers regarding marks. For example, it was very common for parents to complain about teachers not being consistent in marking (Shareef, 2010).

Haveeruonline (2011), a renowned newspaper of Maldives, reported a case of three invigilators being arrested from a rural school (Shaviyani Atoll Milandhoo School) in the Maldives, for helping students plagiarize answers at Cambridge IGCSE Ordinary Level Mathematics examination

in 2010. The Cambridge examiners found some suspicious identical answers for several questions and suspected deception in the International Examination that year. As a result, the University penalized Sh. Milandhoo School's O' level candidates by not proceeding with the grading process in the Mathematics papers.

More recently, Adam's (2012) study on Maldivian primary teachers' mathematical beliefs and practices also found that teachers placed pressure on the assessment results of the students. He noticed the impact of assessment pressure affecting teachers' instructional practice in Mathematics teaching. In fact, this pressure encouraged the teachers to focus each lesson on materials that would provide practice for the tests. Adam also highlighted that there was lots of pressure from the parents and the schools to improve test results. Consequently, the teachers were concerned about getting good results from the school tests and examinations (Adam, 2012).

Another recent study by Mariya (2012) on classroom practices and private tuition settings in the Maldives, shows evidence of all schools needing to create good results as there is a lot of pressure from the parents, the society and media. In that study, Mariya confirmed that education in the Maldives is exclusively examination-oriented and with the test results, students are always in competition with each other. She also highlights how parents supported tutoring and how they spent money

on tuition teachers. The anxious parents sent their children after the school hours to tuition classes to make their children get top grades at Cambridge IGCSE examinations because of the competition (Mariya, 2012).

Shifleen (2012) reported an interview by CHSE ²(Centre for Higher Secondary Education) Principal in Haveeruonline. According to the principal, the chance to study in that school is given to those children who have passed in four compulsory subjects and additional three subjects in the Cambridge IGCSE Ordinary Level. Therefore, those children who obtained the best grades are selected. The principal of CHSE gave reasons for the strict criteria of the selection procedures. It is because of the limited spaces and high demand from the students. The Principal said, “Competition is immense at present, therefore, we need students who are excellent learners. If there are more children who want to join our school then we will select students using the National Award Criteria” (Shifleen, 2012).

Maajid (2012) strongly criticizes the current education system in the Maldives. According to Maajid, there is not a single aspect of our education system that is commendable at the present. Most importantly, Maldivian students who sit the Cambridge Ordinary Level Examinations

² Centre for Higher Secondary Education is the first and is still one of the biggest government high schools in the Maldives

are placed first, second or third in the world. In this way, he writes, “Do those “successes” really reflect the reality? Do they really mean that our students are the best in the world? Or, are they just superficial, meaningless decorations which do not take into account some real factors that matter?” Additionally, he believes this UK based examinations system conducts and places these top rankings “first, second or third places in the world” only to the third-world countries. As these countries are exceptionally lazy and ignorant to conduct their own examination systems (Maajid, 2012).

What is formative assessment?

A topic such as assessment is significant in education. For that reason, many educationists has shown interest in research concerning educational assessment. For the past 14 years, ‘formative assessment’ has been widely studied all over the world. As a result, there are many descriptions and definitions of formative assessment. Among the most popular scholars, Black and Wiliam (1998a) define formative assessment “as encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities engaged” (p.7). Additionally, Black et al. (2003) also note formative assessment can occur several times in each lesson with numerous methods for encouraging students to express what they are thinking and several different ways of acting on such evidence.

Another prominent scholar, Sadler (1989), describes formative assessment being “concerned with how judgments about the quality of student responses (performances, pieces, or works) can be used to shape and improve the student's competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning” (p. 120). Crooks (2002) defines that formative assessment as focussing on enhancing student development by involving relatively unstructured interaction between student and student or teacher and student rather than a planned formal assessment event.

Moss and Brookhart (2009) define formative assessment as an active and intentional learning process that partners the teacher and the students to continuously and systematically gather evidence of learning with the aim of improving student achievement. As a result, formative assessment is a collaborative effort involving teachers and students. For example, when the learning progresses both partners benefit immensely. In particular the combined effort assists students to produce powerful learning outcomes. Moreover, the teachers become more effective and the students become more lively learners (Moss and Brookhart, 2009).

Greenstein (2010) informs what makes any kind of assessment formative is not the use of any specific measuring tool. On the other hand, it depends on the ways the teachers handle the specific information gathered about the students with the specific tool. Greenstein (2010)

elaborates “if a teacher uses information from a particular assessment to track learning, give students’ feedback, and adjust instructional strategies in a way intended to further progress toward learning goals, that teacher is engaging in formative assessment” (p. 29).

William (2011a) quite recently, after considering various scholars’ definitions redefines formative assessment in these words (also see pages 37-45).

An assessment functions formatively to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have made in the absence of that evidence. (p. 43)

Furthermore, William (2011a) has given a clear description of the above definition with many details that are important to the terminology. For example, to help teachers understand formative assessment better in the process of teaching and learning (see pages 44-45). Greenstein (2010) summarizes the explanation on formative assessment briefly in the following points:

- Emphasizes learning outcomes;
- Makes goals and standards transparent to students;

- Provides clear assessment criteria;
- Closes the gap between what students know and desired outcomes;
- Provides feedback that is comprehensible, actionable, and relevant;
- Provides valuable diagnostic information by generating informative data. (p. 19)

More recently, Earl (2013) writes about formative assessment. It “happens in the middle of learning, often more than once, not at the end. It is interactive, with teachers providing assistance as part of the assessment. It helps teachers provide the feedback to scaffold next steps. And it depends on teachers’ diagnostic skills to make it work” (p.27).

Examining basic elements (strategies) of formative assessment

Sharing learning goals, effective questioning, self-peer assessment, and effective feedback are the four basic elements of formative assessments (Black et al., 2003; Clarke, 2001; Davies & Hill, 2009).

Sharing learning goals/intentions

The first ‘active’ step or element in formative assessment is being clear about learning goals (Clarke, 2001). Similarly, the first step in any kind

of assessment is being clear about what the teacher wants the child to know about (Moss & Brookhart, 2009). Sharing learning goals with students is vital for each learner to be successful in their learning endeavours (Black et al., 2003; Brookhart et al., 2008), and when learning intentions are shared the students are much more likely to get straight on with the task and they will be more focused on what they have to do (Clarke, 1998). To explain the learning goals to the students, one of the most effective ways is to involve students in setting the learning criteria, so that it assists the process of assessment and the students will have the chance to get familiar with the language of assessment (Davies & Hill, 2009). Clarke (2008) also notes the effectiveness of having accessible learning objectives displayed in some way so that the students can have continual reference to where each lesson fits and where the learning is going.

Moss and Brookhart (2009) argue that sharing learning targets does not mean merely writing the lesson objectives on the blackboard or telling the students what the learning objective is in a sentence or two. For example, “a reading lesson objective” is not only the students just to find the main idea in a passage. In fact, ‘sharing of learning goal’ is beyond the students being able to identify the main idea. In this way, to have a successful learning session on reading, the students should also find out how to get a better grasp on the meaning of what they read, why that

should be a goal for them, and what it feels like to do that (Moss & Brookhart, 2009). In another circumstance, a learning goal for a science lesson could be for the students to learn to operate a microscope. However, the teachers should also make sure in such a lesson, “if the target of learning is for student to successfully operate a microscope, the instructional strategies should support that target” (Butler and McMunn, 2006, p.13).

According to Clarke (2001) children are motivated and task-oriented if they know the learning intention of the task, and without the learning intention, the students are simply victims of the teacher’s whim. Having explained the benefits of sharing learning goals/intentions, it is to be noted that formative assessment focuses on achieving goals rather than determining if a goal was or was not met. One of the ways it does this is by helping to clarify learning goals and standards for both teachers and students (Greenstein, 2010).

Questioning by the teachers

Questioning is key strategy of formative assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 1998), and it is also known as the most common way that teachers check for understanding with oral language (Frey & Fisher, 2011). In fact the art of questioning is essential to the practice of teaching and learning process (Black et al., 2003) and it has to be well-crafted so that by

questioning students, teachers can determine what their students know, need to know, and what they also misunderstand (Fisher & Frey, 2007). Shermis and Di Vesta (2011) believes formative assessment in a lesson involves the student and the teacher working out answers to questions from the very beginning of a lesson with questions such as, “What is the activity and why is it being learned? What are the expected learning outcomes?” (p. 103).

Black et al. (2003) found teachers in their study recognized that questioning is an essential part of their practice. In the study they also introduced to the teachers the benefits and differences of giving a ‘wait time’ to the students (after a question was asked) as recommended by Rowe (as cited in Black et al., 2003). As such, the teachers found increasing the ‘wait time’ could lead to more students being involved in question-and-answer discussions and furthermore, it increased in the length of the students’ replies.

Fisher and Frey’s (2007) advise questioning should not be thought of as a straightforward process with only two-steps. It is worth noting that, it is not a simple question and a simple answer session. Furthermore, this process has to be treated as a complex sequence where the teacher formulates the questions well before asking the students. These types of questions need the students to think for a while and then the teacher listens to the response of the learner. In this regard, Greenstein (2010)

also advises to employ open-ended questioning techniques so that students can express their ideas, making the answers to be less quantifiable and more sensitive pieces of information. Indeed, Clarke's (1998, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008) various examples of questioning strategy and other form of formative assessment strategies will help in the implementation of formative assessment in the schools.

For example, Clarke (2005) recommends strategies like, "No Hands Up", "Talking Partners" and "De Bono's six thinking hats" can make questioning by the teacher in the class more effective (see page 53-83). "No Hands Up" means any student can be asked to answer the question and that would not allow students to shoot their hands up without thinking. "Talking Partners" allow students to discuss the answer with their partner for thirty seconds to determine the answer. If this feature is regularly implemented in the classroom it will allow all the children to think and articulate therefore extending their learning. Edward De Bono's six thinking hats approach can get students to answer questions from different perspectives. When the teacher asks a question, students with particular coloured hats have to answer according to that perspective (Clarke, 2005).

However, Wiliam (2011a) suggests an alternative to questioning. He believes asking questions may not always generate good class discussions and it might not be the best way. For example, asking a question such as

which country was to blame for World War 1 might invite students to rely on one country or another. “If instead, the teacher makes a statement, such as, “Russia was to blame for the outbreak of World War 1,” students seem to respond more thoughtfully because they realize that just agreeing or dissenting is not enough” (Dillon, as cited in Wiliam, 2011a, p.85). Therefore, in this way the students have to give reasons too.

Self and peer-assessment

Another central feature of formative assessment is self and peer-assessment. Self-assessment involves thinking about students’ personal experiences, attempting to understand what has happened and working out what they themselves have learned (Munby, et al. as cited in Hall & Burke, 2004). At the same time, through peer-assessment students develop the essential skills that they require for self-assessment and may even be a prior requirement for self-assessment (Black et al., 2003). Self-assessment makes the students realize their own learning needs and empowers their future learning targets from their own perspectives. For example, students when correcting their peer’s work in lessons, gradually learns to accept feedback from their friends. As a result, with peer-assessment students’ learn to accept criticisms and respect others’ opinions of their own work. Sometimes, these opinions, feedbacks, and criticisms are accepted and received much better than their own teachers’ comments (Black et al., 2004).

The ability to self-assess is part of the learning process itself and one of the factors that supports it is the feedback from student's peers (Hall & Burke, 2004). They are valuable as students give and receive criticism of their work from peers more freely than their teacher, and when students give each other feedback they use language which both the students can understand rather than the "school language" (Black et al., 2003). In fact, self and peer-assessment can contribute to students' personal and social development as they gradually learn to communicate with their peers in non-judgmental ways. The students further realize if they want constructive feedback they have to be sensitive about the kind of feedback they give others (Weeden et al., 2002).

When students judge their own and others' work they improve their ability to see their own mistakes and learn about the learning targets and criteria for the following tasks and bring improvements. According to Black et al. (2003), self-and-peer assessment will succeed when teachers help their students, particularly the slow learners, to develop the skill. For instance, Greenstein (2010) recommends teachers to prepare rubrics for students to help evaluate their work in self-assessment, and peer-assessment.

Rubrics represent one of the prime ideas of formative assessment and they also provide a structure for laying out goals for students and the path to achieving them from the beginning of the lesson through to its finish

(Greenstein, 2010). A carefully designed set of rubrics with varying levels of quality from excellent to poor can provide students with clear guidelines without limiting their creativity (Hamm & Adams, 2009). At the beginning of self-peer assessment process, many students might find using rubrics too difficult, time consuming or unable to use them. Therefore, getting students started with the process of self-peer assessment can be difficult at the initial stages.

However, students are always much better at spotting errors from their friends' work than their own, so teachers can begin with a simple process (Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, & Wiliam, 2005). For example, the teacher can ask students' to find spelling errors or simple grammatical errors in a sentence. Greenstein (2010) suggests many forms of self-peer assessment and examples of such activities include "muddiest point", "journaling", "critiques", "stars and wishes" and use of "rubrics" (see pages 117-120).

Feedback and feed forward

Feedback is the most crucial element of formative assessment (Black, et al., 2003, Greenstein, 2010) and it is also the principle feature that distinguish formative assessment from routine classroom assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 1998). Conner (1999a) writes: "At the heart of assessment for learning is the way teachers respond to children—the feedback they provide" (p.19). Definitely, quality feedback is an essential

ingredient for helping the learner bridge the gap between what they know and what they need to know (Hall & Burke, 2004). It is the process that provides the conceptual link between what students believe to be true and it is captured in the knowledge carried by teachers, parents, other texts, resources that are available to them as reference points (Earl, 2013).

In fact, feedback informs the student what is good or bad about their work or activity (Clarke, 1998) and formative feedback during a unit also tells the students that the teacher is interested in them and their progress (Greenstein, 2010). Another important aspect of feedback is the feedback that feeds forward. Moss and Brookhart (2009) state that this particular feedback which provide students with specific strategies on following steps in their learning is vital because when the students understand how to follow the steps of learning, they are more likely to take them. According to Moss and Brookhart (2009), “feedback that feeds forward” also helps students harness the workings of their own minds in the following ways.

- Enhances cognitive processing,
- Fosters resiliency and persistence in the face of challenge,
- Provides students with specific next-step strategies. (p. 17)

With effective feedback and feed forward, the teacher can increase learning in relation to any standard or ability of the student. Additionally,

the ongoing feedback and feed forward process identifies student's strengths, weaknesses and suggests areas for improvement. At the same time they help students and teachers to reflect on their work and to come up with practical and active plans for progression (Hamm & Adams, 2009). These plans essentially facilitate teachers to modify instruction with ongoing learning and students immediately benefit from this process. However, to formulate effective feedback the teacher has to make decisions on several occasions, before making a commitment and often there is little time for reflective analysis (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

Similarly, Greenstein (2010) notes the importance of giving students constructive feedback on how to achieve the targets and guidepost measures along the learning process. Crooks (1988) also believes feedback to be most effective if it focuses students' attention on their development in mastering an educational activity or task. For instance, Butler and McMunn (2006) suggest an effective feedback to have the following characteristics:

- Clear - Easily understood and legible, if written;
- Accurate - In both the student's behaviour and the teacher's conclusions;
- Precise - Based on specific behaviour, not just on generalizations.;
- Selective - Including important observations, especially patterns of behaviour noted;

- Timely - Given as soon as possible. (p. 143)

To have a significant impact in the process of feedback, it is best to have it as soon as a work is completed. In the same way, Weeden et al. (2002) recommends the feedback process to occur sooner as students (and teachers) tend to forget work quickly after moving on to a new task.

Summative use of formative assessment/ formative use of summative assessment

Summative assessment differs from formative in various ways. Black (1998) describes summative assessment as the process of summing up or checking what has been learned at the end of a particular stage of learning, and formative assessment as a part of the process of teaching and learning. However, these assessments can be formative or summative. According to Frey and Fisher (2011) mostly it is what the teachers do with the information that is collected from the assessment that determines whether it is formative or summative. In that case, for an assessment to function formatively, the results have to be used to adjust and regulate the process of teaching and learning (Black, 1998). For example, a multiple-choice exam, which is considered a summative test, can be used to determine what students know and what they still need to be taught. In fact, the assessment becomes formative when student performance results are used in a feed-forward way (Frey & Fisher, 2011).

Formative and summative functions are two ends of a spectrum and the teachers at the formative end conduct the assessment, make the inferences, and plan actions for the students learning to move forward with in a short-term. At the same time, at the summative end, the teachers conduct the assessment to draw inferences, and the plans of action as a rule go beyond the teachers and schools to other responsible institutions (Black, 1998). According to Black et al. (2003) sometimes, occasional summative assessment may become a positive part of learning when teachers maintain a balance of formative and summative assessment. However, they believe it should not dominate the assessment practices for teachers and students.

In order to improve summative assessment, peer- and self-assessment are excellent procedures in which students will find beneficial to re-work their examination answers. The formative practices in the class will help them reflect on the way they have done their work to plan their revision more effectively. This will provide them opportunities to mark their own and others' answers and to understand the assessment process to develop their understanding (Black et al., 2003; Black et al., 2004). According to Black et al. (2003) formative use of summative tests was introduced as formative practices can generate a lot of data about pupils' progress, and that it can contribute to summative reporting.

Formative assessment: Why should schools have to put this into practice?

Formative assessment and evidence of achievement

Notably, formative assessment is widely known for the increasing achievement in students' learning. Hence, there are many studies supporting formative assessment and these studies provide evidence on students' achievement.

Numerous studies have shown many benefits and effectiveness of implementing formative assessment. In particular, the members of Assessment Reform Group (ARG) conducted research on formative assessment (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998b) which brought revolutions and reforms to the traditional form of assessments in the global community (Absolum et al., 2009; Bennett, 2011; Burdett & Johnson, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2010a). Studies by the ARG showed formative assessment making significant improvement in students' performance (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Black et al., 2004; Black and Wiliam, 1998a). Particularly, the paper "Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment" (Black & Wiliam, 1998b) summarised data from over 250 articles from several countries.

This review showed that there was a strong body of evidence to support the claim that formative assessment practices can raise standards and help attain better achievements in students (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). After reviewing formative assessment, Black et al. (2003) conducted a two and half year research project, which involved 48 teachers in 6 schools. They found that when the teachers practised formative assessment with the students, it showed positive results in students' performance.

Education systems in the United Kingdom, the USA and many other countries supported the ARG's research findings and implemented formative assessment in their curriculum (Absolum et al., 2009; Bennett, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2010a; Sadler, 1989). These countries strongly believe that formative assessment has an impact on students' achievement and implemented formative assessment in schools.

A study conducted by OECD (2005) looked at the practice of formative assessment in classrooms and schools in eight education systems in the following countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Italy, New Zealand and Scotland. The study investigated how formative assessment was practised across these countries and this project involved many international researchers. Indeed, all these researchers agreed that formative assessment had significance in bringing improvement in educational achievement. Additionally, the outcomes for individual students developed and transformed the learning cultures of assessment

across education systems in these countries (OECD, 2005).

For instance, Wan (2010) from Singapore, reported the reformation of their educational assessment in the primary schools. According to Wan, the Senior Minister of State for Education, Ms. Grace Fu said at the Parliament, “When formative assessments are being used well, it helps accelerate students’ learning.” As a result, the Education Ministry of Singapore collaborated with 16 schools to plan and prototype holistic assessment in Primary 1 and Primary 2 levels. According to Wan, the Education Ministry of Singapore planned for all the primary schools to be trained in the use of formative assessments by 2013 (Wan, 2010).

Tan (2011) investigated assessment for learning in Singapore, and found out that “much weight is given to the notion of holistic learning, but less thought is devoted to the forms of assessment practice that prompts students to learn holistically” (p.100). Nevertheless, Tan further noted how the assessment for learning has increased emphasis on using rubrics to provide feedback to children in Singapore schools. As a result, that informed students their strengths and areas for improvement (Tan, 2011). However, at the time of writing this thesis, further articles regarding the results of this research effort had yet to be published.

In 2001, the Hoover High School (San Diego, California, USA) which is an urban school of 2300 students, implemented formative assessment. It

is a school with a high percentage of low-income students and English language learners. This school experienced impressive gains in students' achievement after the implementation of formative assessment in a school-wide programme (Fisher, Grant, Frey, & Johnson, 2007).

Another successful example of formative assessment is Snow Creek Elementary School (Franklin County, Virginia, USA), which is a small rural school with more than half of its students eligible for the free and reduced cost lunches. From 2004 to 2005, the principal assigned teachers to collaborate and implement formative assessment practices to develop students' learning. Hence, in less than two years this school became a title 1 distinguished school. The students of this school surpassed the state performance in every subject area at every grade level (Stiggins & DuFour, 2009).

The teachers in Armstrong school (Western Pennsylvania, USA) discovered how a focus on formative assessment transformed students' sense of control over their learning and further increased students and teachers' learning as well. At the same time, these teachers observed their students getting excited over formative assessment. In fact, the students' controlled their own learning and became more aware of what they were learning. The researchers Brookhart et al. (2008) acknowledged the fact that it took some years for these teachers to correctly implement the formative assessment initiative successfully. However, the results, which

showed students' progress, were worth the effort and demonstrated that the process of formative assessment did indeed help students achieve success

Formative assessment a motivating factor for learners

As I have already looked into academic achievement and presented some successful stories of formative assessment, I would like to present various other features and functions of formative assessment. Many researchers have studied and reported such facts and benefits of formative assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Cauley & McMillan, 2010; Frey & Fisher, 2011; Greenstein, 2010; Moss & Brookhart, 2009; Earl, 2013) Among them, Cauley and McMillan (2010) identified formative assessment to have a powerful impact on students' motivation for learning and achievement. Moss and Brookhart (2009) write "just as a windmill intentionally harnesses the power of moving air to generate energy, the formative assessment process helps students intentionally harness the workings of their own minds to generate motivation to learn" (p.5). Additionally, Moss and Brookhart (2009) believe formative assessment helps students connect the workings of their own minds to constantly generate and strengthen these four significant components of motivation to learn:

- Self-efficacy - A learner's belief in his ability to succeed in a particular situation

- Self-regulation - The degree to which a learner is met cognitively, motivationally, and actively participating in her own learning
- Self-assessment - A learner's act of observing, analyzing, and judging his own performance on the basis of criteria and determining how he can improve it
- Self-attribution - A learner's own perceptions or explanations for success or failure that determine the amount of effort she will expend on that activity in the future. (p.16)

Approaching the issue of motivation, Greenstein (2010) states the aim of formative assessment is to inform and improve, not to pass judgment about the students. Nevertheless, success breeds success, and students' motivation to learn grows from it. According to Greenstein, when some teachers were asked to describe how routine use of formative assessment affected their classroom, teachers confirmed that it typically increased student engagement and motivation. Crooks (1988) also studied the effect of classroom assessment practices on students and reported on their potential to emphasize what is important to learn and positively affect student motivation. He also noted these as "the most potent forces influencing education" (p.467).

According to Butler and McMunn (2006), when teachers communicate clear learning expectations and what has been learned with students it can lead to understanding and meeting students' individual needs to make learning more rewarding. As a result, the flexibility in the process of

formative assessment automatically motivates students' learning. For example, in formative assessment if certain students do not reach a particular goal in understanding a concept, there is flexibility to go back and re-teach the concept (Bakula, 2010). In this way, students' motivation is enhanced when errors and mistakes are treated as a normal part of learning. Furthermore, with teachers' timely feedback, these students also have a chance to rethink and redo their work effectively (Earl, 2013). In fact, such practices encourage and stimulate students to learn at their own speed and give them a great sense of powerful ownership in their own learning.

Formative assessment assisting various ability levelled learners

Another aspect of formative assessment is its ability to assist learners of various ability levels. In any classroom, there are learners at various ability levels. For instance, sometimes these learners may be gifted, slow, attention seeking, low achieving, or high achieving and may even have different conditions such as a spectrum of mental disorders. However, the teachers' responsibility is to make all the students learn regardless of their abilities and conditions. For example, Morton and McMenamin (2011) found in their study that teachers appreciated narrative assessment as an approach that supports noticing student learning in more personalised and holistic ways. These qualities of the narrative

assessment, show learning in a way that is highly accessible to students and their families and *whānau* (Morton & McMenamin, 2011).

Black and Wiliam (1998b) also note how formative assessment provides opportunities to bring out positive changes that meet the demands such as different learning abilities. Frey and Fisher (2011) assert that “a formative assessment system should include a differentiated curriculum and instruction” (p. 49). Differentiation in teaching and learning provides the teachers with opportunities to assess students’ learning and then brings changes to instruction that are targeted for individual needs (Frey & Fisher, 2011). According to Earl (2013), differentiation is basically making sure that the right students get the right learning tasks at the right time.

Fisher and Frey (2007) also note the system of formative assessment working efficiently when it is nested within an instructional framework that allows for differentiation and when it gives opportunities to respond to student needs. Greenstein (2010) agrees on many strategies available for differentiating both instruction and assessment; however, she believes all of them work best when a teacher uses formative assessment strategies to identify the specific differentiations that best meet a learner’s needs. The following quote by Black et al. (2003) exemplifies some characteristics of a teacher who uses formative assessment strategies.

The formative teacher will be looking for ways that allow everyone in their classes to know that their voice is valued. Teachers practicing formative assessment make sure everyone is invited to speak and that a student's expression of problems is responded to in an appropriate fashion, every time. Such teachers listen to their students and take care to select activities that make it possible for them to listen to everyone and act on what they hear. (p.93)

Formative assessment helps to communicate with learners and to move learning forward

Another significant feature of formative assessment is helping learners to communicate and receive feedback, making them the most powerful elements of formative assessment that lead to student learning (Black et al., 2003; Brookhart, 2008; Davies & Hill, 2009). According to Brookhart (2008), sharing information about learning and giving feedback teachers can show students where learning is headed and what students need to do to get there.

Hence, many researchers agree that the formative assessment must be exclusively at the heart of the learning process and it can be a basis for the teaching and learning process (Absolum, 2006; Absolum et al., 2009; Davies & Hill, 2009). In fact, by communicating and giving feedback

teachers can recognize and appreciate the students' achievement and enhance their learning and make them responsible towards their own learning.

Formative assessment is a process, which continuously circulates on feedback and on making both the student and the teacher use the feedback. However, the nature of the feedback and the correct timing depends on the students' achievement. The information, which is collected, will inform what the teacher has to do next to make the students learn and will inform the student on what he or she has to do to make his or her learning progress in order to achieve the best. The learning that occurs through formative assessment maximizes learning in students and helps them master key concepts and skills (Brookhart, 2008).

Critiques of formative assessment

Debates based on dispute, and contention regarding research is a norm in the research community. In this way, it explores 'two sides of the same coin' to facilitate educators and policy makers. When the researchers criticize formative assessment, mostly, they criticize the work of Black, Wiliam and their associates, the Assessment Reform Group of UK (ARG). For instance, Taras (2007) , who seems to respect ARG, finds they are being challenged less frequently. She thinks it is because of their

seniority, the position, and the respect accorded to them by the academic community. Furthermore, the undoubted contribution, which their work provided, has made an ethical and practical working philosophy of institutional learning. That also prioritizes formative assessment and therefore, learning over assessing.

Those who criticized Black and Wiliam and their associates include Perrenoud (1998), Smith and Gorard (2005a, 2005b), Stobart (2006), Taras (2009), Bennett (2009), and Burdett and Johnson (2009). They have been critical regarding the research on the implementation of formative assessment in the schools. As such acknowledging these researchers' criticisms, Black and Wiliam (2003), responded to them. Furthermore, Black and Wiliam believe many of them are undeniable and relevant to some studies. However, they also argue it is not fair to characterize the whole field of formative assessment entirely. Following, these criticisms from other researchers, Black and Wiliam also argued the critiques of formative assessment.

For instance, Perrenoud (1998) criticizes the lack of theoretical pedagogical context when Black and Wiliam discuss the success of formative assessment interventions. In this way, Perrenoud writes: "If formative evaluation becomes an element in teaching practice, we cannot limit its analysis to the intentional acts of the teacher; we must address ourselves to the effective regulation of the processes, to the underlying

situations and organization” (p. 99). However, Black and Wiliam (as cited in Taras, 2009) responds to Perrenoud and provides an explanation for their success of their classroom interventions to improve learning in schools.

In this regard, Smith and Gorard (2005b) argue that students who have been assessed by formative assessment are disadvantaged by the interventions compared with their peers who are using other forms of assessments. They criticize the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) for bringing students and schools dis-improvement. However, Black, Harrison, Hodgen, Marshall, and Wiliam, (2005) argue that Smith and Gorard (2005a) need to make their study more relevant, trustworthy, and accountable. In response to Black et al. (2005), Smith and Gorard (2005b) yet again argue that although Black and Wiliam and their associates try to implement formative assessment into the curriculum, the schools are not practicing it as they are supposed to. Indeed, it is something policy makers and researchers need to be aware of in disseminating research on formative assessment.

Popham (2010) also agrees that implementation of formative assessment might not be an easy process. He states that it is tough to change teachers’ already established assessment procedures. For example, he writes, “When we ask teachers who are not using formative assessment to begin using it even if we can back up our entreaty with an avalanche of

supporting research evidence, most teachers will, smilingly, deaf-ear us” (p. 184). Therefore, Popham calls for developing ‘A formative assessment starter kit’ to decrease such issues of the teachers.

When Taras (2007) reviewed the work of Black and Wiliam , she highlights irregularities and contradictions related to the definitions of summative and formative assessment. As such, Taras (2007) writes:

..firstly, that the summative assessment process becomes implicit and is often considered absent and therefore not a necessary precondition for formative assessment; and secondly, separating summative and formative assessment into two distinct processes necessitates repeating assessment for learning and assessment for accreditation. (p 370)

It is worth noting various consequences that occur during the initial stages of implementation of formative assessment. A negative consequence might be that the teachers’ workload might double and could result in excluding the practice of formative assessment. The teachers might also start thinking that the processes of formative assessment are too complicated and time-consuming (Popham, 2011; Taras, 2007). As a result, Taras (2009) calls scholars from all over the world to take responsibility of assessment for learning and make it become meaningful and durable. In particular, she argues the definitions

of formative assessment making confusions among educators and the need for clear explanations. In fact, notably at present formative assessment/assessment for learning has become ‘an international property’ and ‘international responsibility’. Hence, Taras believes it is important to make this argument justified both theoretically and in practice. I believe this must be one of the reasons, quite recently, Wiliam (2011a) discusses definitions of formative assessment and makes them quite understandable.

Stobart (2008) points out that in high-stakes testing cultures , such as the UK, USA, Maldives, Singapore and Malaysia, teachers may start using formative assessment to ‘sugar the pill’ for the examination. The teachers can claim that the regular test practice and monitoring of scores is formative. However, this often masks confusion, since much of this type of assessment is summative or mini-summative and formative assessment meaning is lost in the purpose. Thus, the teachers target the students learning in the classroom to bring success in external summative examination (Stobart, 2008).

Bennett (2009), who used to critique formative assessment, surprisingly believes formative assessment can show positive results if teachers with extensive knowledge about the practice implement it effectively in their classroom. Nevertheless, Bennett criticizes the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) for not providing a well defined set of practices for

formative assessment strategies. He expresses doubt about the capacity of American teachers to conduct formative assessment, although already many USA schools practice formative assessment and there are successful stories of formative assessment (Brookhart et al., 2008; Fisher et al., 2007; Stiggins & DuFour, 2009).

Burdett and Johnson (2009) point out that in many national education systems, summative assessment is dominant because of strong parental pressures. When the schools conducted summative testing for a long-time, the schools culture became engulfed in tests. For example, these summative tests became the basis for awarding of privileges that the parents liked and encouraged their children to achieve. In this manner, tests and exams satisfied the expectations held by the parents (Earl, 2013). As a result, these dominance behaviours lead the schools to have a negative impact on the direct implementation of formative assessment. For such reasons, many of the proposed models of formative assessment sometimes become unsuccessful (Burdett & Johnson, 2009). Although they criticize some models of formative assessment, they also believe it does not mean formative and summative assessment cannot be made successful and integrated into educational systems. They further believe, with careful implementation, formative and summative assessment improve outcomes and help to shift educational paradigms. However, because there are negative consequences at the initial stages of

implementation, Burdett, and Johnson advise the policy makers to be extremely conscious of the contextual issues.

Looking into similar research: Practices of formative assessment

This chapter aims to investigate teachers' understanding and practices of formative assessment practices in various education systems relevant to this study. Many of the researchers wanted to find out about the effectiveness of formative assessment practices and to monitor how much knowledge teachers had concerning them. These researchers have used similar data collection methods as to this study; therefore, I wanted to share their findings in this section.

In 2009, the Singapore Ministry of Education decided to implement a 'holistic assessment' approach that supported teaching and learning and introduced formative assessment in primary classrooms. Leong and Tan (2010) studied this initiation using an interpretive phenomenographic research methodology. From their study, they found that there were varying conceptions of 'holistic assessment' among the teachers. However, Leong and Tan found that even though there was some confusion among the teachers about their definitions of formative assessment, it was found that the teachers were still headed towards a good general direction in their practice. In particular, the teachers were

able to adapt the new assessment practices in ways that supported teaching and learning. Nevertheless, there was still uncertainty in the dependability of formative assessment, as the teachers' understanding and practices of formative assessment was minimal. They further believed that the introduction of the new policy was a significant milestone in the examination-oriented Singapore education system and a possible attempt to bring innovative changes in education assessment culture in the future.

Webb and Jones (2009) conducted qualitative research on primary teachers in a UK school. These teachers were engaged in a professional development programme to implement formative assessment. Webb and Jones examined changes in the practices of these teachers in developing assessment for learning such as students' learning experiences, pedagogical decision-making, and the challenges experienced by teachers and students. The researchers explored the nature of classroom practice associated with formative assessment and they found that the division of labour changed in these classrooms. The students in particular became more responsible for their own learning by supporting each other to assess and learn. Therefore, the researchers believed success and failure of formative assessment in the classroom depended on teachers' determination, formative assessment knowledge, and their choice of assessment.

Tiknaz and Sutton (2006) studied teachers' thinking, views and understanding about planning for formative assessment in the UK. The researchers discovered that teachers used many different assessment task formats, sometimes within a unit or more usually over a more extended period, to maximize students' opportunity to succeed and give feedback and feed forward. The teachers also used checklists, which enabled them to plan and implement the key components of formative assessment. The researchers agreed that the differentiated tasks used by the teachers had the potential to satisfy both formative and summative functions of assessment. For example, as a summative assessment the tasks provided a judgement of pupils' progress at a particular point in time. As a formative assessment, the tasks have been used to give feed back to pupils about their ongoing learning and performance. However, the researchers had a dispute over the limited understanding of teachers' planning for the differentiated learning activities. They argued that the more able students had a limited ability to achieve higher levels of attainment as teachers were unable to produce differentiated tasks for the needs of higher achievers.

Rea-Dickins (2006) studied how primary learners using English as an additional language were engaged in formative assessment. She conducted the study in England and Wales and within the context of the National Curriculum. She found that by focusing more closely on the

learner, that assessment, whether formative or summative, could present opportunities for language learning. She suggested that an assessment, although planned to be summative, could also provide opportunities for learners not only for language display but also to explore their understanding and use of language. The study further presented evidence of the complexity of constructing formative assessment and particularly the relationship with summative assessment. She argued that it was not necessary that all assessment should ideally be formative but teachers should provide their learners a balance in the types of assessment within instruction. The study highlighted the importance of sharing learning intentions with the learner for any particular assessment activity in the classroom.

Chapter summary

In adopting a theory for class assessment, many researchers recommend the theory of social constructivism. Social constructivism ideally makes learners take responsibility for their own learning and make them active learners. It is vital for the learners to be engaged in learning to become better achievers. To facilitate the students' learning, assessment forms a strong bond with other areas of learning. For example, this bond holds curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning together giving each other strength. However, in the past, assessment was a separate component and there were many negative consequences that occurred due to the pressure

of assessment. Many of the bitter assessment experiences made educational assessment a controversial issue among students, teachers, and parents. For instance, the Maldives is a country that has lots of assessment pressure. As a result, to decrease the pressure of assessment, adapting a culture of formative assessment is vital in the schools. Formative assessment enhances learning and motivates learners regardless of their abilities. Many researchers support formative assessment as it has resulted in lots of improved student achievement.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have explained the research context and the relevant literature for the present study focussing on formative assessment, research on formative assessment and educational assessment in general. This chapter starts with the theoretical framework, where I explain social constructionism and its relation to the research investigation. As the chapter continues, the focus moves to explaining the selected research design and how the research has proceeded within this structural design. As such, I generally explain the nature of the qualitative research that defines the basis of this project. Following this, I outline the research design and specifications for selecting the case study research methodology using relevant published research to explain this process. In addition, I outline how I managed the data collection and data analysis, followed by an explanation of how the process of rigour and trustworthiness was addressed and conclude the chapter with a section on ethical considerations.

The theoretical framework

Social constructionism

In this study, social constructionism provides a theoretical framework for conducting my research. Social constructionism is a sociological theory of knowledge that views social properties as being constructed through interactions between people. This knowledge exists within the lived experiences of the world where people live everyday (Robson, 2011). For instance, in a social setting a group of people construct knowledge for one another, working together creating a small culture of shared materials, beliefs, and these things have shared meanings. With people's lived experiences of feelings and understandings they all are immersed within a culture where they are learning all the time. For example, such knowledge includes understanding and valuing how to be a part of that particular society on many situations (Burr, 1995). Burr (1995) states, "it is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated" (p. 4). Following Burr's ideas, Hibberd (2005) simply states that knowledge is acquired through the public practice of conversations.

As such, Burr (1995) notes how social constructionists focus on language,

where discourses in our daily life construct social life. According to Burr, “a discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements” (p. 48), for instance, numerous discourses surround objects, events and people which in fact strive to represent them or construct in various ways. These discourses bring aspects into focus, raises various matters, concerns for consideration and there may be various implications and suggestions for them (Burr, 1995). For example, Chapter 5 of this study raises such a concern where it displays discourses that lie around assessment in Maldivian schools. Thus, “discourses are intimately connected to the way that society is organised and run” (Burr, 1995, p. 54).

Burr (1995) believes that social constructionism keeps the focus of all inquiries clear and precise, for example, this project engaged teachers and students and their interactions with each other. Mostly, these social interactions happen in the form of conversations and as a result, in social constructionism, language plays a major role. Burr states many writers hold an extremist social constructionist view. She writes, “they argue that ‘there is nothing outside the text’, i.e. that when we talk about ‘reality’ we can only be referring to the things that we construct through language” (p.9). For example, when people interact responding to each other and the whole process of their talk and behaviour becomes a joint effort. Therefore, by

theoretically framing in this position, I was able to make sense of the world where the participant teachers and students made sense of their class assessment. The classrooms where the study took place were their environments where the knowledge took place in the form of interactions. The particular focus of my research was to find the formative role that the class assessment played in learning, for example, through teachers' questions, students' replies, and teachers' observation of students and their feedback to the students.

In another overview of social constructionism Crotty (1998) says that our knowledge of the natural world is as socially constructed as our knowledge of the social world. For example, understanding of *flowers* is something people come to learn in the course of life. Children might talk about *flowers* with their parents and learn which things growing count as *flowers* and which are *weeds*. Teachers teach about *flowers* in the school and children learn about *flowers*. They find out their different names, characteristics and where they grow. However, if children are from a place where there are no *flowers*, the word or concept may have a very little meaning. According to Crotty (1998) the social world and natural world are the same worlds and these worlds exist side by side. Also there is one human world and each one of us is born into an already interpreted world that is at once natural and

social. Furthermore, social constructionism is an epistemological term embodied in many theoretical perspectives that also includes the term symbolic interactionism (Crotty, 1998).

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is constructionist in nature methodologically and epistemologically (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) defines symbolic interactionism from a theoretical perspective stating “as an approach to understanding and explaining society and the human world, and grounds a set of assumptions that symbolic methodology researchers bring to their methodology of choice” (p.3). Burr (1995) explains a fundamental of symbolic interactionism, which is “the view that as people we construct our own and each other’s identities through our everyday encounters with each other in social interaction” (p.11). Filer and Pollard (2000) also state that with the use of symbolic interactionism in research, the focus is on detailed and holistic case studies.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that through conversations and working together, students in a classroom come to share experiences, but not necessarily share the same interpretations or understandings of those experiences. Bogdan and Biklen note that meanings are always subject to negotiation. According to Denzin (2004) symbolic interactionists formulate

and offer various narrative versions or stories which their participants tell them about the social world they live in. Denzin simplifies how interactionism can be best understood. To study these stories, symbolic interactionists study how narratives, for example, interviews are connected within a particular discourse. These narratives with their systems of discourses give coherence and meaning to people's life every day. These practices represent narrative constructions and their meanings are formed and reflected through the experiences in the narrative representations.

As a result, symbolic interactionism assisted me in understanding and supporting the themes which emerged from data analysis in relation to participant teachers' assessment processes as well as students' experiences of learning that took place in the studied classrooms. The learning experiences were accumulated with formal and in- formal assessment episodes. In that way, the participant teachers also negotiated their understanding of assessment in relation to their understandings of teaching and learning that took place during the semi-structured interviews, where they shared their views on assessment strategies that happened in the classrooms. According to Filer and Pollard (2000) the classroom environment that the teachers build and the consequent interrelation of teacher-student strategies within the environments, has significance for the performance of individual and group

of students and for the assessments of them by teachers. They also point out “both can be seen as products of the patterns of symbolic interaction and meaning that have developed in the lives and biographies of teachers and pupils within particular classroom and setting” (Filer & Pollard, 2000, p. 4).

Ethnography

In this research project, as stated above, the theory of social interactionism tactically undertakes ethnography as a methodology. It is a methodology that emerged from anthropology and anthropological theory, which is also adopted by symbolic interactionism and additionally adapted for many of its own purposes (Crotty, 1998). Gobo (2011) notes three terms that are important in ethnography; they are participant observation, field work and case study.

Robson (2011) asserts ethnography is a description and interpretation of culture and social structure of a social group and a central feature being participants are studied for a long time period in their natural environments. Bryman (2008) defines ethnography and participant observation together because of their similarities: “..the fact the participant observer/ ethnographer immerses him or herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions” (p. 104). In ethnography, these

particular observations usually involve a detailed study of physical characteristics and social customs. For example, Robson (2011) illustrates some features of the ethnographic approach. Among them are:

- The shared cultural meanings of the behaviour, actions, events and contexts of a group of people are central to understanding the group. Your task is to uncover those meanings.
- While participant observation in the field is usually considered essential, no other additional data collection method is ruled out in principle. (p.9)

Furthermore, Robson points out that there is no one way or specific ways of doing research under this paradigm; however, in-depth study of a small number of cases is the norm of ethnography. Finally, Lichtman (2011) summarises key elements of ethnography:

- Ethnography consists of an in-depth look at a culture or subculture.
- Often limits the study to a specific aspect of culture.
- Relies on the field of gaining access, role of observer, power issues.
- Often uses words of participation in written presentations.
- Much of the research in ethnography comes out of the field of education. (p. 5)

Bryman (2008) adds more details to the word “ethnography” by stating that ethnographical research includes all of the description above with a final written product of the research as well. As a result, ethnographies are written as stories, accounts, diaries, biographies, and many other forms to describe the participants’ behaviours. For example, this project is an in-depth study of three participant teachers with the use of methods such as participant/lesson observations, semi-structured interviews with the documents that the teachers used in their classrooms.

Nature of the study: A qualitative study

Being a qualitative and interpretive study, the whole investigation depends on the researcher. Creswell (2013) points out interpretation in qualitative research is abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data. For instance, in an interpretive study objects, people, situations, and events do not possess their own meaning while the meaning is conferred on them (Lichtman, 2010). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argue that interpretation cannot be determined by any particular force, human or otherwise and that it is not an autonomous act. However, individuals construct meaning through interaction and interpret with the help of others such as people from their past, writers, family, television personalities, and persons that they meet in settings in which they work (Bogdan & Biklen,

2007). For example, based on this study it was important to define and redefine the meanings of what was observed and what was heard from the conversations between the teachers and their students (Stake, 2010).

In addition, to make the study more meaningful the findings were related to the literature reviewed on educational assessment and formative assessment strategies. In order to accomplish them fully the participant teachers' thoughts and beliefs about formative assessment and their behaviours were essential factors. Therefore, it was important to listen to them, to watch them interact and to think about the meanings beyond, beneath and around the words the teachers' expressed during their teaching and learning sessions and also with the students (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2010).

To collect data for this study I spent a significant amount of time immersed in the three case study teachers' schools, studying, collecting as much relevant information as discreetly as possible in their classrooms (Lichtman, 2010). For instance, to collect descriptive data, I had to gradually enter the worlds of the teachers and tried to closely understand and observe them to represent them in this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Being an unfamiliar person while inside the classroom, the data was collected as naturally, cautiously and authentically as possible.

Nevertheless, being a novice researcher myself, I have learnt that qualitative

research is quite exciting and, can be rather dynamic and flexible. According to Lichtman (2010), qualitative researchers have freedom to modify procedures as they progress their research. In fact, they do not always have to begin with detailed procedures and concrete plans for how to conduct their research. As such, while the process of data collection and research continued I adjusted and brought changes in the process of the study. For example, in the middle of the data collection process a teacher had to leave due to personal reasons. However, the data collection continued smoothly with another, albeit relatively inexperienced, teacher from the same school.

Research design: A case study

The study is a qualitative case study designed to investigate Maldivian primary school teachers' understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom. A case study is a detailed in-depth examination of one particular subject, place, group or event (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) and the basic idea is that one case or a small number of cases are studied intensively, using methods that are appropriate (Liamputtong, 2009; Willis, 2007). There may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, but, the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible (Punch, as cited in Silverman, 2010). Yin (2009), who is well-known for being an expert in case study research, supports the following

definition of a case study by Schramm (as cited in Yin, 2009).

The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented , and with what result. (p. 17)

Willis (2007) describes case studies as particularistic, naturalistic, descriptive, inductive and heuristic. As a result, a case study research investigates the particulars and complexities of a case as opposed to trying to generalize to a larger group. Saldana (2011) writes “any suggestion of the case study's generalizability or transferability is up to the researcher's logical and interpretive persuasiveness, and/or the reader's ability to draw inferences of how the case speaks to a broader population or issue” (p.9). Yin (2009) also states a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life environment. However, Yin (2009) further argues that the “case study research is remarkably hard, even though case study case studies have traditionally been considered to be “soft” research, possibly because investigators have not followed systematic procedures” (p. 31). Merriam (1998) warns if the phenomenon the researchers are interested in studying is not intrinsically bounded it will not be a case. Furthermore, Merriam (1998) explains:

One technique for assessing the boundaries of the topic is to ask how finite the data collection would be, that is, whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed or a finite amount of time for observations. If there is no end, actually or theoretically, to the number of people who could be interviewed or to observations that could be conducted, then the phenomenon is not bounded enough as a case. (pp. 27-28)

For this project, the data gathered and analyzed was thick and descriptive as it is an interpretive case study (Willis, 2007); however, following Merriam's (1998) recommendations to make the data finite, only three teachers were selected for the case study. In this project and generally in any case study there is varying emphasis on data collection. Whether by means of observations, interviews or document reviews, triangulation is important to decrease the likelihood of misinterpretation (Stake, 1995). By involving three teachers the study became a multi-case study as multi-case studies are studies where researchers study two or more subjects or settings (Stake, 1995). Additionally, with the descriptive data collected, the behaviours of the three teachers were well represented in the study with thorough examinations of their understanding and practices of formative assessment in their classrooms. I believe the research design was well suited and appropriate for

this project, as the study attempted to make sense of the participants' diverse behaviours related to formative assessment in their individual classrooms.

The setting

The study was based on studying teachers' understanding and practices of formative assessment in primary schools. Therefore, three primary schools were selected for the study from Male,' the capital city. In the Maldives, all the primary schools follow the National Curriculum, and the Maldivian MOE, especially professionals at MOE supervises and monitors all the schools. As a result, the schools follow precise rules and regulations implemented by MOE and EDC (Education Development Centre).

These include similar educational assessment procedures and continuation of the National Curriculum using similar text books and pupils' work books in all the Maldivian schools. Additionally, the CFBS (Child Friendly Baraabar School) project implemented by MOE recommends a balance of formative and summative assessment in the schools (Ministry of Education, 2010b). I also selected the primary schools that were open for more than seven years because academic experience is an important aspect to implement formative assessment effectively in the schools (many new primary schools have been opened recently due to the increasing population of Male').

Recruitment of schools

The Ministry of Education's (MOE) provincial departments are in charge of administering the schools. At first the Maldivian MOE was informed of this project and the necessary information was shared including the purpose and the nature of the study (Appendix A and B). The MOE nominated about eight primary schools in Male' (the schools that were opened for than seven years), and gave permission to conduct this study. After that, the MOE shared the contacts' details and other relevant information with me. When I contacted the principals, some of them responded with interest. Therefore, I selected three schools to conduct this study. Subsequently, with a formal request to the schools, I explained the ethical procedures. (Ethical issues and considerations are described in detail in Appendices C and D).

Introducing the participant schools

Table 1: A brief description of the schools

Huvandhuma School	Finifenma School	Noraaneema School
There are 900 students and about 90 teachers in both sessions ³ (sessions 1 and 2). It runs three sectors with primary, secondary, and higher secondary. The school was opened for more than seven years.	There are 1860 students and about 125 teachers in both sessions (sessions 1 and 2). It has both primary and secondary sectors. The school was opened for more than seven years.	There are 1550 students and about 115 teachers in both sessions (sessions 1 and 2). It has both primary and secondary sectors. The school was opened for more than seven years.

Table 1 details brief information about the three schools, in which I conducted this research. They were selected from Male', and the table further shows their differences and similarities. Particularly, these three schools were selected for geographical convenience, where all the schools were located in Male', compared to being dispersed across several islands in

³ Session 1 students and teachers and the senior management come in the morning from 0645 hrs to 1245 hrs and session 2 students, teachers and the senior management come from 1245 to 1845 hrs

the Maldives. Another reason was the availability of time to conduct research in the Maldives, as I was based in New Zealand. More about the schools' assessment policies and related assessment matters are shown in the findings in Chapter 4.

The participants:

Recruitment of the participant teachers and the leading teachers/supervisors

Once the schools approved, the senior management helped in selection of a teacher and a Leading Teacher/Supervisor from each school. The volunteering participants were qualified primary teachers (with Diploma/Bachelors qualifications) who had had at least three years of teaching experience. In fact, teaching experience and qualification were important for the participant teachers, as professional standards including teaching skills and competence of assessment procedures would develop over the years. After the formality of participant selection procedures was completed, the project was explained in detail at a meeting and the necessary ethical procedures were followed (see Appendices E, F ,G, and H). It is to be noted that during the process of data collection, I felt the participant teachers were asked by the school management to participate in the project, even

though they seemed to volunteer.

Introducing the Leading Teachers/Supervisors

The Leading Teachers/Supervisors were interviewed in a one-off interview after the teacher's observations, interviews and documents were reviewed. The necessary ethical procedures were carried out with the Leading Teachers/Supervisors before the interview (Appendices G and H).

These three Leading Teacher/Supervisors supported and made the study more reliable and trustworthy.

Table 2 : A brief description of participant Leading Teacher/Supervisors

Pseudonym used	Heena	Shazla	Rafa
School	Huvandhuma School	Finifenma School	Nooraaneema School
Grade administered	Grade 1	Grade 1 and 2	Grade 3
Number of years of experience in the field of education	17 years and the fourth school that she has worked	19 years in the same school	18 years and the second school that she has worked.
Qualifications and from where they were obtained	Diploma in teaching from Maldives	Diploma in teaching from Maldives	Diploma in teaching from Maldives and at present completing a Bachelors degree in the Maldives

Table 2 illustrates a brief description of participant Leading Teachers/Supervisors. The Leading Teachers/Supervisors who participated in the study were very experienced teachers, before they were assigned these posts. They all represented three different grades for the purpose of the study. Their major responsibilities were in the administration of the grades as the grades they were in charge of had more than 100 students from five or six classes. Other than being administrators, they also observed teachers' lessons, gave them regular feedback, and helped in the management of the schools. As they were senior management team members, they worked collaboratively with the school principals. For ethical reasons, I have given them pseudonyms and their stories will be portrayed along with the participant teachers in the findings chapters.

Introducing the case study teachers

Table 3: A brief description of participant case study teachers

Pseudonym used	Fazla	Asma	Nahula
School	Huvandhuma School	Finifenma School	Nooraaneema School
Leading Teacher/Supervisor	Heena	Shazla	Rafa
Grade and session in 2011	Grade 1, afternoon session from 12.45 to 5.30 pm	Grade 2, afternoon session from 12.45 to 5.30 pm	Grade 3, afternoon session from 12.45 to 5.30 pm
Number of years of teaching experience	10 years	15 years	9 years
Qualifications and from where it was obtained	Diploma in teaching and Bachelor of Education from Maldives	Diploma in teaching from Maldives	Diploma in pre and primary teaching from abroad

Table 3 illustrates a brief description of the participant case teachers. Here, I have used pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. Each teacher from the three different schools represented three different grades. The three grades, 1, 2 and 3 were chosen mainly as the study was focussed on the lower primary grades. These three teachers' stories, especially regarding their formative assessment strategies are the basis of the major findings chapters of this study.

Data gathering strategies

To have an in-depth understanding of the topic, multiple sources of data gathering strategies were used and this led to a fuller understanding of the phenomena studied, making the research more trustworthy, credible and reliable (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). By collecting data through different methods, they were compared against each other for the purpose of triangulation. Triangulation was useful for checking the trustworthiness of different forms of data and furthermore, it also helped to examine the same phenomenon from various perspectives (Gibson & Brown, 2009). For example, the lesson observations, the semi-structured interviews, and the review documents such as curriculum documents, assessment papers, assessment policies and so on. For this study, I conducted three different sets of interviews with teachers before and after each lesson observation. In

addition, there was one particular interview with the Leading Teacher/Supervisor.

I pursued the following phases of data gathering strategies with each individual teacher. Initially, I conducted a pre-interview to find relevant information needed before the lesson observation. Then, the seventy minute lesson was audio-recorded and the lessons were observed using a directed/focussed lesson observation form (refer to Appendix K). The post-lesson observation interviews were held along with review of the documents used in the observed lesson. After that, the interviews, the lesson observation and analysis of the reviewed documents were transcribed and discussed with my supervisor at the University of Canterbury through Skype and email. The guidance from my supervisor was necessary and the continuous assistance helped me to continue the project successfully. Once each teacher's part was completed, I interviewed the Leading Teachers/Supervisors. These interviews with the Leading Teachers/Supervisors were necessary to make the study more credible and trustworthy. It helped me to make sense and understand the context the teachers worked. In addition, it assisted me to acquire more knowledge on assessment procedures of the schools from the administrative level.

During the data gathering stages, I had to spend almost a week in each

school collecting relevant data to make them useful and manageable. As a result, the time spent in each school gave me enough time to accomplish an in-depth study of the collected data during the observation, transcription, pre-lesson plan interviews, post lesson plan interviews and document reviews. The justification for each of the methods is provided in detail in the next section.

Directed / focussed lesson observation

In this study, the directed/focussed lesson observation was important to record student-teacher interactions, body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to what the teachers confirm in their interviews concerning formative assessment. For that reason, an observation form was used so that the focus of the research question centred on the specific behaviours and assessment practices that happened in the lesson (Gibson & Brown, 2009). The lesson observation forms were designed to pick up the key features of formative assessment that happened during the lesson observation (Appendix K).

Being a qualitative researcher, I refrained from becoming too involved with students and teachers while the lessons progressed as this could cause disruptions to the intention of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Although most of the time I sat at the back of the classroom, occasionally I spent time

checking on students' work trying to make sense of the formative assessment related issues happening in the classroom.

In the schools of the Maldives, each lesson is thirty-five minutes and I observed simultaneous double periods of each curriculum area (Mathematics, English and Environmental Studies) that lasted seventy minutes for each lesson observation. Each lesson was observed after a pre-lesson interview. To make this study more trustworthy and accurate, all the lessons observed were audio-taped using a digital audio/voice recorder. Indeed, it was necessary for this project as most formative assessment happened through the interactions between the teachers and students.

Semi-structured Interviews

Qualitative interviews vary in the degree to which they are structured and offer the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It is important not to be too rigid that the subject cannot tell his/her story personally in his/her own words, as then the interview cannot be regarded as qualitative. As a result for this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews. In fact, this allowed me to be confident to interview the participants and helped me to get comparable data across the study. These face-to-face interviews were held at places which the interviewees

found convenient and it also ensured that the interviews were not interrupted.

I began the interviews after a short briefing and gave them assurance that their interviews would be treated confidentially. I also explained to them the importance of sharing their information with me, how helpful the information they shared would be to this study and how it would help them in the future. They all preferred talking in our native language Dhivehi and the transcripts were later translated to English. Each interview lasted one hour maximum and I tried to get as much information as possible from them within that period. The interviews were audio recorded and after that I transcribed and shared the transcripts with them for any discrepancy. Detailed information of the pre and post- interview procedure is explained in the next part of this study.

Pre-lesson observation interview

The purpose of this interview was to find out what the class teacher was teaching in that particular period. The semi-structured interview questions were based on finding out the subject, the topic, the objectives of the lesson and learning aids / work sheets. I collected the teachers' lesson notes/plans with their permission and asked the teacher if there was anything that I should know about the lesson that was observed. These semi-structured interviews lasted for about 10-15 minutes and the meetings were held at a

place suggested by the teachers (see Appendix L).

Post-lesson observation interview with review of documents

I conducted these interviews using semi-structured interviews that were designed to follow up the issues that I noted during the lesson observations. These interviews mainly focused on the perceptions of formative assessment that happened in the observed lessons. The nature of the pattern of the questions was changed from one individual teacher to another depending on issues that emerged during the lesson observation. After completion of the post-lesson observation interview with the teacher, I collected samples of documents used in the lesson by the teachers and the students. Questions were asked about the documents based on formative assessment procedures (see Appendix L).

The interview with leading teachers/supervisors

When the teachers' part of the observation and interviews were completed, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the Leading Teachers/Supervisors (Appendix M). It was based on the understandings and practices of formative assessment and the implementation of formative assessment in their schools. The semi-structured interviews concentrated on professional development

programmes and how the schools monitored teachers' formative assessment practices. Specific questions regarding formative assessment and the school's plans for the continuation of formative assessment were asked. More questions were asked about the guidance provided for the teachers and issues that occurred from parents concerning formative assessment/assessment.

The most important thing during the interviews was to concentrate and listen to what the interviewees said and I treated them importantly. As a result, the nature and the flexibility of this qualitative study gave me the opportunity to treat the interviews as conversations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and kept me focused on the research topic. Before the interviews progressed I gave the Leading Teachers/Supervisors assurance of confidentiality in sharing any information.

Review of documents

Reviewing documents in research is the process of using documents as a means of social enquiry and involves exploring the records that individuals and organizations produce (Gibson & Brown, 2009). By reviewing documents it offered distinctive analytic possibilities for this study, especially when combined with other forms of data used such as interviews

and lesson observations. At the start of the data collection process in the Maldives, I explained the importance of this project and about the documents that I would need from the schools.

As a result, I had access to the following documents from all the schools. For example, I collected official, internal, and personal documents of teachers and students. They included the curriculum (Schemes of work), personal documents of students, student portfolios, lesson plans, assessment papers and the teachers' assessment record sheets. In order to keep the anonymity of personal students' work (documents), the teachers collected the documents that were needed and the names of the students were removed before the collections.

Data analysis

I undertook the data collection for this study from September to October in 2011 and most of the data analyzing took place in 2012. Before the process of data analysis, I systematically arranged the data by putting the interview transcripts, lesson observation notes, and other data on paper or folders and computer files. The storing of data systemically made them accessible and I was able to find what was missing and incomplete before I began the process of data analysis. This process began in the Maldives and whenever I realized

I had to access any particular information I made sure I collected before returning to New Zealand. For example, by transcribing participant teachers' interviews in the Maldives helped to manage the project systematically and to get missing information.

However, after returning to New Zealand, I was worried in determining appropriate and efficient procedures for data analysis. In that case, I also started searching for how other researchers had worked through this process. Nevertheless, it took a while to understand the whole process and gradually the process became easier with the meetings held by my supervisor along with other fellow students. In these scheduled meetings I obtained information on how to analyze data from my supervisors and from other members as well. To have a better understanding, I also studied some researchers' recommendations of data analyzing strategies. Particularly, suggestions from Bogdan and Biklen (2007), Coffey and Atkinson (1996), Lichtman (2010), Merriam (1998), Miles and Huberman (1994), Stake (1995), and Yin (1994) assisted and their ideas and references made the process of data analysis easier and manageable.

According to Merriam (1998) data analyzing is the process of making sense and meaning out of data and the final product is shaped by the collected data. For that reason, I carefully noted down what the students and teachers did in

their classrooms while teaching and learning. As a result, it helped me to make sense of the teachers' performance with a much better understanding of the processes of formative assessment involved in the lessons. For instance, in the process of data analyzing I tried to combine, reduce, and interpret what the teachers' said, did and also what I witnessed or observed as a qualitative researcher (Merriam, 1998). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) assert that the process of data analysis involves systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes and document reviews. As the data collection started in the Maldives, I realized that unknowingly I had begun the first steps of analyzing the data by transcribing the interviews. It gave me time to organize the transcripts, lesson observation forms and to complete any missing information about those participant teachers before I returned to New Zealand.

It is to be noted that early analysis of data is vital in any qualitative study. It is because the process of data analysis becomes complex when concrete bits of data and abstract concepts move back and forth, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between descriptions and interpretations (Merriam, 1998). Miles (as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994) argues the whole process of qualitative data analysis not well formulated and being ambiguous. Hence, the experts of qualitative research advise to take an approach which is

systemic and easier to manage the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gillham, 2000; Lichtman, 2010).

Lichtman (2010) considers a systematic approach to bring discipline to the analysis and interpretation of data analysis. Gillham (2000) writes “... interpreting research data is more than a matter of good intentions. It requires discipline and concentration to present a ‘true’ picture: anything that gets in the way of that threatens the validity of your research” (p.25). According to Gillham the challenge is that the way a qualitative researcher does this is flexible and open to discussion and interpretation. Gillham (2000) advises qualitative researchers to keep the purpose of the analysis in mind in order to faithfully reflect what they have found in the summary in an organized form. As such, during the period of data collection, I always kept in mind the purpose of the study and tried to concentrate on collecting data as precisely as possible. For example, I always thought of the themes that would emerge during the process of data collection and I imagined how the final product would look like at the end.

For the purpose of analyzing data, I chose an inductive approach. An inductive approach works with specifics and moves on to general information. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state “theory developed this way emerges from the bottom up (rather than the top down) from disparate pieces

of collected evidence that are interconnected” (p.6). The process represented that of putting the data in a funnel which was open at the beginning (or top) and more directed and specific at the bottom (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Also following recommendations by Merriam (1998) and Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the data was analyzed through an interactive process by moving back and forth between the data collected. It was also analyzed with patience and giving full commitment to interpreting and making sense of what the data showed.

To make the process inductive, I closely studied the interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. Furthermore, I wrote narratives for each participant in order to understand them better. These narratives were written as if they were telling their own story. Although the project involved primary teachers, I wrote a story ‘a day in the life of a school boy’ (see Appendix N) to understand the Maldivian schools’ assessment procedures better with my own experiences as a teacher/parent. With this story and other narratives of participant teachers I thought of one important theme, for example, ‘Assessment is pressure’. However, during the whole process I had to prepare and take many printouts of the narratives, transcripts and lesson observation forms. Sometimes, these papers were highlighted in different colours and cut down into strips of papers. These strips of paper were pasted

on whiteboards, on the walls of the sitting room and the study space at the University. A further step in the process was to allocate different codes.

Coding is the process used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories and used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretations (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). For this purpose, the narratives and the interview and lesson observation transcripts showed similarities and differences in teaching, learning and assessment procedures of the participant teachers. Consequently, I found key words and phrases as I observed the regularities and patterns as well as topics that the data covered. To make it easier and manageable I drew concept maps using these key words, codes and categories and tried to find a technique that best fits my data. These were read and re-read thoroughly to find emerging themes from the data and gave the analysis a thematic process.

Thematic analysis is the process of analyzing data according to commonalities, relationships, and differences across a data set (Gibson & Brown, 2009). According to Gibson and Brown (2009) when a theme is a generalized feature of a data set, a vital part of the work of the analysis involves working out the relevance of the context of a given piece of data to its membership of a category or categories. As a result, certain words,

phrases, patterns of behaviour, subjects, and ways of thinking by the participant teachers stood out making the data easier to code and analyze (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Using the thematic process it was easy to write analytic memos which helped in the process of writing the findings Chapters 4, 5 and 6. I also made further developments based on the concepts of reviewed literature, in particular recommended formative assessment literature (from experts in this field). Particularly, the research project by Black et al. (2003), and their several other projects (Black et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Wiliam, 2011a) helped in the analysis of this project. Many other researchers were followed including Clarke (1998, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008), and others (for example: Black & Wiliam, 2009; Brookhart et al., 2008; Davies & Hill, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Frey & Fisher, 2011; Greenstein, 2010) who have given many insights of how acceptable formative assessment procedures were to be conducted in the classrooms.

Studying the reviewed literature, I then, tried to make connections to the participant teachers' assessment practices in the classrooms. It gradually helped to make sense of the teachers' and students' actions. In fact, the literature review guided the study as the interpretation of the study involved explaining and framing the ideas that developed from the primary teachers

understanding and practices of formative assessment (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Particularly, Chapter 6 (Formative assessment in action: what actually happens in the Maldivian classrooms) was written using ideas of many researchers and their projects were referenced to make sense of what the participant teachers did in their classrooms.

As the process of data analysis progressed I had the opportunity to share the analytic memos and the findings with colleagues and the supervisors in scheduled meetings at the University of Canterbury. The themes that I had constructed for the findings were further discussed with them to find out if the themes selected made any sense to them. As a result, I found these shared meetings becoming very helpful in carrying out the process of data analysis. Additionally, my supervisor gave me further opportunity to present the process of selection of the themes to her students in qualitative research class (EDEM 697), which also enhanced my research process. Finally, I was able to produce a coherent narrative rich in detail and with convincing arguments in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Additionally, writing the dissertation became easier when I had opportunities to work on two journal articles. In fact, the thesis journey continued until the last day of submission with my supervisors' constructive feedback. As a result, I had many encounters of formative learning experiences, which is also my research topic, throughout my own

research journey as well.

Rigour and trustworthiness

A qualitative inquiry needs to have high quality rigour and trustworthiness in order to produce a valid and a reliable study. The rigour brings quality to the enquiry and it is also “a way of evaluating qualitative research” (Liamputtong, 2009). Rigour and trustworthiness is similar to the concepts of reliability and validity, which is used in positivist science (Liamputtong, 2009). If a study is trustworthy it has to be carried out fairly and ethically with findings representing close experiences of respondents (Padgett, as cited in Liamputtong, 2009) and to make certain the research is trustworthy and reliable in qualitative research it is essential to follow correct ethical procedures (Merriam, 1998). Thus, ensuring rigour and trustworthiness of a research project is significant in order to trust the research results and essential to professionals in the fields of education, for example in the case of this project.

For this project, I followed these processes of ethics (see Appendices A, B, C, and D). I explained information about the research project to the participants before the research began and even after collecting the data whenever there was a need. The teachers had access to the audio recordings

of interviews and lesson observations and the transcripts, which allowed them to check for any discrepancy. All the participants signed on the copies of the interview transcripts that I provided and they brought changes where it was necessary.

Multiple sources lead to complete triangulation of data making the research more reliable and trustworthy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and triangulation is the most powerful means for strengthening credibility in qualitative research (Liamputtong, 2009). Liamputtong states that credibility is similar to internal validity, which is used to find out if the explanation fits the description and if the description is credible. “Triangulation refers to the attempt to get a ‘true’ fix on a situation by combining different ways of looking at it (method triangulation) or different findings (data triangulation)” (Silverman, 2010, p. 277). According to Willis (2007) triangulation is often used as the qualitative equivalent of validity and reliability. However, Willis, states that triangulation is not a core issue in interpretive research. He also argues that a well-done study using one method, such as interviewing, may be more convincing to readers than a poorly done study using three data collection methods.

Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton (2001) also suggests the use of reciprocity, for example, the give and take of social interactions to get good

data—thick, rich, description and in-depth, intimate interviews. The importance of reciprocity is also highlighted by Creswell (2013) and for this researchers have to ask participants to examine field notes and early analysis of the project. The researchers can give back something to their participants for the effort and time given to participate in the projects. Furthermore, they should also engage the participants in member checks as a means of ensuring trustworthiness (Harrison et al., 2001).

Additionally to make this research more trustworthy and more reliable, member checking of the documents progressed in the early stages of the research process in the Maldives. This process continued again while reviewing data for the analysis. For example, initially the member checking process began when the participants started reviewing their interview transcripts in the Maldives. At the same time, they participants had opportunities to make necessary changes to these documents and any additional contributions to the translated interview transcripts from Dhivehi (local language) to English.

Later, the participants received individual narratives to check for inconsistencies, that I shared in their emails. Therefore, the participant teachers reviewed their documents and the participants added further corrections. In the whole process of data analyzing, I regularly kept on

communicating with the participants via phone, social networking and by e-mail. For, instance, whenever I needed additional information or any confusion came up with the collected data. Indeed, it was easier and convenient when the participants' had access to the internet.

While continuing this study at the University of Canterbury, I was able to have regular meetings with my supervisors and colleagues. In these meetings we discussed our data and the themes that emerged. Thus, we all learned data analyzing from each other. For example, two other students who studied with me also analyzed qualitative data. This opportunity provided justifiability in data analyzing as suggested by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Justifiability is an alternative to reliability and validity and the criteria included transparency, communicability, and coherence. Each criterion involves making use of other people to check against the tendency to impose one's own subjective biases on the data analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). In this way, before each meeting, I shared my findings chapters with all the members of the group via e-mail and later at the meetings I explained them how I developed and reached that interpretation. At the same, we all had opportunities to discuss the selected themes and we made changes where necessary. Sometimes, there were great suggestions provided by colleagues and the supervisors and the writings of findings chapters became more

coherent.

Ethical considerations

This research is part of my Masters of Education Programme at the University of Canterbury and as a student and a researcher, maintaining the codes of conduct and ethics of the University of Canterbury was essential as well as following the principles and guidelines of the University's Educational Research Human Ethics (ERHEC). However, I had to follow additional procedures of ethics from the research based country, the Maldives. Therefore, the following procedures were carried out with regard to accessing the participants and schools.

The MOE of the Maldives administers all the schools and I made a formal request for them to nominate some schools, which were appropriate for conducting this study. A letter, which contained project information for access, participation and consent form for the MOE, was sent (Appendices A and B). When the MOE nominated about eight primary schools, the project information for access, participation and consent form was sent to all of them (Appendices C and D). I also contacted the school administration to give them more information. From the interested primary schools, I chose three primary schools. After that, I obtained the approvals from the school

heads/principals. The school heads nominated the teachers according to the criteria outlined in the project information. From the nominated teachers, I selected a teacher and a Leading Teacher/Supervisor from each school based on their experience and qualifications. All the nominated participants had opportunities to ask questions regarding the project and I answered all of their questions. After that, I completed the formalities of ethical approvals with all of them (Appendices E, F, G, and H).

The students in each class were met before conducting the observations and assurance was given to the students that the project involved observing what the teachers said and did. The parents' project information sheet was sent home, with the schools permission, and the teachers made sure each parent received an information sheet before I started the observations (Appendix I and J).

The most important part of ethics was obtaining informed consent from participants, protecting them from harm and ensuring confidentiality. As a result, I made sure to safeguard the participants from any harm, such as physical or psychological harm, discomfort, or danger that may arise due to the research procedures. In fact, I made sure they read the project information and the consent form; the consent form was collected after their agreement. It was also important to get the participant's trust throughout the

process of this dissertation by sharing the lesson observation forms, interview transcripts and any information about the documents reviewed to get their approvals to make their reflections accurately.

As indicated above, I had explained in detail to all the participants how the project information would be handled and how I would protect their identities, personal data and research location. For example, in order to protect their identities, pseudonyms are used in the dissertation. The recorded audio tapes of interviews and lesson observation were destroyed on completion of the dissertation. The transcript of the data was kept in a secure locked facility in the Maldives and would be destroyed after five years. However, I made the schools and the participants aware that I would be sharing information with my supervisors and they would access the data. Furthermore, the participants knew that they had no obligation to continue their involvement with the study if they did not wish to continue. For instance, a participant teacher left in the middle of data collection for personal reasons and I was able to replace her with another teacher from the same school.

Chapter summary

Social constructionism theoretically provided a suitable framework for this

study, because this theory from a social perspective viewed teachers and students' interactions being constructed in the lessons. Additionally, the teachers shared the experiences and their understandings with me regarding the research topic. Through symbolic interactions, the theory helped me focus the interviews in the particular discourse related to the topic, assessment for learning. The research being ethnography, further provided opportunity to narrate the participant teachers' stories in detail with an in-depth qualitative analysis. The qualitative study represented the analysis of three forms of data collected for this project. For example, lesson observations, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. In fact, it purposefully triangulated the collected data giving this research project rigour and trustworthiness. Additionally, I have also taken care to maintain relevant ethical procedures needed. The next chapter focuses on explaining the first finding chapter, Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR

Class Assessment: Examining Learning Events, Teachers' Knowledge, Beliefs, Policies and Practices

Introduction

In a study of Maldivian primary teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment, I believe it is vital to present the participants' (the teachers and the Leading Teachers) thoughts and beliefs. To understand the assessment procedures I include information that teachers maintained as records of their assessment practice. In this section, I present the teachers' theoretical understanding on formative assessment. I further examine different policies that are related such as class assessment records and assessment papers to find out the procedures that the teachers go through every day in the course of action to assess their students.

The learning environment: Classrooms

As the learning environment is an important part of the teaching and learning process, in this section I describe the settings of the three classrooms.

Furthermore, it adds more information to the assessment practices of the three teachers and gives a thorough description of the students' learning environment.

Fazla's Class: Grade 1

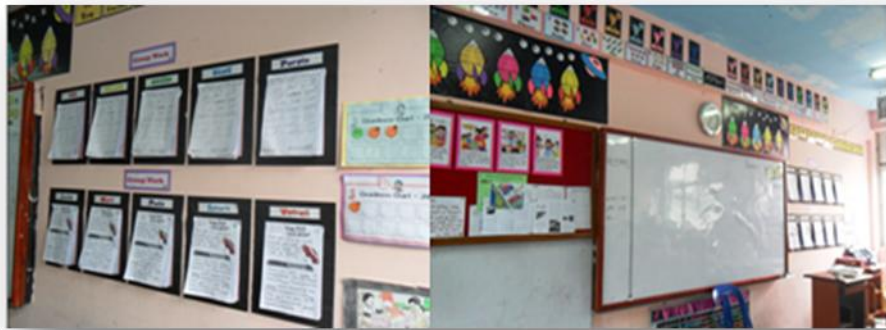


Photos: Fazla's class (source: personal files)

Fazla's classroom was on the first floor of Huvandhuma School. The class walls had posters, charts, and students' work pasted on them. Different areas of the classroom were designed for different subjects. For example, there was an Environmental Studies Center, English Center, Maths Center, Creativity, and Arts, writing center and Dhivehi Center in her class. There were spaces allocated for each student with their work displayed. There was another space for the group activities with displays. The groups had names such as names of cartoon characters. There were small desks and chairs for all the students, and the teacher had a big desk at a side corner of the class.

The desks and chairs were arranged in groups of five and six. There was a separate corner decorated as a library with many files, folders, and stories. When entering the class everyone had to remove their shoes as sometimes the students sat on the floor for reading and to listen to the teacher during the lessons.

Asma's Class: Grade 2



Photos: Asma's class (source: personal files)

Asma's class was on the second floor of Finifenma School. This grade 2 class was decorated with collaborative work from both session teachers as one half of the class walls belonged to Asma. Asma who worked in the afternoon session shared the classroom with another grade 2 teacher who worked the morning session. There were different sizes of posters, charts, and flash cards pasted all around the class. On the walls, there was a space

for each student with their work pasted. There was another space for the group activities and the group works were displayed too. The groups had different names of colours, for example, there was blue, purple, yellow, red, and green. There were cupboards and drawers for the students and teachers. Different coloured files and folders were kept in the cupboard. There was a big whiteboard and a red notice board. In the notice board, there were messages for the students from the teacher. There was a reminder about their class project, which was due soon. There were small desks and chairs for all the students and the teacher had a big table and chair too. The small desks and chairs were arranged in groups of five or six. When entering this class also, everyone had to remove their shoes as sometimes the students sat on the floor for reading as well as to listen to the teacher during the lessons.

Nahula's Class: Grade 3



Photos: Nahula's class (source: personal files)

Nahula's class was on the third floor of Nooraaneema School. There were a few materials of students and some other materials such as posters, and teaching materials pasted on the wall. It looked like some of the materials were removed from the walls and the walls looked bare. The classroom had rows of desks and chairs for the students and they all had to face the blackboard. There was a cupboard, a teacher's table and some drawers at the side of the class. This class had a blackboard while Fazla's and Asma's had whiteboards. There were many files and folders of students. There were spaces allocated to paste students' class work and spaces for their group works as well.

An overview of the three classrooms

Although there were many similarities in the three class settings, there were some differences in the learning environments. Evidently, Fazla and Asma had many similarities even though these two classrooms were in two different schools. For example, the class decorations, such as assigning spaces for individual students and group looked almost same. In addition, they both had whiteboards and notice-boards for the classes. In that case, Nahula did not have a whiteboard or a notice board. Although Nahula had also designed the class similar to Fazla and Asma, the materials were not pasted or they had been removed from the walls. All the three teachers had

various files and folders with colourful stickers and covers. In Fazla's and Asma's class, the students had to remove their shoes before they entered the classes. (Note: I have described learning evidence in Chapter 6 using the same setting with more details)

Formative assessment: Investigating teachers' knowledge and beliefs

As the investigation progressed in the Maldives, "What is formative assessment?" became a significant question. As such, the replies that the teachers' gave made me explore their thoughts and ideas widely. For example, issues in conducting formative assessment in their schools.

Formative assessment is an activity

During the investigation, the teachers and the Leading Teachers found it very hard to express their knowledge on formative assessment. Hence, it was not surprising to find them perceiving formative assessment as an activity. For instance, their explanations of formative assessment included activities such as individual work, pair, or group activities performed in lessons. They further included practical works, project work, and oral assessment as form of formative assessment.

Asma said that formative assessment is how much the students achieved or understood in a lesson and expressed how she explained the lesson to students with different activities. In the same way, Fazla also had defined formative assessment similar to Asma. According to Fazla, her school did not even practice formative assessment as all the students did the same type of assessment in the class. The following quotes provided more examples of the three teachers' beliefs regarding formative assessment.

Giving students' different work and providing them feedback is formative assessment. For example, the exams are summative. We cannot give much feedback in summative assessment. [*Nahula*]

For example, with a separate assessment paper, a grade or a mark is given for summative assessment but formative assessment is how the child performs during the class work. [*Asma*]

Formative assessment is assessing students using variety of methods. With worksheets, orally questioning, and group work and I believe from group work they can then share their work. [*Fazla*]

Nahula was the only teacher who talked about feedback, although when I asked Nahula to give more details she described formative assessment similar to Asma and Fazla. As such, she gave a list of activities similar to

other teachers. Concurrently Nahula also talked about assessing her students orally as she believed it was also checking students understanding by formative assessment.

The three Leading Teachers Rafa, Shahula, and Heena also felt confused and wanted to find information from me as well about formative assessment, in particular as some of them knew me personally and had worked with me in the past.

.. formative assessment is continuous assessment. That's the way I think, such that it helps the students to learn instead of levelling them, or it finds out how the students are progress in learning. It makes them learn and to keep on making the student better by giving them chances of learning, that is formative assessment. [*Shahula*]

.. formative assessment is something, which is done while the students do their work in the class. The students are assessed for the work that is being done and the improvement of the student can be identified while the subject is being taught. [*Rafa*]

With the participants' understanding of formative assessment explained, I further investigated the issues that they thought were barriers and obstructions in conducting formative assessment.

‘I cannot bring changes by myself’

The teachers, when asked about the difficulties they had experienced in conducting formative assessment, all provided a number of reasons they considered obstructions or barriers. Fazla strongly felt it was not possible to bring any changes herself alone and said that all the teachers had to decide such matters concerning assessment including the senior management of the school. Fazla also had difficulties sharing knowledge with her students as she felt that other teachers opposed her ideas and sometimes, she felt she lacked freedom to teach in ways that she believed was best for her students.

I tell other teachers, we cannot only teach what is in the textbooks; we have to take children beyond and share some more information with them. [*Fazla*]

I believe it is not necessary to give written assessment all the time and the assessment can be changed. [*Fazla*]

According to Nahula, too many summative tests were organized in the schemes of work, and this affected the process of formative assessment in her class. She thought too many students in one class was also a negative factor to carry on formative assessment effectively. At the same time, she also talked about lack of time: “There is not enough time to continue lessons,

the way I want to teach” [Nahula]. Later, she also talked about the curriculum due to be updated with effective formative assessment strategies or sample activities of formative assessment.

For Heena and Rafa confronting parents was something of a challenge regarding assessment and they took measures to make parents happy. For example, Heena believed handling parents was a pressure and she believed parents influenced the school all the time, especially matters concerning assessment. (I talk about this issue in Chapter 5 of this study in detail).

As a result, Leading Teachers Heena and Rafa went on talking about the pressure of parents. Hana boldly talked about how she felt about the formative assessment as a parent of another school, while Rafa criticized the society for influencing such matters.

Even if I do not know the correct procedures of formative assessment, I have some ideas. For example, my own children’s school practices formative assessment. Therefore, I know the strength of formative assessment and what these changes have made to their lives. Also the progress they are making. [Heena]

It is also very important to make our society believe these things are more important than a grade written in a report card. These are some

changes, which needed to be addressed if formative assessment is to be implemented effectively. [*Rafa*]

The other Leading Teacher, Shahula thought if the design of the report format changed, it would affect the styles of assessment in their school. For instance, she pointed out that the teachers in her grade thought it was complicated to bring changes to assessment because they had to give marks and grades to the students for each subject. As the reporting format was designed by the Ministry of Education and it was not possible for them to bring changes. According to Shahula there were many issues and they all were very much concerned about assessment procedures of the school.

Even the teachers need to be trained and parents need to be made aware of assessment issues. We always call our techniques of assessment, continuous assessment but there is little effort made to make that happen. I remember in a meeting my teachers suggested to take these issues to the school board and try to make a different report format for this school. [*Shahula*]

Shahula said that they always looked at how other schools (such as International Schools in Maldives and other schools worldwide) pursued formative assessment. She knew these schools used checklists that had rubrics with competencies and she understood how much the students

benefitted using them. Even though they were not following such assessment practices, they were interested in learning and knowing more details about those materials. For example, they had implemented something of that nature to help the students to progress in numeracy and literacy (more details are discussed about them in Chapter 6).

Assessment: Detached from teaching and learning

There were many substantial similarities and some differences in the way teachers practiced their assessment. For these reasons, I investigated the assessment policies, documentation and reporting practices of the three teachers. The evidence from school assessment policies, the schemes of work, written assessment, and assessment records contributed to the fact how the three schools and the three teachers separated assessment from teaching and learning.

School assessment policies

The assessment policies of the three schools showed differences in the way they planned the policy such as the format and the explanations provided.

Table 4: Assessment policy 2011 for grades 1-3 (Nooraaneema School)

Assessment activity	Term 1 (%)	Term 2 (%)
Term Test	-	-
Classroom Assessment (CA)	100	100
Total	100	100

Table 4 is the assessment policy of Nooraaneema School, This shows how the students of grades 1, 2 and 3 are assessed in that school. These grades (1, 2 and 3) have only class assessment. However, it has to be 100% marks as a total from each subject. Further explanation provided types of class assessment such as assignments, project works, quiz, debates, portfolio, etc. The policy also indicates for each class assessment to have an acceptable grading or marking criteria approved by the respective subject coordinators. The policy stresses the importance of informing students well in advance prior to conducting any class assessment. Regarding feedback, the policy indicates: “As a general rule, feedback must be available to the student/parents within 5 days.”

However, assessment policy of Finifenma School (Asma’s) is designed differently. This policy shows the official procedures with strict guidelines

for the parents and the students when and how assessment information will be provided for the parents and how the assessment procedure will follow to the absent cases.

- Assessment is not informed to the students in advance.
- Approaching assessment information for the parents given on every Monday and Thursday.
- If a student gets absent on the day of the assessment, they are assessed on the day they return.
- If a student is absent for a number of days for a reasonable excuse, the student is assessed according to the bullet point two of the policy (Assessment policy 2011 for grades 1-3, (Asma - Finifenma School).

The schemes of work

The Scheme of Works of the three schools show pre-planned assessment topics with assessing details. For example, the scheme of work of Asma (Table 5) has the topics listed for the term 2 and the Scheme of Work of Nahula (table 6), also has the listed the topics and the marks allocated.

Table 5 : The test topics [Asma]

<p>Test Topics- 2nd Term 2011</p> <p>Grade 2 - English Language</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alphabets (Capital & Simple Letters)• Singular / Plural vowels – writing• Writing (letters, words, phrases)• Reading (letter, words, phrases) – oral• Listening (tick, draw, colour) – writing• Speaking (Myself / My School) – Oral• Nouns - writing

Table 5 shows the test topics planned for term 2 of Asma’s class. These are planned test topics taken from the scheme of work of English Language. The teachers have plans to assess the skills, such as writing, reading, listening, and speaking. Table 5 shows few details in the design of the particular assessment but it has other details in the Schemes of Work (original document). For instance, how the students are to be assessed. As such, nouns and listening will be assessed by a pencil and paper test and the marks allocated for the written assessment.

Table 6: The assessment/Test topics [Nahula]

Grade 3/ Environmental Studies (ES) Second Term-	
Assessment topics	marks
plants	15
animals	15
corals	15
birds	15
insects	15
energy	15
transport	15
fishing	15
tourism	15

Table 6 has less information than Table 5 and it shows the assessment topics for the term. Further investigation from the Scheme of Work shows these topics are to be assessed using paper and pencil tests only (written

assessments).

Written assessment

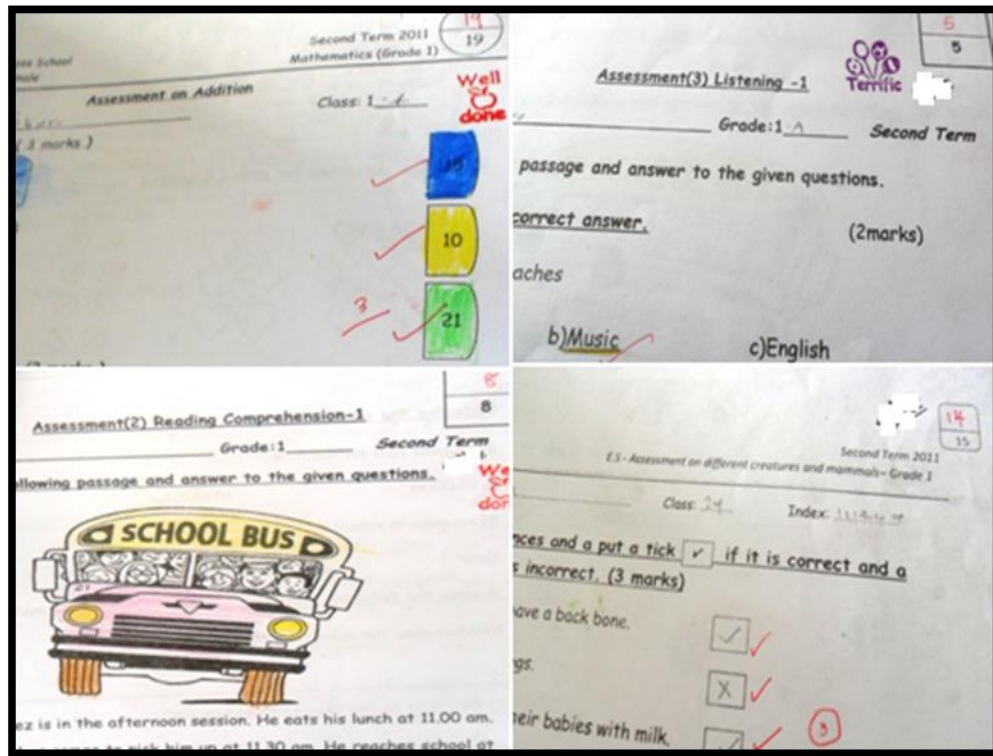


Figure 1 : Class assessment: – Grade 1: written papers [Fazla]

Figure 1 shows a sample of written assessment papers of Fazla's students. Fazla has several written assessment papers, marked and filed in the assessment paper files of students. She has given a written assessment for selected topics at the end of each unit. These papers have marks written such as 15 out of 15 or 13 out of 15. She has written 'well done' or 'great' or 'terrific' if the student has scored full marks.

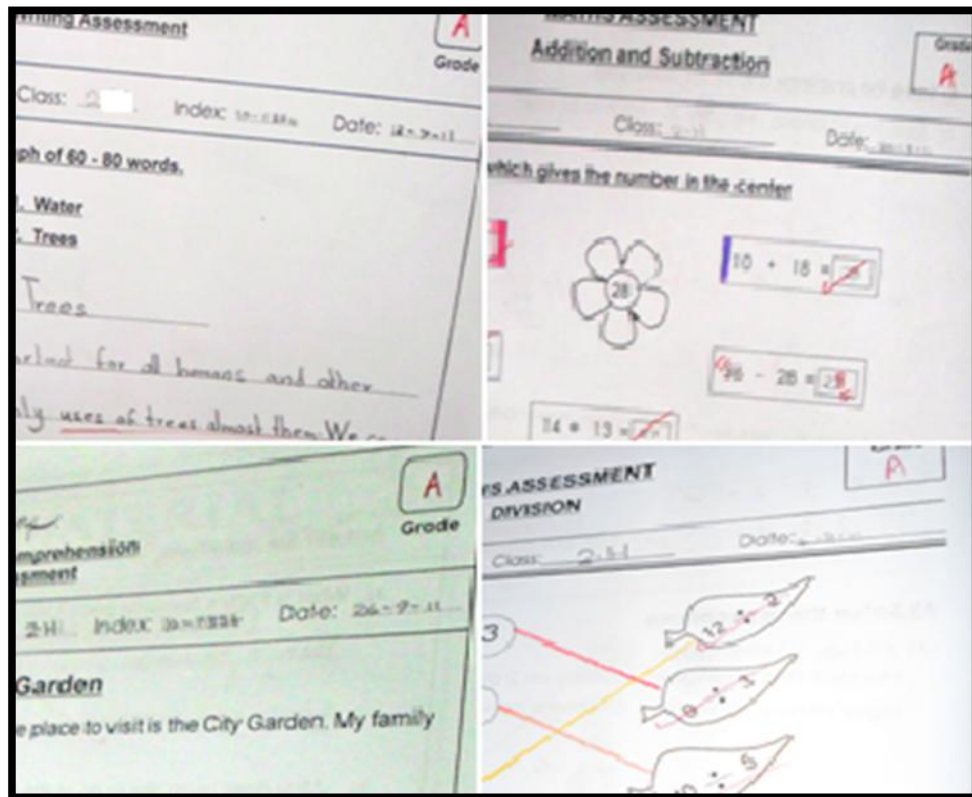


Figure 2: Class assessment: - Grade 2: written papers [Asma]

Figure 2 shows sample written assessment papers of Asma's students. Similar to Asma, Fazla also has several written assessment papers, marked and filed in the assessment paper files of students. Asma also has given written assessments for selected topics at the end of each unit. Unlike Fazla, Asma has given grades, such as A, B, C, D, E and F in the papers.

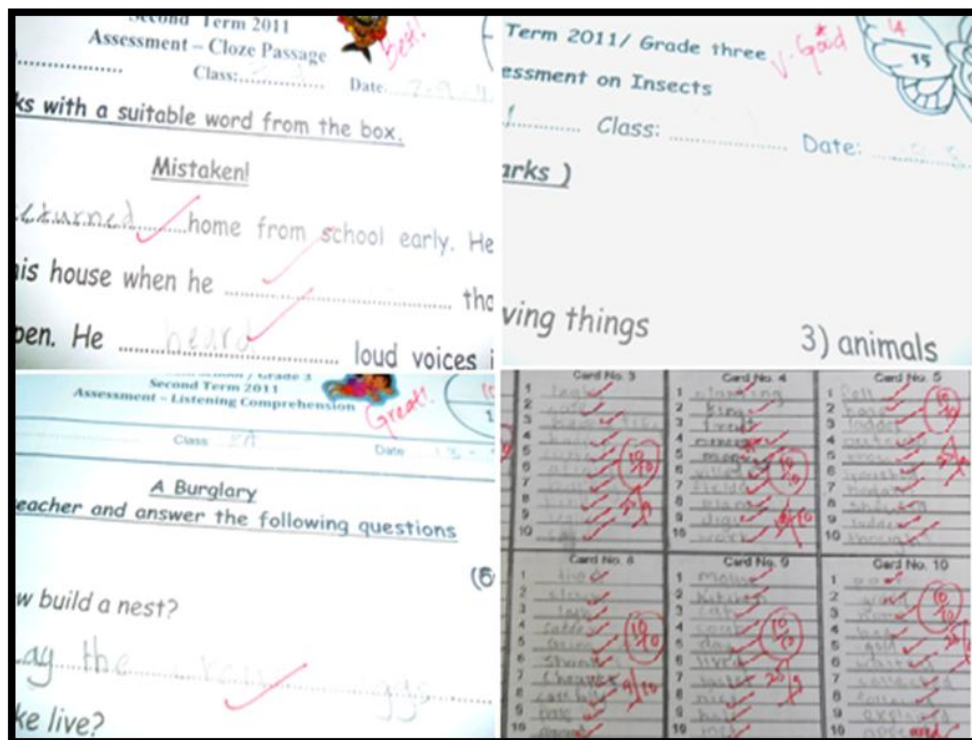


Figure 3: Class assessment: - Grade 3 - written papers [Nahula]

Figure 3 shows sample written assessment papers of Nahula's students. Similar to Asma and Fazla, Nahula also has several written assessment papers, marked and filed in the assessment paper files of students. Nahula also has given written assessments for selected topics at the end of each unit. Like Fazla, Nahula has given marks, such as 10 out of 10 or 14 out of 15 for the written assessment papers.

values, such as if it is an A, a value of 5, or if it is a B, a value of 4 is given. These grades are again added to have a final grade for the subject.

	Open Project with	Contents	Materials	Transport	Communication	Total	TOTAL	GRADE	Simple	tense	Prepo	Degree	Adject	Total	Gram	Listen	Listen	Total	Total	Read	Read	Total	Total	Speak	Speak
	10	15	15	15	15	10	80	100		10	12	20	42	20	5	10	15	10	5	10	15	10	5	5	
sheef	9	15	15	13	14	8	74	92	A																
	7	13	13	14	12	9	68	84	B	9	10	18	37	18	4	8	12	8	5	8	13	8	4		
	8	15	15	14	15	10	77	96	A																
	9	14	15	15	15	10	78	98	A																
el	7	10	12	10	12	8	59	74	B	6	7	17	30	14	2	7	9	6	4	9	13	9	4		
	8	14	15	15	15	10	77	96	A																
	8	15	15	15	13	9	75	94	A	8	8	20	36	17	4	8	12	8	4	9	13	8	4.0		
	9	15	15	15	15	10	79	98	A																
	9	13	15	15	14	9	75	94	A																
	9	15	15	15	15	10	79	99	A																
	9	15	15	15	14	10	78	98	A																
	6	9	10	10	9	8	52	65	B																
	7	10	14	10	11	7	59	74	B																
	9	15	15	15	15	10	79	99	A																
	7	15	15	14	13	10	73	91	A																
	7	13	12	13	13	9	67	83	B																
	5	14	15	12	14	10	70	88	A																
	7	13	10	10	12	8	60	75	B																
	7	15	14	15	14	10	75	93	A																
	10	15	15	14	15	10	79	98	A																
	9	14	15	15	15	10	78	98	A																
	9	14	15	15	14	10	77	96	A																
Total: 1981																									
Average: 90.0																									
No of Passes 22																									
As	Bs	Cs	Ds	Es	Fs																				
26	6	0	0	0	0																				

Figure 5: Class assessment records [Fazla]

Figure 5 shows how Fazla keeps her assessment records of the students. These documents show that even in the initial stages, Fazla gives marks to the assessment papers. According to Fazla, these marks are later added and final percentage shows the marks out of 100 percent. These percentages are converted to grades in the process of evaluation, for example, A- 85% to 100%, while B - 65% to 84%. However, the final report has a grade for each subject and the marks are not written. Fazla has even counted the

number of how many A's or B's that she has got in these checklists.

Plan	Anim	Cor	Bird	Inge	Tran	Fish	four
15	20	10	15	15	15	15	
10.5	13.5	9.5	13	10	11	7	
15	19.5	9.5	15	14	15	14	
15	17.5	9.5	13	13	14	8.5	

Term - Grade Three 2011									
Dictation - Checklist									
Teacher: _____									
Spelling 1	Spelling 2	Spelling 3	Spelling 4	Spelling 5	Spelling 6	Spelling 7	Spelling 8	Spelling 9	Spelling 10
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
3	8	10	9	6	7	6	6	6	6
10	10	9	10	10	9	10	10	9	9
10	10	10	6	8	9	7	10	9	9
7	8	9	10	10	6	7	6	5	4
1	9	10	9	10	10	8	3	3	3
9	10	10	10	10	8	7	8	10	7
9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10

Prepositions	Adjectives	Adverbs	Future tense	Reading comp	Close passage	Creative writing	Listening
15	15	15		14	10	15	10
13	7	11	9	10.5	6	9	9
13	12.5	15	13	14	10	14	10
12	14.5	15	14	12	10	10	7
6	8.5	7.5	3	1.5	1	6.5	3.5
14	12	13	13	9.5	7	8	7.5
14.5	12.5	15	15	13.5	10	13.5	10
11.5	12.5	13	15	10.5	3	12	8
13	12	15	13	13	10	14	10

Figure 6: Class assessment records [Nahula]

Figure 6 shows Nahula’s class assessment records. These records are similar to Fazla’s as they both use marks at the initial stages and give grades finally to the subjects using the same criteria as Fazla. When I investigated the report formats of the Ministry of Education, the report formats show grades described with standards and there are no marks. However, for the school’s convenience, the school administration allocates marks for grading purposes and they list percentages for A, B, C, D, E and F.

Chapter summary

The learning evidence from the classrooms showed similarities in Fazla's and Asma's classes. Nevertheless, Nahula's class had similarities in how Fazla and Nahula handled files and folders of students' learning evidence. All the teachers and Leading Teachers/Supervisors described formative assessment as an activity by giving sample activities. As such, they had confusion in articulating about formative assessment. They all believed they themselves would not be able to change the style of assessment in the schools. The teachers also believed there were barriers for them to conduct formative assessment in their classrooms. In addition, the three schools had a culture strongly showing summative testing. A mark or a grade is given for the final assessment paper leading the students and parents to struggle to achieve the best. This had led the schools to have parents' pressure and influence the schools. As such, I will present the pressure of assessment in the next finding chapter, Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Pressure of Assessment

Introduction

As I have described in Chapter 4, within the current education system, marks and grades are an important part of schooling in the Maldives. In this regard, teachers, parents, and students valued marks immensely. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how the teachers marked and recorded assessment information. These various records of assessment and checklists reflecting significant summative assessment was in these case study schools. In this chapter, I focus on the teachers' interviews to investigate the pressures that exist in the schools because of assessment. However, these were not completely new findings to me as I had experienced similar encounters within the fourteen years of my teaching career.

‘The most important thing for the parents is the marks’

It was common knowledge that there was no particular age for children to encounter the pressure to gain the highest marks in their classes. These ages ranged from five to nineteen years old. In fact, I personally know that children start working to achieve the best marks or grades before they even

begin their primary schooling. For instance, when the children begin their first grade in the primary school, the children and the parents are already aware of marks or grades. As a result, Shahula explained that it was a community problem that has existed in the Maldivian culture for a long-time.

... in our community, not only in this school, everyone searches the report books for the final marks. Sometimes, I think the parents also check out what happens in other schools too. [*Shahula*]

The parents worried so much about marks and grades that they would be asking every little detail of their children's actions at the schools by the end of the day. For example, during the end of the day in the schools, parents asked the teachers why there was no written work in the schoolbooks. The teachers said that parents checked the schoolbooks during the time they came to fetch their children and used to complain about that. Therefore, the teachers told me that they had to show that the students did a worksheet or a group activity instead of work in their school books/workbooks.

I knew this was something the parents complained about years ago and I am not surprised to find such influences still exist in these schools. For instance, when parents find out the teachers have not given written work; they think their children have not studied in school that day. For such reasons, many schools advise teachers to make sure they give at least some work to do in

the exercise books. According to the teachers, such complaints had led them to give unnecessary home work and weekend assignments to their students. For example, Fazla talked about how concerned parents became when they found out there was no written work.

...when there is no work done in the school exercise books, parents will ask questions every day, such as why the child has not done any work. If the child has learned anything or if the child did any work in the class. Then, I have to show the work displayed on the walls or the work sheets that they have completed. [*Fazla*]

When the work of the students' was shown to the parents, many parents would even check the displayed work on the wall and from the worksheets; they would further go to the extreme of finding out if their children had learned the concept well that day. When the parents checked the work displayed on the walls they also became concerned over their children's work. Fazla discussed how the parents observed various corrections of errors and how much concern the parents showed.

Normally parents find out the errors that children have done in their worksheets. For example, if there is a wrong sum, they always ask why the certain sum was wrong. [*Fazla*]

As the pressure of assessment continued, marks and grades were important, such that Shahula explained how the parents were not interested in checking out the progress sheet that they prepared to check literacy and numeracy development of the students. These sheets were prepared to show how the students had progressed throughout the semester using teachers' observations and other formal and informal formative assessment techniques such as standards with rubrics.

..Parents do not have that much interest in finding out what happened in that progress sheet. They are more interested in finding out the grades in the final report form. [*Shahula*]

In the same way, Nahula said that parents usually used to get very concerned when their children scored low marks from assessment/test papers. She also felt that parents of students who scored well were more worried and they would find out the reasons for not achieving the top marks. Similarly, Heena referred to the competitive nature of the parents. Worriedly, she expressed how much the grade 1 students' parents became anxious, when their children did not score the best marks from the class assessment/test. For example, to avoid such circumstances parents made their children memorize the notes in the exercise/text books. Nevertheless, she was against pressuring small children for assessment/test and she further expressed concern.

... the grade one parents tell their children to get better marks than naming a particular child. Even if the child is not competitive, the children are forced to do so to make their parents happy. In that case, the children work hard to get the best marks to show their parents.

[*Heena*]

In fact, the parental pressure encouraging students to get the best grades and marks could explain the demand for the coloured “stars”. All the three teachers expressed how the schools usually awarded stars, badges, and certificates for achievements in the lower grades. As a result, at that age of six years, the importance of winning had become part of their life. Here Asma explains:

We add all the marks and we divide it from the number of assessment and get the final grade. When the child gets all A’s in the report card, that child will be awarded a star from the school every term. [*Asma*]

These conversations with participants revealed some of their varying beliefs on assessment. For instance, Rafa’s concern was about teachers and parents concentrating on grades and marks, instead of developing their different skills. In reality, she wanted to make parents believe skilled based learning was more important than a mark or a grade written in a report card.

According to Rafa these beliefs would change when formative assessment is implemented effectively in Maldivian schools.

In the previous chapter (Chapter 4), it was specified how the teachers counted number of A's, B's, C's or D's. In fact, teachers did not like to have even a C, D, or E grade in their assessment records. Thus, it was not surprising to find Nahula teaching to the test in her remedial class. Nahula says, “.... if there is going to be an English test, I teach the students for the test”.

I have noticed, teachers wanted all A's in their class assessment records and surprisingly the assessment records showed almost the whole class had A's for the subject final except for one or two students. In fact, this was something I had done years ago as a teacher with my colleagues. It brought memories of how desperate I was for my students to get all 'A's in the tests and examinations. As such, Nahla and Asma gave a clear description of how they both graded the papers.

That will be the final marks for that paper. But as the assessments are continuous, we add all the marks to get the total. For example even if a student scores less in one assessment , that student has the opportunity to improve in the next assessment to get all A's in the

final . So there are many students who get all A's as the final mark.

[*Nahula*]

In the checklists, there will be different parts to give marks. We give points and a grade to the total. There are no marks in students' papers. The papers are graded but if a parent wants to see marks, they are able to see the total marks. We show them with the checklist and explain that this is how their child has achieved marks for different parts of the paper. [*Asma*]

‘Me and my students will get sad if we do not get a certificate on the stage’

The contest of winning could be one of the reasons for the teachers to carry on explaining a topic thoroughly for numerous days before the students do the particular assessment. Surely, this practice must have brought better results to make the schools, parents, and teachers happy. For example, for these award winning students and teachers, the schools organize ceremonies and functions and used to give away certificates and prizes for those high achievers at the school assemblies.

At the end of every term we give the students a report card with their final results. The school organizes report giving ceremony. For

example, the top achievers are being recognized and given awards and certificates on the stage. [*Heena*]

During the observations of Fazla's ES lesson, I noticed that many students achieved the learning objectives but Fazla continued teaching the same concept that the students already knew. In this regard, Asma and Fazla shared their views on such matters.

Sometimes I think it is a waste of time to teach a certain topic repeatedly when the students have learned them already. There is no need to give them revision again the next day and give a similar written test/assessment paper the following day. [*Asma*]

I believe if the students have learnt something it is not necessary to go on teaching the same thing over and over again. [*Heena*]

However, these practices existed in the other two schools as well. For example, teachers could be targeting the awards and certificates, so that all their students score all A's in particular subject. There was evidence that teachers got many certificates and awards for their successes, making the learning environment a huge contest. As such, Asma and Nahula explained the kind of awards that teachers got each semester.

In every semester, the school awards conducive and performance awards for the teachers. Therefore, to get the achievement certificate the teachers have to get performance marks of 86 percent. The performance is calculated by finding the whole grade students average marks. And the teachers have to get their class average marks above the whole grade level marks to achieve this certificate. [Asma]

At the end of each term they usually give awards and certificates for creating a conducive learning environment, best class and also for the most well disciplined class. [Nahula]

Nevertheless, Asma refused to believe it was a competition and explained how that award process inspired her to make her class to perform well on the final day of the semester- the reports giving day. She further believed such rules and regulations made students, parents and teachers work harder to get better achievement, and made learning standards of the students better. In this context, Asma expressed her feelings.

I am sure me and my students will get sad if we do not get a certificate on the stage. If I do not get that this time, I will know that it is something, which I need to work harder next time. Although

when looking at these certificates and awards somehow every teacher will want to make her class a better performing class. [Asma]

Additionally the students also participated in many extra-curricular and curricular programmes as the three schools conducted language programmes called ‘English Week’ and ‘Dhivehi Foavahi’⁴. For example, teachers believed their students benefitted from activities such as ‘poetry recitation’, ‘essay writing’, ‘reading aloud’, and ‘oratory’. Asma, Fazla and Nahula informed how they took these programmes seriously and how they tried to win as many places as they could. To make it more picture perfect, Fazla showed off the shining cup and the certificate on her desk for winning the English Week activities. Although these are competitions, Fazla believed the student were enjoying them and they were learning as well. Asma boasted how she had won such events and had been a winner for many years. Nahula also informed me about the programme held the year before with details similar to Fazla and Asma. She was not happy that this particular year the parents were not invited for the celebrations.

In fact, these practices sometimes stressed some teachers so much that they often voluntarily bring in selected students for extra hours tuition in the

⁴ English Week and Dhivehi Foavahi are curricular activities held in the primary schools of Maldives. These activities are language-based activities to make children better in English and Dhivehi language. Most of the time they are weeklong programmes which the schools conduct giving a lot of emphasis and teachers and the students work very hard to get the best achievements from these programmes.

name of winning. For example, I observed Fazla using lesson times and giving special attention to the students selected for inter-class competitions of ‘Dhivehi Foavahi’. In the same way, Asma also brought her competitors to school to practice for extra hours. These competitions are very competitive among the classes and the school organizes shows, specially the oral activities, such as storytelling, reciting poems, show and tell, ‘raivaru’ and ‘Ihenkiyun’ to be presented at the stage. Parents, teachers, children, and the school management view these presentations by the children.

‘Parents want at least the exact date of the assessment’

The teachers talked about the rules and regulations of class assessment as I mentioned in Chapter 4. For instance, as I have explained previously, the assessment policies have strict rules and regulations concerning the dates of the assessment. The teachers also talked about how assessment information could become critical, sensitive, and powerful at the same time among teachers, students and parents.

Teachers also shared the procedures such as how they informed the parents regarding the upcoming assessment. Thus, the procedures carried out were very predictable. In the case of Asma, she explained the process of revision that they previously practised before an assessment. However, Asma and

Shahula proudly mentioned how they stopped that procedure and discontinued writing 'revision' and gave a 'practice paper' instead. Asma also explained earlier how they were informed about any assessment one week before. Both Asma and Shahula further gave details of the changes that occurred in her school regarding assessment information.

Now we do not inform the students that it is a revision. Then, we revise in the class, give students a worksheet, and paste it in their exercise books. We revise the whole topic and give them the particular worksheet. We give it to find out how much they have learned. When we do this then, the parents will even know there will be an assessment. [Asma]

Now we also have specific days to inform of the assessment such as Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday. We also inform them if it is an oral or a listening assessment. [*Shahula*]

Shahula also mentioned how in the same school, the grade-1 parents were given the assessment information using portable notice-boards, which sometimes the students held when the parents came to fetch their children at the end of the day. When I further investigated the schemes of work, I found out that it was similarly prescribed in the Scheme of Work as Asma and Shahula mentioned.

(Note: table 1 is an exact copy of the school's document and it is recognized that there are grammatical errors.)

Table 7: Week 13 - Environmental Studies - scheme of work [Asma]

Pd	Topic/Theme	Students Objectives	T. Aids	Suggested Activities
1	States of water	Draw and the name states of water.	t. copy	Discuss the states of water. Water (liquid) Ice cube(solid) Water- vapour (Gas) Let them write and draw the states of water.
2	Water (practice work)	To do a revision paper on water	Practice paper	Revise previous lessons Give a group work Let them do the practice paper
3	Water (evaluation)	To answer questions from the topic "water"		Give instructions and let them do the paper on their own

Table 7 shows 13th week of Environmental Studies scheme of work. The table shows day 1, 2 and 3, where the day 1 is a continuation of 12th week's topic "states of water." In this part of the scheme, it shows how the teacher

revised the topic with a “practice work.” For example, the practice work is a revision paper, where the students do a similar work as their “pencil and paper test” or “assessment.” The third day is the day of the evaluation, where the students would finally do the assessment paper.

Heena also explained how the parents complained not knowing exact date of the assessment and she further criticized about the parents’ such behaviours.

.. their (parents) major concern is about not knowing the specific date of the assessment. They also say because of that they could not make their child ready for the assessment. It seems to me that the parents are the people studying and learning for test. The only difference is they are not sitting and doing the paper. [*Heena*]

Even though, Fazla, did not inform the parents of the actual date of the assessment, parents had learned some tricks. According to Heena, many parents could easily guess and find out that there would be an assessment because of the ‘revision paper’ given by that school. Nonetheless, Heena miserably said that the parents still complained a lot: “Parents want at least the exact date of the assessment” (*Heena*). A look at the Schemes of Work, of Fazla and Asma, showed slight differences in the way they handled written process of assessment and revision compared to Nahula.

(Note: table 2 is an exact copy of the school's document and it is recognized that there are grammatical errors.)

Table 8: Week 2 - English Language - Scheme of Work (Fazla)

Pr	Topic	Objectives	T. Aids	Procedure
3	Present continuous tense (Revision)	<p>Be able to know and use present continuous tense</p> <p>Be able to make sentences in present continuous tense</p> <p>Be able to change sentences to present</p>	Worksheet	<p>Set induction</p> <p>Revise</p> <p>Main activity</p> <p><i>Explain the difficult <u>once</u></i></p> <p>Do one question each type on the board</p> <p>Give them a group work</p> <p>Get them to do the worksheet</p> <p>Closure</p> <p>Discuss their work</p>

		continuous tense		
4 & 5	Picture sequence	Be able to sequence the picture Be able to write a story	Picture	<p>Set induction</p> <p>Show them an enlarge picture and discuss about it orally</p> <p>Main activity</p> <p>Read one sentence from each group</p> <p>Get them to write story in group</p> <p>Get them to write story in exercise book (individually)</p> <p>Closure</p> <p>Present the story to the class</p>

6	<p>Present continuous tense</p> <p>(Assessment)</p>	<p>Be able to know and use present continuous tense</p> <p>Be able to make sentences in present continuous tense</p> <p>Be able to change sentences to present continuous tense</p>	Assessment	<p>Set induction</p> <p>Revise</p> <p>Main activity</p> <p>Explain the difficult once</p> <p>Do one question each type on the board</p> <p>Give the instruction</p> <p>Get them to do the assessment</p> <p>Closure</p> <p>Discuss how they have done the paper.</p>
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Table 8 shows the arrangement of the written process of assessment used by Fazla. The table indicates that the students are given an extra day in between the day of the revision and the assessment. In the same way, I have found the same procedure in all of the Schemes of Work of Fazla's. According to Fazla, they had intentionally planned it for the convenience of the teachers, parents and the students. For the teachers it would help in the process of marking and providing feedback before the written assessment and at the same time, the parents could help their children before the written assessment paper.

Nahula also explained how they used give a "pencil and paper test" at the end of each unit. These assessment/tests were very formal and prescribed with questions and answer sections or fill in the blanks (refer to Chapter 4). Students were not allowed to check each other's work and the students sat at a distance from each other during the assessment/tests. As similar to other two teachers, Nahula also gave a revision paper. Rafa and Nahula explained the process in their school.

In grade 3 after teaching a topic in each subject, always there is a revision and after that, a unit test paper is given. Each paper carries different marks. [*Rafa*]

We give a revision at the end of each unit. Then we mark the revision paper and give the children one day to study again and then we give the assessment. [Nahula]

According to Nahula, they used to inform the parents about assessment with a written note from the school. These particular slips of paper are pasted in all the subject exercise books. For example, Nahula described the process.

It has a column to write the date and children write the date when the teachers inform the assessment date. Also I tell the parents when they come to fetch the child from school. [Nahula]

When I looked at the Schemes of Work, of Nahula, it also had many similarities with others Schemes of Work.

(Note: table 3 is an exact copy of the school's document and it is recognized that there are grammatical errors.)

Table 9: Week 2 - Mathematics - scheme of work (Nahula)

day	topic	objectives	Level of achievement	resource	Procedure
4	Revision on addition and subtraction	By the end of the lesson the students will be able to:	Knowledge Comprehension	Work sheet	Revise the lesson. Revise word problems.

		<p>Solve the given addition and subtraction sums.</p> <p>Solve the given word problem sums.</p>	application		Explain and give a worksheet.
5	Mass	<p>By the end of the lesson the students will be able to:</p> <p>*Get some classroom objects and weigh them.</p> <p>*Write kilogram in short form.</p>	<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Comprehension</p> <p>application</p>	Class room objects eg colour box etc	<p>Explain what is mass.</p> <p>How to find weight from a scale.</p> <p>Explain pg 20 and get children to weigh some class room objects in groups to complete pg 21.</p>
6	Assessment on addition and subtraction	<p>By the end of the lesson the students will be able to :</p> <p>Solve the given addition and subtraction sums.</p> <p>Match to the correct</p>	<p>Comprehension</p> <p>application</p>	Assessment paper	Give instructions and get the children to do the assessment.

		answer.			
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Table 9 shows the arrangement of the written assessment of Nahula's class. The table indicates how much time is available between the day of the revision and written assessment. I have found the similar procedure in all of Nahula's Schemes of Work. It shows how the planning of assessment made the process convenient for teachers, parents and students.

Chapter summary

The data collected for this research showed strong evidence regarding the theme 'assessment is pressure'. The teachers and students worked hard to have better grades in the class assessment, which again the parents and the students took very seriously and wanted to get awards and recognition. Parents and teachers struggle to make children learn and the school has become a prescribed learning centre. For the teachers, to make the students achieve and make their class perform the best has led to detrimental teaching practices. Moreover, I have realized that learning has become a competition, which has become a significant aspect of the lives of students, parents and schools in the Maldives.

CHAPTER SIX

Formative assessment in action: What actually happens in Maldivian classrooms

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, Chapter 4 and 5 respectively, I have examined the learning context, teachers' knowledge on formative assessment, and various assessment records. Furthermore, I have shown the pressure of assessment in the Maldivian primary schools. As I have discussed before, assessment of learning/summative assessment dominated most classroom assessment activities of the three teachers. Nevertheless, understanding the three teachers' use of formative assessment was significant for the study. As a result, I needed to further examine the data with a focussed lens, to get a complete picture of their pedagogical instructions. In the rest of this chapter, the lens is purposefully set out to see the sights and images associated with practices of possible formative assessment happening in the three classes. Various sources of literature guided in formulating this chapter, in particular, well-known researchers in the field of assessment. In fact, there are many possible formats of formative assessments and information that can be

gleaned from many information-gathering activities (Cizek, 2010). For example, these activities can be traditional classroom tests, observations, oral questioning, class discussions, projects, portfolios, homework, performance assessments, group work with peer feedback, student self-assessment, and other sources (Cizek, 2010; Davies & Hill, 2009; Harlen & James, 1997). As previously stated in Chapter 4, similar activities were part of the three teachers' normal class routines.

Class discussions

For this study, nine lessons of seventy minutes duration were observed. In these lessons the teachers' conducted numerous discussions where there were lots of student participation and interaction. From the lesson transcripts, I saw incidences of formative assessment occurring in the lessons. For example, these incidences happened in the form of conversations, such that dialogues of learning were exchanged between the teachers and students. These dialogues strongly contributed in assessment for learning (Shermis & Di Vesta, 2011). As Black and Wiliam (1998b) state "dialogue with the teacher provides the opportunity for the teacher to respond to and reorient a pupil's thinking" (p. 143). In this way, Asma, Fazla and Nahula displayed considerable skills, with various teaching and learning strategies being

employed to involve the learners in class discussions.

Asma, Fazla and Nahula also guided their students in leading the conversations, although there existed both balanced and imbalanced proportions of students' and teachers' dialogues in the lessons. In these classes, there were many types of learners, some of whom were self-assured, withdrawn, quiet, or even loud. For example, some of them whispered the replies softly while many learners loudly expressed their ideas and thoughts whenever they had the opportunity to do so. As a result, many times the classes became loud and students' individual voices were difficult to hear.

To investigate formative evidences that happened in the classrooms, I studied Fazla's English language transcripts closely. She also had the youngest learners among the three classes. Her lesson was an English Language reading lesson. Therefore, she planned to read a story book (a big book ⁵called 'Ely's fun day at the beach'). It is about a girl, Ely, who goes to the beach with her toys. The students were to listen to the story and to identify, and name/label the beach toys mentioned in the storybook. At the start of the lesson, the teacher had a bag and showed plastic toys used at the beach. She took the toys out, one by one, questioned, talked, and discussed the toys, while the students sat and listened. In Lesson Transcript 1, Fazla

⁵ A big book is storybook of size A3 size or larger, with enlarged pictures and one or two sentences to illustrate the image shown.

continued the lesson.

Fazla: A bag is there, you are correct. There is a bag. Do you know what is inside the bag?

Students: yes...Toys (all together)

Fazla: Very good. Hmmmm .. What type of toys?

Students: Sand toys (all together)

Fazla: Sand toys. Very good. Some of the sand toys are here in this bag. Now let's see what those are. (She took one toy)

Hisham: bucket

Fazla: Let's see what a bucket is! Have you seen a bucket before?

Students: Yes (all together)

Fazla: What do you use bucket for?

Moosa: Bathing

Fazla: hmm bathing..... but this bucket is used for?

[Lesson Transcript: 1]

In Lesson Transcript 1, Fazla continued the lesson and encouraged students to participate in the discussion. Even though she was looking for specific answers from the students, she tried to make the students involved in the lesson discussion as she focussed on involving different students.

Fazla: To play with sand... bucket. Now the student who knows the answer this time, raise your hand not all the students at the same time. The students who I call the names answer the questions. Nahid, what is this?

Nahid: Sand play (May be he wanted to say sand toys)

Fazla: Did I tell the name before? First think and answer.

Nahid: I didn't see this before

Fazla: Aruham

Aruham: (Indiscernible)

Fazla: Starting with letter S (teacher asks all the students)

Zimaam: Spade (he answers when the teacher asks all the students but teacher misses his answer)

Fazla: Okay let's learn... spade ... What is this called

Fazla and students: Spade (everyone together)

[Lesson Transcript: 2]

In Lesson Transcript 2, Fazla focussed further on individual students as she noticed many students responded all at once. Fazla used teaching strategies such as letter sound to introduce the toys to make the students guess the correct word that she wanted. When students said the word, she made sure everyone repeated the name of the toys. As she further progressed, I noticed

Fazla trying to share information about all the toys before starting to read the book. In fact, she made sure the students had enough information about the toys that the girl 'Ely' had used in the story.

Fazla: Do you know what this is? What is this? Shiyam

Shiyam: Farmers use...

Fazla: Farmer use! Now..... Is this a farm? hmmm. Is this a farm?

Students: (Many students laugh when teacher mentions that)

Danish: Teacher, I know

Fazla: Yes, tell me Danish

Danish: Hand rake

Fazla: Yes, rake. This is a hand rake. Very well done. You are correct. (Showed spade again) This called aspade.

Students: Spade

[Lesson Transcript 3]

In Lesson Transcript 3, even though spade is a farm tool Fazla did not seem to accept that answer. She accepted answers related to the uses similar or exactly to the storybook or according to her lesson plan. As the lesson continued Fazla did not seem prepared at all to explain more than what she had planned and written in the objectives of the lesson plan.

Fazla: Then, what is this? (Teacher shows a sieve and different children named different things).

Haisham: Serve

Fazla and students: sieve (corrected the pronunciation)

Fazla: What is the use? When you take the sand you can filter it. The holes are there. See (Teacher shows the holes to all the students).

This is used to strain sand at the beach.

Fazla: What is this?

Ismail: Spade

Hassan: Spoon

Fazla: Not a spoon. Spade is there... in yellow colour. This one is in red colour. Can you tell me its name?

Students: (indiscernible)

Fazla: Sh .. sh (made the sound)Shovel. It s called a.....

Fazla and students: Shovel

[Lesson Transcript: 4]

Lesson Transcripts 1, 2, 3 and 4 showed that Fazla allowed no deviation from the lesson plan, even though some of the words could have multiple meanings, interpretations, and uses. For instance, a student replied ‘spade’ as a farming tool, ‘bucket’ as a bathroom utensil and ‘sieve’ could also be used

to strain flour in the kitchen.

Questioning by the teachers

Evidence of the class discussion demonstrated close links and episodes of formative assessment that occurred in the lessons. The teachers seemed to be powerful and dominant in the classes during all the processes of learning, particularly because of their position in organizing and managing the class and assessment. The lesson observations showed that the students followed instructions of their teachers and they were also accustomed to taking orders from the teachers. It was easier for the teachers to dominate the teaching and learning processes as this study involved learners at Key Stage 1 of primary education in Maldivian schools and some of these learners were at their initial stages of formal education. Consequently, the teachers' questioning dominated, controlled, and covered most of the processes of the class discussions.

As a result, the teachers' question/answer dialogues became rituals that Fazla, Asma and Nahula generated to the whole class as their common questioning strategy. As they continued teaching, sometimes the questions were not focussed to any particular individual; hence many students replied shouting back in unison. Noticeably, the teachers were not able to make out

who answered them correctly or incorrectly. It appeared that when using questioning strategies Fazla and Asma acted more confidently and managed students much better than Nahula, who was the least experienced and the youngest teacher of the three.

During questioning strategy when the classes were loud and students seemed restless, the teachers seemed to always adjust teaching and learning by changing the method of questioning. For example, at the very start of the English Language lesson, Nahula asked questions to all the students. Afterwards, she continued doing that for the first ten minutes of the lesson. When she realized it was difficult to hear the students' answers as they all shouted at once, she automatically changed the strategy to questioning individual students. Then, she continued asking questions to many individual students for about five minutes before starting the next activity of the lesson. Here is an example of this process from the lesson transcript.

Nahula: If everyone shouts, I can't hear, Now Ahmed tell me, where do you live?

Ahmed: a flat

Nahula: Now, Hassan, where do you live?

Hassan: In a house

Nahula: Everyone lives in a house or flat. Now I will show you some pictures. What is this? (Teacher shows a picture of a horse)

[Lesson Transcript 5]

According to Nahula, in the above lesson, she wanted to find out which students had learned and which had not learned by individually focussing on individual students.

The teachers often answered the questions they asked themselves, as a final confirmation of the correct answer. When the teachers self-answered the questions, they also made the learners repeat the answers after them. In some instances, the teachers were in such a hurry they answered the questions themselves without waiting for students' responses, and then they continued the discussion with another question. This was particularly seen more in curriculum areas such as Environmental Studies (ES), where the students had to recall a lot of factual information. This involved a 'whole class questioning strategy'.

When the teachers employed this strategy, there were some students who always listened, some who never tried to answer and another group of students who always responded. However, the teachers were not only practicing one form of questioning strategy. For example, the teachers sometimes did not affirm the answers straight away and hence stood still

with a firm face or eyed them for a while. When inquired about their purpose for this particular behaviour, the teachers reported that they were trying to find out the students' level of understanding by strategically taking a pause for a while. I noted that this strategy was similar to Black et al.'s (2003) suggestion of 'wait time'. These teachers also purposefully did this to make the learners think before they answered. 'Wait time' is considered the time provided after posing a question and prior to a response and there are many benefits according to research (Black et al., 2003; Crooks, 1988). In the case of Asma, the 'wait time' lessened seeing 'blank faces' on her students, as she was used to seeing many hands up, whenever a question was posed .

I see blank faces frequently during the lessons whenever a question is asked. Therefore, I used to wait for a while to make sure, the students thought and attempted to give me the right answer. I found out they (students) do think when I wait for a while after I ask the question. [*Asma*]

Likewise, in Fazla's class, she noticed that when she waited for a while without affirming the answers, the students' eagerness arose, and they tried to think, and willingly provided the answers themselves. While Fazla agreed that she gave enough time to think before the students answered any questions, in some circumstances she did not practice this strategy.

According to Fazla, “I believe I do not give them time to think if I have explained the lessons thoroughly.”

The other teaching styles observed were the teachers’ guidance and feedback at the time of questioning. In some lessons, while questioning when students’ responded with a misconception or an error; the teachers readily prompted the students. Whenever the prompts failed to resolve these issues, the teachers provided cues and helped the students. Potentially, there were situations where the teachers and students collaborated to produce the best possible answers.

Sharing of learning intentions/goals

The importance of involving learners in sharing of learning intentions/goals is highlighted by Torrance and Pryor (1998) in their study and they have suggested that formative assessment “...must inevitably involve pupils reflecting on what they have achieved and how they have achieved it” (p.16). To make it easier for the students to learn Rayment (2006) pointed out the importance of explaining the students learning objectives and outcomes of the lessons. The Assessment Reform Group of England proposed sharing of learning goals as one of the seven precepts that summarized the characteristics of assessment that promote learning (Wiliam, 2011b).

The transcripts (interviews and lesson observations) showed evidence that the three teachers already had existing expertise and knowledge about sharing of learning intentions/goals. For example, Asma knew the importance of this process, and therefore, often shared learning intentions/goals with assessment information such as what they were supposed to do, how they could do the learning tasks and what she would be looking for in the lessons with her learners. As a result, she found out that the students became more interested in learning and gave full commitment to their work in the lessons. She also stressed how difficult it would be for the students to work if they had no idea about their learning intention/goals.

I think that if I explain tasks and what they have to do, at the start of the lesson, the children will be more interested in doing their work. I believe the children will not be able to work just like that with no idea. How can they work just like that? They should have an idea on what they are supposed to be doing. [Asma]

In fact, Asma began to share the learning intentions in almost all of her lessons regularly, when she came to find about the importance of using this strategy from a Professional Development Session (a workshop conducted in her school). However, according to Asma, her Leading Teacher, Shazla thought somewhat differently about this issue.

Sometimes when the Leading Teacher observes my lessons, she tells me not to do that. She says it will be more interesting if I do not tell what I am going to do in the lesson. For example, ‘today I am going to teach you’ or ‘today you are learning’ not to say that straight away. [Asma]

Similar to Asma, Nahula was also positive towards sharing the learning objectives. Practically she found out that the students worked very hard to achieve them, when they knew such information about the lessons. Previously, in Nahula’s school, there was an official regulation for this process.

Previously, in this school, there was a rule to write and share the objectives of each lesson on the blackboard for all the children to see. Then, we used to start each lesson after explaining them (students) the lesson objectives. [Nahula]

Likewise, Fazla continued the same belief of sharing the learning intentions/goals with her students. Unlike the other two teachers, Fazla practiced this process by sharing the learning intentions with both parents and the students together. She met them (both parents and students) on the last day every week to inform them of what the students did that week and shared the upcoming weekly events. This also included sharing assessment

information such as talking about how well the students did overall in an assessment. When Fazla mentioned this particular point, she talked about it proudly. According to Fazla, “My students even note down the information that I write on the board, I have not seen any other class students doing such things.”

The three Leading Teachers were aware of the importance of sharing learning intentions/goals as well through professional development sessions and they shared their knowledge in this area with the teachers frequently.

Although all the teachers in this study shared the learning intentions, according to Wiliam (2011a) teachers have to be cautious of keeping a “wallpaper objective.” He describes it as “the teacher writes the objective on the board; the students copy the objective into their notebooks; and the objective is then ignored for the rest of the period” (p. 56). Harris (2007) suggested that an effective lesson introduction format is to start with an outline of the topic or unit of work as a way of providing the overview and then followed with the stimulus, if appropriate. The introduction of the lesson objectives have to be discussed well and clarified with the learners so that they are motivated to continue the lesson enthusiastically.

Setting targets and learning criteria

Setting targets and learning criteria is considered one of the most important strategies of assessment for learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Davies & Hill, 2009). Setting targets and criteria is customary in some Maldivian schools while in other schools, teachers and Leading Teachers exercised range of routine practices. In the three studied schools, there were some requirements already set by the school management regarding setting targets and sharing learning criteria. These regulations and formalities meant it was a necessity for each teacher to involve both the students and the parents in the processes. Beyond the school regulations, it was clear that the teachers also could pursue any additional initiatives themselves. Thus teachers involved their students in setting learning criteria, and regularly shared assessment information with their students. As a result they found out they were better positioned to comprehend their learners' needs.

In the case of Asma and Shazla (Finifenmaa School), the school management annually organized sharing of learning targets and many other issues of learning. For example, with the use of power-point presentations, the Leading Teachers and teachers provided information on matters such as on assessment processes to the parents. According to Shazla, "At the beginning of the year, all the parents are invited to a meeting and with the use of a

power point presentation, we share such information.”

In the same school, the targets and standards were well organized and set for all the students with rubrics for each developmental area of both Mathematics and the two languages – English and Dhivehi. Asma always showed these rubrics with the set targets and standards during the student-parent-teacher conferences and talked to the parents and students using them. Asma and Shazla shared the detailed information.

I also set targets and inform the parents how much the child has to attain to get to a certain level of achievement. Normally, it is referred to the numeracy and literacy sheet. If a child does not perform a listed criterion, I write a dot, and then for the next student-parent-teacher meeting, if the child could meet a certain criteria I write a tick near the dot. Therefore, there will be a dot and a tick in the same column with dates written for each dot and tick, so that parents will find out when and what the child has tried achieving.

[*Asma*]

For example, if the child can read three letter words, there will a tick in that place. Before the end of the year, targets are set for the children to achieve. There will be many targets for them such as this.

[*Shazla*]

More details from Shazla indicated that whenever there were unaccomplished targets and standards, the teachers usually kept on informing the parents. In fact, she personally ensured that the teachers continued the practice by internal supervision. In the case of Nahula and Rafa, they regularly met with the parents of their ‘slow-learners’ or ‘underachievers’, for example, whenever there was a need for the students to achieve certain targets and/or learning criteria.

To assess the students with a diagnostic test at the beginning of the term is a common practice in their school. For instance, Rafa explained the purpose of conducting a diagnostic test.

By diagnosing the students, we come across children who cannot read and write. Therefore, for them children we have set targets, such as by the end of second term to make them read and write.

There are different targets for different children. [*Rafa*]

According to Nahula and Rafa, they normally found one or two students from each class that they called ‘illiterates’, and the teachers prepared individual targets for these special students. Usually, these individual cases were filed with essential information, which the Leading Teachers monitored closely, and if there was a need, the parents of these learners were met on a regular basis. According to Rafa and Nahula, a sample of a set target or a

standard could be to make these underachievers read and write simple phrases and sentences, thus there would be different targets for each student. In some cases they had to teach the alphabet, number and word recognition, and counting to eight year olds of their grade 3. However, according to the curriculum standards they were supposed to have these standards acquired by the learners before entering this particular grade level.

Although many matters related to formative assessment happened in Rafa's school, she strongly felt it was unnecessary to record every step of each student's learning because primary teachers spent a lot of time with students teaching five curriculum subjects⁶. She believed that teachers should have adequate information about students to set their individual targets. Rafa's description of her teachers' knowledge on students was similar to findings by Hill (2003). In Hill's study she investigated primary teachers' assessment knowledge and practices and found head-noting by teachers as a familiar process where the teachers relied mainly on their memories of what students could do.

In contrast to Rafa's head-noting process, Heena, believed in teachers keeping records and information on students. She stated that this could benefit the students in many ways including the setting of targets for the

⁶ Maldivian teachers teach English Language , Mathematics, ES (Environmental Studies), Practical Art and Physical Education

individual learners. Heena shared her views on this matter.

Recording information about the students means that the teachers will have better understanding and knowledge about their students and I believe that is a very good thing. Then, if the teacher has a better understanding, it is also important is to share the information with the parents to bring out better results from the students. [*Heena*]

Heena also believed targets had to be set for every individual student's own self-improvement as students' ability levels differed. She also noted that students could not be compared to each other and each student had to be guided to go on a separate plan according to his or her own potential ability level or the standard. It was evident from the collected data that the practice of setting targets and learning criteria happened with minor degrees of variation in the three schools.

Self-peer-group learning activities

Studies by Torrance and Pryor (1998), Clarke (1998, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008), Black et al. (2003) and Wiliam (2011a) highlight the many benefits of using self and peer-assessment in assessment for learning. In the case study teachers' classes, there were many opportunities of self/peer/group learning carried out in the daily teaching and learning practices, and evidence from

many documents showed that these practices existed in their teaching, learning, assessment, and curriculum, the Schemes of Work. They have recommended such learning incidents to be carried out in the suggested activities columns of schemes of works. For example, I have noted such examples from the following schemes of work such as Mathematics, Environmental Studies (ES), and English Language.

(Note: in table 10 has exact version of suggested activities of the school's document.)

Table 10: Sample suggested activities from scheme of work

<p>Explain how to add without renaming. Play finding partner-game. Divide the class into two groups. One group will get addition sum cards and the other group will get answer cards written in numbers. Students have to find their partners. Explain we have to start the addition from ones column then tens column. Give them a group work and display it on the class. Give clear instruction. Get them to do page no. 10 and 11. [Scheme of work, Mathematics: Fazla]</p>
<p>Group the children in pairs. Let children choose the questions</p>

to ask. Gather information and let them write a paragraph about 'My New Friend'. [Scheme of work, English Language: Asma]

Students discuss in groups and list down what plants need to grow. Let them complete a concept map on what plants need to grow in groups. Give notes. Give them to answer some questions in ex bk. Do activity 2a on pg 6, 7, 8, and 9. [Scheme of work, ES: Nahula]

These examples in Table 10 revealed the powerful influence of self/peer/group learning. For teachers' convenience there were numerous explanations of how they could practice and conduct these activities in their lessons. From the suggested activities (Table 1), the students were expected to work with their peers or in groups. For example, there were activities on how students could develop concept maps by themselves or with their peers on different topics of ES and English Language, special math learning games and group language activities in English Language too.

As a result, I witnessed well organized group activities by Asma and Fazla. In this way, Nahula's strategies were more informally structured than those of Asma and Fazla. For example, she gave more freedom when the students were involved in doing group work. However, the observed lessons regularly

involved one or two sessions of self/peer/group learning, and the students showed enthusiasm towards them by actively participating and collaborating with others.

According to the teachers, they assigned tasks to foster positive student inter-relationships and to build learner confidence. I also observed the teachers making students exchange each other's work or books. After the students exchanged their books teachers gave instructions on how they could mark and do corrections. They further gave guidance for the students to complete this task by walking around and helping the students. For example, in Fazla's English Language lesson students exchanged their pupil's book and Fazla directed them to put a tick if the sentence was correct and to leave the given bracket blank if it was incorrect.

Practices of such nature were more common in Nahula's class as her students were older than Fazla's and Asma's. Thus, Nahula also shared her insights of this learning process of self-correction. Even though she was in favour of peer-correction, she discontinued self-correction (marking of the student's own work). She explained the reasons.

Sometimes I ask them to exchange and mark their own books and worksheets but now I do not give them to mark their own work, seeing that they tend to erase the mistakes and correct them

themselves. Therefore, mostly now I ask them to exchange with the child sitting next each other or with someone in their own group.

[*Nahula*]

At the same time, she was also not in favour of group work as she realized it was not effective unless it was well organised. According to Nahula, she came to know that some students seemed to become controlling and they gradually dominated the whole group by not letting other group members to participate or contribute. Individual-peer-group learning activities were part of Fazla's routine practices. According to Fazla, she gave individual-peer-group activities more if there was a double-period and with a single period she could only give group work. For instance, time became a factor for the teachers to have such learning activities included in their lessons. Fazla also shared benefits of having such learning activities.

Students can talk to each other. They (students) can discuss their difficulties and ask some of their friends or the peer and as for the whole lesson; I believe they (students) will be achieving their learning objectives. [*Fazla*]

I have also noted the process while observing Fazla's lesson in my lesson observation form.

After the completion of the activity, Fazla asked the students to exchange their books. Then told the students what they were supposed to do. They have to mark the peers English pupil book activity and put a (✓) if the sentence is correct and leave the space blank if it is incorrect. [Direct/focused lesson observation sheet, Fazla's English lesson]

Additionally, both Asma's and Fazla's classrooms walls were pasted with posters and other tasks that the students had completed over the semester. In all three classes, the students' books and files/folders provided additional evidence of the students' involvement in peer and group learning processes.

Differentiated learning instructions

In Fazla's, Asma's and Nahula's classes significant uses of formative assessment took place when they taught using differentiated learning instructions. In Tomlinson's (as cited in Greenstein, 2010) view, differentiated instruction is a continuum of teaching and learning and it is not one strategy but, rather, an array of strategies that teachers select and use to meet the needs of individual learners. Greenstein (2010) defined differentiated instruction in the glossary of assessment terms as "a teacher's response to the needs of diverse learners with the goal of maximizing student

growth and individual success. Differentiated instruction is guided by the general principles of respectful tasks, flexible grouping, ongoing assessment, and adjustment” (p. 169). In addition, Greenstein has identified many features that go along with formative assessment features (see Greenstein, 2010, pp 145-150).

The three teachers’ teaching and learning styles had similarities and differences, where each teacher already had established unique styles of handling learners of varying ability levels. These teachers identified the different ability levels of the learners, the low-achievers, or illiterates (sometimes as they are called by the teachers) by diagnostic tests and they conducted special classes called remedial classes. Previously in this chapter the purpose of the diagnostic test was explained by Rafa, the Leading Teacher, and here for the second time she explains it in more detail.

Every year at the beginning of the academic year within the first week, we give children a diagnostic test for English, Maths, and Dhivehi, these three subjects. In this way, we also identify children who are different ability levels in the class. By identifying their ability levels, we conduct extra classes too. [*Rafa*]

These remedial students’ are handled with much care and many kinds of programmes are always conducted for them in these schools. For example,

the teachers usually focused on individual learners after explaining the learning activity to all the students in every lesson. While the teachers agreed that in most cases students were not given individualized tasks and assignments, in some circumstances, the teachers were obliged to do so, where they had to prepare customized and individualized materials for learners of different abilities. Nahula and Asma explain:

We usually give same types of work to all the children but I notice some children having difficulties in doing the worksheets, so I believe it will be more effective if we prepare work sheets according to different levels. [*Nahula*]

I give them same work as the other children, but I keep an extra exercise book for these children to give them different work, which I have planned. There is also another book, which I call ‘reading book’. Mostly, I give them work that they are able to do in these books. [*Asma*]

Asma’s segregation of her learners gave her the opportunity to assess her five slow-learners’ progress as well as the opportunity to provide feedback on how they could improve their learning. I observed Asma sitting near these students, teaching and explaining the concepts over and over again, sometimes changing pedagogies according to the individual student’s needs.

Often, I saw her teaching them mostly on a one to one basis. Although all the learners did the same work every day, Asma prepared special folders and books and different learning materials for this particular group. As Asma explains:

What I do with these children is that when I explain the learning activities at the beginning, it will be generally for all the children. After that, I always give time to this particular group. Then, I sit in the group and explain the learning activity again until these children are able to do the given learning task. I may have to explain and teach them (students) on a one to one basis many times of the day.

[*Asma*]

Then, she would talk and would explain difficult concepts to them more during the lessons. For example, in the English Language lessons, she helped the young learners by telling them some words that they could use in writing the sentences. According to her, when she sat with the students, they would begin their work with more confidence.

Nahula's lessons also followed similar routine practices. After the students were given instructions for completing the set work, Nahula also walked around helping and assisting individual learners. Fazla's and Asma's learners were younger than Nahula's and their classes looked more spacious with

smaller desks and chairs. While Nahula's class had bigger desks and chairs for the students, the class looked less spacious. Therefore, sometimes it was much easier for her to bring the students near to her desk, whenever she found learners having trouble in understanding. As such, Nahula, believed that when she explained tasks to individual learners in this particular manner it was more effective. Nahula reasoned out her special motives for doing that.

I bring them near me and teach them, as they need more attention. It is difficult when I have many children to bring them near me and teach them. If I keep them near me then, they do the work well. I notice they need more attention. [*Nahula*]

I notice when I explain to children individually, on one to one basis, particularly children who need more attention, they do understand the lesson well. [*Nahula*]

In Fazla's case, she had fewer learners who needed guidance and special attention. Similar to Asma, Fazla also walked around helping and guiding the learners by providing feedback while the students worked and did exercises in their pupils' books and worksheets. During the post lesson interview, she said:

...Even if I did not mark from the pen, I can recognize students who will have difficulty. Then, I talk and explain them more, such as words that they could use in writing...specially students in that group those two at the other side and the student in this side. When I went there and explained them, they began their work; they do continue work, even if it is to put a tick in a sentence, when I personally attend them. [*Fazla*]

Usually teachers gave all the students the same tasks in all the lessons and they all said that it was the regular procedure of the schools. Accordingly, Fazla indicated that she did not usually focus on giving individual students completely different learning activities or tasks in the Mathematics lesson. However, upon closer inspection of her lesson notes, I found that she did in actual fact cater to three different levels in the same activity. For example, Fazla writes in her lesson plan:

Three abilities: Level 1: draw and read the clock faces. Level 2: draw and write the time. Level 3: draw what they see from the clocks and what they could do for given time. [*Fazla*]

Along with individualized teaching and learning, there were well-planned one hour long remedial sessions for under-achievers held in all the three schools. The students who were categorized as such were ones who scored

the least marks from assessments and sometimes these students had difficulties in reading and writing. Thus, the three teachers conducted remedial sessions using a variety of activities all designed to help the students become more competent in the curriculum areas, which these students' achieved the least scores.

As such, the teachers also believed it would help these learners to achieve the learning standards of the particular grade before they transferred to the next level. Accordingly, it made the three teachers particularly focus on numeracy and literacy standards of these students as well. In this way the students improved their standards in the two languages – English and Dhivehi. As a routine practice, the remedial sessions were held after school hours and the teachers prepared separate learning materials and innovative approaches to re-teach the same concepts that had previously been taught in class. For example, Nahula indicated that she focussed on the use of different learning activities to help make the learners competent, and that whenever there was an upcoming class assessment she would re-teach that particular assessment topic in the remedial class. She believed the remedial hour was valuable and helped the learners involved to make genuine progress in their learning, as gradually these particular students were improving their own standards of learning. Nahula explained more.

I give them different activities. I connect these lessons to the topics that I teach in the class. For example, if there is going to be an English test, then I teach them for the test. Sometimes I make them do in completed work in the class. Then, if there is a difficult topic for them, I explain the topic more to these students. [*Nahula*]

From the lesson observations and document analysis, it was evident that the teachers in the study recognized that individuals in mixed ability classes could benefit from exposure to different teaching and learning processes in their attempts to achieve the learning outcomes. The documents such as the Schemes of Work showed many such examples of sample activities on how different ability levels could be taught. For example, the illustrated activity in the following mathematics Scheme of Work. (Note: the activity in the Scheme of Work is taken verbatim from the original source)

Give them a group work (five sums to each group). Get them to use shell or beads if they want. [Scheme of work, Mathematics: Finifenmaa School- Fazla]

According to Black and Wiliam (1998) when teachers adapt their teaching and learning processes, it can help all learners, and particularly yield good results with low achievers, by targeting specific problems and giving learners a clear understanding of what is wrong and how to put it right. Particular

methods of instruction and activities indeed happened in the remedial sessions and the teachers have identified different learning styles of their learners to make them achieve their learning objectives. Although, differentiated instruction is much more than individualized learning or designing a lesson for every student as it involves building mixed-ability group instruction around the idea that individual students or a group of students learn in exceptional ways and at varying levels of difficulty (Hamm & Adams, 2009).

Formative use of revision

‘Revision’ is a common term and doing the revision/practice work in classes is customary to schools in the Maldives. Even though the learners were at the Key Stage 1 of primary education, all three teachers practiced revision activities. I have also discussed this topic in Chapter 4 and 5.

For such arrangements, they enforced similar processes, prior to any formal summative assessments being carried out in the class. To complete this course of action, the students completed prepared worksheets, exercises given in the books, and also oral exercises with the students, such as quizzes and question/answer sessions. The revision materials were filed and documented in the students’ files/folders or pasted in the exercise books.

One of the reasons for having revisions was to make learners competent and to make them able in the curriculum topic taught in the classes.

Although revisions were much-loved by the schools, there were disputes among participants. For example, Heena and Fazla thought it was unnecessary and reasoned out why they thought it was.

..when the students have learned a certain topic and the teachers have the knowledge that all the students of her class have learned and achieved the objectives it is not necessary to take an extra period for revising the same thing and to do an assessment paper again the following day. [*Heena*]

..I think revision is a waste of time to teach a certain topic repeatedly even if they have learned, to give them revision again the next day, and to give a written assessment paper the following day. But I am supposed to do it as it is the rules and regulations of the school and I am not in a position to bring changes to those rules. [*Fazla*]

Although Heena and Fazla had issues in conducting revision, Shahula and Rafa believed revision as a good form of practice. For instance, Shahula was proud of the way her school conducted revision and mentioned that they had replaced the word 'revision' and used 'practice work' in the school (The

same issue was discussed in Chapter 5). Rafa strongly believed in giving revisions as she said: “Giving revision is something very good.” Further she expressed more about revision.

I believe in every lesson, there has to be ongoing revision. As for every lesson, there are objectives, assessment procedures and how much the students will achieve. Then, by the end of the lesson teacher finds how much the children have learned. Here in this school, revision is part of the class daily work. For example, as an extra work, even though a revision paper is practiced by the students, I do not think it is something bad and it is kind of revision. [*Rafa*]

As previously mentioned in this section, the school documents such as work sheets, ‘exercise books’ and the Schemes of Work, showed how much ‘revision’ was done by the students before the final assessment. For example, the sample activities are shown in Table 11, 12 and 13.

(Note: these activities in the Schemes of Work (Table 11, 12 and 13) are taken verbatim from the original source.)

Table 11: - Mathematics Scheme of Work – Asma

Week 4, period 5
Multiplication (practice work)
<p>Suggested Activity</p> <p>Revise the previous lessons and let them do the practice work. Discuss the common mistakes.</p>

Table 12: ES Scheme of Work – Fazla

Week 15, period 4
Revision on Transport
<p>Main Activity</p> <p>Make question stripe and put them in a small box. Divide the class into two groups and have a quiz among two groups. The one who comes from the group has to pick up a question stripe ask that question to their group. If they answer the question give a point to that group. Select the best group and give stars to them. Distribute the revision paper to them. Explain and get them do the paper.</p>

Table 13: ES Scheme of Work – Nahula

Week 13, period 3 (Nahula ES)
Revision on Energy
<p>Main Activity</p> <p>Revise the topic orally and give them the revision sheet to answer. Discuss the answers and get them to do it</p>

Table 11, 12, and 13 show specified different activities that were to be given to the students as ‘revision’. These activities also indicated oral tasks such as quizzes, and written work with discussions on commonly performed mistakes as well. For these practices, the students also prepared themselves with help from home. Additionally, the teachers marked their work and gave feedback to bring the learning forward. For example, Asma explained a typical revision lesson.

We revise in the class, give students a worksheet, and paste it in their exercise books. Usually during the week, we revise the whole topic. We give revision to find out how much they have learned. When we

do this, then the parents will even find out that there is going to be a test. [*Asma*]

Revising the whole topic was the next step in teaching and learning once the case study teachers had completed the curriculum topic for the given week. Although tests were most commonly used as summative assessments, according to Frey and Fisher (2011) these types of revision tests could also be used as formative procedures. For example, short quizzes to check for understanding; self-corrected spelling, cloze and maze procedures, question-answer relationships and common assessment (see Frey and Fisher, 2011, pp. 54-60).

However, for an assessment test to be formative, the information it provides must be used for improving performance placing the student in the central role of learning (Brookhart, 2001). The participant teachers generally gave the learners two or three days between the revision work and the formal written assessments. In many circumstances teachers postponed the date of the final written assessment paper, until the students were ready. A study by Black, et al. (2003) regarding teachers using formative strategies to aid preparation for summative tests found it was important for the learners themselves to be engaged in a reflective review of the work they had done to enable them to plan their revision more effectively. The three participant

teachers could have improved their revision work by providing the students with more timely feed forward and encouraging students to self reflect on their own efforts.

Evidence of learning

In a classroom, there can be many ways to show and prove that the students are learning and in fact, they become collected evidence of learning. According to Wiliam and Black (1996) whenever there are students working in small groups within a classroom, they may demonstrate, very high-quality speaking and listening skills, but this may not be observed by the teacher, because she is in another part of the room at the time. However, learning is taking place in the classroom and these learning evidences include everything that the students do such as conversing in groups, completing a worksheet, answering and asking questions, working on projects, handing in homework assignments, even sitting silently and looking confused (Leahy et al., 2005).

I noticed the teachers putting lots of effort in displaying and collecting students' work and other forms of learning evidence. All of them were potential sources of information about what the students did and what happened in these classes. Additionally, teachers collected several folders

with students' work, and I believe, if the teachers assembled them appropriately, a sustainable learning portfolio can be created. For example, a portfolio is a systemic collection of one's work, collected as evidence with variety of purposes and is a clear alternative to more traditional forms of assessment (Popham, 2010). The purpose of the portfolio can be such as to show progress, to show process, to show "best work", to show evidence of learning destination, or to show evidence of meeting goals – or a combination of purposes to fit the needs of a particular audience (Davies & Hill, 2009).

When I observed Fazla's class, it looked lively with teaching aids, posters and students work pasted (already discussed in Chapter 4 with details). Fazla regularly gathered, marked, and updated evidence of learning in files and folders such as reading materials, assessment papers, and weekend assignment and so on. While I was studying Fazla's class and spending time there, she kept on practicing many oral activities with the students. Some of the students practiced traditional songs and other forms of local poetry in the class while the normal lessons continued. When I inquired about the activities and why it was happening she answered:

I believe the children learn things form extracurricular activities such as English ⁷Week activities and Dhivehi Week activities. The children recite poems, ‘raivaru’ ⁸ and many other orally presentable things in the class and on the stage confidently. I believe that is also way of learning the language and it will make the children more talented. [*Fazla*]

These particular types of celebrating different weekly programmes were common practices of the Maldivian Schools and there were evidence of such activities in the other two schools as well. There were functions organized to display such activities as concerts and competitions with parents and well-wishers invited by the schools. I witnessed an end of the year programme of ‘Environment Club’ students’ display of the whole years work and one of the teacher in-charge was Fazla. They invited the school management and the parents to this exhibition and the students stayed near their products and displayed them. According to the teachers and their Leading Teachers, these were usual practices and such exhibitions and events of the club activities happened in all the schools all the time.

Asma kept numerous records of students and these practices have been

⁷ During English Week and Dhivehi week, the students perform oral and written English activities, such as drama, essay, poetry, and spelling. The students practice them to participate in a competition for the class and inter-class level.

⁸ Raivaru is is a type of Maldivian traditional singing, that is sung to a certain type of melody.

ongoing for several years in this school. (I have also described Asma's class environment in Chapter 4). Of this evidence of learning documents, there was a booklet 'Student record book-Grade 1-7' for each student. Asma gave a detailed account of this particular document.

In this book, the teachers have to record information such as completion of homework, conduct, attendance, and so on. In that book, there will be information about students every year. The students conduct, attendance, there we have to put a tick, such as good, very good and excellent. Even we have to record behaviour problems. Then, the next year that teacher will know the performance and important information about the child. [Asma]

Additionally, Asma has another book that has information sheets to collect about the students' daily learning activities happening in the classroom. This book with the name 'Student Particular Book' has many applications and Asma explained the functions of this book.

In this book, I record information such as how much the child gets home supervision, how child works in the class, weekend assignments, spelling tests. Particularly I note down, the weekend assignments, to check if they are doing that on time and how much the students achieve from spelling. Also I check if the students bring

necessary books and items. There are columns to fill if the students are following schools rules, regulations, and many other important issues. [*Asma*]

In Nahula's class, there were signs that posters and other materials had been removed from the walls. However, there still existed some evidence of individual and group work (I have described Nahula's Class in detail as well in Chapter 4). When I inquired about the displays Nahula replied: "I display the group activities and even individual work. The art works too. Usually I display them weekly."

Additionally I wanted to find how she recorded certain information about her students and she informed me about them and how they collected and kept these types of data.

Before we used to keep a sheet for noting down the progress of each student but now we keep only for the low achievers records. For example, children who are in the remedial class progress is checked often and a record is kept. [*Asma*]

Nevertheless, she kept lots of files and folders as documents, similar to Asma and Fazla. She collected and kept them by maintaining these documents. In this regard, she kept various documents of students unlike, the

other two teachers.

I have made folders for different things. There are folders for weekend assignments, language learning, and reading. I keep reading folders and other folders separately. In reading folder there will be reading checked regularly. Then I check the multiplication tables. I give reading materials to each child. For language folder there will activities for maths and English. I send these folders regularly and parents check them. Then, I display the class work in the class. [Asma]

Furthermore, there were two files for reading, a file labelled as 'Reading File' and the second one as 'Read and Gain'. In this second file, there were sheets for checking students for the reading materials or reading cards that students were reading. This particular reading programme was for the students "English 400 Reading Programme"⁹ (<http://www.orientblackswan.com>, 2013) . As a result, Fazla continuously checked students' reading level and gave remarks. In addition to this, the students who completed this activity were rewarded with badges and certificates.

⁹ The English 400 Reading Programme is a graded reading material for beginners and advanced learners of English Language and is specifically designed to help children read independently and at their own pace. The programme consists of two boxes of 250 cards each, each box graded into 5 levels, a teacher's booklet, answer keys, and placement tests. (See <http://www.orientblackswan.com> for more information)

Teachers can collect different learning evidence and it can differ from teacher to teacher, even though the description of what their students need to learn may be the same. The three sources of evidence mostly teachers collect are (1) evidence of learning happening through teachers observation of the students (2) products or work that students are doing in the class (3) conversations or discussions that students have in the class with the teacher and other students (Davies & Hill, 2009). All these were happening in the classes of the three teachers in the study.

Feedback

The key element in formative assessment is the feedback, and it is usually defined in terms of information about how successfully something has been or is being done (Sadler, 1989). In other words, it is necessary to provide feedback to the learners, both to assess their current achievement and to indicate what the next steps in their learning trajectory should be (Black et al., 2003). According to Brookhart (2008), “good feedback should be part of a classroom assessment environment in which students see constructive criticism as a good thing and understand that learning cannot occur without practice” (p. 2). Perhaps, for these reasons I found the participant teachers not only giving feedback to their students but also regularly updating parents

about the standard of their children. These teachers might not have proper training based on formative assessment; nonetheless, I believe they have their own practices of giving feedback.

Feedback and feed forward from teachers to students

The feedback and feed forward happened many times and continued through many forms of learning activities. For example, in the class discussions and by questioning the students, the teachers kept on giving feedback and feed forward. At the same time, they corrected the answer of a student or added extra information that might provide better understanding of the learning concept. In the process of helping students, teachers when adding missing points have encouraged the learners to progress their ongoing learning in the classes.

As I have mentioned earlier in the chapter it was very common procedure for the teachers to move around the class after assigning tasks to the students. The teachers observed students doing their work in progress and then they conversed with the students. Sometimes, while the rest of the class worked the teachers sat with a student or groups of students giving informal feedback and it was a very familiar teaching process with Fazla, Asma and Nahula (Brookhart, 2008). For instance, Nahula explained in detail of what usually happened in her class.

At first, I gave them a work to do by themselves. Then I walked around the class and individually checked how they were doing. I found out some of them did the work well and few of them had trouble continuing the work. So I had to give them more guidance and explanation. In this lesson, there were not many but two children told me that they have not understood and asked for my help. So I had to explain them even later after the end of the lesson too.

[*Nahula*]

Similarly, in a study by Black, et al, (2003) the teacher walked around the classroom as the written work was being completed, stopping at each table and checking with some individuals so that the students were clear about what they needed to include in their learning activity. For this reason, in the Mathematics lesson Asma walked around talking to individual students, assisting them while they continued doing their work. Afterwards when I inquired why she did that in that particular lesson.

I wanted to find out if all of them (students) did their sums correctly. So I walked around by checking everyone's work and whenever I came across individuals who had difficulties in continuing work I explained and helped them. [*Asma*]

Apart from the individualized attention given by the teachers in the classes,

all three schools planned weekly remediation in their academic calendars and were conducting these classes regularly. These classes had regular sessions for lower primary conducted twice or more on a weekly basis. In these formal small classes, for the second time the teachers had the opportunity to pay attention to a group of students who were in need of re-assessing individual strengths and weaknesses of a particular learning area. For example, at the remediation sessions of Fazla, Asma and Nahula, there were similar cases of students who made common errors in Mathematics and needed more assistance in the curriculum concepts like addition and subtraction, despite their age differences. This included English and Dhivehi language where the students learned to read simple words, phrases, and sentences. Feedback and feed forward were vital for these learners when they continued learning extra hours after school ended. However, based on my experience these students needed lots of encouragement and had to be fed properly as they become too tired after school hours.

In these remedial sessions, Fazla, Asma and Nahula usually spent time with the particular students by reviewing their standards and frequently re-teaching the lessons. However, they also tried different techniques with appropriate materials in order to bring the learning forward where necessary. Their focuses were mostly towards developing the same learning targets and

learning objectives as the previous lessons, earlier taken initially in the classes. Here, Asma and Nahula explained how they both made the time purposeful in the remediation sessions.

These children I call ‘slow learners’ and this special time is called ‘study time’. I keep them for an hour twice weekly. At that time, I re-teach them the same topics taught in the class. I also try to identify how much those five students have already learned giving them special care and individual attention. [*Asma*]

For example, if the reading comprehension is incomplete and a child has difficulty in finding the answers, I make him/her read the questions carefully and see how much is understood. I always make children find the answers without me telling everything so they can learn to use their own thinking. Sometimes, I read them the passage aloud or make the child read the passage after me and then make the child find the answer on his/her own. I make them do ‘cloze passages’ like this too. [*Nahula*]

To make the students more fluent in reading, writing and better at numeracy, particularly up to the grade level (the curriculum level) were the most important responsibilities of these teachers. For this reason, teachers also concentrated on individualized methods plus feedback trying to move

learning forward. For instance, Fazla continuously suggested and recommended which storybooks were the best for her six-year-old learners and encouraged them to read further. She kept on asking parents continuously to verify if the students had read the suggested book and always kept on encouraging them to read as she gave oral feedback to the learners. Furthermore, the Leading Teachers usually kept on checking individual students, specially reading ability levels, identified learners who were unable to read, and reported their findings to the teachers and parents. They also kept on giving feedback and rewards for the learners to develop their reading with encouragement.

As part of this study, I had to investigate the students' various documents. For instance, when I looked into the students' different activity books (exercise books), files and other folders, I found out that the three teachers' had regularly corrected students' errors and mistakes and gave written comments. In fact, it was significantly encouraged and supervised by the school management to keep the students' books marked well on a regular basis. Partly, this pressure of marking the students' books regularly by the teachers' was because of parental pressure as well.

In fact, all the participants constantly gave many kinds of rewards for the students' books, files/folders and the displayed work on the walls with multi-

coloured stickers, stars, and words. For example, Asma explained: “When I mark students’ books, I write - please revise - keep on trying – excellent - and so on, such comments.” However, I believe if these words and phrases are to be used as feedback, they have to be more specific and clear to what they are for, so that students can be more productive and the parents of these young learners can follow them and successfully move learning forward. In this case, Nahula did something differently: “I give remarks in the children’s books. Usually, I talk to them individually if they score low and if they do well as well.”

It was a common practice of all the teachers using this type of feedback to give short remarks; they believed it could encourage the students in the continuation of their work. For example, I observed from these three schools, grade 1 and 2 students wearing a designed crown/hat as a reward for getting all tasks correct in the spelling and other activities happening at the end of every week or the term. At that time, most of the students had all kinds of badges, stars and medals pinned on their uniforms as well. In fact, Nahula’s class, the grade 3 students seemed to like rewards a lot.

Children like to work at the level of students who got stars.

Whenever the children see other’s work displayed in the class, they

see that I have given a ‘star’ the others want to do their work as good as that. [*Nahula*]

However, sometimes teachers wrote comments for the essays with remarks emphasizing the good points, and the points the students could develop more. As such, teachers usually asked their students to re-write essays/compositions and to do the corrections of arithmetic numbers and other exercises in their books. Sometimes students are requested to re-write the corrections of the wrong answers. Teachers write, “Do Corrections,” “Home Work and “Please re-write” as headings so that the parents who regularly keep on checking students work find them. According to the teachers whenever parents check their children’s books and find particular headings and remarks the parents usually help their children to re-do the activities as homework and hence, the learning continued at home as well.

Feedback from teachers to parents

I noticed that most of the parents of the early primary grades were quite friendly with their children’s teachers in the schools of Maldives. All of the parents were given the teachers’ personal contact numbers and the parents usually called the teachers if there was any necessity. As a primary school parent myself some years ago in the Maldives, I could recall the friendliness

and kindness of my daughter's teachers as well. In addition, I had the same experience with my students' parents when I was a primary teacher for ten years and I understand and acknowledge the fact that Maldivian primary teachers and parents usually have a pleasant relationship.

Fazla also had a similar relationship with her students' parents and she usually met the parents to discuss different matters concerning the students weekly particularly on Thursdays¹⁰. According to her, the parents also sometimes wanted time with her privately and during that time she provided more descriptive feedback to the student's parent.

..., even weekly I meet with the parents and tell them what could be done to improve and how they could do that. In the meeting, I inform the parents what has been done this week and what the children will do in the next week. [*Fazla*]

It should be noted, this particular meeting with parents was an initiative which Fazla implemented herself. In these informal meetings in the school, she had better chances of interacting with her students' parents. According to Fazla, this practice made the parents of her students' well informed of assessment practices along with many other issues. For example, she always started the meeting talking over general issues such as what would happen

¹⁰ The Week begins on Sundays officially in the Maldives and ends on Thursdays

after students achieved a certain criteria in the assessment or inform the parents of weekly class programmes. Usually, conversations became spontaneous and parents appreciated her meeting them regularly. These sessions made her give the students positive feedback and encouragement to continue the learning process. In addition, she mentioned that she had never compared students with each other and any matters concerning performance from assessment were private. Nevertheless, sometimes she talked about assessment issues in general as in the following example.

I tell every student individually what that student has to make better. Sometimes I talk of students overall performances in assessment. For example in English language writing assessment, this many students have done well. I do not mention any student's name.

[Fazla]

At the end of school, the teachers brought the students to allocated spots in the schoolyard, where the students had to wait for their parents to come and fetch them. Although Fazla had to come downstairs with her students, she preferred to stay upstairs in the class with her students and she asked the parents to come upstairs. According to Fazla, this was an opportunity for her to communicate and meet with the parents everyday and to communicate issues concerning students' studies. As such, these typical informal meetings

happened in the three schools and the Leading Teachers/Supervisors gave more information, as seen below.

Children who do not complete work, those who need attention, slow learners, these children's parents can meet the teacher at the end of the school, everyday to find their progress. [*Shazla*]

To get feedbacks, we always welcome parents to meet the teachers any day. For example, an issue concerning the assessment or with their studies, parents can meet the teachers' every day. [*Rafa*]

Almost every day the parents come to the class and teachers communicate with the parents. Therefore, the teachers meet the parents' very frequently. Especially, on Thursdays, teachers discuss about the marks that the students have achieved and teachers show activities that the students have done in the class, for example, dictation¹¹, and any other work that the students have done in the class to the parents. [*Heena*]

The teachers in the study were quite confident about their learners' standards. In fact, Asma showed lots of confidence knowing about her students' strengths and weaknesses. This was because Asma was the one

¹¹ Dictation – is a form of checking spelling of words given weekly in a list that teachers usually assess in written form and give marks or a grade (A to F).

making judgements about her students and making decision about their learning. In fact she knew the students who would understand a concept immediately, would learn and those who have already learned lessons in her class. One of the factors, she believed, was the length of time she usually spent with her students. Apparently, this was a common factor with Fazla and Asma as well. They all taught five curriculum subjects/areas (for example, English Language, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Practical Art and Physical Education) to their students. The findings indicated that these teachers used their personal knowledge of the students and their understanding of the context of the assessment form all the curriculum areas that they taught. Thus, Asma felt it provided opportunities for her to become more familiar with each and every individual students' learning and to provide the feedback to scaffold next steps in learning. For example Asma said: "When I notice something of concern about children's studies or any other issues, I always keep on informing the students and their parents."

In all three schools and within the schools, teachers displayed similarities and differences in providing feedback with unique and quite authentic procedures and regulations regarding feedback to parents. However, in the case of Nooraaneema School, a matter concerning a student's learning feedback usually became serious if teachers found the parents being ignorant

to the continuous feedback. For that matter, Rafa explained the steps taken in such circumstance.

Usually teachers meet the parents regularly to inform about different areas needing improvement and if a child is below the standard where the parents do not pay much attention to the oral feedback, we call the parent and give a written format in three categories. Normally, we give this particular format if the child is very weak in studies; otherwise, there is no need for the written format. [*Rafa*]

It seems that the teachers in this study communicated with the parents quite frequently and there seemed to be lots of sharing of what happened with the students in the classes. As such Davies and Hill (2009, p. 100) state “there is no one right or best way to do this. Select the method or combination of methods that work for you, your students, and families in your school community.”

Student – parent –teacher conferences

In student-parent-teacher conferences, parents have an opportunity to take part in reviewing the learning evidence, listening to their son or daughter talk about his or her strengths and areas needing improvement, helping to set goals for future learning, and identifying plans for supporting their child’s

learning (Davies & Hill, 2009). In the three schools that I conducted this study in, the student-parent-teacher conferences were part of the official year planner for many years and the three schools organized and maintained such meetings well. Heena and Shazla, both Leading Teachers, explained how they reviewed and conducted the meetings in their schools.

They are conducted after reviewing the students' marks and the different skills. Then comments are written based on the students' strengths and things to improve. [*Heena*]

.....The teachers will talk about how the students have performed academically and how the students do the work in the class. [*Shazla*]

Furthermore, Shazla shared more details of how they conducted these meetings/conferences. According to her, previously, they used to show the mark sheets with students' scores and talked about the summative assessment completed after each topic. Then, the teachers mostly talked about performances of written tests done in the class. They used to show this although the test papers were being sent regularly home. However, they changed the style and are now focussing more on the learners' development as is explained in the following:

Now we do not show the parents the marks sheet from the files, as the parents see those assessment papers. The teachers will look into the numeracy and literacy sheet generally and overall talk about the behaviour, the child's intellectual growth. For examples, how the child participate in the classroom and more things like that. [*Shazla*]

Additionally, Asma and Nahula, shared the information based on the student-teacher-parent conferences. The schools planned these meetings in a way that all the teachers had to fill a sheet previously as a preparation for the meetings. Here Asma and Nahula explained how the procedures took place for their students.

I have to give a written feedback based on numeracy and literacy for each student. This sheet has details of how the child has been assessed in both numeracy and literacy, for example in English language, the level of achievement assessed from reading and writing using the rubrics that we have made in these sheets. [*Asma*]

I give feedback to all the children. I know as the teacher what the children do in the class so I write comments separately. For example, in reading comprehension such as I comment, 'very good'. Then I can find out from their books too how they do in the class. I check everything and fill forms. I give a form filled with such information

every term to the parents. It shows how the children participate and perform overall in the class. [*Nahula*]

Student-parent-teacher conferences were common programmes of Maldivian schools and part of their yearly schedules, mostly happening at least twice a year. They were valuable and were also one of the best ways to communicate about learning. According to Davis and Hill (2009) when close people such as parents, carers, grandparents and others watch demonstrations of learning or attend student-parent-teacher conferences, it increases their appreciation of their child as a learner, his or her level of skill development, the breadth of the classroom and school curriculum, and the efforts needed on everyone's behalf to make learning possible.

Chapter summary

This chapter focused on exploring the Maldivian primary teachers' practices of formative assessment in action in their regular classroom settings. The findings represent the normal day-to-day happenings in the three classrooms chosen for this study. Furthermore, the chapter described the teachers' beliefs on assessment and the regular assessment practices, and their relation to formative assessment practices with literature to support them. The summary highlights on the formative assessment in action and the key events

on what actually happened in these classrooms.

As mentioned earlier, all three teachers' assessment approaches had similarities and differences. Obviously, their class discussions contributed to the processes of the assessment for learning in the classes. As the teachers continued these discussions, for example, they were regularly questioning the students to find out how much they had learned. In the same way, the students were guided to move their learning forward and the teachers helped the learners to set targets. When teachers involved students in their assessment they shared learning intentions with students and furthermore, in some circumstances with the parents as well. There were incidents of formative assessment strategies practiced in these classrooms and they included self-peer-group learning activities/assessment and differentiated learning instructions and guidance. In almost all the lessons, these approaches became part of teachers' lessons, for example, as seen in the Schemes of Work, there were such initiatives recommended for the teachers to practice in the lessons.

An important aspect of these schools was to improve the standard of their low achievers up to the grade curriculum level. The teachers tried to make these learners competent in both literacy and numeracy. Therefore, the schools implemented many programs and the teachers took responsibility in

maintaining them and helping those students. Other than that, there were many formalities in their assessment policies and the schools enforced similar processes, such as revisions conducted with a formative process before any formal assessment. There were various learning evidences displayed in different corners of the classroom and teachers allocated spaces for each learner. In addition, they gave rewards and acknowledgement to the students' work. Another important feature of this chapter is the process of feedback and feed forward that the teachers accomplished throughout teaching and learning in these classrooms. The feedback and feed forward continuously happened many times in different forms of learning activities. Finally, this chapter brings out a holistic representation of what happens in the Maldivian classroom showing a complete assessment process with lots of detail. Furthermore, a genuine account of formative assessment in action in primary classes was demonstrated.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Discussion and conclusions

Introduction

For this study, I have explored assessment in the Maldivian primary schools by providing insights into the nature of primary teachers' understanding and practices of formative assessment. Using semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and reviewing of documents such as photographs, this qualitative ethnography has described and disclosed the teachers' class assessment practices in the findings chapters and revealed teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices of assessment.

By using social constructionism as a theoretical framework in conducting and analyzing the qualitative data, this ethnography has flourished. Viewing from a broader spectrum, this social learning theory enhanced the investigation and the discursive nature of social constructivist learning theory helped me understand the learning setting, the need for students to be given time to talk, and the teacher's role as being more of a listener and an observer (Adams, 2006). To put it briefly, by knowing and understanding theories such as social constructionism and social constructivism, the research process became easier and strengthened the focus of the

investigation.

Finally, as this is the last chapter of this study it describes implications on the findings from the research. For that reason, to help guide the discussion, I will now present my research question.

How do primary teachers in the Maldives understand and practice assessment in their classrooms?

To explore my research question further, I used the following questions and examined the topic thoroughly. They include:

- (1) How do the primary teachers practice formative assessment? and what are the different forms of class based assessment practices?
- (2) What do the teachers understand by the term ‘formative assessment’? and how do they make summative judgments?
- (3) What are the consequences of assessment in the primary schools? and what needs to be done to deal with the issues?

In summary, to present a clear picture of this study, this chapter collectively brings together the findings and aims to discuss the meanings of the findings. I will discuss firstly primary teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and typical assessment practices in the Maldives; secondly, the pressure of assessment of

assessment in the primary schools; and thirdly, how teachers and students encounter episodes of formative assessment in the Maldivian classrooms.

Primary teachers knowledge, beliefs and typical assessment practices

Significant details on routine classroom assessment were revealed from the interviews, during the lesson observations and from various documents. In fact, I understood from this study that teachers found it hard to articulate their ideas about assessment, in particular formative assessment. For instance, some of them even requested me to explain to them what it was and to provide some examples. Although there were significant differences in teaching and learning styles, I realized there were many similarities in the ways that teachers, understood, practiced, and recorded assessment information. Significantly, all three teachers separated assessment from teaching and learning process. They treated these assessment procedures formally by planning, and prescribing the processes in the Schemes of Work (a document aligned with the National curriculum) and other policies. Indeed for such reasons, their assessment policies showed austere rules and regulations regarding primary students' assessment procedures.

Another aspect that was similar among the participants was their knowledge on formative assessment. All of them believed it was an activity. In fact, it was not surprising to find these three teachers perceiving formative

assessment as an activity. For instance, researchers like Torrance and Pryor (1998) when investigating formative assessment found that the teachers in their study also perceived assessment as a formal activity. When I searched for more information from the case study teachers, Fazla, Asma and Nahula even showed various examples of planned formative assessment activities.

As the investigation progressed the teachers described formative assessment activities with examples, such as group work; pair work, individual work, practical work, oral assessment, and project work were examples of formative assessment. According to Cizek (2010), these activities described by the teachers can be possible formats of formative assessment as the term itself is correspondingly broad. However, these descriptions are mostly formative assessment information-gathering activities, while the purpose of formative assessment has to be:

.. understanding the students' learning and conceptual organization, identification of strengths, diagnosis of weaknesses, areas for improvement, and as a source of information that teachers can use in instructional planning and students can use in deepening their understandings and improving their achievement. (Cizek, 2010, p. 7)

Additionally, when I tried to get more information on formative assessment, one teacher told me that that formative assessment was not even practiced in

their schools. It was also common among teachers to think of formative assessment as continuous assessment. One participant believed through various oral assessments they were giving opportunities for the students to learn something over and over again making the process formative.

Evidently, the case study teachers had misconceptions and bewilderment in understanding formative assessment. In fact, this is not a matter that exists solely in the Maldives; many researchers from different backgrounds have also raised these issues and concerns. James (2011) argues that there are misinterpretations and confusions about what the term “formative assessment” in reality means. As a result the Assessment Reform Group’s (ARG) decided to adopt a distinction between assessment for learning and assessment of learning. For example, they made it more accessible (less technical) in expressing formative/summative distinction. Consequently, this encouraged its widespread use in various countries (James, 2011). However, Hall and Burke (2004) also highlighted the confusion that was held in the minds of the teachers regarding formative and summative assessment. Similarly, Harlen and James (1997) believe that the relationship between these two kinds of assessment, formative and summative, although simplistic, has brought about a fundamental confusion in teachers' minds. As such, they further believe, the reliability of summative

assessment has suffered from the confusion. For instance, Bennett (2011) who constantly used to criticize formative assessment writes:

The term, 'formative assessment', does not yet represent a well-defined set of artefacts or practices. A meaningful definition requires a theory of action and one or more concrete instantiations. When we have those components in place, we have something useful to implement and to study (p.20).

Taras (2007) also argues that there is confusion in the definitions of formative assessment. In Singapore, Tan (2011) found the teachers articulating the need for sufficient time for them to develop and establish an appropriate formative assessment culture in the classroom. He was also doubtful about the teachers' ability to sustain formative assessment practices accordingly. In fact, recently, Sach (2012) found in her study, that teachers seemed less confident than they claimed to be in putting actual strategies of formative assessment in place. Noyce (2011) argues that ongoing analysis and modification of assessment is not something easy for the teachers. In such circumstances, the teachers may not have the ability and confidence to adjust their lessons on a daily basis. In this way, the teachers often lacked the tools, time and the depth of content knowledge needed to analyze misconceptions or see at what branch of reasoning the student went wrong

(Noyce, 2011).

Thus, I can understand the likelihood of Maldivian teachers having issues in understanding formative assessment. In fact, this could be considered to be acceptable at the initial stages of the implementation of formative assessment and does not really come as a surprise. However, confusion and misconceptions can weaken the effectiveness of formative assessment and block its reliability and dependability in the classroom (Moss & Brookhart, 2009). According to Moss and Brookhart (2009), the following examples are some misconceptions made by teachers, and remarkably they are quite similar to those of the teachers in this study.

1. Formative assessment is a special kind of test or series of tests that teachers learn to use to find out what their students know.
2. Formative assessment is a program that teachers adopt and add to what they already do.
3. Any practice that gathers information for the purpose of improving programs or improving teaching is a part of formative assessment.

(p. 14)

Moss and Brookhart assert that misunderstandings are the inevitable result of misinterpretation and often cause teachers to question the process of

formative assessment. To make teachers understand the process of formative assessment, Moss and Brookhart (2009) and Hamm and Adams (2009) provide some examples:

A teacher asks students in his 6th grade social studies class to form pairs to generate three strategic questions that will help them better meet their learning target of describing how erosion has produced physical patterns on the earth's surface that have affected human activities. (Moss & Brookhart, 2009, pp. 7-8)

In his feedback to a 1st grade student, a teacher shows the student what she did correctly in her attempt to draw the life cycle of a frog. Then the teacher gives the student a strategy to use to improve the accuracy of her drawing before she turns in her final sketch. (Moss & Brookhart, 2009, pp. 7-8)

When studying a unit on plants with second graders, have the team divide a plant according to its parts (e.g., stem, flower, leaves, roots, etc.). Next, have them describe each part and tell how the plant uses that part. Students can assess their learning by illustrating the plant and explaining it to a partner. (Hamm & Adams, 2009, p. 43)

As I mentioned previously, the study showed how the three teachers

separated assessment from their teaching and learning. I had these similar experiences when I was a teacher, teaching at a primary school, and as such, I can confirm that these same practices from fourteen years ago are still persistent in schools today. Similar findings were also noted by Hill (2003) in her study when she studied New Zealand teachers' assessment procedures.

When the investigation progressed, there were incidents that involved the three teachers marking written assessment and storing detailed assessment information in checklists. By investigating the checklists I found that they were designed for the curriculum objectives, filled with marks, and neatly documented in various files. This kind of storing of data dominated the three school's style of administration. As these documents were prepared by the administration, the three teachers were not authorized to make changes to the documents. Consequently, Hill (2003) argues that checklists are not prepared to guide students in how to improve their learning, and neither do they diagnose individual strengths and learning needs. Indeed, the planning and the recording of assessment data was a topic of interest and I noticed how teachers spent their valuable time exhausting themselves in planning, marking, and accumulating assessment information. For instance, Hill also found out in New Zealand the check listing made it very difficult for teachers to prioritize assessment for formative purposes. Hence, Hill (2003) writes:

“The checking approaches seem more consistent with criterion-referenced assessment, the criteria are often used as a hierarchy of performances to be checked off, graphed, and reported” (p.9).

In the checklists, all the teachers in this study circled students who achieved A's or the students who received full marks from the written assessment papers. For example, students were given numerical scores, which represent their aggregate that also later represented a certain grade score for all examined subjects. In that case, Gandal and McGiffert (2003) believe teachers expectations for their students differ such that an “A” awarded in one school can mean something very different from an “A” awarded in another school. These processes of handling assessment information directly resembled to the traditional psychometric testing model described by Gipps (1999). Thus, Gipps criticized this particular approach essentially having a limitation and considered as a major disadvantage of the psychometric approach. For instance, traditional psychometric testing model measures attributes which are a property of the individual and which were thought to be fixed and innate. As such Earl (2013) argues that when teachers' effort in assessment is in marking and grading, there is a strong emphasis on comparing of students, and there is little direction for improvement.

When I examined the teachers' planning of assessment, they spent time

preparing assessment papers for each unit, which is listed in the Schemes of Work and used to inform to the parents prior to the assessment. These written papers had labelling, drawing, circling correct answers, putting a tick; underlining the correct answer, writing short answers or writing extended explanations. In these written assessment papers, teachers gave marks or grades. If the student scored full marks or it was an 'A' grade teachers gave them badges and wrote comments such as 'V.Good', 'Well done', 'Excellent' and so on. Although there are positive aspects of such markings, there are also negative aspects. For some students, when the classroom culture focuses on rewards, "gold stars", grades, or class rankings, then they look for ways to achieve the best marks rather than to progress their learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). As a result, Earl (2013) points out, how the certainty of praise and success in this enterprise has become a drug for some students and how they continually want more. In this case, the other students, year after year of hearing the phrase "not good enough" has "eroded their intellectual self-confidence and resulted in a kind of mind-numbing malaise" (p. 86).

Likewise, I noticed the same occurrences and experiences of "stars," "grades" and "marks" becoming a culture in the primary classrooms. Thus, many students had stars and other shining badges glowing in their uniforms.

According to Chappuis and Stiggins (2002), these are traditional practices of teachers used to register their approval or disapproval of student performance. However, these kinds of evaluative feedback, basically provide inadequate assessment information for improving student learning, and can actually have negative effects on students' desire and motivation to learn. According to Earl (2013), when students consistently fail, they lose their motivation to learn and go to great lengths to avoid the pain of failure, the possibility of public embarrassment and further confirmation of their ineffectiveness. As such, Chappuis and Stiggins (2002) criticize "... grades, those traditional coded symbols and markings — B-, 71 percent, 4/10, Satisfactory, F — actually communicate even less about what students have done well or need to do to improve" (p.2). An alternative for this process is providing teacher comments that focus on student work and not on individual student characteristics, so that it can increase students' motivation and desire to learn.

To have a better learning process, Chappuis and Stiggins (2002) believe in the assessment for learning model, assessment has to be an instructional tool that encourages learning rather than an event designed exclusively for the purpose of evaluation and assigning grades. According to Black and Wiliam (1998b), these kinds of tests used by teachers encourage rote and superficial

learning even if the teachers articulate they want to develop understanding from such tests. In fact, they believe these issues are common among many teachers.

In this study, the schools, teachers, parents, and students had lots of pressure regarding assessment. Nevertheless, for some parents and students these were unavoidable circumstances. This obsessive focus on competition from high achievers and the existing fear of failure from low achievers existed in the school system for many years (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). In the same way, as the students start schooling in the Maldives, the school is “already socialized by the long-standing history of schools as places where they are judged and marked, often with important consequences (from parental reactions to entry to further and higher education)” (Earl, 2013, p. 85). In particular, these reasons have a tendency to focus both students’ and parents’ attention on meeting such standards and demands rather than on any other benefits of the learning.

Thus, Earl (2013) states that breaking old habits is not easy and traditional assessment of learning is not likely to disappear. However, the trick is to balance the effects of assessment. In this way, teachers can use assessment to foster and motivate learners and not as method of passing the test. It is also important to integrate assessment into the learning process, where teachers

and students can work together and share the beliefs and understanding. For example, by doing this the students are allowed to be liberated with their natural curiosity and the teachers can further encourage them to engage in the work to acquire knowledge or skills (Earl, 2013; Greenstein, 2010; Wiliam, 2011a).

The pressure of assessment in the primary schools

As I noted, the impact of pressure on assessment is immense in the primary school. The most significant reason for getting this enormous pressure to make students to get the best marks is the present competitive nature of the Maldivian school systems. The teachers and students are given lots of awards school wide, nationwide and internationally for the achievement in their examinations. The pressure of assessment is in fact something that seems to have always existed in the Maldives. As a result, Nazeer (2006), Didi (2007), Shareef (2010), Adam (2012) and Mariya (2012), all have expressed concern for the existing pressure concerning assessment in the Maldivian school. Even the major newspapers of the Maldives reported incidences of assessment pressure (Maajid, 2012; Naif, 2011).

Similarly, the findings from my study indicated that the teachers and parents are concerned and worried over the students' marks or grades and they pressure their children into performing in their studies. The teachers in my

study believed the pressure of achieving the highest grades and marks was a problem that had existed in the community for a long time. For instance, when students scored less (marks) the parents would force their children to score better marks and sometimes they would tell their children to score better than so and so in the class. Black and Wiliam (1998b) also noted the negative impact of such approaches that are used to compare students with one another. They argued the prime purpose of these approaches led to negative competition rather than personal improvement. As a result, the consequences heavily depended on the marks or grades and rarely did the students really care about what they had actually achieved. With this kind of grading system, status within a group becomes more important than attainment of learning objectives (Shermis & Di Vesta, 2011). According to Sacks (1999), test-driven classrooms intensify boredom, fear, and exhaustion, promoting all manner of automatic behaviours on the part of teachers, students, and schools, and depriving them from the natural love of learning. Amrein and Berliner (2003) also conclude in their study that high-stakes testing policies have resulted in no measurable improvement in learning while it hurt the students' learning instead of helping it.

As I have noted previously, the school gave many awards such as “stars” and “badges” if the children scored the best marks. In recognition of these

students' achievements, for example, if the students got all A's, then they were awarded school coloured "stars" which the students would wear the whole year. Consequently, I believe the other students who did not receive the stars would feel disadvantaged and uninspired to learn. According to Black et al. (2003) when the learning environment becomes competitive, then everyone is aware that there are losers as well as winners and those who see themselves as losers with records of underachievement will see little point in trying. However, there are also threats for the high-achievers in a competitive classroom. Black et al. (2003) make it clear:

The emphasis on ability as fixed rather than incremental leads to a performance orientation in which they become focused on maintaining their position at the top of the class, and so the high grades and marks become ends in themselves rather than simply indicators that they have learned something well. (p. 76)

Butler (1993) argues such ego-oriented students in time are likely to reduce putting effort in the face of failure as they attribute outcomes primarily to ability and they might think continued hard work would not be enough. Harlen and Crick (2003) also noted such effect was greater for the less successful pupils and due to this it tends to widen the gap between higher and lower achieving pupils. Shermis and Di Vesta (2011) noted that students

who are motivated by such norm-referenced scores tend to be competitive, striving for higher scores than their peers or often become anxious when their grades are lower than their peers' grades. For example, in such circumstances the students' main concern is, "what did I get? and then they always look for what their friends and others got" (Weeden et al., 2002, p. 114). Thus, in norm-referencing when the emphasis is on the competition then the result becomes informative. However, if a person wants to find out how competent the students are in a subject area or how much of what was taught they have mastered, then the result is of little use (Black, 1998). Black (1998) further noted the result might indicate that the student is well above average in ability or not having the ability. For instance, in such circumstances there are limited and brief details given by the teachers.

To make matters worse, teachers also awarded certificates such as the "Performance Award" and "Conducive Learning Environment" and so on. The affect was so much that primary teachers in this study look forward to receiving certificates and awards on stage as much as their students. They also felt their students would worry if the class or the teacher did not win any awards. For such reasons, the teachers seemed to teach for the assessment, so that their performance would be better than that of the other classes. It was also noted how the young learners of grades 1, 2 and 3 were kept in the

‘remedial classes’ and teachers used to teach the ‘assessment topic’, in a deliberate attempt to increase the performance of the class. Harlen and Crick (2003) also highlighted the negative effects of teaching for exams and tests. In such circumstances students may not in reality have the skills or understanding which the test is designed to assess, given that the teachers are motivated by the high stakes to teach students how to pass tests, even when the students do not have these skills and understanding (Harlen and Crick, 2003). Black et al. (2003) found teachers in the study wanted to minimize competition between students as they found minimizing competition also supported collaboration between students. They did this to make learners able to meet the learning criteria easily with satisfaction and to make them not to feel discouraged.

Additionally, in the three schools, the extracurricular (educational) programmes were planned in a way to increase the competitive nature among parents, teachers and students. In these language development programmes such as “English Week,” and ‘Dhivehi Foavahi” also teachers and students received certificates, prizes and awards. Teachers and students worked very hard to achieve the highest prize and cups from these competitions. For example, Fazla and Asma were always winners as they usually get the best class award every year.

At the same time, the parents stressed upon the teachers to inform them of the exact date of the class assessment. Sometimes the parents guessed the day of the assessment when teachers gave ‘revision’ and ‘practice work’ in their children’s exercise books. Although there are variances in the assessment procedures, all the teachers in this study followed strict rules and regulations. As a result, there were special days that teachers informed the parents about the assessment. Moreover, there were additional procedures that the schools followed such as more rules and regulations if the young learners got absent for an assessment. Teachers would give slips and notes written with assessment details for the whole term. Sometimes there were incidents where students held mobile notice-boards to show the assessment dates to the parents. The three teachers had to follow more regulations provided by the school management for the assessment processes. For example, the Schemes of Work had information for teachers to carry such practices accordingly with revision exercises included for them to practice before any assessment.

Hamm and Adams (2009) argue that a single form of assessment does not work for all the students in a class and they advise not to settle for a single assessment strategy, such as testing, which is as an adequate representation of what students understand. That is the reason Harlen and Crick (2003)

suggest to avoid drills and practice for tests and to take further steps to prevent students from being faced with tests in which they are unlikely to succeed. As students who repetitively receive low marks or grades come to believe that they cannot succeed and tend to disengage from learning (Black, et al., 2003). Rea-Dickins (2006) criticizes the series of summative tests in the classes that disconnects the flow of teaching and learning process being unfair and depriving students of formative assessment opportunities.

Close encounter of formative assessment in the Maldivian Classrooms.

As I noted above, formative assessment process is a widely researched topic and various researchers have issues with the definition and procedures. The study showed the predominant assessment in the three schools as assessment of learning (summative assessment) where the teachers created assessment/test papers and marked them on a regular basis (Earl, 2013). Additionally, the three teachers' also had uncertainties in understanding formative assessment in this study. Nevertheless, there is strong emphasis on learning in the three classrooms indicating ongoing assessment for learning (formative assessment). For that reason, I wanted to explore the research settings and analyze the data using a formative assessment lens approach.

With this perspective in my mind, it enabled me to observe and understand the sights and images that are associated with recommended practices of

formative assessment. By examining the data using this approach, these learning incidents of formative assessment became more visible and identifiable. For this particular approach, the literature on formative assessment provided enormous insights and guided the overall focus of the study. In this way, I have further divided the discussion into learners' and Primary teachers' experiences of formative assessment.

Learners' experiences of formative assessment

In all the three classrooms, the classroom observation data revealed the students engaged in class discussions. While the class discussion progressed the teachers and the students exchanged dialogues. In this way, I found the students experiencing assessment for learning when the dialogues were being exchanged. Wiliam (2006) agrees high-engagement classroom environments to have a significant impact on student achievement and also by engaging students in class discussions teachers are really making students smarter. For instance, Wiliam (2006) made it clear that an assessment of a student is formative if it shapes the students' learning by evoking and interpreting their learning needs, and consequently, the learning evidence is used to make adjustments. For example, in Fazla's illustrated English language lesson the dialogues that were exchanged between the teacher and the students provided opportunities for her to respond to and reorient students' thinking and

provided opportunities for her to make the learners smarter as well (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). With the class discussions, the teachers continued questioning the students in their lessons. This became habitual or the norm for them as they engaged themselves in questioning when teaching. In many parts of the lessons, they also focussed on questioning individual learners, deliberately using 'wait time' and making students think carefully before they answered the target questions. In a similar circumstance, Black et al. (2003), while investigating the effect of increased 'wait time', found that wait time made more students become involved in question-and-answer discussions and as a result, the length and quality of their responses improved. However, it is also important to make a note of how much time a teacher allows a student to respond before evaluating the response and the types of questioning, such that factual recall does not need much time (Wiliam, 2011a). "But when the question requires thought, increasing the time between the end of the student's answer and the teacher's evaluation from the average wait time of less than a second to three seconds produces measurable increases in learning...." (Wiliam, 2011a, p.84).

Fazla, Asma and Nahula were experienced teachers in providing direct feedback and feed forward during the class discussions. I observed them providing instant oral feedback and feed forward while also guiding their

students, informing them about the nature of their errors, and providing chances to correct them. According to Black et al. (2003), feedback can only serve learning if it involves both the evoking of evidence and a response to that evidence with some ways to improve the learning. When teachers provide feedback in a class discussion, Black and Wiliam (2009) noted it has to relate to the needs of the subject taught and that it has to be an immediate intervention in the flow of classroom discussion. It is also important for teachers to make sure that students get right feedback that encourages their learning and that brings their learning forward. What happens is that when a feedback is vague or faulty, there are students who make inappropriate modifications to their work or sometimes there are students who get uninspired to learn more or make any adjustments to their decision (Earl, 2013).

In this study as well, there were incidents where the teachers gave evaluative feedback in the form of grades or they used short nonspecific comments such as “Well Done,” “Very Good,” and “Keep it up.” According to Earl (2013) “this kind of feedback tells students that they are ‘ok’ or not and affects their sense of themselves and their position in relation to learning, but it offers very little direction for moving their learning on” (p.99). In a recent study, Frey and Fisher (2011) discuss innovative

approaches for feedback and feed-forward instructions that would provide the best practices of formative assessment such as guided instruction, prompts (heuristic and reflective), error analysis, error coding, looking back-looking forward, cues to shift attention and direct explanation and modelling to clear up confusions (see pp. 91-118).

Similar to Frey and Fisher's suggestions, I observed the three teachers correcting pronunciations, reformulating the students' answers, and prompting and giving cues to assist learners to remember the answers. When the teachers used reminder prompts students benefitted and they were pushed forward in their learning with the scaffolding prompts (Earl, 2013). As a result, the feed-forward usually began as soon as mistakes, errors, and misconceptions were identified and the students were very motivated by the teachers' "closing the gap" prompts (Earl, 2013). Hill explains this particular formative assessment which is interactive formative assessment (Bell and Cowie, as cited in Hill 2012), as more immediate and embedded in classroom action. As a result, this often takes place while the classroom activity progresses and this particular process relies on the teachers recognizing the significance of the information and then responding appropriately to support the students to address their learning (Hill 2012). According to Earl (2013) errors are the window into students' learning and

when teachers recognize students' incomplete understandings, false beliefs, misconceptions, and naïve interpretations of concepts, they provide teachers' clues for generating conditions for learning.

When the participant teachers took action and adjusted students' learning, it would have benefitted the learners more if the teachers had been more open minded about the learners' responses. For instance, I noticed that there were learners who shared information beyond their ability levels. However, the teachers were not looking for advanced knowledge and the students' answers were rejected, ignored and turned down without being acknowledged or appreciated. This particular behaviour of teachers reflects an assertion from Torrance and Pryor's (1998) study, in which they pointed out that "a situation where pupils are only guessing at what the teacher wants to hear is unhelpful" (p. 107). The negative impact of this might be that during the process of learning, the students might think they are not allowed to give a range of possible answers because the purpose of the teachers' exercise is to work out - or guess - what answer they expect to see or hear (Black & Wiliam, 1998b).

In such circumstances, the learning task becomes more difficult for these young learners and they may believe that they have no ability to learn or that they are not very good in a particular curriculum area (Hill, 2012). If such

behaviours from teachers continued and they concentrated on getting the right ‘book answers’, the students could feel constrained in participating in lessons and this would likely affect their future contributions in lessons. Hill (2012) recommends conversations to be dialogic in the classroom so that the teacher’s voice becomes one voice among many. As a result, in that kind of learning environment questions are encouraged and students are supported to share their developing ideas with the teacher and other students.

Clarke (2008) also points out that in order to create a positive learning environment students should feel safe to speak out and they should be treated with respect in classroom. Furthermore, Clarke advises teachers not to leave students with misconceptions and to deal with students in a ‘grown-up’ way’, as if running a staff meeting. In the same way, Clarke (2008) suggests following strategies for teachers:

- Opening it up: Include the words ‘do you think’ in any question (e.g. How do you think an aeroplane stays up in the sky?) so that a response becomes an opinion rather than a wrong answer.
- Transfer: Say ‘That was the answer to another question I was going to ask!’

- Gathering: Does anyone agree? Disagree? Have a different opinion?
- Stalling: I think you might want to come back to that idea a little later....
- Returning to the same pupil: Do you want to say something different now? I think I know where you were coming from before. You were put off/misled by the... (p. 63)

In this study, Fazla, Asma and Nahula also tried and used their own methods to stimulate and challenge the learning experiences of the students by adapting different formative assessment practices in their classroom similar to Clarke's suggestions. However, I recommend teachers to make students feel more comfortable when debating and defending their viewpoints and as I felt sometimes the teachers were firm with their students. McMillan (2010) also asserts that the practice of incorporating the feedback of others and sharing ideas openly with one another as a valuable high-level formative assessment practice. Thus, Joyce (2007) also advises teachers to keep an open mind about the learners' responses and to remember that talking to students always provides additional evidence in finding the next step in helping them to learn. In the same way, Black & Wiliam (1998b) also note the importance of class discussions in which pupils are led to talk about

their understanding in their own ways.

Of the three teachers, I recognized that Fazla and Asma were very experienced and were already incorporating formative assessment procedures not only in their lessons but also had implemented some policies (school-wide documents). As such, Nahula also reported that she had received guidance in formative assessment practices through professional development workshops. In Asma's school, to help students and parents recognize teachers' expectations and the prospect of learning the intended curriculum, the school had well-planned targets (school-wide documents) that included rubrics set up for their students. These systematically arranged rubrics, used to identify each student's achievement levels, such as the progress they achieved in numeracy and literacy during the term.

In addition, I identified these rubrics were simple, straightforward, and easier to manage. According to Greenstein (2010) rubrics and formative assessment perform some of the same functions as such, when rubrics are used in a formative classroom, rubrics help teachers monitor learning and instruction by providing meaningful feedback to students. Asma also handled them separately from routine assessment information, as these documents were part of school's own culture separated from the regular reporting system proposed by the MOE. According to Asma, the parents were also not

interested in these documents which included narrative and descriptive feedback for the young learners. As mentioned before, parents concern was for the marked test/assessment papers and their results written neatly in checklists.

In Fazla's case, regular weekly meetings kept the parents of her students happy and satisfied with important information incorporating learning intentions/goals, targets and assessment criteria for upcoming weeks. The importance of sharing of learning intentions/goals and setting learning criteria has been emphasised by Clarke (2001) and highlighted by Black and Wiliam (2009). Harris (2007) has also explored the advantages of students setting their own targets and how this was effective for them in taking more responsibility for their own learning. Indeed, "a simple chart of curriculum objectives on the classroom wall can be useful for students as they are working, as well as regular statements of the intent of the learning throughout a lesson or a unit" (Earl, 2013, p. 90).

Although I had not observed such charts described by Earl, this learning process of setting targets learning criteria happened in various other forms. As such, some of the targets set by the teachers included the students to read and write using simple words and sentences. In this way, some schools had policies to make the target group or grade/level students to acquire certain

standards before they transferred to the next grade/level. Although, I noticed these targets were the minimum requirements of the certain grade/level the students benefitted, particularly the low achievers. This particular requirement was a necessity in this school and became important targets to achieve before the end of the year. However, Earl (2013) notes how these curriculum standards have limitations in not providing a sense of how the students should go about the learning process.

Literature shows that when learners are involved in learning experiences such as self/peer/group activities, they are involved in the process of assessment for learning. Knowing that, Clarke (2008) states that when students are involved in peer-assessment, it provides them valuable opportunities to give feedback to each other. In a recent study, Laud (2011) suggested some valuable practices of self and peer-assessment for mathematics students. She recommended making Mathematics learners self-assess the accuracy of their work with answer keys, to make them re-solve the problems, so that they get the same answer the second time, to let them do the inverse of operations and to work out the solutions back into problems. This study evidently showed the learners were encouraged to participate in such learning activities set by their teachers, and furthermore the schools established and incorporated such learning experiences in their

schemes of work as well.

Primary teachers' in the process of formative assessment

This study represents how three Maldivian primary teachers' practiced formative assessment in their classrooms. It is also noted how some of these formative assessment practices were incidental and ongoing in nature, occurring naturally during teaching and learning. Mostly, these incidents happened as these teachers were very experienced and their intentions included making their students learn and achieve learning objectives one way or another. When Greenstein (2010) discusses formative assessment, she also has the understanding that there is no single principle that makes assessment formative. Further, she believes it is through the weaving together of all the principles that high-quality formative assessment arises. One consistent finding is that the formative assessment occurs by blending assessment and teaching.

According to Wiliam (2011a) "teachers have a crucial role to play in designing the situations in which learning takes place, but only learners create learning" (158). Hall and Burke (2004) also agree assessment is something that is done to students in a classroom rather than done with them. As noted previously, the teachers were not fully trained in the use of formative assessment practices and they lacked clear understanding of the

procedures recommended by Clarke (1998, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008) or by Black, Wiliam and associates in their research (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Black et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 2003, 2009; Wiliam, 2011a, 2011b). However, Asma, Fazla and Nahula employed strategies and created opportunities to help assist their students in the assessment for learning process. Several of these practices had already existed and were part of their teaching and learning culture. This was similar to the study by McNaughton (2011) who found that her case study teacher already had existing formative assessment strategies in practice even before she had received formal training in the use of formative assessment.

One technique that teachers used was helping low-achieving students to become successful in their learning. Even though the teachers planned their lessons generically for all students, they all had special plans and ideas for the low-achievers, providing them with further guidance, and differentiated learning instructions. In this way, all the three teachers were aware that their classes were made of students with different needs, backgrounds, and skills. Mostly, due to the assessment pressure (Chapter 5) the teachers found ways to create a wide range of learning options and paths for these various ability learners. In fact, the three teachers wanted all students to have the opportunity to learn as much as they could and also to make them learn

deeply and efficiently (Earl, 2013). As a result, the methods with which the teachers handled these students had similarities and differences.

Asma purposely kept her ability level learners segregated, while Fazla and Nahula did not segregate the low-achievers in their classes. Regardless, these teachers' main goal was to assist these low-achievers in raising their standards up to the intended curriculum level, particularly in numeracy and literacy. A further similarity was all three teachers conducted remedial classes for these learners modifying their teaching and learning process to suit the students' needs. This use of additional time helped the teachers identify individual students who were struggling with particular concepts or applications and provided the opportunity to respond with personalized feedback, assistance, and redirection to get the student learning back on track. As Greenstein (2010) advises teachers:

If assessment data gathered during instruction indicate that all students understand the material, you might skip a planned explanation, or activity and move directly to the next topic; if more are lost or struggling, you can slow down, providing additional practice or skills-based drills, perhaps, or allowing more time for questions and clarification. (p.90)

Even though the teachers planned activities to assist learners who had

difficulties, I understood it was not possible for them to follow Greenstein's suggestions fully, as the schools had implemented many rules and formalities in their assessment policies. The teachers had to follow the set schemes of work and continue with the next topic leaving those lower-achievers with their struggles unresolved. Another important aspect of learning that I noticed was the guidance and assistance provided through "revision" before any formal assessment. During the process of revision, teachers mostly used printed papers similar to the formal assessment paper or sometimes, oral activities such as quizzes or "practice" activities. After the completion of these particular revision exercises, the teachers also gave extra time, usually two to three days, for the students to have additional practices for the formal assessment.

Gipps (1994) argues that it is wrong to teach to the test. Gipps explains that learning the answer to a set of questions is not the same as coming to understand whatever the skill or concepts are that the questions represent. For instance, if there is too close a match between teaching materials and the test itself teachers may not be able to gauge whether the key constructs and understanding are being assessed. While the revision process continued in the three classrooms, the teachers marked students' work and provided feedback orally and in written form such as providing correct answers. Hill

(2012) argues “if teachers simply mark the work, decide whether or not it has met a standard, or give a grade (evaluative feedback) and move on to the next topic, there is no opportunity for improvement” (p.170).

As such, Irons (2008) pointed out that if feedback is given to the students constructively and openly it can give them the confidence to ask questions, to discuss their work and find out more about their subject as well as clarify any errors or misconceptions they might have. Fazla, Asma and Nahula believed the students and even the parents of the young learners in the study took notice when they gave directions with feedback and feed forward. For instance, the parents supported the young learners by trying to follow the teachers’ guidelines and further improved the standard of their children at home possibly with private tutors as well. However, Fazla and Heena thought these revision practices were not of much use to the six year olds in grade 1 classes and believed the revision time wasted these young learners’ precious time in studying something that they had already learned for more than a week. Instead of undertaking that process, they both believed in making the students learn innovative ideas or continue with the next topic in the curriculum.

I realized feedback and feed forward occurred often many times and in different forms in all three classes. From the start of the lessons till the end,

there were many processes of feedback and feed forward. One process that I frequently observed was when the teachers' used questioning in their lessons. I saw the teachers correcting the students' answers, by providing suggestions, sometimes adding missing points, and encouraging them to make ongoing progress. Fisher and Frey (2007) noted feedback that includes praise is something that has to be offered to students. For instance, it may include assertion of a correct response or elaboration on an incomplete answer. While the learning activities continued, teachers circulated helping the learners and encouraging them to complete their work. According to Earl (2013), the teacher's responsibility is to provide current, accurate, and focussed feedback, with examples and reasonable directions for the students to keep their learning to progress. In this way, feedback will allow the students to see the gap between their actual production and some reference point that makes sense to them.

As previously mentioned, learning was monitored with feedback, and feed forward during the revision sessions. There was also evidence of teachers giving various types of rewards, marks, and grades as feedback. However, Black et al. (2003) argues that feedback given as rewards or grades generally enhances ego of the students rather than task involvement. A negative consequence that might result from this is that it can lead students to

compare themselves with others and focus on their image and status rather than encouraging the students to think about the work itself and how they can improve it. Another feedback process involved teachers meeting with the parents on a regular basis to share and discuss their findings of their children. This process was intentional and used by some teachers to make parents aware of the help needed at home, such that parents also could assist their children to learn.

According to Hall and Burke (2004) the potential for both learners and their parents to be more actively involved has not yet been fully explored or exploited. Nevertheless, they found more optimism in students' learning when parents and learners were involved in the assessment process together. At the same time, teachers created a favourable condition for their learners by making the classroom learning friendly and conducive. There were various learning evidences displayed in different corners of the classrooms with rewards and acknowledgement. With all the collected evidence of learning the teachers undisputedly had materials to produce portfolios for students. This allowed students to have their progress demonstrated in a more authentic and meaningful manner.

As Hamm and Adams (2009) note portfolios not only capture an authentic portrait of a student's thinking, but can also provide an excellent

conferencing tool for meetings with students, parents, and supervisors. The three schools held student-parent-teacher conferences, and the teachers presented the collected student work and sometimes grades and as feedback in these meetings. Black and Wiliam (1998b) recommended feedback during learning to be in the form of comments rather grades. Wiliam (2011a) in a more recent study discouraged the use of grade stating that “as soon as students get a grade, the learning stops” (p.123). He also believed that if grading stops learning, students should be given them less frequently.

Maldivian teachers also shared collected information about student’s conduct and personality with parents. In addition, schools often conducted activities such as concerts, drama, dances, and celebrate special days to provide additional evidence of students’ learning. During the term breaks, the teachers sent written descriptive documents to parents, which they had produced by analysing the data that they collected from the classroom assessment. Generally, the teachers presented narrative feedback twice a year in the school’s own format. However, I realized, these documents needed to be more detailed than a simple phrase or a sentence. In that way feedback has to be descriptive and explicit. Accordingly descriptive feedback is powerful on student achievement as it provides the students with visible and manageable next steps based on an assessment of the work at hand (Earl,

2013; Hill, 2012). When such feedback is provided for the students, they could have more information in areas that need help and improvement. According to Wiliam (2011a) for feedback to be effective, the most important thing is to direct attention to what's next, rather than focussing on how well or badly the students have done, and this rarely happens in the typical classrooms. In regards to teachers providing advise Black and Wiliam (1998b) state:

The positive aspect of students' being the primary users of the information gleaned from formative assessment is that negative outcomes – such as obsessive focus on competition and the attendant fear of failure on the part of low achievers are not inevitable. What is needed is a culture of success, backed by a belief that all pupils can achieve. (p.142)

Despite professional development efforts focused on training teachers to use best practices in their classroom, studies clearly show that teachers do not always teach in ways that research supports as best practices for student learning. Rather, teachers teach in ways they believe to be best, often ignoring the findings of educational research (Moss & Brookhart, 2009).

Limitations of the study

I have taken care at every stage of data collection to make this study have high quality rigour and trustworthiness. For instance, I followed the steps described in the ethical considerations (Chapter 3). However, there are limitations for this study similar to any other study.

The teachers who nominated themselves from each school, I believe, were the schools' best teachers of that grade and were asked to participate or volunteer in this project by the management. As a result, the project reflected these schools' best teachers' assessment practices, although there was one teacher who had to leave the project due to personal reasons. In this case the particular teacher, who was regarded as one of the best teachers' from that school left in the middle of the project and the school assigned another teacher with less experience.

Other limitations to the study included location and sample size. I was able to conduct this research in urban schools, due to the availability of time and resources allocated for data collection. The urban schools in Male', Maldives was easier and more accessible in terms of travelling as the island (rural) schools are scattered all over the Maldives. For these reasons, I believe if I had more time, I could have involved teachers from rural schools to obtain diverse set of data to have a complete representation of the Maldivian

schools.

In addition, I was only able to observe the three teachers' three lessons and was able to spend one week in each school. During the other available time, I had to get documents and missing information from each school. As a result, I believe three lessons of each teacher is not adequate enough to fully represent the general practice of assessment of the teachers. For example, they all knew I was observing their lessons and these lessons were scheduled and planned well. These lessons could represent the teachers' intentional planning and if I had spent observing more lessons I would have a complete knowledge of their proper teaching and learning processes. I also realized if I had recorded videos of the lessons of the teachers instead of audio-recordings, I could have saved further time. In this regard, during the data analysis the audio-recordings became a nuisance to listen to as they had background noises.

Furthermore, from the letters of consent, my research topic was known to all the teachers. I realized some of them had searched from online resources about formative assessment and some had admitted that they tried to find information. As a result, I believe some teachers' discussed formative assessment with me using this newfound information as opposed to really talking about what they really understood and what they really practiced in

their classrooms.

However, considering all these factors, the triangulation and richness of the data enhanced the project to have valid, trustable, and authentic findings as the implications provided in this project can be applicable to bring changes to assessment practices in the Maldivian primary context.

Areas for further research

With the policies documented by MOE and EDC to conduct formative assessment in schools, it would be appropriate to have professional development sessions in this field. As I have mentioned in the methodology chapter, schools are expected to perform uniformity in assessment procedures and the results are reported to the parents in the official documents (report forms) of MOE. Furthermore, the schools and teachers have limited authority in carrying out their own styles of assessment practices. When the schools have their own authority over assessment procedures, such as practices and reporting format, then, a research on this particular topic would be interesting and directly relevant to policy makers. (As a participant mentioned in Chapter 4, citing the necessity to develop the schools' own reporting formats).

The study represented a small sample of three teachers and they all were

selected from urban schools in Male' Maldives. In the Maldives, majority of the schools are situated in rural areas and many of these schools have limited resources and untrained teachers (Department of National Planning, 2008). In this regard, there are fewer schools in Male' as most of the schools are in rural areas and they might also have limited resources and more untrained teachers. As a result, teachers from rural areas need to be investigated along with their understandings and beliefs on formative assessment. Findings based on both urban and rural schools' formative assessment practices would be a fascinating investigation.

Based on the findings of the study, it is known and acknowledged that the teachers had not been given training in further formative assessment practices. The results of the findings could have changed if teachers knew the differences between formative and summative assessment well. As a result, further research is needed in this regard after proper implementation of formative assessment in Maldivian context. I believe an action research project with different phases of data collection would be more appropriate to consider at the beginning stages of implementation of formative assessment. In this way, there would be abundant time and resources allocated for the project. Different phases of data collection involving the same teachers would show remarkable findings for the policy makers.

Researcher's reflections

I have come to the end of a great and fascinating journey of my life, where I have spent almost three and half years away from home. It has been a wonderful experience in Christchurch, New Zealand that I would cherish all my life. I have learnt many new things, gained innovative ideas, and have had a successful time at the University Canterbury learning and conducting research. Although I came across world-renowned disasters in this country, the experiences of learning diminished all such encounters.

As a result, this study is a significant project that I had the opportunity to handle with utmost interest and care. With this project, my knowledge in the field of educational assessment has peaked giving me confidence to study, assist institutions and to do research in this area in my future projects. For instance, learning about formative assessment made me discover well-known researchers like Professor Paul Black, Dylan Wiliam and many others. In reviewing literature I found out that there are critics and supporters of formative assessment and this had highlighted the consequences that I would come across if I got the opportunity to implement and further formative assessment when working at Maldivian Ministry of Education.

During the whole research process, I have learned theories that are

appropriate for my research project and learning theories that are effective in class assessment. These theories are not something to be comprehended easily and I needed support from my supervisor. As a result, knowing and understanding a theory such as social constructionism, the research process became easier and it strengthened the focus of the investigation. The theory prompted me to listen carefully to the teachers and students classroom conversations as teaching and learning progressed. At the same time, I was able to make sense of what happened in the classrooms between the teachers and the students. The interviews that I conducted with the teachers became more sensible and helped me understand how the teachers regarded assessment/formative assessment.

In particular, the know-how of qualitative research was one of the major and highest learning achievements gained from the University of Canterbury. Dr. Missy Morton's instructions and guidance on this field will be remembered and valued highly. During the process of research journey, she arranged meetings with colleagues (other masters' students) and their supervisors. Due to this, I had learnt data analyzing and qualitative research process from many others as well. Furthermore, the ending of this study awakens a new beginning, confirming that I want to become a researcher.

As a result, the Masters of Education journey at the University of Canterbury

has made me a true academic and taught me knowledge that I would value my whole life. I also know this valuable knowledge will benefit me in my future studies and at my work place at the Maldivian Ministry of Education.

Nevertheless, I regret not being able to collect data from rural schools as in that way the findings would have been richer and more generalisable.

Conclusion

The research project focused on finding out Maldivian primary teachers' understanding and practices of formative assessment in their classrooms. To engage in the research process, a theoretical framework such as social constructionism optimized my ability to accomplish this study. In the same way, symbolic interactionism maximized the understanding of the data, in relation to the teachers' assessment practices and the events that took place in the classrooms. Ultimately, the data became more understandable and the connection to the themes that emerged from data analysis became more natural. Essentially, ethnographic tools such as semi-structured interviews, lesson observations, and selected documents of teachers and students helped to progress the research process well. Eventually, the qualitative case study research provided in-depth understanding of the three teachers' teaching and learning processes.

As Earl (2013) asserts using assessment to guide students in their learning demands a great deal of expertise from teachers. In this way, the teachers constantly apply what they know and how they assist learners in the diversity of their strengths, weaknesses, home background, cultural experiences, developmental stages, and learning styles that exist in the classroom context (Earl, 2013). From such experiences of teachers and students, I was able to make sense of their understanding towards formative assessment. Thus, these close encounters of formative assessment episodes were perceptible from observing them in the teaching and learning process. In fact, when I viewed assessment episodes from a social constructivist perspective, these case study teachers had an important role in developing and arranging contrasts in order to stimulate discussions and thoughts of their students (Adams, 2006).

Fortunately, the semi-structured interviews became functional in discovering the teachers and the Leading Teachers/supervisors understanding of formative assessment. From their conversations, I came to know that they all regarded formative assessment as an activity. Subsequently they provided many sample activities such as group work, pair work, individual work, practical work, oral assessment, and project work. To support these findings, the schools' documents, schemes of work and students' work revealed the evidence. From the participants' conversations, it was evident that they were

confused about formative assessment. Nevertheless, many instances of research showed this similar issue and other concerns on formative assessment existing in various other education systems (Bennett, 2011 ; Noyce, 2011; Perrenoud, 1998; Popham, 2010; Tan, 2011; Taras, 2007).

The three schools embarked on the teaching and learning process while all the three teachers separated assessment from their pedagogical instructions. This collected assessment data (in various files and folders) was valued significantly by the students, parents, and teachers. At the same time, there were strict rules and regulations for assessment procedures and students did written assessment papers on scheduled dates. When the schools and teachers put into practice such firm rules for assessment processes, parents of these learners became worried over marks. Astonishingly, appreciation for marks was widespread among these three school's community. When the students succeeded or failed in these schools, their performance was reflected in statistics or in grades. Consequently, the whole process of learning in the schools became a competition among students, teachers, and parents.

Nonetheless, there was also evidence of close encounters of formative assessment episodes occurring in the three classrooms. Being experienced teachers, they had knowledge and it was a significant factor for them to

move their learning forward with formative assessment. These findings represented normal day-to-day happenings in the three classrooms and demonstrated formative assessment in action at the initial stages of dissemination in three Maldivian schools. The assessment for learning practices led the learners to encounter positive learning experiences that helped assist and contribute to their on-going learning with guided feedback and feed-forward. Nevertheless, there were incidents where the teachers obstructed students from becoming autonomous learners. While this happened it was observed that learners benefitted more when they had the freedom to share information, discuss what they were learning, and had the chance to participate in such activities without any obstructions and hesitations from the teachers.

The data showed the case study schools were endeavouring to implement formative assessment and this is benefiting the learning experience for Maldivian students. Given more time, ongoing professional development and support enhancement of formative assessment practice by Maldivian teachers in the lower primary school grades 1, 2 and 3 should be achievable. In part, this could be achieved through pre-service and in-service developmental programmes including a greater emphasis in policy directions by MOE to promote the inclusion of formative assessment in the lower primary school

grade levels.

The focus of the study was to identify formative assessment practices happening intentionally or unintentionally in Maldivian primary classes and to consider future developmental needs. In each of the three case study participant's classrooms evidence of formative assessment in action was observed albeit at the initial implementation stages, and the potential benefits such practices can offer the learners were noted. However, as evident in the discussion sections, the need exists for future teacher professional development training to develop greater teacher understanding and proficiency in the use of assessment. The implementation process would also benefit from a reduction in the numerous formalities and regulations that exist around current assessment practices, that if allowed to continue could act as potential blockers to assessment for learning. To successfully implement the curriculum and assessment reform policies desired in Maldivian junior primary school education system, it needs professional development opportunities involving ongoing support and guidance.

Popham (2010), a strong advocate of formative assessment greatly acknowledges the benefits of utilising a 'formative assessment starter kit' in schools to assist the implementation process. Based on personal experiences he believes such kits greatly help teachers to develop inherent efficacy in the

use of formative assessment strategies in their classrooms. In addition, Popham (2010) advises policy makers to avoid making the formative assessment implementation process overly complex for teachers. He writes “If a teacher is on the fence about using formative assessment, then any perception that it is too complicated will surely dissuade the would-be user from hopping aboard the formative assessment bandwagon” (p.185). He also acknowledges the importance of keeping teachers’ thoughts and attitudes towards the use of formative assessment processes positive. The Direction for Assessment in New Zealand (DANZ) project (Flockton, 2012) provides a valuable model in this regard for Maldivian policy makers to consult. In this way, Hill (see 2012, pp. 160-181) explains the methods of assessment for learning and teaching, and summarises the assessment of learning and reporting. This brief chapter also “sets out why using classroom assessment for learning is critically important in schooling” and provides some suggestions for educators to reflect on assessment practices with further guidance (Hill, 2012, p.180). In the same way, Brookhart (2010), Clarke (1998, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008) Davies and Hill (2009), Frey and Fisher (2011), Greenstein (2010), Hamm and Adams (2009), and Wiliam (2011a) have also made formative assessment practices easier for teachers.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Project information for access and participation to the Ministry of Education

niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz Phone no: +64 (New Zealand), +960..... (Maldives)



Title of the Research Project: Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom

Director
Ministry of Education, Maldives
7th September 2011

Dear Madam/Sir

My name is Niuma Mohamed. I am a student at the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Masters of Education. In the past, I have worked as a teacher/ supervisor in a primary school and at the Ministry of Education (Maldives) as an Educational Supervisor in ESQID (Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division). I am undertaking a thesis that explores assessment in primary school in the Maldives.

My area of interest is in classroom assessment and the focus of this study is formative assessment or assessment for learning. My research question is, **'How do primary teachers in the Maldives understand and practice formative assessment in the classroom?'**

The aim of the study is to find out how primary teachers understand and practice formative assessment in the classroom. In order to find answers to the question, I plan to interview, observe lessons, and study students / teachers documents. I will try to study when and how teachers use formative assessment (assessment for learning) and what types of assessments are used. The main focus will be given on teachers' planning of formative assessment, sharing learning intentions, questioning, peer-self assessment, target setting, and feedback (oral and written) used in the classroom.

In order to access the school sites I need consent from MOE. I would also like MOE to nominate about six/eight primary schools so that I can identify three schools willing to participate in this study. In addition, I want you to select primary schools, which have experience in the primary sector for at least seven years.

I assure you that the confidentiality of teachers will be maintained at the highest level and, as a substitution for their names and schools, pseudonyms will be used in the final report. Transcripts of interviews and lesson observations will be available for the teachers and HODs to comment on to strengthen the validity in order to reflect on them accurately. The final

dissertation will be submitted for assessment for the Masters of Education from The University of Canterbury and can be accessible from the university library. I will be happy to provide a copy of the completed dissertation for the MOE library in the future. Findings might be used for publications and conference presentations. All data will be stored safely in a locked cabinet in the Maldives and will be destroyed after five years.

If you have any questions, or you would like to have a more detailed description of the study, please do not hesitate to email or phone using the contact details below. I have included the University of Canterbury contact for any inquiries regarding ethical concerns. In addition, the contact details of my supervisors and the Masters co-ordinator are included if you desire to contact them concerning the research. The consent form for the MOE (Appendix B) and the project information that I want to give the schools is attached with this letter for your information.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

Niuma Mohamed

Contact details for further information in New Zealand and the Maldives

Niuma Mohamed

....., Riccarton, Christchurch - 8011, New Zealand

Phone no: +64....., skype:,

email: niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz

Flat,, Male' Maldives, Phone no: +960.....

The contact information of my supervisor

Dr. Missy Morton

Principal Lecturer

Coordinator, MEd & MTchLn

School of Educational Studies and Human Development,

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand

Phone: +64....., email: missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz

For any inquiries, regarding ethical concerns please contact:

Chair: **Nicola Surtees**

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC)

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140,

Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz **University of Canterbury** Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. **www.canterbury.ac.nz**

Appendix B: Consent form for the Ministry of Education

niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz/ Phone no: +64 (New Zealand), +960.....
(Maldives)



Title of the Research Project: **Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom**

Researcher: Niuma Mohamed

I have read the project information on behalf of the Ministry of Education and

- I have had opportunity to ask questions and have them answered by the researcher.
- I consent to the teachers and the schools participating in the study with the understanding that the participation of teachers and the school's site access are entirely voluntary.
- I understand that the schools and teachers can withdraw personally at any stage and can withdraw any information that they have contributed up to four weeks after the information was recorded. I agree to the researcher observing in the classrooms of the three schools which are nominated by us, the Maldivian Ministry of Education. The researcher is allowed to take photographs/photocopies of the students' work including any models and exemplars used during the teaching and learning.
- I understand that the classroom observations and follow up interview will be audio taped and transcribed and that names of students/teachers/schools will not be used in any written or oral presentation.
- I understand that everyone's privacy will be respected and that the findings may be used for publication and conference presentations.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept locked and secure in the Maldives and will be destroyed after five years. I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this study if I request and I have provided my email details below for this.

I understand that if the MOE requires further information, the researcher, [Niuma Mohamed] and her supervisor can be contacted. If there is any complaint, the Ministry can contact Nicola Surtees, the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

On behalf of the Ministry of Education, signing below, I give Niuma Mohamed, the permission to conduct research in any three primary schools on the list provided by the school Administration Division, Ministry of Education.

Name:	Email Address:	Phone number:
Signature:		Date:

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. www.canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix C: Project information for access and participation - The Principal of the school

niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz / Phone no: +64 (New Zealand), +960.....(Maldives)

Title of the Research Project: **Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom**



The principal of (Insert school name here)

Male' Maldives

(Date here)

Dear Mr/Ms (insert name here)

My name is Niuma Mohamed. I am a student at the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Masters of Education. In the past, I have worked as a teacher/ supervisor in a primary school and at the Ministry of Education (Maldives) as an Educational Supervisor in ESQID (Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division). I am undertaking a thesis that explores assessment in primary school in the Maldives. Your school was recommended and nominated by the Ministry of as one of the schools most suitable for conducting my research.

My area of interest is in classroom assessment and the focus of this study is formative assessment or assessment for learning. My research question is, **'How do primary teachers in the Maldives understand and practice formative assessment in the classroom?'**

The aim of the study is to find out how primary teachers understand and practice formative assessment in the classroom. In order to find answers to the question, I plan to interview, observe lessons, and study students' and teachers' documents. I will try to study when and how teachers use formative assessment (assessment for learning) and what types of assessments are used. The main focus will be given to teachers' planning of formative assessment, sharing learning intentions, questioning, peer-self assessment, target setting, and feedback (oral and written) used in the classroom.

If you allow me to conduct this study in your school, I would like you to nominate at least three teachers of grades 1, 2 and 3, so that I can select a teacher and an HOD from your school based on the selection criteria. The selection criteria for the teacher and HOD in my study are:

- The teacher/HOD has to be a qualified teacher, who is a graduate with a diploma or bachelors of primary education/ teaching.
- The teacher/HOD has to have at least three years teaching experience.
- Once the teacher is selected, I will spend at least a week in your school and carry out the following procedures with the teacher and HOD.
- Three lessons from three curriculum areas, English language, Mathematics and Environmental Studies will be observed. Simultaneous double periods of seventy minutes will be observed.
- These lessons will be ones that the teacher takes as part of her/his normal classroom programme. I can assure you that neither the teacher's involvement in this project nor my undertaking the observations should in any way disrupt the regular classroom programme.
- Prior to the lesson, I will speak with the children in the class to tell them very simply about the project and what I will be doing in the classroom. During the explanation, I will reinforce that my interest is in what the teacher says and does.
- There will be pre-observation interviews and post- observation interviews to discuss the events leading to formative assessment. In addition, the study requires me to interview an HOD from your school. These interviews will take no more than sixty minutes and will occur at a time and a place convenient for the participants
- After the observation, during the post-observation interview I will seek permission to take photographs/photocopies of student personal work/documents and teachers as they pertain to the questions guiding this research project.
- In order to keep the anonymity of students' personal work (documents), the teachers will collect the documents that I need and the names of the students will be covered before they are proposed to me. Once the anonymous documents have been gathered, I will request the teachers' and schools' permission to copy or take a photograph of the documents for later study.
- Transcripts of interviews and lesson observations will be available for the teachers and HODs to comment on..

If the teacher/HOD agrees to be involved, I would like to audio tape the classroom observations and the interviews. A transcript of each classroom observation and the interviews will be sent to the teacher/HOD as soon as possible after these events so that the teachers can verify that it is an accurate record, or for the teachers to make changes, if they so desire.

I assure you that the confidentiality of your school and the teachers will be maintained at the highest level and all names and forms of identification will be replaced with pseudonyms. While the MOE has nominated a number of schools, I have not told them which school I will

be doing my study in and I will not share any information with the MOE concerning this project about your school or teachers. The final dissertation will be submitted for assessment for the Masters of Education from the University of Canterbury and can be accessible from the university library. Findings might be used for publications and conference presentations. All data will be stored safely in a locked cabinet in the Maldives and will be destroyed after five years.

I would also ask if you would send out an information letter to parents of the children in the selected teacher's class outlining the nature of the research project so that they are aware of what is happening (I have attached the information letter and a consent form – Appendix I and J).

If you have any questions or you would like to have a more detailed description of the study, please do not hesitate to email or phone using the contact details below. I have included the University of Canterbury contact for any inquiries regarding ethical concerns. In addition, the contact details of my supervisors and the Masters co-ordinator are included if you desire to contact them concerning the research. The consent form for your school is attached with this letter for your information

(Appendix D).

I am very aware that school is a busy place and I would like to thank you for considering participating in this project.

Thank you

(sign here)

Yours sincerely

Niuma Mohamed

Contact details for further information in New Zealand and the Maldives

Niuma Mohamed

....., Riccarton, Christchurch - 8011, New Zealand

Phone no: +64..... , skype:

email: niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz

Flat, Male' Maldives, Phone no: +960.....

The contact information of my supervisor

Dr. Missy Morton

Principal Lecturer

Coordinator, MEd & MTchLn

School of Educational Studies and Human Development,

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand

Phone: +64....., email: missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz

For any inquiries, regarding ethical concerns please contact:

Chair: **Nicola Surtees**, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC)

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140,

Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

If you feel it is difficult to contact New Zealand for any inquiries, regarding ethical concerns please contact:

Mr.Ahmed Shafeeu

Director General Policy, Planning & Research Section, Ministry of Education, Male' Maldives

Phone: +960 ,+960 email:shafeeu@moe.gov.mv

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand.
www.canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix D: Consent form for the Principal of the school

niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz Phone no: +64 (New Zealand), +960.....
(Maldives)



Title of the Research Project: **Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom**

Researcher: **Niuma Mohamed**

I have read the project information of this project and

- I have had opportunity to ask questions and have them answered by the researcher.
- I consent to the researcher coming onto the school site to undertake observation and interviews of the teacher and HOD in my school. This permission has been given voluntarily.
- I allow her to take photographs/photocopies of the students work including any models and exemplars used during the teaching and learning.
- I agree to a parent information sheet being sent home to parents informing them of the project.
- I understand that the classroom observations and follow up interview will be audio taped and transcribed and that any name of a student/teacher/school will not be used in any written or oral presentation.
- I understand that everyone's privacy will be respected and that the findings will be used for publication and conference presentations.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked, secure facilities in the Maldives and will be destroyed after five years.
- I understand that the schools and teacher/HOD can withdraw personally at any stage and can withdraw any information that they have contributed up to four weeks after the information was recorded. I agree to the researcher observing in the classrooms of the three schools which are nominated by us, the Maldivian Ministry of Education. The researcher is allowed to take photographic/photocopies of the students' work including any models and exemplars used during the teaching and learning

If I have any complaints, I can contact Mr.Ahmed Shafeeu, Director General Policy, Planning & Research Section, Ministry of Education, Maldives or I can contact Nicola Surtees, the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

By signing below, I agree to allow a teacher and HOD to participate in this research project.

Name: email Address:Phone number:.....

Signature: Date:

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand.
www.canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix E: Project information for access and participation - To the participant/teacher

niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz , Phone no: +64 (New Zealand), +960..... (Maldives)



Title of the Research Project: **Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom**

(School Name)

Maldives

(Date)

Dear (insert teacher's name)

My name is Niuma Mohamed. I am a student at the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Masters of Education. In the past, I have worked as a teacher/ supervisor in a primary school and at the Ministry of Education (Maldives) as an Educational Supervisor in ESQID (Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division). I am undertaking a thesis that explores assessment in primary school in the Maldives.

Your school was recommended and nominated by the Ministry of as one of the schools most suitable for conducting my research. You are receiving this information as the principal has put forward your name as a suitably qualified participant to take part in this study. However, participation in this study is entirely voluntary and cannot take place without your consent. Below here, is an explanation of this project.

My area of interest is in classroom assessment and the focus of this study is formative assessment or assessment for learning. My research question is, '**How do primary teachers in the Maldives understand and practice formative assessment in the classroom?**'

The aim of the study is to find out how primary teachers understand and practice formative assessment in the classroom. In order to find answers to the question, I plan to interview, observe lessons, and study students' and teachers' documents. I will try to study when and how teachers use formative assessment (assessment for learning) and what types of assessments are used. The main focus will be on teachers' planning of formative assessment, sharing learning intentions, questioning, peer-self assessment, target setting, and feedback (oral and written) used in the classroom.

If you agree to participate, I will carry out the following procedures.

- Observe three lessons in three curriculum areas. English language, Mathematics and Environmental Studies will be observed. Simultaneous double periods of seventy minutes will be observed.
- These lessons will be ones that you take as part of your normal classroom programme. I can assure you that neither your involvement in this project nor my undertaking the observations should in any way disrupt the regular classroom programme.
- Prior to the lesson, I will speak with the children in the class to tell them very simply about the project and what I will be doing in the classroom. During the explanation, I will reinforce that my interest is in what the teacher says and does.
- There will be pre-observation interviews and post- observation interviews to discuss the events leading to formative assessment. These interviews will take no more than sixty minutes and will occur at a time and a place convenient for you.
- After the observation, during the post-observation interview I will seek permission to take photographs/photocopies of student personal work/documents and teachers as they pertain to the questions guiding this research project.
- In order to keep the anonymity of students' personal work (documents), you will collect the documents that I need and the names of the students will be covered before they are proposed to me. Once the anonymous documents have been gathered, I will request and schools' permission to copy or take a photograph of the documents for later study.

If you agree to be involved, I will audio tape the classroom observations and the interviews. To audiotape the classroom observations, I would like you to wear a small microphone so that I can hear the conversation between you and students about assessment.

I assure you that the confidentiality will be maintained at the highest level and all names and forms of identification will be replaced with pseudonyms. The final dissertation will be submitted for assessment for the Masters of Education from the University of Canterbury and can be accessible from the university library. Findings might be used for publications and conference presentations. All data will be stored safely in a locked cabinet in the Maldives and will be destroyed after five years. While your school principal and the Ministry of Education have given permission for access to the school site and thus know of your involvement in the study, you will not be recognised as the source of information in any written or oral presentation of the findings.

If you have any questions or you would like to have a more detailed description of the study, please do not hesitate to email or phone using the contact details below. I have included the University of Canterbury and person from the MOE (Maldives) to contact for any inquiries regarding ethical concerns. In addition, the contact details of my supervisors and the Masters co-ordinator are included if you desire to contact them concerning the research. The consent form for you is attached with this letter (Appendix F).

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary. If you do participate you have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw I will do my best to remove any information relating to you provided this is practically achievable. Therefore, you will receive the transcripts of the interviews and observations as soon as possible and any suggestions and changes will be made accordingly. Then the chapters which summarise your involvement will be shared with you and after that I will proceed with writing the dissertation.

I acknowledge that teachers are busy professionals with major responsibilities and activities on daily basis and thank you for considering participating in this project.

Yours sincerely

(sign)

Niuma Mohamed

Contact details for further information in New Zealand and the Maldives

Niuma Mohamed

....., Riccarton, Christchurch - 8011, New Zealand

Phone no: +64....., skype:

email: niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz

Flat, HulhuMale', Male' Maldives, Phone no: +960.....

The contact information of my supervisor

Dr. Missy Morton

Principal Lecturer

Coordinator, MEd & MTchLn

School of Educational Studies and Human Development,

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand

Phone: +64....., email: missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz

For any inquiries, regarding ethical concerns please contact:

Chair: **Nicola Surtees**

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC)

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140,

Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

If you feel it is difficult to contact New Zealand for any inquiries, regarding ethical concerns please contact:

Mr.Ahmed Shafeeu

Director General Policy, Planning & Research Section, Ministry of Education, Male' Maldives

Phone: +960 ,+960 email:shafeeu@moe.gov.mv

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand.
www.canterbury.ac.nz

***Appendix F: Consent form for the principal of the participant/
teacher***



niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz / Phone no: +64 21 2176959 (New Zealand), +96033500833 (Maldives)

Title of the Research Project: **Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom**

Researcher: **Niuma Mohamed**

I have read the project information of this project and

- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered by the researcher.
- I consent to the researcher observing three double lessons of three curriculum areas of English Language, Mathematics and Environmental Studies in my class.
- I will allow the researcher to take photographs/photocopies of the anonymous students' work including any models and exemplars used during the teaching and learning.
- I understand that the classroom observations and follow up interview will be audio taped and transcribed and that any name of a student/teacher/school will not be used in any written or oral presentation.
- I understand that everyone's privacy will be respected in writing about the study findings and that the findings will be used for publication and conference presentations.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked secure facilities in the Maldives and will be destroyed after five years.
- I understand that if I request, the findings relevant to me will be available after the submission of the final dissertation. I have provided my email details below for this.
- I understand that I can withdraw from participation at any stage and can withdraw any information that has contributed up until four weeks from the data collection.

If I have any complaints, I can contact Mr. Ahmed Shafeeu, Director General Policy, Planning & Research Section, Ministry of Education, Maldives or I can contact **Nicola Surtees**, the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: Email address: Phone number:.....

Signature: Date:

Appendix G: Project information for access and participation - To the participant- Supervisor/Leading Teacher)

niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz / Phone no: +64 (New Zealand), +960..... (Maldives)



Title of the Research Project: **Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom**

(School Name)

Maldives

Dear () insert HOD' name

My name is Niuma Mohamed. I am a student at the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Masters of Education. In the past, I have worked as a teacher/ supervisor in a primary school and at the Ministry of Education (Maldives) as an Educational Supervisor in ESQID (Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division). I am undertaking a thesis that explores assessment in primary school in the Maldives.

Your school was recommended and nominated by the Ministry of as one of the schools most suitable for conducting my research. You are receiving this information as the principal has put forwarded your name as one of the best-qualified participant HOD to take part in this study. However, participation in this study is entirely voluntary and cannot take place without your consent. Below here, is an explanation of this project.

My area of interest is in classroom assessment and the focus of this study is formative assessment or assessment for learning. My research question is, '**How do primary teachers in the Maldives understand and practice formative assessment in the classroom?**'

The aim of the study is to find out how primary teachers' understand and practice formative assessment in the classroom. In order to find answers to the question, I plan to interview, observe lessons, and study students / teachers documents. I will try to study when and how teachers use formative assessment (assessment for learning) and what types of assessments are used. The main focus will be given on teachers' planning of formative assessment, sharing

learning intentions, questioning, peer-self assessment, target setting, and feedback (oral and written) used in the classroom.

If you agree to be involved, I would like to audio tape the classroom observations and the interviews with the teachers. I would also like to complete an interview with you. This interview would be audio taped and transcribed.

I assure you that the confidentiality will be maintained at the highest level and all names and forms of identification will be replaced with pseudonyms. The final dissertation will be submitted for assessment for the Masters of Education from the University of Canterbury and can be accessible from the university library. Findings might be used for publications and conference presentations. All data will be stored safely in a locked cabinet in the Maldives and will be destroyed after five years. While your school principal and the Ministry of Education have given permission for access to the school site and thus know of your involvement in the study, you will not be recognised as the source of information in any written or oral presentation of the findings.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary. If you do participate you have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw I will do my best to remove any information relating to you provided this is practically achievable. Therefore, you will receive the transcripts of your interview as soon as possible and any suggestions and changes will be made accordingly. Then the chapters which summarise your involvement will be shared with you and after that I will proceed with writing the dissertation.

If you have any questions or you would like to have more description of the study, please do not hesitate to email or phone using the contact details below. I have included the University of Canterbury contact and the MOE (Maldives) contact for any inquiries regarding ethical concerns. In addition, the information of my supervisors and the Masters co-ordinator are included if you desire to contact them concerning the research.

I acknowledge HOD's are busy professionals with major responsibilities, activities on daily basis and thank you for considering participating in this project. If you like to find further information about the proposed research project, please contact me.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

(sign)

Niuma Mohamed

Contact details for further information in New Zealand and the Maldives

Niuma Mohamed

1/15 Peverel Street, Riccarton, Christchurch - 8011, New Zealand

Phone no: +6433416132 , skype: niuma.mohamed,

email: niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz

Flat,, Male' Maldives, Phone no: +960.....

The contact information of my supervisor

Dr. Missy Morton

Principal Lecturer

Coordinator, MEd & MTchLn

School of Educational Studies and Human Development,

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand

Phone: +64....., email: missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz

For any inquiries, regarding ethical concerns please contact:

Chair: **Nicola Surtees**

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC)

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140,

Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

If you feel it is difficult to contact New Zealand for any inquiries, regarding ethical concerns please contact:

Mr.Ahmed Shafeeu

Director General Policy, Planning & Research Section, Ministry of Education, Male' Maldives

Phone: +960 ,+960 email: shafeeu@moe.gov.mv

Appendix H: Consent form for the participant- Supervisor/ Leading

Teacher

niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz Phone no: +64 (New Zealand), +960..... (Maldives)



Title of the Research Project: **Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom**

Researcher: **Niuma Mohamed**

I have read the project information of this project and

- I have had opportunity to ask questions and have them answered by the researcher.
- I agree to let the researcher interview me as a participant.
- I understand that the interview being audio taped and transcribed and that any name of a student/teacher/school will not be used in any written or oral presentation.
- I understand that everyone's privacy will be respected and that the findings will be used for publication and conference presentations.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked secure facilities in the Maldives and will be destroyed after five years.
- I understand that if I request, the findings relevant to me will be available after the submission of the final dissertation. I have provided my email details below for this.
- I understand I can withdraw personally at any stage and can withdraw any information that has been contributed up until four weeks from the data collection.

If I have any complaints, I can contact Mr.Ahmed Shafeeu, Director General Policy, Planning & Research Section, Ministry of Education, Maldives or I can contact **Nicola Surtees**, the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: Email address:Phone number:.....

Signature: Date:

Appendix I: Project information for parents

niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz/ Phone no: +64 (New Zealand), +960.....
(Maldives)



Title of the Research Project: **Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom**

Dear Parents,

My name is Niuma Mohamed and I am currently undertaking a Masters of Education at The University of Canterbury, New Zealand. In the past, I have worked as a primary teacher / supervisor and worked at the Ministry of Education (Male', Maldives) as an educational supervisor in ESQID (Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division).

At present, I am pursuing a Masters Degree in Education and therefore, I would like to inform you about a research project I am currently undertaking and to explain your child's teacher's participation in the project.

The area of interest is in classroom assessment and the focus of this study is formative assessment or assessment for learning. My research question is, '**How do primary teachers in the Maldives understand and practice formative assessment in the classroom?**'

To search for the answers to the question, I plan to interview, observe lessons, and study students' and teachers' documents. I will try to understand when and how teachers use formative assessment (assessment for learning) and what types of assessments are used. Focus will be given to the planning and use of formative assessment in the classroom.

To gain answers to these questions I need to observe in teachers' classrooms. Your child's teacher has very kindly agreed to take part in this study. I will be observing in your child's class on three different occasions over a one-week period. Each observation will take about seventy minutes. The focus of my observations is on teachers' formative assessment practices as it naturally occurs within the context of their daily interactions with children. The lessons that I will observe will be ones that the teacher takes as part of her normal classroom programme. I can assure you that the teacher's involvement in the project or my undertaking the classroom observations will not disrupt the regular classroom programme in any way.

To help me to describe all of the detail of a lesson, I will be taking notes and will audio record the lesson. Then I will transcribe the recording. The teacher will receive the recording when the lesson has been transcribed and she/ will destroy it. Prior to the observations beginning, I will speak with the children in the class to explain the project and what I will be doing in the

classroom. During the explanation, I will reinforce that my interest is in what the teacher says and does.

However, I will need to study some students' schoolwork/ project. In order to keep the anonymity of personal students' work (documents), teacher will collect the documents that I need and the names of the students will be covered/ protected. Once the anonymous documents are gathered, I will request permission to copy or take a photograph of the documents for later study. If you agree your child's schoolwork / documents to be included in this research, please sign the consent form attached (Appendix J).

If you need more information, you can contact me, the school principal, or the class teacher to find information about the project.

Yours sincerely

Thank you

Yours sincerely

Niuma Mohamed

Contact details for further information in New Zealand and the Maldives

Niuma Mohamed

1/15 Peverel Street, Riccarton, Christchurch - 8011, New Zealand

Phone no: +64....., skype:,

email: niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz

....., Male' Maldives, Phone no: +960.....

The contact information of my two supervisors and acting co-ordinator of the Masters programme :

Dr. Missy Morton

Principal Lecturer

Coordinator, MEd & MTchLn

School of Educational Studies and Human Development,

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand

Phone: +64....., email: missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz

Dr. John Everatt

Acting Masters Co-ordinator,

Deputy Head of school, School of Literacies and Arts in Education

College of Education, University of Canterbury, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand

Fax: +64, email: john.everatt@canterbury.ac.nz

For any inquiries, regarding ethical concerns please contact:

Chair: **Nicola Surtees**

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC)

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140,

Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

If you feel it is difficult to contact New Zealand for any inquiries, regarding ethical concerns please contact:

Mr.Ahmed Shafeeu

Director General Policy, Planning & Research Section

Ministry of Education, Male' Maldives

Phone: +960....., +960 email:shafeeu@moe.gov.mv

The School principal's details and the class teachers detail will be pasted/written here

Appendix J: Consent form for parents

niuma.mohamed@p.g.canterbury.ac.nz

Phone no: +64 (New Zealand), +960..... (Maldives)



Title of the Research Project: **Maldivian primary school teachers understanding and practices of formative assessment in the classroom**

Researcher: **Niuma Mohamed**

I have read and understood the project information given to me about the research project and what my child's school work/documents will be used for.

I understand no findings that could identify my child or school will be published

I understand participating in this study is voluntary and I can ask the teacher at any time not to let my child's school work / documents to be used in this study.

By signing below, I give permission to use my child's school work/documents to be used in this project.

Name: Signature: Date:

Appendix K: lesson observation information sheet

Name of the teacher: _____
Subject: _____
Grade: _____
Class: _____
Duration: _____
School: _____
No of students () Girls () Boys ()
Date: _____

Topic: _____
Objectives of the lesson:

Resources used in the lesson: Lesson introduction: Time taken

Main activities of the lesson: Time taken

Evidence of formative assessment in the lesson:

Sharing of learning goals by teacher/ students

Questions asked: individual / group / wait time

Feedback (oral / written)

Self-peer evaluation

Any other evidence of formative assessment:

Conclusion of the lesson:

Reflections on the lesson by the researcher:

Appendix L: A guideline for pre-lesson observation interview and post-lesson observation interview

Semi – Structured Interview Questions

At the start of the first interview ask about teaching background and experience

Pre-Observation Lesson plan Interview

Probe questions like

Which curriculum area.....How long is the lesson.... ? Show me the lesson plan; if possible, Can I have a copy for later study.....?

How did you plan the activities....., Why? The lesson objectives..... Do you think it is.....

How do you understand and plan the FA (formative assessment)procedure
Why/ tell me more..... Can you give me an example of an FA practice that you will have in the lesson..... Do you have students that you may have to give extra attention.....? According to their ability levels? Did you plan various activities.....?

How did you plan activities for them..... Why ? What strategies will you use with those students?..... Note: More questions will be asked according to the teachers answer.

Post lesson observation Interview

Probe questions such as...How did the lesson go...? Were you satisfied with the lesson? Why? Tell me more..... During Pre-interview , I asked about FA practices.... How did you learn about FA? From Where?

I saw you doing.....? Why did you.....? During the lesson, were you able to relate concepts of FA? Give some examples..... How do you do FA? What strategies do you use? Do you any problems with FA practices What are the questions that you have about FA?

How do inform parents about students learning? Why.....How do you make those summative judgments....about students learning What are your best when you do FA... Why? Tell me more.....

Do you get professional help to continue FA..? From.....? Do you think it is useful? What do you suggest? Do you keep record of students learning, how..... show me...Why do you keep those records? How do you differentiate the students learning? What help do you provide those students?

How do you think students responded to the activities in the lesson? Were they involved? Why Is there anything that you would like to share with me...

What do you want to know/learn about FA in the future?

Note: During the interview, ask and probe questions related to activities happened in the observed lesson, specially, FA practices, such as self-peer learning, questioning strategies used, why the teacher used them, how is the learning intentions used, why it was used.

If any activity relating to FA is used, researcher can ask questions related to those activities...and probe

Why certain students were given extra help or different materials? Talk about the student/teacher documents used by the teacher. How did she handle comments/ feed back... Why.....

Appendix M: A Guideline for semi-structured interview with Leading Teachers/Supervisors

Tell me about yourself a little bit..... regarding your teacher training and becoming HOD

What are your responsibilities?

From where did you hear and learn about FA and how do, you understand the term formative assessment?

Can you tell me some good ways that teachers can use FA? For example.....

What are the questions that you have about FA?

How do you, as a school HOD / manger would like to see teachers use of formative practices? Why? Tell me more....How do you monitor the teachers' use of FA practices? What are the changes that have been occurred since the use of FA... in teaching and learning.... Can teachers differentiate students' abilities with the use of FA?

How much do the teachers communicate with parents?How do you organize student-parent-teacher conferences? How often.....

What do the parents think of the feedback , that they receive during term

breaks...How do the teachers make those summative judgments ?

What kind of plans and activities have been planned to make good use of FA? Why.. Do you have plans to conduct in-service programs? Have you conducted based on FA practices?What is the teachers' reaction to having FA practices in the school?What do you want to know more about FA practices? Note:More questions will be asked based on the answers

Appendix N: A day in the life of an eight-year-old boy

Hassan is an eight-year-old boy who studies in a big and famous primary school in the Maldives. The school is well - known for its academic, sports, and other achievement nationally. Around 2000 students study in the school, while approximately 100 teachers, 30 office staff and 30 other workers work at the school. The school has two sessions, the first session starts at 6.45 am in the morning till 12 pm at noon. The second session is from 1.00 pm till 5.30 pm.

Hassan is the only child of Aisha, a 30-year-old divorcee. His father is a married man who has moved on with his life. Hassan gets the full support and love from both his parents, who want the best for their child. Both Hassan and his mother live on an island called Villingilli. Villingilli is considered as a suburb of the capital city, Male. Ferries from Villingilli take people to and from the capital city regularly. The ferries depart from the island every five minutes; therefore, it is a very convenient and easy way to travel between the islands.

Hassan's parents started asking around which school would be the best for their six-year-old son. The teachers in the above-mentioned school were known best for being very hard working, and the school was also famous for bringing the best results from national diagnostic examinations, therefore their friends suggested that school to be the best choice. When Hassan's mother filled out the form that was to be sent to the Ministry of Education, she had to put Hassan's name under an address of another house in order to enrol her child in that school. Hassan goes to this school in the capital city even though there is a primary school in their suburb. All the primary schools are government schools; teach the same curriculum. The Ministry of Education enrolls the teachers themselves and sends them to schools all over the country.

Aisha works at Dhiraagu, a telephone company from eight in the morning to four in the evening. She also works overtime every day, as she needs income to send Hassan to various tutors. As a result, Aisha ends up spending 10 -12 hours working at the office. As means of transport, she used to walk or take taxis, taking Hassan to and from school. In the end, she learnt how to drive a motorbike, as the other alternatives were difficult and time consuming, and to make it easier for her to transport Hassan to and from school and his tuition classes as well as go to her work office. Hassan goes to school in the second session, also known as the afternoon session. Every day, he has to get ready by 6.00 in the morning, as he lives in Villingilli, to go to Male, with his mother. Unlike many other students in his class, he has to pack four bags instead of one or two. One for his school books, one for his clothes, another small bag with food for his interval break and the remaining one for his various tuitions.

Early in the morning after doing his morning prayers, he starts the day as an energetic and fresh young boy, and takes breakfast with his mother. All of these tasks have to be done in a hurry and Aisha gets frustrated and angry if Hassan gets things done slowly. She yells at him trying to make him realise all the things she has to do by herself every day. Naturally, Aisha has issues with Hassan's father and often has a tendency of talking negatively about him in front of Hassan. Unlike his mother, he loves his father dearly, so this does not make him happy. They quickly run to the ferryboat as in the early morning the ferries get quite full, and they cannot be late in order to get a space on the vessel. As this time in the morning is a peak hour,

there are plenty of ferries to take passengers to the capital island. For ten minutes, they relax on the ferryboat, enjoying the cool breeze, and observing other people on the ferry. Although Aisha has been living in Villingilli for about ten years; Hassan has lived there his whole life. He has many friends in the island with whom he goes to mosque and riding bikes in the island. The island has few vehicles and many of the big vehicles are not allowed, so children could play and ride bicycles freely on the road and parks in the island.

In the ferry he sees his friend Hassan and he said “Hi, Hassan, are you playing soccer, this Friday?” His friend said, “Oh Hassan! We waited for you last Friday but you never showed up” Hassan said, “Too bad, I had to study for a test. I wanted to play but you know my mom she never allowed me to go, I think I can join you guys this weekend.” Ten minutes talking with his friend, Hassan and his mother also enjoyed the cool breeze fresh from the sea; they reach Male, the busiest city in the country, where one third of the entire population lives. Aisha scans the parking lot for her motorbike holding the bags. Hassan also carries his school bag filled with books and the bag with his food for morning tea. Hassan has to attend Qur’an class from 8 to 9 in the morning as his school starts in the afternoon. His mother drops him off at the Qur’an tuition class, Noorul Qur’an.. He recites and learns the holy book here with a Qa-aree (A qualified person to recite holy book). When he finishes this class, his father comes to pick him up, and drops him off at his aunt’s house. Even though by this time Aisha is busy at work, she makes sure that Hassan is picked up from Qur’an class on time by reminding his father. Hassan then starts to complete all the homework. He has two pages of addition numbers from his Maths Work book, a worksheet in English language on grammar, an Islam lesson to memorize and read to the teacher. This is the second week since his Islam teacher has given it to study. It is an assessment, which will add to the final grade of that subject. It is an essential part of the daily prayer, which is compulsory for Hassan to learn. He should spend about half an hour learning it. Hassan thinks and says to himself, “Why does teachers give us so much work to complete at home?” After that, his aunt gives him a snack as he begins the next homework. Aisha then calls Hassan to check if he is doing his work, as she has already checked his books the previous night to find out what he has done at school. That is something, which she does regularly.

During this time, his cousin who has finished secondary school recently invites him to play a video game with him but he refuses, thinking of all the homework he has to do. He says to his cousin brother, “Sorry bro, too much homework, may be tomorrow.” He could also think of his mother’s frustration if he does not complete the homework. Without a doubt, the class teacher will complain about him to his mother at the end of the day, after school. Therefore, he starts doing the work given in his Maths Work book, finishes the work quickly, and begins his English grammar work. When he checks the clock, it is almost 11.30 am in the morning. He gets himself ready to go to school, as his father will come to pick him up at 12.45 pm. He takes lunch from his aunt’s house, and wears his school uniform. His father comes at 12.45 pm to fetch him to go to school and he rides to school in his father’s motorbike. He enters the school gate at about 12.50, as children do not have the permission to come to school very early. Children are always advised to come by 12.45 pm, but not earlier than that, as teachers who teach during the second session sign in by 12.45 pm. If children come early to school, it becomes a problem for the school management. The children cannot stay at school without supervision, as they are very young and the school is a big four-storey building.

Carrying his bags until the bell rings, Hassan stands in the schoolyard with all the other children. As soon as the bell rings, everyone runs upstairs to get to the classes. . When he reaches his class on the second floor, he realises that his teacher has not arrived yet. Happily,

he joins his friends who gather around to talk, or run around the classroom. As soon as they see that their teacher coming, they become quiet and walk to their assigned desks. Most of the girls remain quiet and do something like reading a book. He sees some children reading the displayed work of others. Some boys also stay quiet; however, Hassan is not one of them. He is among the boys who cannot be trusted by the teacher.

The teacher quickly scolds them and tells them to do something quietly like reading. Eventually, the second bell goes off, indicating that it is time for assembly. All the students get up in silence, and the principal greets them from the microphone. When all the children greet the principal back, he starts giving some advice on making their time useful in class and at home. As soon as he finishes, the supervisor asks them to begin the day. She says, "You may start your work." Those are words they all hear every day. During the first 15 minutes, the children read storybooks. The teacher also joins them by reading a book. They all have a book, which they either have to bring from home or the library.

The bell rings for the first period, English, to begin. The teacher asks all the children if they completed their homework. Some children who said no, came up with excuses like "Teacher, I forgot". After scolding them for forgetting, the teacher notes down their name in a particular book. The teacher collects all the sheets from the students that have finished their homework, including Hassan. She then starts on the continuation of the previous grammar lesson, and tells them that there will be a reading comprehension sheet as homework. After asking them to inform their parents about the test, she gives them a slip with all the unit tests of the year written on it. She tells them to write the date of the unit test next to the topic "Reading comprehension". After doing as he is told, Hassan thinks to himself, "I will have to tell my tuition tutor tonight."

When the bell rings for the second period to start, the Islam teacher walks into the class. The children greet her and they greet her back. Reminding the students of the lesson that she asked them to memorize, she asks them to put their hands up if they have learned it. Putting his hands up, Hassan reads the verses one last time to make sure he remembers it when the teacher asks him to recite it. The teacher gives them a task to do on the board. She writes down five questions, which the children have to finish while the teacher checks if they have memorized the verses. One by one, she asks students to come near her table to recite the prayer that they have learnt.

His heart beating fast, Hassan becomes very nervous when he forgets a part of the prayer while checking at the last minute. Looking at his friend next to him, he says, "Hey Ahmed, did you learn it?" Ahmed, "Yes, I already recited it to the teacher yesterday, remember?" Then showing his a sticker, he said, "I even got the badge." Hassan, "Wow! Cool, mum will freak out if I don't recite this today. This whole week, she's been telling me to learn this." While he is talking to his friend, the teacher calls out his name. He stands up, walks up to her desk, and starts reading it. While he is reading it, he keeps forgetting parts of it. Getting very angry, the teacher, Fathima, notes down his name, and says, "Hassan, ask your parent to meet me after school. And remember you got 12 out 15, the last test paper."

He remembers his mother's disappointment, even though he has an A., it was not a paper, which his mother liked and because of that he missed watching his favourite wrestling match on TV. Hassan, now very sad and miserable, begs the teacher, "Miss Fathima, can you please, please, please, give me just one more day and I'll learn it." Miss Fathima says, "Okay, but be sure to learn and come tomorrow. I have to show this checklist to your class teacher today as

she wants to find out who has not learned it.” He does not want his mother to get irritated by the end of the day because of his conduct at school, as his mother gets worried if teachers complain about him. If something such as this happens at school, he thinks about his mother’s non-stop babbling and he does not want to approach similar confrontations. However, he has to go through many such confrontations due to his teacher’s complaints. Even though Hassan is one of the studious students, he has issues with his behaviour in the class. Sometimes, there are problems as he cannot sit quietly, and he runs around the class, or because he starts fights with other boys. One time, a teacher complained to Hassan’s mother saying she cannot leave him alone with the others. She also told Hassan’s tutor, who also used to work in the same school as the teacher and was a friend of hers, “Oh Hassan, he is quite a handful.”

Again, the bell rings and the teacher warns them that if they do not behave well in class, they will not be given the privilege to take part in Physical Education. The last period of the day is PE, which all of them love, especially Hassan. PE is his favourite period and he does not want that to be cancelled. All the children get depressed if the teacher cancels the PE period. It usually happens with few children misbehaving or not completing their work on time. The next period is practical art period, an hour that all the children enjoy. They all do an Artwork using crayons. Hassan draws a boat, sea, and colours with crayons. When all the students finish their drawings, they get displayed on the wall of the classroom. After this class, it is the break time and they drink and eat something. During this time, they are allowed to talk and walk in the class freely. If there is a problem, the teacher makes sure that they do not become a nuisance.

The next three periods run smoothly; with the children doing work in their exercise books and workbooks. During the Maths period, the children are given work on addition on two pages of the workbook. The teacher gives them two more pages as homework and reminds them about a test on addition that would be on next week. The children note it down in their examination slips. Hassan makes note of reminding his tutor about it. Next, there is the Environmental Studies revision period and the children complete an exercise called „practice work. They all have learned notes given on transport. by the teacher. They finish their work quickly. Some children need individual help, and the teacher tells them to study for the test the next day. She reminds them that if all of them get A’s in their assessment, she will give them a reward. Finally, the time of the day that Hassan has been desperately waiting for comes. It was time for Physical Education. The bell rings, and the children get excited and noisy. Hassan is the kind of student that cannot stop laughing and being loud. The teacher starts calling, “Hassan! Hassan! Hassan! Remember, I told you to be quiet!” She also warns him that if he does not behave well, she will not let him join any game. His friends tell him not to be a fool, because they do not want to miss PE. The teacher is already too tired and unhappy about taking them to the playground. PE is hated by many class teachers and they used to discuss this with the senior management to get PE instructors. She asks the girls to form a straight line and sends them down stairs after giving them instructions about where they are supposed to stay. She trusts the girls to behave well and she can leave them unsupervised at places, unlike the boys.

Then she leaves the class with the boys following her after they form a line. Making sure that they do not disrupt other classes so that the senior management does not make a huge fuss about how her class behaves on the school grounds, she walks down the staircase slowly. They join the girls who are already sitting quietly. Then, they are divided into two teams, boys, and girls, to play a friendly game of netball. It is fun for all of them, so this time, when the bell rings, everyone groans and yells, “oh no!” Although they are all sweaty and worn out, they are all satisfied with an enjoyable period of Physical Education. After packing their bags, they

make two lines in the balcony, one for girls, and one for boys according to their height. The teacher leads the class and assembles them in the space that is allocated for their class. There, they stay until their parents come to fetch them. As soon as the bell rings and the school gate opens. The parents enter the school and Hassan spots his mother among the many adults. She waits near the teacher for a while until many parents leave. There were many parents asking questions to the teacher about the next assessments and the dates of the assessments. As soon as Aisha gets the chance to speak to the teacher, she clarifies some information.

Aisha greets the class teacher, “Assalaam alaikum” and the teacher greets Aisha, “Wa alaikumussalam.” Aisha asks about Hassan .s day at school and his behaviour. These are same question which Hassan’s mother asks every day. Teacher answers,” He is all right but he has to practice addition numbers, English grammar, and practice for the Shakespeare award. The Shakespeare Award is an Inter-class competition, in which children have to learn meanings of around 80 English words. Hassan s mother is very interested in this competition and wants Hassan to compete in it. Hassan succeeded the previous year, among the best 10 students out of 300 students in the grade. The teacher was aware of this, and encourages Hassan .s mother to make him memorize the words and the meanings. They also have to learn to write and orally make sentences to those words. Hassan practices this at the tuition class every night. The first round of the four will be held the next week. After a satisfactory information session from the teacher, Aisha leaves with Hassan. She is concerned about Hassan .s assessment and many other things, which she has to do alone being a single parent. It is not a happy thing for her and she wants to settle down too. On the way, she asks Hassan about the things that happened that day in his class. He gives a running commentary excluding the part about the Islam recitation assessment.

However, his mother remembered and she asks. Aisha, “Hassan, What happened with your Islam recitation, aren’t you supposed to recite it today.” Hassan replies, “Mummy, I did learn it, but when I started reading it to the teacher, I forgot some parts. I will learn it tomorrow, don.t worry.” Any way his mother scolds him about it being not careful about his studies and not concentrating his work. Hassan is a cub-scout, which is an extra-curricular activities he is involved. He has to return to school by 6.30 pm and some days his mother makes him wait and continue Cub Scout if she is busy at work. Today he has to learn knotting and welcome some new kids. They go to a relative’s house and changes to his cub scout uniform. Aisha takes him to school again.

Cub scout is an activity that Hassan really enjoys because he gets to play in school with his friends. An hour later, the meeting is over and Hassan .s father comes to pick him up, as his mother is working at the office. As it is time for his tuition, his father takes him straight to the tuition class. Hassan likes to be in the tuition, as his tutor helps him with his schoolwork and gives him care and attention. Hassan enjoys spending time there and he has some friends from other schools he meets here regularly. The tutor helps him to succeed in competitions such as school interclass activities and the Shakespeare award. When he reaches his tuition class, it is already 7.00 pm. He tells her about his day and about all the tests that are coming up. He also mentions the Shakespeare Award. Hassan calls her Miss Hana and Hassan says to Miss Hana, “I have Maths addition test, English reading comprehension test, Shakespeare award and a listening test”. Miss Hana says that’s alright, let’s practice reading comprehension first”
(Story continues)