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## Performance-Based Assessment within a Balanced Literacy Framework: An Analysis of Teacher Perceptions and Implementation in Elementary Classrooms

Amy McGowan Duke

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PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT WITHIN A BALANCED LITERACY  
FRAMEWORK: AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS AND  
IMPLEMENTATION IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

by

AMY MCGOWAN DUKE

(Under the direction of Grigory Dmitriyev)

ABSTRACT

This mixed methods study explored the perspectives of thirty-nine (N=39) elementary teachers employed in four elementary schools in one school district in Georgia regarding the use of performance-based assessment strategies within an all-encompassing balanced literacy framework for instruction. Participants were surveyed on their use of performance-based assessment strategies, and both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. This study draws on the research regarding the dichotomy that exists between standardized tests and the performance-based assessment practices of teachers implementing balanced literacy. Because teacher buy-in is critical to the success of any curricular initiative, inquiry into teacher perceptions of their role in the assessment process and in the information they derive from performance-based assessments is necessary. This study provides a deep understanding from the perspectives of teachers how they value and use the assessment strategies incorporated in the framework and what level of autonomy they perceived for themselves while incorporating the balanced literacy initiative.

The findings of this study indicated wide variances in the degree of implementation of the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach to instruction. The data revealed that more training is needed in Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) and in the use of running records and the Qualitative Spelling Inventory. What was clear from the responses to the open-ended questions was that teachers were divided on whether or not they valued the assessment strategies in balanced literacy. Phenomenological analysis of the data revealed that teachers felt a loss of instructional decision-making power as a result of implementing the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach, and many have experienced a lower level of job satisfaction. Implications for practitioners are discussed, as well as implications for future research in the field of literacy instruction.

**INDEX WORDS:** Balanced literacy, Literacy instruction, Phenomenological analysis, Instructional decision making, Practitioners

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by

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Brad Duke, and my children, Taylor and Thomas, who offered me unwavering support and unconditional love. Thank you for allowing me the time and freedom to work on this project in spite of the inconveniences to our family.

This work is dedicated to my mother, Paula McGowan, who taught me that life is about never ceasing to learn and grow both personally and professionally. Thank you for reading to me as a child and for instilling in me a love of literature and learning. Without your support and encouragement, this work would not have been possible.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The current obsession with student performance on standardized tests has resulted in a fast and furious search for a program that will raise reading scores. One school district in middle Georgia has embraced an all-encompassing literacy program designed to transform instructional practice and incorporate performance-based assessment. Based on more than 40 years of research, a balanced approach to literacy instruction has recently regained popularity. Experimental research studies have measured standardized test scores and found that a program encompassing both whole language and phonics instruction does, in fact, have a positive effect on test scores (see Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, Denton & West, 2002, Lyon, 1999, Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). The school district touts *balanced literacy* as an approach, not a program, but it clearly delineates teacher behavior in eight areas of literacy instruction. These areas include four reading and four writing components. In reading, teachers learn how to use Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Readers Workshop, and Read Aloud. In writing, they learn to use Writer's Workshop, Focus Poetry, Shared Writing, and Interactive Writing. Since 2004, balanced literacy has been implemented in Grades K through 4 in all of the district's elementary schools.

Student progress in this county's balanced literacy framework is monitored using formative, ongoing assessment. In sharp contrast to the high-stakes standardized tests mandated by the federal law, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the assessment strategies required in balanced literacy attempt to provide meaningful information that can be used to affect instruction in classrooms. This initiative ensures that teachers understand that assessment is for learning, not only for summative evaluation. In this partnership,

multiple types of formative assessments are utilized: diagnostic assessments, pretests and posttests, running records, teacher observations, formal and informal assessments, and most recently, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).

The balanced literacy approach used in the district and under consideration in this study is based on the belief that all children cannot be taught with one program or philosophy. Cambourne's (1988) conditions of learning is a foundational piece of the balanced literacy framework. The conditions are designed to enable teachers to create classroom environments that will support learners of all levels in any content area, not just literacy. The conditions describe the classroom environment, the teacher's actions, and the responsibility of both the teacher and the student. Multi-faceted research exists to support the structure and components of the balanced literacy approach. Margaret Mooney's (1990) gradual release model guides teachers as they plan the instructional components to best meet the needs of students in any learning task. An example would be the teacher modeling the skills first, and then using explicit instruction to involve students in scaffolding a shared activity, and then using an interactive guided activity. In this model, the student has multiple opportunities to practice the skills or concept independently. In addition, the balanced literacy approach involves ongoing formative assessment before and throughout instruction. This mixed methods study measured the frequency of use of performance-based assessments and how teachers value the information they glean from those assessments.

#### Statement of the Problem

A scarcity of literature exists regarding the use of performance-based assessments within a balanced literacy framework. Because teacher buy-in is critical to the success of

any curricular initiative, inquiry into teacher perceptions of their role in the assessment process and in the information they derive from performance-based assessments is necessary. This study sought to understand from the perspectives of teachers how they value and used the assessment strategies incorporated in the framework during the 2006-2007 school year and what level of autonomy they perceived for themselves while incorporating the balanced literacy initiative.

### Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions about the assessment strategies incorporated in one district's balanced literacy program. This project considered several research questions:

1. How do teachers implement the assessment strategies incorporated in balanced literacy?
2. To what degree do teachers value the information derived from assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework as providing meaningful information about how individual students are learning?
3. What level of autonomy do teachers feel they have in regards to teaching using the balanced literacy approach?

### Rationale for the Study

Today, there is a new enthusiasm for “research-based decisions in education, especially in the design of early reading programs” (Allington, 2006, p. 1). Indeed, standards-based reform has become the driving force behind most federal, state, and local education policy in the United States today. In an attempt to respond to charges that the American public school system was not adequately preparing students for future demands

of work and life, educators turned to standards as an attempt to raise student expectations and performance. Legislators and others who have the power to make decisions affecting public education continue to call for higher standards, high stakes testing, and educational accountability (Vinson & Ross, 2001, ¶ 9). The federal NCLB Act of 2001 and numerous state education laws now demand “rigorous, replicable, and scientific evidence to support the design of reading instruction and the selection of reading materials” (Allington, p.1).

Historical studies on beginning reading instruction were quantitative and experimental in nature. They relied on standardized test scores to measure the effectiveness of differing instructional strategies (Pearson, 1999). Presently, there is scant qualitative research on teacher perceptions of their own level of autonomy and professional practice within a balanced literacy framework. Instead of a study about which assessment strategies are most effective at gauging student progress, research is needed to determine how real teachers use the strategies in their classrooms. This research is necessary because teachers who do not perceive that certain assessment strategies are useful may be less likely to carry out those strategies correctly and consistently. Teachers need to value the teaching and assessment strategies they are asked to use because teachers have significant control over whether an initiative becomes a resounding success or a miserable failure. According to Darling-Hammond (1997), “If you want an intervention to fail, mandate its use with a school full of teachers who hate it, don’t agree with it, and are not skilled (or planning to become skilled) in using it” (cited in Allington, 2006, p. 34).

Hence, it is important to analyze teacher motivation when considering a literacy program. Research on teacher perception of the value of the program can help



administrators understand how and where to target attention for continued school improvement.

### Potential Significance

School administrators are charged with the responsibility of providing for the education of children in the community in which they serve. As the learning leader of the school, the administrator reads and attempts to stay abreast of current educational trends in an effort to introduce methods and strategies proven in research to be effective. However, a method can “never in itself guarantee the best of all possible outcomes” (Adams, 1990, p. 49). The most fundamental components of effective literacy instruction are the decisions teachers make in the classroom as they “work with children to support their individualized needs” (Leu & Kinzer, 2003, p. 6). By examining and reflecting on curricular initiatives, school principals can “find ways to support them as they figure out how to best meet the needs of their students” (Allen, 2006, p. vii).

Because of the importance of effective early literacy instruction, school administrators need pedagogical guidance to help teacher’s effect literacy change in schools. Indeed, it is important for the administrator to remember that the focus of school change must be on supporting teachers in their efforts to become more knowledgeable about literacy instruction so that they may teach as expertly as they know how to and as they have been trained to teach (Allington, 2000). This study provided data on assessment strategies from teachers and examined how teachers implemented these strategies in the classroom and whether they felt they gained valuable information about individual children from the assessment strategies incorporated in the framework. The major research studies conducted in the United States on beginning reading instruction

were funded by large groups, they were broad in scope, and they were quantitative in nature, relying on standardized test scores as the litmus for effectiveness (Cowen, 2004). Instead of looking at summative test scores, this mixed methods study incorporated quantitative and qualitative analyses of teacher perception of the value of the information gained from performance-based assessments. Because this kind of study has not been found in the literature, the researcher wanted to address the gap that exists in curricular theory regarding assessment and how teachers feel about using the assessment strategies. Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher examined teacher insights about the balanced literacy program and their mandated use of performance-based assessments. This study enhances curriculum theory with additional insight into teacher perceptions of the assessment strategies utilized by elementary teachers in a balanced literacy program. The data gleaned from the responses to survey questions in this study offers new knowledge about how administrators can better understand the role of teacher motivation when implementing curricular initiatives.

#### Overview of Research Procedures

A mixed methods approach was chosen to provide the most effective means for describing the perspectives of thirty-nine ( $N = 39$ ) elementary teachers in one county in Georgia who used performance-based assessment strategies within a balanced literacy framework during the 2006-2007 school year.

The researcher created a survey and pilot-tested the questions with instructional coaches, teachers, and central office personnel in the district; administered the survey electronically and configured it for anonymous participation; and collected both quantitative and qualitative data from the survey.

The survey instrument used in this study was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey consists of 113 individual items within seven closed-ended, forced choice questions or quantitative questions and seven open-ended or qualitative questions. Two separate analyses were conducted. The quantitative data was run on statistical software, specifically SPSS version 15. The nature of the measurement scales in the data is primarily ordinal thus requiring the use of nonparametric statistics. The goal of the analyses was to assess how each of the quantitative items assesses the first and second research questions. The quantitative data was run on statistical software, while the qualitative data was categorized into themes and topics by hand by the researcher. In chapter four, the quantitative data will be discussed through the findings from various statistical tests and will be presented in table format. The qualitative data will be presented for each of the seven open-ended questions in narrative form. A separate narrative section will describe the themes found in responses to both the quantitative and qualitative questions. The research design and methodology will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

#### Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined within the context of this study.

*Assessment:* Gathering data about student learning in order to make instructional decisions in the best interest of student progress.

*Evaluation:* A judgment of student progress based on assessments conducted by the teacher.

*Authentic assessment:* An assessment or activity that requires a student to perform a task in a real-world, realistic context.

*Autonomy:* Professional freedom to choose how to deliver curriculum to best meet the needs of the students in the classroom. In this study, autonomy refers specifically to teacher autonomy and pedagogical freedom. It has the assumption that teachers are experts, having received specific instruction, and they best suited to choose how to differentiate instruction.

*Performance-based assessment:* An activity that requires a student to demonstrate what he or she knows and is able to do by completing a task. Performance-based assessments require a student to demonstrate rather than select an answer. This term is used synonymously with alternative assessment.

*Balanced literacy:* A comprehensive literacy program that is based on the belief that all students cannot be taught with one program or philosophy. It includes four components of reading instruction and four components of writing instruction: Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Readers Workshop, Read Aloud, Writer's Workshop, Guided Writing, Shared Writing, and Interactive Writing. The approach incorporates various forms of performance-based assessments into these literacy strategies.

#### Assumptions and Limitations

For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that participants completed a 48-hour training seminar in the district on the eight components of balanced literacy. However, it must be understood that the level of training varied, and some of the participants were trained as many as 4 or 5 years ago, while some were trained within the past year. Participants received instruction from different trainers and may have received

differing levels of support as they implemented the program. The researcher assumed that teachers were the best data source for this study, and that the use of assessment strategies within the balanced literacy framework is important when considering implementation of the balanced literacy program.

The researcher was aware that as the principal of one of the schools in which this study was conducted, participants may have been reluctant to share ideas and opinions openly and honestly. To combat this limitation, participants were asked to respond anonymously via an online survey. This research attempted to identify and define the way participants understood and implemented the assessment strategies in balanced literacy. Because some district teachers have been vocal in their criticism of the balanced literacy approach, findings from this study may be more negative than those obtained from participants who may be more committed to the program. The findings and conclusions were based on the perspectives of the participants in a single county, and the small number (N=39) of participants impedes generalizability to larger samples.

#### Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 included the background and rationale for this study, including the statement of its purpose. Chapter 2 will provide a review of related literature including a discussion of the history of balanced literacy and the dichotomy that exists between performance-based assessment and standardized testing. Chapter 3 will present the design of the study including data collection methods and the methods of analyzing data. Chapter 4 will report the data and its analyses. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the results, including implications for school leaders and the personnel who assume the role of implementing a balanced literacy program

incorporating performance-based assessment strategies. Implications for further research will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Standards-based reform has become the driving force behind most federal, state, and local education policy in the United States today. In an attempt to respond to charges that the American public school system was not adequately preparing students for future demands of work and life, educators turned to standards as an attempt to raise student expectations and performance. Legislators and others who have the power to make decisions affecting public education continue to call for higher standards, high stakes testing, and educational accountability (Vinson & Ross, 2001, ¶ 9). The imposition of standards and tests has enabled state education departments and school district administrators to survey and assess whether teachers and students have met the standards. Standardized tests are those “commercially published tests that contain a fixed set of items and have uniform procedures for administration and scoring” (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 95). By administering a standardized test, schools can classify and categorize students based on their efficiency and accuracy in demonstrating knowledge previously determined appropriate for their grade level. The standardization of the skills tested, and of the exam itself, allows large-scale comparison and classification of students.

Despite numerous reform efforts, lawmakers, politicians, and many in the private sector still maintain that educators must find the pedagogical magic pill, the solution to our education troubles. However, many in the field of curriculum studies shun this search for a pedagogical remedy. Pinar (2004) wondered why many believe that education is “somehow like a complex automobile engine, that if only we make the right adjustments—in teaching, in curriculum, in assessment—that we will get it humming smoothly, and that it will transport us to our destination, the promised land of high test scores” (p.170).

As part of President Bush's Goals 2000, states and the federal government were charged with developing performance standards that could be used to measure competency in core academic subjects. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted; this legislation mandated state creation of an aligned standards and assessment system for Grades 3 through 8. This legislation has as its goal that every child perform on grade level by the 2012-2013 school year. In an effort to meet this ambitious goal, Georgia revamped its curriculum and is now implementing the Georgia Performance Standards. Full implementation of the Georgia Performance Standards is expected to be complete by the 2008-2009 school year. To comply with the NCLB, students must pass standardized tests in reading in Grade 3, and reading and math in Grades 5 and 8 in order to be promoted to the next grade (Georgia Performance, 2005).

#### Problems with the Tests

By requiring students to pass standardized tests in order to be promoted, "the message that we send to students is that what really matters in their education are their test scores" (Eisner, 2001, p.376). There are many problems with such a system. The likelihood that a child "will succeed in the first grade depends most of all on how much he or she has already learned about reading before getting there" (Adams, 1990, p. 82). In fact, "performance on standardized tests of reading comprehension depends not only on a child's reading ability, but also on the child's prior knowledge of the topics addressed in the test passages" (Anderson et al., 1985). Many teachers and reading researchers (e.g., Harp, 1994, Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993, Valencia & Pearson, 1987) question the assumptions that underlie standardized tests. An important question focuses on how a



single measure designed to compare students with each other or to some prescribed set of expectations may provide useful instructional information.

It comes as no surprise that when a system “fails” those in charge are quick to label the problem and create a strategy for solving it as quickly and efficiently as possible. This makes sense when thinking in terms of systems management, but in education, educators work with people, not commodities. Sacks (2000) reported that “America’s history with the scientific management of its schools has demonstrated time after time that Americans have tended to side with efficiency over equity in the approach to public education” (p. 70). This is to suggest that looking at test scores is an efficient, or easy, way to gauge how well a student, teacher, or school is performing. However, scholars such as Kohn (2000), Kozol (2005), and Sacks (2000) reminded people that just because standardized tests are scored by a machine does not mean they are objective. Tests “formatted in the multiple-choice mode are decidedly not objective simply because their bubbled-in answers can be scanned and scored by a computer” (Sacks, 2000, p. 202). According to Kohn (2000), “the quest for objectivity may lead us to measure students on the basis of criteria that are a lot less important” (p. 4).

Kohn (2000) suggested that education should not be focused primarily on outcomes. He writes about criterion and norm-referenced tests as examples of how school districts attempt to quantify learning. He argues that learning cannot be quantified and it is not always linear. In fact, he says “measurable outcomes may be the least significant results of learning” (Kohn, 2000, p.3). Norm referenced tests are “not only dumb, but dangerous” (Kohn, 2000, p. 15) because they contribute to the competitiveness of our culture, and whether it is reasonable for kids to get the answers right is irrelevant to those

making the tests. If a majority of students get a question correct on the pilot test, that question is not even used in the test. In such a system, there must be a curve; someone will always be at the bottom. Norm-referenced tests do not measure mastery of learning against criterion standards; they pit students against each other competing for the highest percentile. Criterion-referenced tests do attempt to measure standards but it is the standards that are in question. Critics of outcomes based education question how a year's worth of learning can be summarized into a list of objectives that can be tested with multiple choice questions; they question the validity of such tests. Such criticisms of standardized testing are thoroughly discussed in the literature. Yet, when students or schools do not perform well on these standardized tests, they are labeled as "Needs Improvement" schools or "Failing" schools. Kohn (2000) urges educators to realize that a system hinged on rewards and punishments is a rigged game: "Rewards and punishments can never succeed in producing more than temporary compliance, and even that result is achieved at a substantial cost" (p. 21). In fact, assessment systems designed to monitor progress lose "much dependability and credibility for that purpose when high stakes are attached to them" (Linn, 2000, p. 14). In addition, there is a positive correlation between high-stakes testing and the number of students who receive failing grades (Allington & McGill, 1992). The rise in high-stakes testing has not produced more effective reading instruction; in fact, the number of children retained or placed in special education has significantly increased since the 1970s when standardized tests became more widely used (Cunningham & Allington, 1999). Additionally, the "special needs and learning styles of low-income urban children" (Kozol, 2005, p. 64) are achievement problems that have not been addressed well by standardization. These scholars reported that the current

obsession with school improvement and accountability results in “many schoolchildren being treated as criminals, with their punishment inflicted by the state” (Sacks, 2000, p. 97) in the form of school sanctions, vouchers, and reorganization.

### *Lowering Standards*

Many scholars have written about negative effects of the contemporary obsession with behavioral objectives and standardized assessments. Graves (2002) suggested that contemporary approaches to standardized assessment are lowering standards and that those schools with high tests scores may not be as “effective” as the numbers seem to indicate. According to Kohn (2000), “as a rule, good standardized test results are more likely to go hand-in-hand with a shallow approach to learning than with deep understanding” (p. 10). He reported that “higher scores do not necessarily signal higher quality learning” (p.33). Further, McNeil (2000), in *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Standardized Testing*, concluded that “standardization reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught and learned in schools” (p. 3). In other words, educators pare down curricular content to that in which the state places the most value. According to Kohn (2000), “the quest for objectivity may lead us to measure students on the basis of criteria that are a lot less important” (p. 4).

When education is reduced to a set of predetermined goals, students suffer. In the words of Pinar (1994), “Intelligence is made more narrow, and thus undermined, when it is reduced to answers to other people’s questions, when it is only a means to achieve a pre-ordained goal” (p. 243). Miller (2005) said that educators should be looking for a path that offers “an exchange not contingent on sameness” (p. 13). Instead, educators prescribe learning paths and evaluate whether students show progress in sequential grade

level steps. Kohn (2000) asserted that “expecting all second graders to have acquired the same skills or knowledge creates unrealistic expectations and leads to one-size-fits-all (which is to say, poor) teaching” (p. 13).

The idea of curriculum as a “regime of scarcity” (Jardine, Friesen, & Clifford, 2006, p. 57) makes sense when educators consider that a standardized curriculum forces teachers to teach the standards that will appear on the test. In *Curriculum in Abundance*, Jardine, Friesen, and Clifford (2006) described how teachers are “on edge” (p. 57) because they know they will be held accountable for how their students perform on these tests. As a result, they skim the surface without venturing deep into content; they deliver fragmented bits of content that have little relevance for individual students. Indeed, often assessment activities are “not reflective of the literacy practices of the classroom and/or the outside world” (Cairney, 1995, p. 136). Many scholars say that such a system reduces what educators teach to those standards that are covered on the test. These scholars suggested that in far too many situations, teachers spend an enormous amount of time focusing on test-taking skills, especially with those children who are only a few points above or below the cut-off score. Instead of teaching children how to think, teachers focus more on improving test scores. By doing so, they are teaching students to be obedient and to replicate prescribed behaviors. Scholars such as Kozol (2005) claim that educators send the message of what they value by what educators grade or by what they put on the test. By mandating standardized curricular standards that are tested on high-stakes exams, we are limiting what teachers can teach and what students can learn. In fact, “Nobody ever discovers anything within a well-run school in the United States which someone somewhere does not give him license, sanction, and permission to

discover” (Kozol, 1975, p. 137). He says that education should never consist of a “fixed inventory of sequential stages in a predetermined plan” (p. 103). Instead, Kozol says that we should vow to “never be too determined to predict the destination of a journey or a conversation” (p. 120). Educators send a message to students that what is measured on the test is most important (Bomer, 1995).

In addition, standardization may create an opportunity for less-than-ideal teachers to appear to be more effective than they really are. In effect, subpar teachers or those with less than satisfactory preparation or instructional skills are equipped with the materials and strategies they need to deliver the material. Such “teacher-proofing” became popular during the 1960s when “educators became infatuated with behavioral and instructional objectives. These objectives stressed a teacher-proofing curriculum that was based on scientific laws and industrial metaphors for education” (Palmer, Bresler & Cooper, 2001, p.248). However, educators now know that “under a prescriptive system of curriculum, student testing, and teacher assessment, the weakest teachers were given a system to which they could readily conform” (McNeil, 2000, p. 225). In effect, testing may weaken instruction to the point that anyone can teach the curriculum. Pinar (1994) explained it this way: “Behavioral objectives...and standardized forms of evaluation have contributed to the deskilling and disempowerment of educators” (p. 231).

### *Empowering the Journey*

According to scholars in the field of curriculum studies, for students to be successful, they must have a sense of empowerment. McLaren (1989) discussed the social purpose of empowerment as, “the process through which students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden

their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live” (p. 186). Such scholars argue that a truly democratic education is not one in which a universal curriculum is scripted and mandated for all children regardless of their individual circumstances. In such a system, “there is little sense that anything a child learns has an inherent value of its own” (Kozol, 2005, p. 76). Kozol reported that when educators script the journey, they deny the pilgrimage and instead teach children how to find the answer to someone else’s question. Garrison (1997) explains: “Students learn best when encouraged to make personally meaningful connections between new knowledge and their prior experiences and to assume responsibility for their own learning” (p. 194). Kozol says we all possess this intrinsic desire, or passion, for knowledge that is squelched when learning is reduced to a set of pre-determined goals. This idea is based on Freirean teachings against the banking method of education. Freire (2005) wrote: “Teaching cannot be the process of transference of knowledge from the one teaching to the learner” (p. 40).

According to Kozol (1985), “the talk is all of standards—not solutions” (p. 69). Today’s high stakes system “holds an inner city child accountable for her performance on a high-stakes standardized exam but does not hold the high official of our own government accountable for robbing her of what they gave their own kids” (pp. 53-54). Alternatively, Reynolds (2004) and Serres (1997) wrote of the need for an emphasis on the middleness of learning. For example, Serres compared learning to getting far enough away from the shore to lose sight of where you were coming from or where you are going. Serres imagined a context of a third, educated place where different elements of the humanities can be constructed. He said that teaching and learning should be a journey

to invent new knowledge, not simply fragmented practices that replicate a process someone else prescribed for children. According to Serres (1997), educators should embrace a journey of education in which they create new ideas:

The goal of instruction is the end of instruction, that is to say, invention. Invention is the only true intellectual act, the only act of intelligence. The rest? Copying, cheating, reproduction, laziness, convention, battle, sleep. Only discovery awakens. Only invention proves that one truly thinks what one thinks, whatever that may be. (pp. 92-93)

Reynolds (2004) referenced Deleuze's lines of flight as a way to embrace those middle aspects of learning experiences. In today's world of standardized reform, he suggested that educators remember that "it is in the middle, that space that is productive of a 'stammering' in thought and language. It is never the beginning or the end which are interesting: the beginning and end are points" (p. 111). Places of frustration, of confusion, are the places in which educators learn the most. The lost places are the most fruitful. The goal should be to create similar unsettling, uncomfortable learning opportunities for students. When educators are disturbed, offended, that is when they begin to think and begin to learn.

Weaver, Anijar, and Daspit (2004) suggested that when children are not empowered, when they do not have ownership in their learning, they become disillusioned. Indeed, Julie Webber's (2003) work with school violence provided ample support for this claim. Instead of questioning the curriculum, Weaver said people blame societal factors when in fact those societal factors are symptoms. Instead of questioning the curriculum, people decry the declining moral state of our nation's children. Likewise,

teachers and students blame themselves and question what they did wrong. They followed the curriculum and met all of the behavioral objectives. Why then, are they discontented and apathetic towards schooling?

### The Balanced Approach to Reading Instruction

Until recently, two polarized schools of philosophy have argued over how to best teach our nation's youngest children to read and write. Those who favor the whole language approach embrace holistic immersion into the experience of language. Those who favor the phonics approach advocate a set of sequenced skills (Bainbridge & Malicky, 1996). Over the past 50 years, major studies have shown that emergent readers need phonics skills to be able to encounter unfamiliar text successfully. But at the same time, research has also shown that primary students need experiences using quality children's literature to promote comprehension and a love of reading. What resulted from the research was data supporting a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction.

#### *Defining Balanced Literacy*

Researchers have offered varying definitions of the term *balanced literacy*. Honig (1996) defined a balanced approach as one that encompasses activities rich in language and literature while combining phonics skills with whole language strategies. Rasinski and Padak (2001) saw balanced literacy in a similar way as encompassing the best parts of whole language and phonics instruction: "Balanced reading instruction retains what is best from whole language—real reading for real purposes—and adds to it a limited amount of direct instruction in necessary strategies and skills for reading (p.3). Still another definition refers to literacy instruction in which there is a gradual release of responsibility toward student ownership: "The components of balanced literacy provide a



framework of support as the student moves toward independently accessing and using strategies in reading and writing” (Nations & Alonso, 2001, p.3). In this study, the researcher considered the assessment strategies in balanced literacy, and therefore prefers the definition offered by Cowen (2004): “A balanced approach to reading instruction is necessarily built on children’s strengths, and that balance refers to the assessed present and future language developmental needs of children” (p. xi). For this study, balanced literacy refers to a comprehensive literacy framework that encompasses four reading and four writing strategies. It has at its core an underlying belief that no one method, program, or philosophy will meet the needs of all children. Teachers who are educated in literacy and who know their children’s strengths, weaknesses, and subsequent instructional needs are the best equipped to choose appropriate instructional and assessment strategies. These instructional and assessment decisions cannot be prescribed or mandated by an omniscient literacy program.

#### *A Historical Perspective on the Balanced Approach*

In the 1960s, the United States government spent hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to find the best approach to beginning reading. One of the first studies to examine best practices in reading instruction was conducted by Bond and Dykstra between 1964 and 1967. The *USOE Cooperative Research Program in First grade Reading Instruction* collected data from first and second grade classrooms across the country. The results were inconclusive; some methods worked in some schools better than others. The study concluded that, in general, combination approaches worked better than any single approach (Bond & Dykstra, 1967) and that a “strong phonics emphasis is more valuable than a basal-driven, meaning or sight-word approach” to reading instruction (Cowen,

2004, p. xiv). Chall's (1967) study, documented in *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, concurred with this point and also found that phonics instruction is essential to successful literacy acquisition. Chall argued that in addition to instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics, learning the alphabetic code and reading from appropriate level books leads to increased reading achievement.

In 1985, Anderson et al.'s *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report on the Commission on Reading* (BNR) supported the two studies conducted in the 1960s. The findings of this report suggested that phonics instruction is most effective when it occurs early and that children need to read appropriately leveled reading material. Again, it supported a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction that encompasses both phonics and whole language strategies. In 1990, Marilyn Adams in *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print* suggested that phonics instruction is essential to effective literacy instruction. Like Chall's work, Adams' work stressed the "value of teaching phonograms using a phonics approach with onset and rime" (Cowen, 2004, p. xv). Both researchers did not, however, advocate for an approach that excluded whole language strategies. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) conducted a study in 2000 at the request of Congress. They identified three instructional elements which must be present in order for a child to learn to read: alphabetic, fluency, and comprehension. Together, these five studies suggested that a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction is necessary for successful literacy acquisition. While these studies were beneficial in that they shed light on the importance of phonics and whole language instructional strategies, they were not successful in defining a program or method that is universally effective. In no study were "any

programs of any type identified that reliably raised reading achievement from site to site” (Allington, 2006, p. 21). All of the reports “can be construed as supporting a balanced approach to literacy” (Pearson, 1999, p. 244).

Recent research (French, Morgan, Vanayan, & White, 2001; Frey, Lee, Tollefson, & Pass, 2002; Taylor & Pressley, 2000) has supported what the major literacy studies showed. According to Frey et al., recent research has looked at the elements of balanced literacy instruction so that curriculum developers and educators set a good foundation for reading instruction. Frey et al. reported on the many school districts across the United States that have successfully incorporated a balanced literacy program. Tucson, Arizona and Austin, Texas in the United States, as well as Toronto, Canada, are among some of the districts implementing the program. Data from longitudinal studies have shown that students who have learned under a balanced literacy model have made literacy gains on seven out of eight standardized measures (French et al, 2001). Taylor et al. (2000) examined the research that had been conducted on students who are at risk for failure due to high poverty. They found that it takes a combination of classroom and school to improve literacy. They also found that “effective literacy teachers provided good classroom management, scaffolded balanced literacy instruction with a focus on explicit skills and authentic opportunities to read and write and discuss the text” (p. 5). Effective schools provided a “collaborative learning environment, shared the responsibility for student learning, reached out to families and supported the learning of teachers and students” (p. 5).

Although the research shows that there is no one best method for teaching reading; the effectiveness of any particular method “depends too much on the details of

how it is implemented” (Adams, 1990, p. 123). Despite the obsession in the 1960s with behavioral and instructional objectives that attempted to teacher-proof the curriculum “based on scientific laws and industrial metaphors for education” (Palmer, Bresler & Cooper, 2001, p.248), the research emphatically stated that there is no one best method (Eisner 1995; Honig, 1996; Rasinski & Padak, 2001). In such a “complex process as learning to read, it is not likely that any one method will ever be found which will be effective with all children. Just as children themselves are different, so must the methods of teaching reading be different” (Barbe, 1961, p. 2). Snow, Burns, and Griffin’s (1998) study, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (PRD)* suggested that excellent instruction by a knowledgeable teacher is most effective with emergent readers who may struggle with reading. Indeed, it seems that it is the quality of the teacher, not the method, is most important. According to Adams (1990), “to improve reading achievement, we must improve both programs and classroom delivery” (p. 43). Having an expert teacher in the classroom who understands the needs of her children is more important than searching for a universal approach that will work in any given setting with any children (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999). Asking “Which method is the best?” is the wrong question. Each method has strengths. Educators should be asking, where are the students, and which method will suit their needs? They should also be asking “How can we organize classrooms so that we have it all?” (Cunningham & Allington, 1999, p. 14).

An underlying belief in the balanced literacy approach is that no one method, program, or philosophy will be successful with all children. Implementation of this approach must include an understanding of a set of conditions regarding learning. A foundational piece of the balanced literacy framework is Cambourne’s (1988) conditions

of learning. These conditions pertain to the very essence of learning for both teacher and students and they are relevant for any classroom and every content area. The conditions describe the classroom environment, the teaching that occurs in the classroom, and the responsibilities that lie with both the student and the teacher. Cambourne's (1988) work has been supported and discussed in the literature by such researchers as Adams (1990), Graves (1991), Eisner (2002), and Leu and Kinzer (2003). In this framework, the goal is for the teacher to create a classroom environment that supports learners of all levels. Cambourne's (1988) research provides teachers with a natural framework with which to support learners as they move towards independent literacy. The conditions of learning include immersion, responsibility, expectation, approximation, demonstration, employment, and response (Cambourne, 1988). When an appropriate classroom environment exists, student learning is supported and students become fluent and capable thinkers, readers and writers. To best meet the individual needs of each student in the classroom, balanced literacy uses Mooney's (1990) gradual release model in which children receive explicit instruction and modeling, the opportunity to scaffold their learning with a shared activity, and an interactive guided activity followed by multiple opportunities to practice the learned skills or concepts independently. In this way, student learning is supported by way of individualized instruction that is conducive to literacy growth. The gradual release model and the conditions of learning are vital to the balanced literacy approach. Incorporated within the approach are various forms of assessment and evaluation. Within balanced literacy, assessment is formative and ongoing.

#### *Assessment in a Balanced Approach*

Educators who embrace a comprehensive approach understand that “avoiding instructional extremes is at the heart of providing a balanced program of reading instruction” (Strickland, 1998, p. 52). In the balanced literacy approach, “The classroom teacher is viewed not as the user of a particular system, but rather as a decision maker whose task it is to enhance the learning of his students” (Harris & Smith, 1972, p. iii). In fact, “busy, successful reading teachers often combine and modify a selection of established, well-researched practices with creative flair” (Sadoski, 2004, p. 119). A critical factor in a balanced approach is a teacher who systematically observes her students and becomes what Goodman (1978) termed a “kidwatcher.” Teachers may be the best judges of the literacy development of their students because they observe them day after day as they are engaged in literacy tasks (Allington & Walmsley, 1995; Graves, 1991; Johnston, 1987; Leu & Kinzer, 2003; Rasinski & Padak, 2001). The most effective reading teachers know how to use their insights about literacy to meet individual student needs (see Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000; Sadoski, 2004; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Several formative assessment strategies are incorporated within the balanced literacy framework: diagnostic assessments, running records, teacher observations, formal and informal assessments, and most recently, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2). Formative assessment strategies such as these are intended to equip teachers with the information they need to tailor reading instruction to the specific, individualized needs of individuals. In the 1960s, Veatch popularized what she called an “individualized reading” approach. Children selected books that interested them, books that they really wanted to read. Teachers conferred with students individually and provided whatever

help was necessary. The individualized reading approach referred to in balanced literacy does much more than allow individual choice in reading selections.

Assessment is defined as “the act or process of gathering data in order to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of student learning, as by observation, testing, interviews, etc.” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 12). In the balanced literacy classroom, the purpose of assessment is to collect information about individual student progress in order to make instructional decisions in the best interests of each student (Cairney, 1995; Cunningham, 2000/2005). Assessment is an “ongoing process for experienced teachers who have become good kid watchers” (Cunningham, 2000/2005, p. 170). Collected data is used to “make judgments of student learning, especially in relation to needs, strengths, abilities, and achievements” (Cairney, 1995, p. 132). Essentially, assessment is “the foundation and provides a continuous guideline for every guided reading and writing session” (Hoyt, Mooney, & Parkes, 2003, p. 153).

The purpose of assessment in the balanced literacy framework is to “find out what children already know” so that the teacher can “take them from where they are to somewhere else” (Clay, 1993, p. 6). The assessment strategies in a balanced approach require teachers to be “careful observers of learners’ behaviors” (Brown & Cambourne, 1990, p. 113). Genishi’s (1982) work dealt with using direct observation as a method of data collection in early childhood education. However, careful observation is the key to informal assessment. Systematic observation is made easier and more informative by the use of observation records. Marie Clay’s (1993) running record is one such observation record that is widely used in the balanced literacy approach. To use a running record, the teacher “has to set aside time from teaching to become a neutral observer” (Clay, 1993,

p.1). Clay contends that observation records yield more valuable information about a child's strengths and weaknesses because they "are more useful than estimates of tests or the intuitions of informal/casual observations" (p. 2).

The assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework utilize performance-based assessments. Advocates of performance assessment say "schools ought to focus more on what people can do and less on how well kindergarteners, high school students, and prospective teachers take tests" (Sacks, 2000, p. 5). According to Anderson et al. (1985), performance-based tasks are more reliable and offer valuable information about how children are progressing:

A more valid assessment of basic reading proficiency than that provided by standardized tests could be obtained by ascertaining whether students can and will do the following: Read aloud unfamiliar but grade-appropriate material with acceptable fluency; write satisfactory summaries of unfamiliar selections from grade appropriate textbooks, explain the plots and motivations of the characters in unfamiliar, grade-appropriate fiction.(p. 99)

It is also worth noting that Marzano, Pickering, and McTighe (1994) provided a practical guide for teachers and a thoughtful framework for developing performance-based assessments. Their framework is a five-step process used by many educators who utilize a balanced approach to literacy instruction.

Unlike a standardized test, an informal assessment is "not something external to teaching and learning; rather, it is an integral part" (Cairney, 1995, p. 135). Standardized tests occur after instruction; informal assessments occur before and during the instructional process (Allen, 2006; Durkin, 2004; Graves, 2001). Students need frequent,



ongoing feedback to grow as opposed to information received from standardized tests that “is often too little, too late, too vague, presented in the wrong form, and therefore lacking in impact” (Jensen, 1998, p. 54). For example, guided reading is an instructional strategy, but it is also an “assessment approach in itself. It is responsive and responsible teaching with the teacher in a monitoring and assessing mode from the moment she begins to plan the first lesson of the year through the last lesson” (Hoyt, Mooney & Parkes, 2003, p. 153). In this way, assessment within the balanced literacy framework can be understood as circular rather than linear (Cairney, 1995 & Graves, 1983). Likewise, shared reading also provides numerous opportunities for ongoing assessment. Informal assessment takes place “in the course of the shared reading experience and requires no preparation other than good “‘kidwatching’ skills and knowledge of the reading process” (Parkes, 2000, p. 69). Because these assessment strategies are incorporated into the instructional components of the balanced literacy approach, these are a part of the instructional process, not separate from it (Gregory & Chapman, 2002).

An important component of our understanding of the assessment strategies in balanced literacy is self-evaluation. Graves (1991) reported that “children are valuable participants in the evaluation process” (p. 186). One of the most common types of self-evaluation is the portfolio assessment (Gambrell et al., 1999). Portfolios afford students the opportunity “to gauge their own progress towards mastery” (Durkin, 2004, p. 426). It is important to note that a portfolio is something done *by* the child rather than *to* the child (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991). Self-evaluation “fosters the kind of reflective thinking that leads to improved learning” (Fiderer, 1995, p. 77). Indeed, there are benefits in using self-evaluation for both the teacher and the student. In this method, “students can

begin to take responsibility for their own learning, and teachers can learn about instruction from their students' points of view" (Rasinski & Padak, 1996/2004, p. 261).

### Chapter Summary

Contemporary educational reform models are correct to identify curriculum as the center focus for consideration and revision, but they may error in regards to their prescriptive ideas of what constitutes the best education for children and in their emphasis on pedagogical "best practices." In response to No Child Left Behind, school districts are searching for a pedagogical remedy to low test scores. The literature is replete with criticisms concerning the validity of standardized tests, yet they continue to be litmus tests for school effectiveness. The high stakes associated with these tests force many districts to focus on test-taking skills, fragmented skills and pieces of knowledge. Scholars argue that easy, in terms of how schools can be evaluated, is not always better and that higher test scores do not necessarily mean that one school is more effective than another. In addition, there is ample evidence that the use of standardized tests has resulted in a lowering of standards and in what students are expected to know and be able to do. Drawing on the literature regarding the correlation between the number of students who fail and the increase in the use of and reliance on standardized tests in the United States, the researcher in this study cautions educators to consider achievement problems that have not been addressed well by standardization.

Curriculum studies scholars such as Weaver, Pinar, and Weber and scholars including Serres, Kozol, and McLaren confirmed the disenfranchisement that occurs in students when they do not have the opportunity to make meaningful connections with the things they are taught in school. They ascertained the need for education that allows

individual journeys of exploration that are not scripted by behavioral objectives. Student ownership of learning is a critical factor that must be considered when designing curricular programs.

The historical debate between proponents of whole language and phonics has been resolved largely by several literacy studies conducted in the United States since the 1960's. These studies concluded that a program encompassing components of each approach is the best way to teach children to read and write. An underlying philosophy in the balanced literacy approach is that no one method or approach will work with all children. In the present study, balanced literacy is defined as a literacy framework that includes four reading and four writing components. Cambourne (1988) conditions of learning and Mooney's (1990) gradual release of responsibility are important tenets that form the basis for the approach. Students need appropriate, explicit instruction, modeling, interactive, guided activities, and ample time to practice new skills in a safe classroom learning environment.

Because the research on teacher perceptions of performance-based assessment within a balanced literacy framework is scant, the researcher discusses the literature base for the assessment strategies incorporated in the balanced literacy approach. In this model, various performance-based assessment strategies are at the crux of instructional decision-making. The purpose of assessment is to collect information about individual student progress in order to make instructional decisions in the best interests of each student. Assessment is ongoing and is formative in nature. Such assessment strategies require teachers to become proficient at closely observing student behavior and to assess students throughout instruction, not only after it is completed. Frequent feedback is

essential for student growth and progress. The components of balanced literacy allow for this type of assessment, feedback, and evaluation, and its design allows students to have ownership in their learning.

In this chapter, the researcher provided an overview of the research base for assessment in early literacy, and discussed the major literacy studies conducted in the U.S. This study is important because it captures teacher insight about the performance-based assessment strategies within the balanced literacy approach. It is unlike the studies mentioned in this chapter that relied on quantitative data designed to measure standardized test scores. This study closes the gap between the research done on assessment in early literacy by focusing on a smaller participant sample and by delving deep to understand which strategies teachers use, what their motivation is, and to what extent they value each of the assessments.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine teacher perceptions about the assessment strategies incorporated in the one district's balanced literacy program. This project considered several research questions:

1. How do teachers implement the assessment strategies incorporated in balanced literacy?
2. To what degree do teachers value the information derived from assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework as providing meaningful information about how individual students are learning?
3. What level of autonomy do teachers feel they have in regards to teaching using the balanced literacy approach?

The researcher chose to use a mixed methodology because that methodology presented the best opportunity to gain a clear picture about teachers' perceptions about assessment strategies incorporated in balanced literacy. The research questions ask "how" and "to what degree" and, therefore, explore "interconnected qualitative and quantitative components or aspects" (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p. 207) that require a mixed approach to research. Because the research questions seek to understand human feelings and perceptions, a quantitative analysis alone would not suffice. The researcher wanted to explore the insights of teachers and she chose a phenomenological approach that would allow her to use both quantitative data and qualitative data. Some quantitative analysis was required because the researcher wanted to understand the current level of frequency of implementation. The researcher hoped to use both sets of data together to describe a more complete situation.

The close-ended questions can only give a limited picture of teachers' perceptions because the teachers are choosing from forced choices; there is no room in a close-ended question for the teacher to justify his/her answer, to elaborate on an answer, or to explain what he or she means. However, in an open-ended question, teachers can go into detail about their perceptions. An open-ended question allows the participants to elaborate on concerns or issues that could not be addressed in the forced-answer questions. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative data affords the researcher a clear, more defined, picture of what teachers' attitudes may be about using the assessment strategies in balanced literacy. As Creswell (2002) reported, researchers who include only quantitative or only qualitative data in a study risk painting an incomplete picture of the phenomena under study. Using a phenomenological approach to analyzing the data allowed the researcher to consider teacher insight into the implementation of this program.

For those reasons, the researcher decided to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data into the study methodology. This mixed approach allowed the researcher to better understand why balanced literacy is seen by the teachers as an effective strategy in raising students' reading ability or why balanced literacy was seen by the teachers as ineffective. The researcher hoped to determine teacher value of the program by considering how they actually use it. A mixed methods approach also helped to define what the causes of teachers' perception may have been. A discussion of the use of this methodology to answer the research questions in this study follows.

## Mixed Methods

A research design is the “logic that links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to the initial questions of a study” (Yin, 1994, p. 27). The researcher chose a mixed methods design for this study. According to Brewer and Hunter (1989), researchers should recognize that “social science methods should not be treated as mutually exclusive alternatives among which we must choose” (p. 16). Researchers should reject the “forced choice between positivism (including postpositivism) and constructivism with regard to methods, logic, and epistemology” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, pp. 22-23) and instead understand that they can capitalize on the strengths of both approaches. While some mono-method supporters claim that the two methods cannot be used together because of profound philosophical differences, pragmatism “rejects the either-or of the incompatibility thesis and embraces both points of view” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 23). Utilizing a mixed methods/model approach can open new doors for research and allow for transformative thinking.

Using mixed methods in a study has its origin in educational studies and social science research. The definition of mixed methodology has been debated by researchers, but the most quoted definition comes from Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) who defined mixed methods research as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study” (p. 17). The focus on one topic, as in this study, is critical to mixed methods research. Mixed methods give the best result in trying to develop a clearer picture of the object being studied—in this case the perceptions of district teachers about the use of performance-based assessments in a balanced literacy

approach. The use of the mixed methodology in this study allowed the researcher to look holistically at the perception of teachers, thus a phenomenological approach using both quantitative and qualitative data was necessary.

Many scholars in the field have argued that combining research methods into a single study is not only beneficial, but also necessary to ensure validity. Benz and Newman (1998) argued that “between the qualitative and quantitative paradigms, there is a continuum of methods” (p. 11). By integrating qualitative and quantitative research methods, researchers can improve the quality of research because they are “better able to match the approach to gathering and analyzing data with the research questions (McMillan, 2004, p. 12). In another work, Creswell (2002) argued that pragmatic researchers are those who see the benefit of using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in all stages and aspects of research studies. Likewise, Tashakkori and Teddlie’s (1998) work is a sourcebook of the literature done on this subject and was written to assist those who may want to utilize a mixed methods or mixed design approach to research. They argue that a pragmatic viewpoint is responsible for the end of the paradigm wars regarding quantitative versus qualitative research. Pragmatics believe in paradigm relativism, that is, the “use of whatever philosophical and/or methodological approach works for the particular research problem under study” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 5). For the contemporary pragmatic researcher who sets out to conduct mixed method/model research, the research question takes precedence over selection of method. In fact, “decisions regarding the use of either qualitative or quantitative methods (or both) depend upon the research question as it is currently posed and the phase of the research cycle that is ongoing” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, p. 24).



There are many advantages to using a mixed methods design. Quantitative analysis of content can add richness and complexity to the qualitative data. In a concurrent QUAL-QUAN analysis as used in this study, qualitative data is coded and assigned meaningful numerical values (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). By manipulating the values assigned to the data, researchers can gain greater insight into the phenomena (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). Qualitative research was incorporated into this study so that the researcher could analyze data phenomenologically. In educational research, phenomenology allows the researcher to interpret events “in light of the meanings participants make of those events” (McNeil, 2005, p. 336). Part of the appeal of qualitative research is the amount of information that we can learn from the specific or the particular. A phenomenological approach was chosen for this study because it produces more in-depth, comprehensive information than could be obtained from quantitative data, and because the researcher aims to look at an entire situation; she wanted to understand how teachers used and valued assessment strategies in a literacy program. In this study, quantitative data was viewed with qualitative judgment based on the values and viewpoint of the investigator. The qualitative inquiry that resulted is based on assumptions about what the frequency of responses may or may not mean (Howe, 1988). The analysis was qualitative; the method to produce the results was quantitative. A phenomenological approach such as the one used in this study allowed the researcher to examine teacher insight and feelings about the assessment strategies used in the balanced literacy approach to instruction.

Quantitative research excels at summarizing large amounts of data. When paired with qualitative analysis, the researcher is free to reach generalizations based not only on

statistical projections derived from quantitative analysis, but also on the human context, the rest of the story (Creswell, 2002). In this way, numbers are paired with descriptive detail and context for a phenomenological perspective. Such a valuable result is not possible in stand-alone qualitative or quantitative research (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). In this study, the researcher coupled forced choice questions with open-ended questions in an attempt to understand why participants chose their answers. She considered the statistical frequencies calculated in the quantitative analysis, but cross-compared them with the answers to the open-ended questions. Together, they will provide a more complete assessment of how teachers feel about the program.

Greene et al. (1989) listed five purposes for mixed methods studies: triangulation, complementarity, initiation, development, and expansion. Triangulation means “seeking a convergence of results” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 43). In this study, the quantitative questions and qualitative questions were used together to solicit responses about teacher perceptions of the program. Complementarity means that a mixed methods approach allows the researcher to examine overlapping and different facets of the same phenomenon. Overlapping questions in this study are those questions that ask participants to indicate which assessment they use most often and least often and then why they chose that answer. Through initiation, the researcher discovers contradictions, paradoxes, and fresh perspectives. Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher hoped to discover insights into teacher perceptions of the use of performance-based assessments and about the balanced literacy program. Development means that by using methods sequentially, results from the first method can inform the second. The quantitative analysis was conducted first, followed by qualitative consideration of teacher feelings and perceptions.

Finally, by using mixed methods approaches, expansion occurs; that is, the mixed method approach adds breadth and scope to the project (Greene, 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Using a mixed methods design allowed the research questions to be answered more completely and allowed individual teacher voices to be considered.

### Methodology

An electronic survey was created in Survey Monkey. The office of professional learning in the school district provided a database of teachers employed in each of the four participating schools who had received training in balanced literacy. The link to the survey was sent to each participant via e-mail with a short explanation of the purpose of the study (Appendix D). Letters of explanation and consent were mailed to the district superintendent and each principal (Appendices B and C). The survey contained forced choice response questions and several open-ended questions (Appendix A). Quantitative analysis was conducted by categorizing responses and calculating frequency of answers. Qualitative analysis was conducted using a five 5-step procedure of qualitative analysis suggested by Powell and Renner (2003).

### *Instrument*

A survey was the medium with which to collect data for this study. A nonexperimental, noncorrelational design, survey research is used in “studies in which no independent variable is experimentally manipulated” (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p.285). The data collected from a survey is typically used to either examine relationships between variables or to describe a situation (Kault, 2003). In survey research, it is typical to “use sampling and closed-response type questions (quantitative) and also have some open-ended questions at the end that are analyzed qualitatively” (McMillan, 2004, p. 12).

By using such a format in this study, the researcher was able to better understand the perspectives of the participants. Using a survey offered the opportunity to collect data anonymously while accomplishing the goal of this research which was to examine teacher perceptions about the assessment strategies incorporated in the county's balanced literacy program. A phenomenological approach was used to examine teacher insights and perceptions about performance-based assessments. Since the researcher is a principal in the district under study, it was very important that teachers be able to report the data without feeling pressure from an administrator who was also the study author. An anonymous format was used via an electronic survey.

The survey instrument used in this study was created by the researcher and contains questions about the frequency of use of the different assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework. The researcher constructed the survey based on a review of literature pertaining to assessment and evaluation. After drafting the survey questions, the researcher shared them with three instructional coaches and with eight teachers trained in balanced literacy at similar schools in the district. Using survey pretesting allowed the researcher to identify "questions that respondents have difficulty understanding or interpret differently than the researcher intended" (Krosnick, 2002). The instructional coaches and teachers who responded to the pilot questions did not become participants in this study. After pretesting, the researcher asked for feedback about clarity, flow, and content. Pretesting feedback resulted in wording clarification and a change in order of the questions. The researcher also deleted two survey questions and revised her survey questions to more closely match the research questions. The researcher then shared a final

version with the director of elementary literacy in the district. Her suggestions were few and the final version of the survey was confirmed for this study.

Structurally, the survey was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The first seven questions are quantitative in nature and the last seven questions are qualitative. Table 1 illustrates the match between the research questions and each of the survey questions. The forced choice survey questions ask specifically about the frequency of use and which ones they value as being more useful for improving instruction. The researcher chose to ask about frequency first so that participants would first begin thinking about which assessment strategies they used in their classrooms. The forced choice questions designed to measure frequency were asked first, followed by open-ended questions that asked why they used the strategies. The researcher wanted to first find out what they were doing and then sought to understand why they chose those strategies and how their use might have affected instruction in the classroom.

The first question asked how often participants used each of the following assessment techniques: open-ended questions (oral), open-ended questions (written), performance tasks on demand, projects, conferencing, running records, Developmental Reading Assessment, anecdotal records, and Star Reader. Participants were asked to indicate whether they used each of these assessment techniques daily, weekly, at the end of unit, once or twice a year, or if they have not used it this school year. The researcher's purpose in asking this question is to see which assessments participants used more frequently.

Table 1

*Research Questions Matched to Survey Questions*

<p>Research Question 1: How do teachers implement the assessment strategies incorporated in balanced literacy?</p>	<p>Survey Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How often do you use the following types of performance-based assessment in your classroom?</li> <li>2. How many of your rubrics have levels of quality created with student input?</li> <li>3. How many of the student performance assessments you assign present problems and challenges that are based on real-world experiences?</li> <li>4. How many of the student performance assessments you assign come from textbook or workbook-related material presented in hypothetical or simulated situations?</li> <li>6. How often do the following types of feedback and evaluation occur in your classroom?</li> </ol>
<p>Research Question 2: To what degree do teachers value the information derived from assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework as providing meaningful information about how individual students are learning?</p>	<p>Survey Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. For each of the following types of assessments, identify how often you make instructional decisions directly related to information you receive from that assessment.</li> <li>7. Of these choices, which of the following types of performance-based assessments gives you the most valuable information about an individual student's reading ability? Choose only one.</li> </ol>
<p>Research Question 3: What level of autonomy do teachers feel they have in regards to teaching using the balanced literacy approach?</p>	<p>Survey Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Please explain why you feel that the type of assessment you chose in the previous question provides the most valuable information about an individual student's reading ability.</li> <li>9. Overall, do you believe the assessment strategies in balanced literacy provide adequate information about individual student progress? Please explain your answer.</li> <li>10. How has implementing balanced literacy changed how you make instructional decisions in your classroom?</li> <li>11. How has implementing balanced literacy changed how you feel about student assessment?</li> <li>12. Has implementing the assessment strategies in balanced literacy changed how you feel about teaching? Please explain your answer.</li> <li>13. As a result of implementing balanced literacy, do you feel that you need more training in formative assessment? Explain why or why not.</li> <li>14. For those assessment strategies that you indicated you do not use, what is/are the reason(s)?</li> </ol>

If a teacher uses one assessment strategy more frequently than others, this information would be important because it could indicate that the teacher values it more than others.

For the second question, the researcher asked participants to identify how many of their rubrics contained levels of quality that were created with student input. This forced choice question asked participants to choose all, most, some, few, or none. The purpose of this question was to gauge whether teachers involved students in setting criteria for student work. Because “self-evaluation fosters the kind of reflective thinking that leads to improved learning” (Fiderer, 1995), it was important for the researcher to examine whether teachers were creating opportunities for student input into rubrics.

The third question was a forced choice question that asked the participant to identify how many of his/her performance assessments present problems and challenges that are based on real-world experiences. Again, participants could choose between the following choices: all, most, some, few, or none. The researcher wanted to know if participants understand and use assessments that have real or situational relevance for students. This question is important because when we ask students to perform a task in a real-world, realistic context, we are asking them to perform an authentic task (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

The fourth question asked participants to identify how many of the student performance assessments they assigned came from textbooks or workbooks and deal with hypothetical or simulated situations. Again, in balanced literacy, teachers are taught to use performance-based assessments that students can easily associate with and with which they have input. The assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach are designed to ensure that time is not wasted by children who “see no relevance to their lives

in the consumption and use of print” (Graves, 1991, p. 28). Instead, students need to see relevance to their everyday lives (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). This survey question attempts to gauge the frequency of the use of textbook assessments that do not have real-world relevance for students.

The fifth question asked participants to identify how often they made instructional decisions directly related to information they receive from the following types of assessments: open-ended questions (oral), open-ended questions (written), performance tasks on demand, portfolio tasks, projects, conferencing, running records, Developmental Reading Assessment, anecdotal records, standardized tests, and Star Reader. Participants could select one of the following responses: daily, weekly, end of unit, once or twice a year, or have not used this year. This question was designed to inform Research Questions 1 and 2 to provide data about the implementation of the assessment strategies in the approach.

Next, the participants are asked to identify how often differing types of evaluation and feedback occurred in their classroom during the 2006-2007 school year. Each of the following are included in the sixth question: Students evaluate and reflect on their own work against criteria; students evaluate other students work against criteria; teacher evaluates student work and gives descriptive feedback; evaluation is a cooperative effort between the student and teacher; and I use a rubric with levels of quality to evaluate student work. Each of these types of evaluation and feedback are necessary in a balanced literacy approach (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Participants are asked to choose between the following responses for each type of evaluation or feedback: daily, weekly, end of unit, end of grading period, or not done this year. In the balanced literacy approach to



instruction, teachers are expected to implement a variety of formative assessment strategies. The purpose of this survey question was to gather data about how teachers are implementing these strategies in their classrooms.

The seventh question is a forced choice response question that informs research Question 2. Participants were asked to select the type of performance-based assessment that gave them the most valuable information about an individual student's reading ability. Participants could choose from the following types of performance-based assessments: running records, Developmental Reading Assessment, Anecdotal Records, standardized tests, Star Reader, or Qualitative Spelling Inventory. For this question, the researcher will gain data about teacher perception of the value of differing types of performance-based assessments.

The next questions are open-ended and required the participant to write in a response. The first open-ended question is Question 8, which asked the participant to explain why he/she feels that the type of assessment chosen in Question 7 provides the most valuable information about an individual student's reading ability. In this phenomenological study, the researcher wants to understand why a participant chose one strategy over another. This question provided data and insight into teacher preference of various performance-based assessment strategies.

The ninth question asked the participant to explain whether he/she believes that the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach provide adequate information about individual student progress. In the balanced literacy approach, the teacher is expected to recognize the needs of individual children. Proponents of the approach understand that no one knows children's "needs and interests as readers better than their

classroom teacher” (Rasinski & Padak, 2001, p. 183). Participants were asked to explain their answers. This survey question was designed to gather data about teacher feelings, perceptions, and the value placed on assessment strategies. The tenth question is also an open-ended question; it asked participants to explain how implementing balanced literacy changed how they made instructional decisions in the classroom. The purpose of this question was to understand how teacher’s perception of their level of autonomy may have changed since implementing this initiative. As Allington (2006) reported, teacher buy-in is critical to the success or failure of any curricular initiative. Linda Darling-Hammond (1990) calls this “the power of the bottom over the top” (p. 34). Because teacher autonomy is significant in this study, it is an important element to consider when examining the balanced literacy program.

The eleventh question asked participants to explain how implementing the performance-based assessment strategies incorporated in the components of balanced literacy changed how they feel about student assessment. Teacher perception was important in gaining an overall picture of how teachers value and use the program. The twelfth question is another open-ended question that attempted to solicit responses that would allow the researcher to understand how teachers feel about using the approach and the assessment strategies. Participants were asked to explain how implementing the assessment strategies changed how they feel about teaching. Both questions were designed to gather data about teacher perceptions and feelings.

The thirteenth question asked participants whether they felt they need additional training in formative assessment. It is important to note that participants were asked to explain their answers. The researcher wanted to know how teachers felt about their level

of expertise after having been trained and asked to subsequently implement the assessment strategies. The final question asked participants to explain why they do not use the assessment strategies that they indicated they did not use in their classroom this school year. Again, this question was intended to consider teacher insight into which assessments are most valuable for instructional use.

### Participants

In this study, seventy teachers employed at four elementary schools in a district in middle Georgia were asked to complete an electronic survey. Each of these teachers in Grades K-4 had received previously forty-eight hours of training in balanced literacy. Because this was an IRB exempt study, identifying information about individuals was not available. The researcher was not able to distinguish between responses from her school and responses from the other three participating elementary schools.

In an attempt to include participant teachers from schools with varying student populations, the researcher chose four schools in the district. The researcher chose the school in which she serves as principal; she was particularly interested in how her teachers felt about using the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework. The researcher chose a school similar to her own in demographics and achievement. Both her school and School 2<sup>1</sup> are located in the northern part of the county and consist of students from middle- to upper-middle class families. Both of these schools populations are majority White. The other two schools, School 3 and School 4, are classified by the district and the state department as inner city schools; they serve mostly African-

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the identity of each school used in the program, all schools have been given a number from 1-4 to identify them. School 1 (the researcher's school) and School 2 are suburban, mostly White, and have mostly middle- to upper-middle class families. School 3 and School 4 are mostly African American, urban, and, mostly poor families, and are Title I schools.

American students, and the majority of their students receive free or reduced lunch. They are both Title I schools. It is important to note that all four schools have never failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP).

In considering the population for the participant sample, the researcher thought that it would be beneficial to look at two distinctly different types of schools based on student demographics and school location. The researcher considered whether the teachers at all four schools were using the assessments in similar ways or if there were assessments favored by inner city teachers that were not favored by the teachers in the suburban schools. However, this was an IRB exempt study, and the researcher was not allowed to identify teachers as being employed at particular schools; the design of the survey did not allow her to request any identifying information from participants.

The researcher contacted the office of professional learning and requested a list of teachers who had received training in the district in balanced literacy at each of the four chosen schools. Balanced literacy is a week-long (48 contact hours) seminar that trains teachers to use each of the eight literacy strategies incorporated in the approach. In this approach, there are four reading components and four writing components. In reading, teachers learn how to use Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Readers Workshop, and Read Aloud. In writing, they learn how to use Writer's Workshop, Guided Writing, Shared Writing, and Interactive Writing. Teachers who received this training and who were employed at the four chosen schools during the 2006-2007 school year were selected as participants in the study. Letters of informed consent were mailed to the superintendent (Appendix B) and to the principals of each of the participating schools (Appendix C). The researcher created an e-mail database containing all participant e-mail

addresses. The researcher sent an e-mail to seventy teachers requesting their participation in the study. The informed consent was in the body of the e-mail with a link to the online survey (Appendix D). The researcher sent two reminder e-mails to each of the participants approximately 4 days apart. In addition, she spoke in person with each principal and asked each to talk about the study in a faculty meeting and to remind teachers to complete the survey. The researcher also asked the instructional coach at her school to discuss the study with the instructional coaches at the other three schools and have them talk to the staff and remind them to participate. As a result, participants were constantly reminded of the survey during a two-week period in late May from a variety of sources.

#### Ethical Considerations

All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Because responses were anonymous, it was not possible to associate individual participants with their answers. Because this researcher is the principal of one of the schools in which surveys will be distributed, it was necessary to solicit anonymous responses from teachers in order to gain more honest answers. The researcher was not able to distinguish between the responses of her faculty and those of the other participating schools.

#### Data Collection

In this mixed methods study, a survey was used to collect data. The survey was created using Tables in Microsoft Word and was uploaded to the Survey Monkey website. In line with requirements for an IRB exempt study, the researcher configured the survey for anonymous participation on the website and did not require user registration or identification. The policies of the Survey Monkey website require that all data be stored

at a third party location that is unknown to the researcher and the participants; Survey Monkey will not release information to any party without written consent from the researcher. In this study, the researcher configured the survey to prevent tracking of IP addresses or responses, and participants were not asked to enter any identifying demographic or confidential information. Participants were sent a link to the online survey via e-mail, and the researcher was not be able to track which participants completed the survey. The survey was not posted publicly and was only accessible to participants who received the electronic hyperlink to the survey via e-mail.

### Data Analysis

Since this is a mixed method study, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately. The following is a discussion of how the data was analyzed by type.

#### *Quantitative Data*

The seven quantitative forced-choice questions in this study used predominantly ordinal scales. For example, Questions 1, 5 and 6 assessed the frequency with which participants used certain types of evaluations or assessments; the scale was “daily, weekly, end of unit, once or twice a year, not used this year.” Although there is a clear order to the point of the scale, the intervals between the points of the scale are not equivalent. This indicates that this is an ordinal scale (Myers & Well, 1995). Questions 2 through 4 all used a Likert-type scale including *all*, *most*, *some*, *few*, and *none*. This scale is often treated as an interval scale, but easily falls under the category of an ordinal scale because of the imprecision of the intervals between the points on the scale (Sprinthall, 2003). The last forced choice question, Question 7, simply asked participants to choose the assessment they find the most valuable. This scale is clearly a nominal scale. Given

that the scales were predominantly ordinal and nominal in the quantitative portion of this study, nonparametric statistical analyses were the most appropriate for analysis of this data (Kault, 2003).

More traditional and commonly used parametric inferential statistics require the use of interval and ratio scales in the analyses. These tests also typically have assumptions of normality of the data. Nonparametric statistics are most appropriate for nonnormal data and for data that uses nominal or ordinal scales. Nonparametric statistics do not calculate means or variance for variables, but generally calculates rank ordering in the data depending on the specific nonparametric test (Kault, 2003). The first two research questions: (a) "How do teachers implement the assessment strategies incorporated in balanced literacy?" and (b) "To what degree do teachers value the information derived from assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework as providing meaningful information about how individual students are learning?" can be assessed in part by examining Questions 1 through 7 with nonparametric statistics.

Questions 1-4 and 6 were designed to answer the first research question, "How do teachers implement the assessment strategies incorporated in balanced literacy?" Question 1 asked participants to rate how often they used each type of performance-based assessment. In order to determine which type of performance-based assessment was used the most often by participants a Friedman Rank Test was used. The Friedman Rank test is the nonparametric version of the parametric test repeated measures ANOVA which compares within subject data in terms of changes over time or differences between conditions (Sprinthall, 2003). In this case, the Friedman Rank test is assessing difference between conditions, treating each type of performance-based assessment as a condition,

in order to determine which assessment was used most often by teachers. This comparison is important to address Research Question 1.

The Friedman Rank test assigns a rank to each assessment type within each participant. Assessment types that are used daily were ranked the highest (a one), followed by those used weekly, followed by those used at the end of unit, etc. If more than two assessment types were used daily, then those two would be assigned a rank of 1.5, the average of the first two ranks of 1 and 2. Since nine performance-based assessments were used, the ranks range from 1 to 9. Then the average rank was calculated for each assessment type based on the ranks calculated for each participant. The test statistic then assesses whether at least one condition (in this case performance-based assessment) is significantly different from the others. If the Friedman rank test statistic is significant, in order to determine which performance-based tests are significantly different from each other, post-hoc tests using the Wilcoxon matched pairs sign rank test for each pair of performance-based assessments were performed. A Wilcoxon matched pairs sign rank test is a nonparametric analysis that can be used with repeated measurements on a single sample such as the one in this study. It is the nonparametric equivalent of the correlated samples *t*-test (Myers & Well, 1995). In this case, the researcher calculated difference scores between the values assigned to each type of performance-based assessment by each participant. Next, these difference scores were ranked across all participants. Signs were added to the ranks to indicate which assessment scored higher than others. These ranks were then used to calculate whether there is a difference in value between the performance-based assessments. In the end these tests provided the rank order of the usage of the performance-based assessment strategies. The



purpose of this analysis was to indicate which tests were used significantly more often than others.

Survey Questions 2, 3 and 4 assess how much student input was included in the assessments, and whether the assessments used real-world simulations or hypothetical situations. These three questions were also designed to inform the first research question. Question 2 is designed to indicate simply to what extent participants include student input in the development of the assessments. This data was described to indicate what proportion of teachers include student input frequently. As discussed in chapter 2, the literature on performance-based assessments utilized within a balanced literacy framework suggests that it is more important for teachers to use real world examples than hypothetical or simulated examples from textbooks (Cairney, 1995, Gambrell et al., 1999, Gregory & Chapman, 2002, Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1994). Thus participant responses to Questions 3 and 4 were compared with a Wilcoxon matched pairs sign rank test. As described above, this test determined whether teachers are more likely to use real-world examples or hypothetical textbook examples.

Question 6 assessed how frequently five types of evaluation and feedback took place in the classroom. As with Question 1, the Friedman Rank test assessed which methods of evaluation and feedback the participants in the study used most often. If the test statistic was significant indicating that at least one type of evaluation or feedback was used differently than the others, this test was followed up by the Wilcoxon matched pairs signed rank test to determine which types of evaluation and feedback were used significantly more than the others. Overall, the results of the analyses of Questions 1

through 4 and 6 indicated how much participants used assessment strategies incorporated in a balanced literacy approach.

Questions 5 and 7 were designed to assess research Question 2, “To what degree do teachers value the information derived from assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework as providing meaningful information about how individual students are learning?” Question 5 asked participants how often they made instructional decisions based on the various types of performance-based assessments. In order to assess the level of value placed on each assessment strategy, the Friedman Rank test was used with the set of eleven assessment strategies. Similar to the parametric ANOVA test, the Friedman test is a nonparametric test used when there are multiple test attempts and when the researcher wants to discover any differences in treatments across those attempts (Myers & Well, 1995). This test was identical to what was done with survey Question 1. A significant test statistic may indicate that at least one assessment strategy was used differently than the others. In order to be able to determine which assessment strategies were valued more than others, the Friedman Rank test was followed up by a Wilcoxon matched pairs signed rank test.

Question 7 asked participants which assessment they valued the most out of a list of six assessments. Given that this scale was a nominal scale, the ideal nonparametric statistical test was a chi-square goodness of fit test (Sprinthall, 2003). A nonparametric test, the chi-square goodness of fit test is used for estimating how closely an observed distribution matches an expected distribution (Myers & Well, 1995). The chi-square test was used to determine whether participants were equally likely to choose any of the set of six assessments. A significant chi-square test may indicate that one or more assessments

was chosen more often (or less often) than the others. The chi-square test calculates the expected value for each test (the number of participants that should choose each test if all tests have an equal probability of being chosen) given the total number of tests and participants in the study. In this case, with six types of assessments and thirty-nine participants ( $N = 39$ ), the expected value for each test is 6.5. If the difference between the observed number of participants and the expected number of participants is great, the chi-square was significant. In the case of a significant chi-square, the residuals indicated which tests deviated the most from the expected values in order to indicate which types of assessments were chosen the most often and which types of assessments were chosen the least often.

The final set of analyses to assess research Question 2 examined the relations between responses to Question 5 and Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4. Spearman's rho, the nonparametric form of correlation which was used with ordinal data (Sprinthall, 2003), was used to determine whether how participants answer questions about their use of various assessment strategies and evaluation strategies is related to how much they value the various assessment strategies. A Spearman's correlation was calculated for each of the eleven assessment strategies in Question 5 with each of the nine strategies in Question 1 and with Questions 2 through 4. A significant positive correlation may indicate that the participants' use of specific strategies is associated with greater valuing of specific assessment strategies.

### *Qualitative Data*

Questions 8-14 on the survey required teachers to write in their responses and hence required a different way of analyzing the data. The open-ended, qualitative

questions addressed Research Question 3: “What level of autonomy do teachers feel they have in regards to teaching using the balanced literacy approach?” Open-ended questions like the ones used in this study generate words, phrases, or complete sentence answers; hence the amount of data collected from each question may be different. The data collected from the last seven questions, therefore, was treated separately, following the suggested 5-step procedure of qualitative analysis suggested by Powell and Renner (2003).

The following steps were repeated for the data collected from each question:

*Step 1: Get familiar with the data.* In this step the researcher read over the answers from the question several times so as to become knowledgeable about what was written. Reading and rereading the answers allowed the researcher to identify recurrent words or phrases that were used to identify themes in the responses.

*Step 2: Focus the analysis.* The researcher reviewed the purpose of collecting the data and then sorted the data by that purpose. Powell and Renner (2003) suggest focusing by question, time period, or event. For the purposes of this study, the researcher focused the analysis by each individual open-ended question. For example, open-ended Question 9 asked, “Overall, do you believe the assessment strategies in balanced literacy provide adequate information about individual student progress? Please explain your answer.” Since the purpose of these open-ended questions was to gauge teachers’ perceptions of balanced literacy, it was important to look at the responses to this question. If a majority of the answers were very brief or consisted of only a few words, the researcher was able to see a pattern that showed teachers are not “happy” with balanced literacy.

*Step 3: Categorize the information.* For each question, the researcher identified themes in responses for each question. The researcher then considered these themes in comparison with those found for other questions. According to Powell and Renner (2003) this is the “crux” or most important part of qualitative analysis (p. 5) and although it is very labor intensive to do this sorting, it is the only way to accurately report the data that has been collected. While discovering the themes, the researcher was able to identify important teacher insights about the value of the assessment strategies incorporated in the balanced literacy approach (Powell & Renner, 2003).

*Step 4: Identification.* In this step the researcher identified patterns and connections between and within themes. The researcher asked herself the following questions: “What are the key ideas being expressed within each theme?”; “What are similarities and differences in the way people responded, including subtle variations?”; “How do things relate?”; “What data support this interpretation?”; “What other factors may be contributing to this?” (Powell & Renner, 2003, p. 5). In this study, the researcher considered how the answers to the quantitative questions may have affected the responses to the qualitative questions.

*Step 5: Interpretation.* In this step, the researcher brought together all that she had discovered. She used all the themes found to present the data. The researcher started by listing all the key points discovered as the result of sorting and the data. She stood back and considered what she found and asked herself the following questions: “What are the major lessons?”; “What new things did I learn?”; “What applications are there to other settings, programs, studies?”; “What will those who use the results of the evaluation be more interested in knowing?” (Powell & Renner, 2003, p. 6). The researcher then

developed an outline to report the data and developed diagrams to explain how the data was analyzed.

All of these steps were followed when examining the seven open-ended questions so that the researcher could offer a complete picture of what teachers' perceptions were about using the performance-based assessment strategies in balanced literacy.

### *Response Rate*

It is important to note that of the seventy teachers who received invitations to participate in this study, 39 completed the survey. The response rate was 55.7%. The topic of this research was one that triggered extreme feelings from the participants. It is the feeling of the researcher that many of the participants knew that the study was being conducted by a building administrator and participants simply wanted a chance to be heard. Because the survey was conducted in an anonymous format, participants were allowed to speak freely and openly without fear of retaliation. In the district in which this study was conducted, there is a large presence of negative attitude toward the balanced literacy program because it has been mandated across all schools and in all classrooms and because teachers don't like the amount of time required to incorporate all of its elements. Many of the teachers at two of the participating schools have been successful with their students and they feel as if this program is one designed to remedy the low test scores that exist in some of the other schools in the district. The distrust that teachers feel towards district leaders was evident in the open-ended responses to the survey and may have contributed to the high response rate because teachers wanted the opportunity to express their negative feelings.

Another factor that may have contributed to the high response rate was the way in which the survey was distributed. Teachers had two weeks to complete the survey online at their convenience. They received two e-mail reminders from the researcher and also from their building principal and the instructional coach at their school. The survey was discussed at staff meetings and in grade level meetings. Participants were constantly reminded to complete the survey.

### Chapter Summary

This mixed methods study collected both quantitative and qualitative data using a survey containing forced choice and open-ended questions. Using a mixed methods design allowed the researcher to consider the perceptions of teachers while allowing for anonymous participation in the study. Because the researcher is the principal of one of the schools participating in this study, it was important to ensure participant confidentiality. The survey was created using tables in Microsoft Word and then pilot-tested with a focus group of instructional coaches and teachers in nonparticipating schools. Seventy teachers employed at four elementary schools in one county in Georgia were asked to complete the electronic survey. This study sought to understand from the perspectives of teachers how they valued and used the assessment strategies incorporated in the framework and what level of autonomy they perceived for themselves while incorporating the balanced literacy initiative during the 2006-2007 school year. Quantitative analysis was conducted by categorizing responses and calculating frequency of answers. A variety of non-parametric methods of analyses was utilized. Qualitative analysis was conducted using a five 5-step procedure of qualitative analysis suggested by Powell and Renner (2003).

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the perspectives of thirty-nine ( $N = 39$ ) elementary teachers in one middle Georgia school district regarding their use and value of the assessment strategies incorporated in the county's balanced literacy program. This research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers implement the assessment strategies incorporated in balanced literacy?
2. To what degree do teachers value the information derived from assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework as providing meaningful information about how individual students are learning?
3. What level of autonomy do teachers feel they have in regards to teaching using the balanced literacy approach?

The study included an electronic survey of the thirty-nine ( $N=39$ ) participants. A response analysis of the quantitative and qualitative questions reflected data that describes the perspectives of the elementary teachers and their implementation of the performance-based assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework. This phenomenological study incorporated both closed ended and open-ended questions in an attempt to understand the insights of teachers. Each of the participants completed a 48-hour training seminar in the district on the eight components of balanced literacy. The purpose of the survey was to examine how and to what extent these teachers had been able to implement the strategies they had learned in the workshops. The researcher pilot tested the survey questions with instructional coaches and teachers before finalizing the



content, order, and format of the survey. A link to the electronic survey was distributed via e-mail, and responses were confidential as no identifying information was requested or tracked. There were 39 ( $N=39$ ) collected surveys that were deemed usable for the purposes of data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the survey in three parts. Part 1 reports the quantitative findings from the first seven questions that inform Research Questions 1 and 2. Part 2 reports the qualitative data that was collected from Questions 8-14 that inform Research Question 3.

For Part 3, findings were aggregated across the survey questions and the research questions to reflect the deeper meaning from the data. The findings were analyzed and themes were drawn from the teacher's perspectives. Themes were developed to better understand phenomenologically the perspectives of teachers implementing the performance-based assessments in the balanced literacy program. These thematic findings are reported in Part 3 of this chapter.

### Quantitative Findings

In order to answer the first research question, "How do teachers implement the assessment strategies incorporated in balanced literacy?" the first question in the survey asked participants to rate how often they use each type of performance-based assessment. In order to determine which type of performance-based assessment was used the most often by participants a Friedman Rank Test was applied to the data. The Friedman Rank test is the nonparametric version of the parametric test repeated measures ANOVA which compares within subject data in terms of changes over time or differences between conditions (Sprinthall, 2003). The Friedman Rank Test was significant,  $\chi^2(8) = 163.19, p < .001$ , indicating that there was a significant difference in rank ordering of the

assessment types. In order to determine which performance-based tests were significantly different from each other, several post-hoc tests using the Wilcoxon matched pairs sign rank test for each pair of performance-based assessments were performed. The Wilcoxon matched pairs sign rank test is the nonparametric equivalent of the correlated samples *t*-test (Myers & Well, 1995). The Friedman Rank Test provided the rank ordering of the performance-based assessments (see Table 2). The two highest ranked assessments were compared first, oral open-ended questions versus conferring. The Wilcoxon matched pairs sign rank test was not significant,  $Z = -1.66, p = .097$ . However, oral open-ended questions was ranked significantly higher than performance tasks on demand,  $Z = -4.34, p < .001$ . Therefore we know that oral open-ended questions are ranked significantly higher than everything ranked from performance tasks on demand through the lowest ranked assessment – the developmental reading assessment. Next the second ranked assessment, conferring, was compared to performance tasks on demand. These assessments were not significantly different from each other,  $Z = -.43, p = .67$ . Next, conferring was compared to written open-ended questions; this was also not significant,  $Z = -1.66, p = .097$ . Next, conferring was compared to running records; conferring was ranked significantly higher than running records,  $Z = -3.81, p < .001$ , and therefore ranked significantly higher than everything ranked below running records.

Performance tasks on demand were next compared to written open-ended questions. These were not ranked significantly different from each other,  $Z = -1.42, p = .155$ . However, performance tasks on demand was ranked significantly higher than running records,  $Z = -3.29, p < .001$ . Written open-ended questions was compared to running records, and was found to be ranked significantly higher than running records,  $Z$

= -2.534,  $p = .011$ . Running records was then compared to the next ranked anecdotal records, but these were not significantly different from each other,  $Z = -.37$ ,  $p = .713$ . Next running records was compared to projects; these two assessments were also not significantly different from each other,  $Z = -.92$ ,  $p = .356$ . Running records was next compared to Star Reader, and these were also not significantly different from each other,  $Z = -1.89$ ,  $p = .058$ . However, running records was ranked significantly higher than the Developmental Reading Assessment,  $Z = -4.55$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Anecdotal records was next compared to projects and was not found to be significantly different,  $Z = -.47$ ,  $p = .64$ . However, anecdotal records was ranked significantly higher than Star Reader,  $Z = -1.98$ ,  $p = .048$ . Projects was compared to Star Reader but was not significantly different,  $Z = -1.68$ ,  $p = .092$ . But projects was significantly ranked higher than Developmental Reading Assessment,  $Z = -3.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . Star Reader was compared to Developmental Reading Assessment and was found to be ranked significantly higher,  $Z = -2.38$ ,  $p = .017$ . Table 2 lists the mean rank of each of the types of assessment. A lower mean rank means that the assessment was used more often than others.

Survey Question 2, “How many of your rubrics have levels of quality created with student input?” was also designed to assess the first research question. None of the teachers answered “All”; 20.5% of the teachers answered “Most”; 30.8% answered “Some”; 33.3% of the teachers answered “Few”, which was the most common answer; and 15.4% answered “None.”

Table 2 *Mean Rank for Performance-Based Assessments*

Performance-Based Assessment	Mean Rank
Oral open-ended questions	1.68
Conferring	3.33
Performance tasks on demand	3.72
Written open-ended questions	4.26
Running Records	5.69
Anecdotal Records	5.83
Projects	6.26
Star Reader	6.63
Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2)	7.60

Survey Questions 3 and 4 asked teachers whether the assessments they used included real-world simulations or hypothetical situations; these questions were also designed to answer Research Question 1. These two questions were compared with a Wilcoxon matched pairs sign rank test to determine whether they were more likely to use real-world examples or hypothetical situations. The test was significant and teachers ranked using real-world examples higher than using hypothetical examples,  $Z = -2.98$ ,  $p = .003$ .

Question 6 was the final survey question to test the first research question. As with Question 1, the Friedman Rank test was used to assess which methods of evaluation and feedback the participants in the study used most often. The Friedman Rank Test was significant,  $\chi^2(4) = 48.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that there was a significant difference in

rank ordering of the evaluation types (see Table 3). In order to determine which types of evaluation were significantly different from each other, several post-hoc tests using the Wilcoxon matched pairs sign rank test for each pair of performance-based assessments were performed. The two highest ranked evaluation types were compared first, “Teacher evaluates student work and gives descriptive feedback” and “Evaluation is a cooperative effort between the student and teacher.” “Teacher evaluates student work” was ranked significantly higher than “Evaluation is a cooperative effort,”  $Z = -3.21, p < .001$ , therefore it was also ranked significantly higher than all lower ranked types of evaluations. Next, “Evaluation is a cooperative effort” was compared to “I use a rubric with levels of quality to evaluate student work.” These two types of evaluation were not significantly different from each other,  $Z = -.89, p = .376$ . This test was followed by comparing “Evaluation is a cooperative effort” to “Students evaluate and reflect on their own work against criteria.” Again, these were not significantly different from each other,  $Z = -1.78, p = .075$ . However when comparing “Evaluation is a cooperative effort” to “Students evaluate other students' work against criteria,” “Evaluation is a cooperative effort” was ranked significantly higher,  $Z = -3.39, p = .001$ .

Next “I use a rubric with levels of quality to evaluate student work” was compared to “Students evaluate and reflect on their own work against criteria.” This comparison was not significant,  $Z = -.60, p = .547$ . However, when “I use a rubric” was compared to “Students evaluate other students' work against criteria,” it was ranked significantly higher,  $Z = -3.27, p = .001$ . Finally, “Students evaluate and reflect on their own work against criteria” was compared to “Students evaluate other students' work against criteria.” This final comparison was also significant,  $Z = -2.97, p < .003$ .

The findings for survey Question 6 informed Research Question 1 and indicated that teachers chose “teacher evaluates student work and gives descriptive feedback” as the most frequent type of evaluation and mechanism for student feedback. Table 3 lists the types of evaluation ranked in order by their use. A lower mean rank indicates more frequent use by the participants.

Table 3

*Mean Ranks of Types of Evaluation*

Types of Evaluation	Mean Rank
Teacher evaluates student work and gives descriptive feedback	1.94
Evaluation is a cooperative effort between the student and teacher	2.63
I use a rubric with levels of quality to evaluate student work	3.27
Students evaluate and reflect on their own work against criteria	3.28
Students evaluate other students' work against criteria	3.88

The second research question, “To what degree do teachers value the information derived from assessment strategies in the balanced literacy framework as providing meaningful information about how individual students are learning?” was examined with survey Question 5. The fifth survey question asked participants how often they made instructional decisions based on the various types of performance-based assessments. As with survey Questions 1 and 6 the Friedman Rank test was used to see if there was a difference in which assessments teachers were most likely to use to make instructional decisions. The Friedman rank test was significant,  $\chi^2(10) = 151.74, p < .001$ , indicating

that there was a significant difference in rank ordering of the assessment types (see Table 4). In order to determine which assessments were ranked as more important several Wilcoxon matched pairs signed rank tests were conducted. The first signed rank test compared the two highest ranked assessments, oral open-ended questions and conferring. Oral open-ended questions was ranked significantly higher than conferring,  $Z = -2.24$ ,  $p = .025$ , and therefore significantly higher than all the other assessments. The next comparison was between conferring and performance tasks on demand; this comparison was not significant,  $Z = -.163$ ,  $p = .870$ . Conferring was also not significantly different from written open-ended questions,  $Z = -1.60$ ,  $p = .109$ . However, conferring was ranked significantly higher than running records,  $Z = -2.96$ ,  $p = .003$ .

Next, “performance tasks on demand” was compared to written open-ended questions. These two assessments were not significantly different from each other,  $Z = -1.82$ ,  $p = .069$ . However, performance tasks on demand was ranked significantly higher than running records,  $Z = -3.14$ ,  $p = .002$ . Written open-ended questions was compared to running records, but these were not significantly different from each other,  $Z = -1.54$ ,  $p = .125$ . Written open-ended questions was ranked significantly higher than anecdotal records,  $Z = -2.29$ ,  $p = .022$ . Running records was not significantly different from anecdotal records,  $Z = -1.33$ ,  $p = .182$ , nor was it significantly different from Star Reader,  $Z = -1.82$ ,  $p = .069$ . On the other hand, running records was significantly ranked higher than Standardized tests,  $Z = -2.62$ ,  $p = .009$ .

Anecdotal records were next compared to portfolio tasks. These were not significantly different from each other,  $Z = -.125$ ,  $p = .900$ . Anecdotal records was also not significantly different from Star Reader,  $Z = -1.13$ ,  $p = .258$ , projects,  $Z = -.738$ ,  $p =$

.461, or standardized tests,  $Z = -1.90$ ,  $p = .057$ . However, anecdotal records was ranked significantly higher than Developmental Reading Assessment,  $Z = -3.13$ ,  $p = .002$ .

Portfolio tasks were next compared to Star Reader, projects and standardized tests and none of these comparisons were significant,  $Z = -1.17$ ,  $p = .243$ ,  $Z = -1.042$ ,  $p = .298$ ,  $Z = -1.88$ ,  $p = .06$ , respectively. However, portfolio tasks was ranked significantly higher than Developmental Reading Assessment,  $Z = -2.96$ ,  $p = .003$ .

Star Reader was compared to projects and standardized tests. Neither of these tests were significant,  $Z = -.54$ ,  $p = .588$  and  $Z = -.53$ ,  $p = .599$ , respectively. However, Star Reader was ranked significantly higher than Developmental Reading Assessment,  $Z = -2.10$ ,  $p = .036$ . Projects was not ranked significantly higher than standardized tests,  $Z = -.96$ ,  $p = .338$ ; however, projects was ranked significantly higher than Developmental Reading Assessments,  $Z = -2.46$ ,  $p = .014$ . Finally, standardized tests was not ranked significantly higher than Developmental Reading Assessments,  $Z = -1.86$ ,  $p = .063$ .

Table 4 indicates the mean rank order of how often participants made instructional decisions based on different assessment strategies. A lower mean rank indicates that participants more frequently made instructional decisions after using the assessment strategy.



Table 4

*Mean Ranking of Assessments Used to Make Instructional Decisions*

Types of Assessments	Mean Rank
Oral open-ended questions	2.58
Conferring	3.79
Performance tasks on demand	4.06
Written open-ended questions	4.60
Running records	5.82
Anecdotal records	6.87
Portfolio tasks	7.12
Star reader	7.31
Projects	7.47
Standardized tests	7.71
Developmental reading assessment (DRA2)	8.67

Survey question seven asked teachers to choose the performance-based assessment that gave them the most valuable information about an individual student's reading ability. This question was also designed to assess the second research question. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was used to determine if teachers chose any of the assessments more often than they chose others. A nonparametric test, the chi-square goodness of fit test is used for estimating how closely an observed distribution matches an expected distribution (Myers & Well, 1995). The test was significant,  $\chi^2 (5) = 19.31, p$

= .002, indicating that there were specific assessments that were chosen more often or less often than others. In order to determine which assessments were chosen more often or less often than by chance alone, the residuals were examined. Given 39 participants and six assessment choices, the expected value for any assessment was 6.5. The assessment most chosen was running records; this had a residual of 6.5 because 13 participants chose it. The assessment chosen the least was the qualitative spelling inventory; this had a residual of -6.5, because none of the participants chose it. The next least likely assessment chosen was standardized tests which had a residual of -5.5 because only one person chose it. The remaining assessments had residuals between 1.5 and 2.5, making them close to the expected value (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Chi-Square Results for the Most Valuable Information About a Student's Reading Ability*

	Category	Observed <i>N</i>	Expected <i>N</i>	Residual
1	Running records	13	6.5	6.5
2	Developmental reading assessment	9	6.5	2.5
3	Anecdotal records	8	6.5	1.5
4	Standardized tests	1	6.5	-5.5
5	Star reader	8	6.5	1.5
6	Qualitative spelling inventory	0	6.5	-6.5
	Total	39		

The final set of analyses to assess the second research question examined the relations between responses to Question 5 and Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4. Spearman's rho, the nonparametric form of correlation which is used with ordinal data (Sprinthall, 2003), was used to determine whether how participants answer questions about their use of various assessment strategies and evaluation strategies is related to how much they value the various assessment strategies.. Their use of written open-ended questions was strongly positively related to their value of written open-ended questions,  $r_s = .69, p < .001$ , projects,  $r_s = .33, p < .05$ , and standardized tests,  $r_s = .36, p < .05$ . Their use of performance tasks on demand was strongly positively related to their value of oral open-ended questions,  $r_s = .47, p < .01$ , performance tasks on demand,  $r_s = .84, p < .05$ ; portfolio tasks,  $r_s = .39, p < .05$ ; conferring,  $r_s = .42, p < .01$  and anecdotal records,  $r_s = .33, p < .05$ . Their use of projects was positively related to their values of written open-ended questions,  $r_s = .38, p < .05$ ; portfolio tasks,  $r_s = .37, p < .05$ ; and projects,  $r_s = .75, p < .001$ . Their use of conferring was positively related to their value of oral open-ended questions,  $r_s = .47, p < .01$ ; performance tasks on demand,  $r_s = .42, p < .01$ ; portfolio tasks,  $r_s = .62, p < .001$ ; conferring,  $r_s = .75, p < .001$ ; and anecdotal records,  $r_s = .54, p < .001$ .

Their use of running records was strongly positively related to their value of running records,  $r_s = .87, p < .001$ ; and DRA2,  $r_s = .54, p < .001$ . Their use of DRA2 was negatively related to their value of oral open-ended questions,  $r_s = -.34, p < .05$ ; but positively related to their value of running records,  $r_s = .61, p < .001$  and DRA2,  $r_s = .91, p < .001$ . Their use of anecdotal records was positively related to their value of portfolio tasks,  $r_s = .46, p < .01$ ; projects,  $r_s = .40, p < .05$ ; conferring,  $r_s = .38, p < .05$ ; running

records,  $r_s = .38, p < .05$  and anecdotal records,  $r_s = .84, p < .001$ . Lastly, Star Reader was positively related to their value of written open-ended questions,  $r_s = .35, p < .05$ ; standardized tests,  $r_s = .34, p < .05$  and Star Reader,  $r_s = .91, p < .001$ . These results indicate a positive relationship between use and value for most assessment strategies.

The final analyses examined the Spearman's Rho correlations between Question 5 and Questions 2, 3, and 4 (see Table 6 for all Spearman's Rho correlation values). Question 5 asked how often participants made instructional decisions based on information they received from various types of assessments. Question 2 asked participants to indicate how many of their rubrics were created with student input. Question 3 asked how often they used assessments involving real-world problems and challenges. Question 4 asked participants to indicate how many of their assessments included hypothetical or simulated situations from textbooks or workbooks. This analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the use of assessment strategies to make instructional decisions and the participant's knowledge of effective assessment strategies. The findings indicated a positive relationship between using real-world examples and valuing the assessment strategies in balanced literacy for instructional purposes. The findings indicated a negative relationship between including student input into rubrics and using the assessment strategies to make instructional decisions.

Teacher value of written open-ended questions was positively related to whether or not they included student input in their rubrics of quality,  $r_s = .37, p < .05$ . Their value of portfolio tasks was positively related to whether or not they included student input in their rubrics of quality,  $r_s = .34, p < .05$ . their value of projects was strongly positively

related to whether or not they included student input in their rubrics of quality,  $r_s = .53$ ,  $p < .001$  and how often they included real world examples in their assessments,  $r_s = .40$ ,  $p < .05$ . Their value of running records was negatively related to how often they included hypothetical examples in their assessments,  $r_s = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### Qualitative Findings

There were seven open-ended questions on the survey designed to elicit responses from the participants concerning their feelings about the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach. Specifically, these open-ended questions were designed to inform Research Question 3: “What level of autonomy do teachers feel they have in regards to teaching using the balanced literacy approach?” This section of chapter 4 reports on the responses the teachers gave to survey Questions 8-14. Themes that developed from the analysis of these findings are discussed in Part 3 of this chapter.

#### *Teacher Responses to Open-Ended Questions*

*Question 8.* This question asked teachers to explain why they felt that the type of assessment they chose in Question 7 provided the most valuable information about an individual student’s reading ability. All 39 participants answered this question. As reported in Part 1 of this chapter, participants ranked running records and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) as the types of assessments that provide the most valuable information about an individual student’s reading ability. Twelve teachers felt that Running Records gave them the best information about their students’ reading ability.

Table 6

*Spearman's Rho Correlations for the Relation Between Question 5 and Questions 2, 3 & 4*

Question 5	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Oral open-ended questions	0.09	0.07	0.08
Written open-ended questions	0.37*	0.16	-0.08
Performance tasks on demand	0.19	0.21	-0.12
Portfolio tasks	0.34*	0.19	-0.22
Projects	0.53***	0.40*	-0.11
Conferring	0.03	0.26	-0.11
Running records	0.03	0.18	-0.32*
Developmental reading assessment	0.07	0.19	-0.07
Anecdotal records	0.18	0.31	-0.02
Standardized tests	0.14	-0.29	-0.10
Star reader	0.31	0.09	0.01

Four teachers who chose Running Records said the following about the value of that assessment:

Running Records provides the most valuable information about individual student's reading ability because I assess this way more often with one-on-one administration. I believe that DRA is too time consuming and that it does not provide for students with special needs.

Running Records RR provide the most detailed information. I have not done this consistently this year due to all of the changes that have taken place in my room.

A running record is a good tool to determine areas that a student struggles or needs more reinforcement.

Running Records, these assessments provide continuous and immediate feedback regarding the fluency and accuracy of the student's reading ability.

Nine teachers reported that Development Reading Assessment (DRA2) was helpful in assessing a student's reading ability. As two teachers reported,

The DRA offers information about reading engagement behaviors as well as decoding and comprehension abilities. I have found that at times students can decode very well; however, they do not score as well on the comprehension portion of the assessment. This tells me that I must work on comprehension strategies with these students.

I am able to distinguish what the student's weakness is at that moment and this gives me the information needed to drive my instruction for the next week.

It is important to note that eight participants chose Star Reader and offered some of the following reasons:

I feel it is more accurate to rate comprehension questions and answers.

Star Reader has given accurate information when compared to DRA2. It takes less time away from instruction and also gives practice that is similar to that of the CRCT. I can also sit and watch and listen to the student and gain valuable information about the student's reading practices and strategies. DRA is very time

consuming and subjective. STAR is objective and consistent. It is also easier to measure growth and data is easy to interpret and easy for parents to understand. Answers to Survey Question 8 indicated that teachers were largely divided in their choice of the “best” assessment. In fact, three teachers reported that the assessment used needed to be tailored to fit individual students; they felt that there was no “best” assessment type. The responses to this open-ended question showed then that assessment, like teaching, strategies seem to depend upon the individual teacher’s style.

*Question 9.* This question asked, “Overall, do you believe the assessment strategies in balanced literacy provide adequate information about individual student progress?” Five teachers gave one word answers of “yes,” “no,” or “somewhat” and did not give an explanation. The remaining teachers gave an explanation. Of the 39 respondents, nine teachers reported that they did not find assessment strategies in the balanced literacy program to offer adequate information. Those teachers felt that the assessment strategies in balanced literacy were too complex, took too much time, and really did not provide teachers with adequate information. As one teacher complained,

No. I do not because this type of assessment does not give the students a complete idea about what they will be facing on the state tests. In order for this to be an accurate assessment of their learning, the state needs to incorporate state performance based assessment.

Another teacher adamantly reported her dislike of the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy program:

No!!!!!!! Too time consuming. Takes away from instruction. Too complicated and too much paperwork. Very subjective and very expensive. I wish the people



making these decisions would listen to teachers. The money wasted on these programs could be spent on things we actually need that would improve instruction.

Many teachers felt there was a disconnect between the strategies used in balanced literacy and the strategies needed to help students perform well on state performance tests. Some teachers, even those who agreed that assessment strategies did provide them with helpful information, said time was an issue: “They are so time consuming; they are sometimes impractical in upper grade.”

Those teachers who feel that the assessment strategies in balanced literacy provide good information about students’ reading abilities said the following:

I believe Balanced Literacy is the best way to teach reading/writing that I've ever learned as a teaching method. The assessments are much more involving of the students. They get much more out of the books and stories we read due to their hands on ways of reporting what they learned and when making text connections. The DRA is so comprehensive it allows the kids to move on to other levels or stay on current levels until they master all the skills necessary to move on to higher levels. As a teacher of Special Ed. students, I have gained so much more individual information about my students this year and have seen much more improvement in my students than in any other teaching year of my career, 15 total years. I love Balanced Literacy and look forward, everyday, to learning more, to be a better teacher to my students.

I believe that, if a teacher uses all the assessment strategies taught in BL, they can get a good picture of how their students are progressing from day to day,

week to week, semester to semester, etc.... My personal preference is taking short notes weekly or by skill taught, but all the elements of BL work together well when the teacher is trained and open-minded enough to use them.

I am very pleased with the feedback I give and receive using the balanced literacy approach. I can tell that this approach has changed the way I teach. It has been a wonderful journey for me.

The responses from the teachers ranged from extreme displeasure with the balanced literacy program to effusive statements about the program. However, the majority of the responses offered some caveat of doubt about whether the program was really worth what teachers felt was a huge time investment. The following responses are an example of the ambivalent feelings expressed by the teachers about the value of the assessment strategies in the approach:

Yes and No. I have learned more about my students' individual strengths and weaknesses in BL. However a lot of the assessment is teacher judgment and we all have different ways to assess a students achievement therefore it is not consistent across grade level.

Yes, but it is entirely too complex and has too many components for very young children.

Hence, even teachers who reported a favorable response to the question still had some significant issues with the assessment strategies in balanced literacy. More will be discussed about this ambivalence and possible meanings in chapter 5.

*Question 10.* This question was "How has implementing balanced literacy changed how you make instructional decisions in your classroom?" A full third of the

teachers gave a negative response to this question, reporting that all balanced literacy had done for them was caused them to do more paperwork and as one teacher reported, “It has made me a nervous wreck trying to ‘fit it all in’ and be sure I do it just like it was taught to me.” Other teachers have not bought into the program and do not feel that the program has any benefits for their instruction: “I implemented BL because it was county mandated. I'm not totally convinced that this will work. It is not realistic.” Or as another teacher reported, “It has only changed by adding more things to do in the school day. The instruction is basically the same with added tools and ideas.” Thus, for a third of the participants there has been a negative change since the introduction of balanced literacy. Those who see balanced literacy as a negative influence on their teaching also state that they feel as if they have lost professional autonomy as a result of implementing the strategies in balanced literacy:

I feel like my instructional decisions have been taken away. Once I was teaching very creatively...hands-on, learning through the arts, etc, but now all teachers are expected to do it the same way. All children do not learn the same way.

There are supporters of balanced literacy, however, and some participants noted that there have been positive changes in their teaching style and their students reading ability since implementing the assessment strategies in balanced literacy. Some participants reported that they now have more informed instructional decision-making ability. The teachers reported:

It has changed my whole scope in how and what I teach my students and with what materials I do it. I never used a Basal per se but I have used a “canned” reading program that has only served to hinder my students. Balanced Literacy

allows you to use any poem, book, story or theme to teach any concept you want/need. When you cross-reference materials within the same theme this allows for many more text connections that the children can make. This has allowed me to make better planning decisions within my room to make sure that themes are well rounded and full of all aspects that I want the students to learn. I am a better teacher because of this.

It's been an amazing change. I found that I was able to push my children further than I ever have. I am a Kindergarten teacher. My students are reading and writing like never before. The instruction was much more focused on literacy, and had more of a cohesive flow. I felt like we bounced around from QCC to QCC before. Now, there is a more natural flow to instruction.

Responses to Question 10 indicated that about one third of the teachers feel as if they have more or better instructional decision-making power as a result of implementing the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach. These participants felt as if the approach has made them better teachers. The other two thirds, however, felt as they their instructional decision-making power had been hindered by the assessment strategies.

*Question 11.* This question was “How has implementing balanced literacy changed how you feel about student assessment?” The responses indicated that a majority of the teachers feel implementing the assessment strategies in balanced literacy has caused them to recognize the benefits of formative, performance-based assessment. Teachers indicated that the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach allow them to better meet the needs of individual students. These teachers found that assessing

students using balanced literacy was helpful in creating plans for future lessons, in giving them a clearer idea of what student weaknesses are, and in allowing them to individualize instruction:

I feel like the types of assessment I do now (having implemented Balanced Literacy) help me plan better for my students.

More one on one with the students during Guided Reading and Workstation times.

Implementing balanced literacy has made assessment more personal. It allows for one on one and small group time. I have a clearer idea and more data about the literacy needs of each child.

Teachers seemed especially to like the fact that assessment could be done in a variety of ways and could be done more frequently. Responses to survey Question 11 indicated that a majority of teachers who have implemented the assessment strategies in balanced literacy now recognize the benefits of alternative, formative, and performance-based assessments:

Student assessment is no longer about reaching the end of a unit every three months or so. You can assess for new skills at any point for any number of skills. Assessment can be a project, an oral response, demonstrating that the student understands by doing, or any other way. It is much more open-ended and varied, especially for students that have language issues like some of mine do. Paper and pencil tests have their place in the classroom but they are only one option among many other options to assess.

Conversely, some of the participants indicated that implementing the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach has made them feel negatively towards student assessment. These participants said that they do not value the assessment strategies because they have been forced on them and they are not excited about implementing them:

I dread doing DRAs and running records.

Balanced Literacy has made me feel like certain assessments have to be done within a certain time frame and that makes it more stressful.

These participants also said that these assessment strategies have not improved their instruction because of the lack of time to plan for and use them appropriately:

It takes a lot of planning to assess a student. Sometimes I feel as if all I do is assess which leaves less time for actual instructions. And in the end they still have to pass the CRCT which is a nonperformance based assessment.

It has not really helped me in my instruction, because if you know your students you know what level he or she is reading on. It is something tangible that can be shown to the parents.

It requires too much time that is not allotted by the county. I feel that if the county wants us to implement effectively then the county needs to allow more time for planning and not just when they wanted to allow the planning.

These teachers repeat the same phrases and words such as “taking too much time,” “stressful,” and “dread” that they used to respond to previous survey questions. These responses indicate that fully one-third of participants feel as if there are few, if any,

assessment strategies in balanced literacy that teachers feel comfortable using in their classrooms.

*Question 12.* The next question asked, “Has implementing the assessment strategies in balanced literacy changed how you feel about teaching? Please explain your answer.” As with previous survey questions, some of the teachers felt as if implementing the assessment strategies had enhanced their teaching and others expressed negative feelings about the effects of their implementation. There were more extreme responses to this question than to any of the previous survey questions. Most teachers said that implementing the assessment strategies in balanced literacy have negatively affected how they feel about teaching. These teachers reported feelings of inadequacy, frustration, distrust, and even anger:

It makes me dislike teaching in public schools.

It makes me feel like a “bad” teacher when I haven't felt like I'm doing it “right.”

I have become more frustrated because I want to do a good job but time is an issue.

I work a lot harder, spend more time planning and doing paper work. It drains you.

I do not enjoy teaching as much. I know when a child needs help in reading. I don't need to spend an hour proving it.

Yes, I feel out of sorts because of all the components to be assessed in Bal. Lit. I feel that Bal. Lit. is monopolizing the time needed for Math, Science, Social Studies and Art.

Some days it makes me angry, other days I think it is good, but I am afraid I see more bad than good.

It makes me feel overwhelmed and annoyed, because once I get this down pat, they will change it again.

No, still too much paperwork. If they would only trust the teachers in what they are doing in the classroom it would make teaching more enjoyable. Teachers become familiar with one way of assessing and then the system goes and changes everything. They state that it will make things easier, but instead things become harder.

The balanced literacy assessment requirements make me wish I was closer to retirement. I hate wasting time and that's what I feel like I am doing most of the time.

It just confirmed that if something isn't broken, don't try to fix it. The way I taught before worked for me and my students. I do use Balanced Literacy, but not in the exact way it is meant to be.

From the above statements, it is clear that teachers have strong feelings about the negative effect implementing the assessment strategies have had on their feelings about teaching. The words *frustration*, *anger*, and *annoyed* are added to the responses in previous survey questions to build a picture of a group of teachers who are doubting their teaching ability because of the new assessment requirements that have been forced upon them.

The positive responses for this question were fewer than for previous questions. Fewer teachers report a positive growth in their profession because of the implementation



of the assessment strategies in balanced literacy. In this question, teachers seemed to be contradicting some of the things they have reported previously. These teachers reported that implementing these assessment strategies has enabled them to learn new assessment strategies and to gain more valuable information about individual student needs:

I enjoy the feedback I am able to provide my students and my family.

It has not changed how I feel about teaching, but it has opened my eyes to a new approach.

I love it. I am retiring, but am happy that our system is moving in this direction. It helps put the joy of learning back into instruction.

It has made me teach a little more in depth than I probably would of before. I also had more time to spend one on one with my students.

I have enjoyed teaching more using the Balanced Literacy program and I feel the students have enjoyed learning as well. I believe these instructional strategies are more successful than the typical direct instruction used in years past.

None of the positive statements match the intensity of the negative responses and that may suggest that the teachers are being overwhelmed by the implementation of different programs and that is affecting how they feel about their own teaching abilities and the teaching profession in general.

*Question 13.* This question asked, “As a result of implementing balanced literacy, do you feel that you need more training in formative assessment? Explain why or why not.” Of the 39 responses, 25 were in the affirmative. Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that more training would help them improve their skills. As most teachers reported:

Yes. To validate that what I am doing is correct.

Yes, because the expectations of the rubrics could be interpreted differently by each teacher.

Yes. I need more real life examples and training on rubrics.

Yes, I could always use more training. I view my job as a learning experience. I want to be continually learning how to better my teaching.

Yes! The training in Balanced Literacy did not provide enough time.

Yes. You can never have too much training. You want to stay up to date with assessments and the training helps you confirm that your assessments are appropriate or need to be changed.

However, 14 of the participants were very adamant about not needing additional training in assessment strategies. These teachers used matter of fact, extreme language similar to that found in previous survey answers. Their reasons for not wanting additional training centered on the lack of time they perceive is necessary to properly plan for the assessment strategies. These participants stated:

NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Training is time we are not teaching... enough!!!!

We don't need more training!!!!!!!!!!!!!! We need time to plan and figure out how to do all of this.

No, but I do feel more planning time is required to do a superior job with A.

Heavens no! I have enough training to sink a ship. Just get out of the way and let me teach the way that I know works.

No we need planning time. We have been trained. We need time to put our thoughts together and look at the materials. Please do not over load us with more classes and stuff.

No, I feel that we as teachers need to be given the time to work out the kinks of Balanced Literacy so that it can be fully implemented.

It is clear that teachers who do not like using the assessment strategies in balanced literacy are not interested in receiving more training in a program that they have no vested interest in and have no desire to implement.

*Question 14.* This question asked, “For those assessment strategies that you indicated you do not use, what is/are reasons?” The responses to this question elicited reasons for why teachers avoided certain assessment strategies in balanced literacy. As reported in part 1, a significant number of teachers indicated that they do not use the DRA2, Star Reader, and Anecdotal Records as often as other assessment strategies or even at all. Of the 39 participants, seven indicated that they use all of the assessment strategies. The remaining 32 participants indicated various reasons for not using certain assessments. Most of the teachers responded that they either lacked enough training in certain assessments to do a thorough job, or they did not like some of the balanced literacy assessment strategies and therefore just did not implement these strategies. Ten teachers said they did not use the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) because they have not been trained in how to use the instrument. Others indicated that they choose not to use DRA because they don’t value its use. Some participants indicated that Star Reader, Standardized tests, and open-ended written questions were not developmentally appropriate for their students. It can be assumed that these responses came from PreK,

Kindergarten, or Special Education teachers. Of the remaining responses, it is important to note that those who did not use DRA2, Running Records, and Anecdotal Records gave the following reasons:

Not enough time.

Toooooo much----- At some point we have to stop assessing and just teach.

I do not enjoy using running records, but I do use them (because I am told to do it). I do not like doing DRAs. I also do them because I am told to do them.

DRA requires much too much teacher scoring and administration time which takes away from instructional time. For the amount of money it costs and time it requires, it does not reap proportional benefits.

I do not know very much about anecdotal records. I need more training.

This is my first year teaching this grade level and an inclusion classroom. I have needed some time to adjust and have not had as much time to implement all of the strategies.

You cannot use every assessment strategy. Depends on your children.

One word that was repeated frequently in this group of responses was *time*. Repeatedly, teachers complained that time was a limitation in the number of strategies that could be implemented. In fact, *time* was the number one word repeated throughout all the survey questions, being expressed over 100 times. The frequency of the use of this word in the survey responses is an indication that teachers are being stressed by a school day already filled with other district requirement and federal mandates and that time is not being given to the teachers to incorporate all these mandates.

## Themes

The findings of the survey revealed very significant information about teacher perceptions of assessment strategies in the balanced literacy program. What was clear from the responses to the open-ended questions was that teachers were divided on whether or not they believed that the assessment strategies in balanced literacy were beneficial. To discover themes, responses to the quantitative and qualitative questions were cross-referenced and analyzed. The analysis of the final data showed that there were six themes that emerged from the teachers' responses to the survey. These themes capture teacher insight into the implementation of assessment strategies in the county's balanced literacy approach.

### *Time*

The word *time* was used approximately 100 times in the survey responses. For the assessments that participants stated they did not use during the 2006-2007 school year, time was cited as the most frequent reason. Regardless of whether a teacher reported valuing the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach or being deeply dissatisfied and unhappy with them, most were likely to mention the time that they had to invest in order to implement the assessment strategies. For example, a teacher who praised the assessment strategies said,

Balanced literacy has provided a good framework for structuring instruction. The assessment strategies work well within that model, however, they don't allow for the actual grades that we have to report to the parents. Every grade has to have a rubric written for it and allow for much input from the students to allow for

instruction to be properly driven. This takes a lot of time and patience. We don't always have enough time to accomplish all that we should.

This teacher, like others who expressed positive comments regarding the value of the assessment strategies, thought that time was the missing element in accomplishing all the evaluative components of the balanced literacy program. Other participants, however, were more adamant about the lack of value of the assessments because of the inadequate time to prepare to implement the strategies. Teachers feel as if no consideration was given to providing teachers with more planning time. One teacher stated, "We need time to plan and figure out how to do all of this." Instead, they feel as if they are required to do more assessment and are required to individualize instruction, but do not have adequate time to prepare and plan. As a result, teachers scramble to "fit it all in" and their frustration with the balanced literacy approach becomes greater. It is notable that even those who stated that they value the assessment strategies in balanced literacy are having difficulty arranging their schedule to include enough time to carry out all of the components. Repeatedly, teachers stated that they need planning time to be able to successfully implement the assessment strategies. Their responses indicated that they want to do a good job with the strategies but they feel hindered by the lack of time. One teacher stated, "I do feel more planning time is required to do a superior job with AFL." Another teacher stated, "we need planning time. We have been trained. We need time to put our thoughts together and look at the materials. Please do not overload us with more classes...." Yet another teacher reiterated this point by saying, "I feel that we as teachers need to be given the time to work out the kinks of balanced literacy so that it can be fully implemented." The time issue is best summed up by what one teacher reported: "It is a

lot more paperwork and we are not given enough time to complete the work or most importantly not enough time to reflect on the student's progress to drive instruction.“

Because balanced literacy is based on the assumption that the teacher is the expert in the classroom in terms of identifying student needs, it is imperative that teachers have time to plan and reflect on instruction and assessment. The teachers in this study are unified in their desire for more time to complete these critical steps towards successful implementation of the assessment strategies in balanced literacy.

### *Lack of Support*

Many teachers felt that the county had not been supportive of teachers in terms of funding or resources. It appears that teachers in this study feel as if financial support and resources are inadequate for successful implementation. Participants indicated that there are far too few resources and support available to them:

I am very frustrated with the amount of time I spend and lack of funding that has been given. I am amazed at the amount of money that has been spent on consultants and notebooks without providing teachers with time and supplies needed to properly prepare.

Another teacher expressed similar frustration with funding for the assessment strategies:

“The money wasted on these programs could be spent on things we actually need that would improve instruction.“ Teachers in this study feel as if they need additional support in terms of personnel, too. Statements such as “we need more one on one time from the instructional coach” and that the assessment strategies are “very cumbersome for classroom teachers without paraprofessionals or other support personnel” indicate that teachers may need help organizing instructional structures to optimize time for instruction.

In addition, many participants stated that the reason they have not used the Developmental Reading Assessment, Star Reader, or the Qualitative Spelling Inventory is because they have not been trained. They stated that if they had this training, they would implement these assessment strategies. Similarly, it is important to note that 25 of the participants expressed the desire for more training in formative assessment. Although time is noted as a prominent barrier to implementation, the teachers in this study nonetheless expressed a desire for more training in performance-based assessment strategies.

#### *Grading and Standardized Tests*

Teachers expressed their frustration with the mismatch that exists between the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach and the grades they must provide to parents on report cards. One teacher's answer to survey question 14 crystallizes the frustration that exists for many teachers: "Because [they] make us have a set number of grades with a set number of items the BL system does not work. This causes teachers to do double the work because both types of assessments must be done. I think that is one reason that many people hate the BL program." Another teacher reiterated this point and named the reason for the mismatch: "Balanced literacy does not provide a formal assessment that can be used in the grading process." It appears that teachers in this study don't understand how to report grades on a district report card while also using the performance-based assessments. One teacher's response explains this conflict and lack of understanding:

Balanced literacy has provided a good framework for structuring instruction. The assessment strategies work well within that model, however, they don't allow for



the actual grades that we have to report to the parents. Every grade has to have a rubric written for it and allow for much input from the students to allow for instruction to be properly driven. This takes a lot of time and patience.

It is clear that teachers need more training to better understand how to create grades from performance-based assessments. One teacher asked for “more training in assessments that can be used for grading purposes as well as to evaluate progress and instructional success.” It appears that teacher frustration exists because they experience the conflict between performance tasks and the district’s required number of numeric grades on report cards.

In today’s world of high-stakes educational accountability, the litmus test for effective teaching is standardized test scores. Teachers in this study are aware of accountability and its consequences. One teacher described this uncomfortable situation in the following way: “We are living with our feet in 2 worlds and this is not a happy place to be. It is making us tired and angry and NO one will listen.” Teachers are expected to enable their students to perform successfully on standardized tests, yet they feel as if the performance-based assessment strategies in the approach are vastly different from standardized tests. One teacher stated:

This type of assessment does not give the students a complete idea about what they will be facing on the state tests. In order for this to be an accurate assessment of their learning, the state needs to incorporate state performance-based assessment.”

Another teacher explained, “Assessment strategies in balanced literacy are not like the CRCT so it makes it even harder to prepare children for the test that counts so

much.” For these teachers, teaching skills for the CRCT is primary, and the assessment strategies in balanced literacy are used when time allows. Teachers say they prioritize this way because “in the end they still have to pass the CRCT which is a nonperformance based assessment.”

### *Teacher Confidence*

For more than a third of the teachers surveyed in this study, the balanced literacy program has become a demoralizing initiative that has made teaching more difficult for them and has left them feeling that they are not competent teachers. Anxiety levels have increased and teacher frustration is evident. Responses such as “It has made me a nervous wreck trying to ‘fit it all in’ and be sure I do it just like it was taught to me”, “Balanced literacy has made me feel like certain assessments have to be done within a certain time frame and that makes it more stressful” and “It makes me feel like a ‘bad’ teacher when I haven’t felt like I’m doing it ‘right’” all indicate that some of the teachers in this study have begun to question their effectiveness in the classroom. One teacher stated, “This program has made teaching more difficult and less effective for me overall.” These feelings of inadequacy and doubt about personal effectiveness were evident in roughly one third of the responses.

### *Instructional Decision Making*

Some teachers also felt that they are not given the right to make instructional decisions. Instead, they felt as if the district is forcing them to implement a program that is very complex and time consuming. As one teacher reported: “I feel like my instructional decisions have been taken away. Once I was teaching very creatively...hands-on, learning through the arts, etc, but now all teachers are expected to

do it the same way. All children do not learn the same way.” This teacher, like many others, used words like *annoyed*, *frustrated*, *overwhelmed*, feeling *dread*, and feeling *anxious* to describe their perceptions of the assessment strategies in the program. Another teacher stated, “It is not a cookie-cutter profession. There is no one right way to assess a child. Each child performs differently, and should be assessed in the manner that is best for them.” Teachers in this study expressed the desire for trust from county administrators to act in the best interest of their students. For example, one teacher said, “If they would only trust the teachers in what they are doing in the classroom it would make teaching more enjoyable.” Another teacher said, “Nobody knows how my students are performing or what skills my students are excelling/bombing at better than I do. I’m skilled at assessing them and I don’t mind saying that.” The teachers in this study appeared to want the trust of county administrators and the ability to make instructional decisions without fear that they are not implementing the strategies appropriately.

#### *Teacher Buy-In*

The responses to the quantitative and qualitative questions in this survey reveal that teachers are not fully implementing all of the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach as often as they should. In addition to lack of time, infrequent and inconsistent implementation may be the result of a lack of teacher buy-in. One teacher stated this feeling directly, “I implemented BL because it was county mandated. I’m not totally convinced that this will work. It is not realistic.” In addition, another teacher stated that she does not use the assessment strategies because she wants to, only because she has to: “I do not enjoy using running records, but I do use them (because I am told to do it). I do not like doing DRA’s. I also do them because I am told to do them.”

Lack of agreement with the purpose and need for such an initiative has also impacted teacher buy-in. One teacher stated, “I feel I should be allowed to teach how I feel comfortable teaching and be using what has worked for me in the past.” Some teachers in this study clearly don’t see a need for this type of assessment and feel that it is too complex and not worth their time. Numerous teachers stated that they thought they were already successfully assessing and instructing students and that these assessment strategies are cumbersome and not warranted. One teacher stated this idea succinctly: “It just confirmed that if something isn’t broken, don’t try to fix it. The way I taught before worked for me and my students.”

Some teachers also felt that this program was just a temporary fad and that in a few more years they would have to relearn another methodology that would be imposed on them again. As one teacher said, “It makes me feel overwhelmed and annoyed, because once I get this down pat, they will change it again.” It is possible that teachers have not bought into this program because they “don’t like having to deal with something new every year. [We] can’t get used to one thing before something else is implemented.” Several teachers expressed the belief that this initiative would soon be replaced with something new and that it was not beneficial to fully implement the assessment strategies.

#### Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings from the survey in three parts. Part 1 reported the quantitative findings from the first seven questions that inform Research Questions 1 and 2. The data revealed that teachers most frequently used open-ended questions and conferring in their classrooms. The least used performance based assessment was Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2). A majority of participants indicated that all

or most of their rubrics contained levels of quality and were created with student input. Participants indicated that they used real-world examples in assessments more frequently than they used hypothetical situations. The participants in this study used two types of evaluation more than others: “Teacher evaluates student work and gives descriptive feedback” and “Evaluation is a cooperative effort between the student and teacher.” Part 2 reported the qualitative data that was collected from Questions 8-14 to inform Research Question 3. Varying responses were received that indicated participants did not choose one best assessment strategy. Instead, their thoughts were captured about the use of each strategy and the barriers they encountered while implementing the assessment techniques in the balanced literacy program. In Part 3, findings were aggregated across the survey questions and the research questions to reflect the deeper meaning from the data. The findings were analyzed and six themes were drawn from the teacher’s perspectives. Numerous negative responses were received that indicated time is presently a barrier to the implementation of the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy program. In addition, teachers feel that their teaching effectiveness is being compromised because they are forced to implement the assessment strategies in this program without having the proper time or resources. Teachers felt that the county failed to provide adequate support in terms of funding and resources. They also questioned the mismatch that exists between the district’s grading policies and the performance-based assessment strategies. Several questioned their teaching ability and stated that the implementation of this program has caused them to dislike teaching. Finally, a significant number of teachers stated that they felt as if they had lost the power to make instructional decisions. It was noted that

responses indicated a lack of teacher buy-in to the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy program.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions about the assessment strategies incorporated in the county's balanced literacy program. In order to do that, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from a 14-item survey that consisted of both close- and open-ended questions that was distributed to teacher participants who had completed a 48-hour training seminar in the district on the eight components of balanced literacy. Ultimately 39 teachers agreed to participate and completed the electronic survey that was distributed via e-mail and posted on SurveyMonkey.com. This chapter discusses the findings in both the quantitative and qualitative parts.

### Discussion of the Quantitative Data

The close-ended questions in the first part of the survey indicated that teachers are implementing the program in varying degrees. The two most commonly used types of performance-based assessments, as indicated by the responses from the participants in this study, were open-ended questions and conferring. Because these types of performance-based assessments occur daily in most classrooms, it makes sense that they would be the most commonly used. It is important to note that running records and DRA2 are designed to be used weekly or monthly, and they were the least used types of performance-based assessment strategies in this study. After the completion of the survey, the researcher discovered that many of the participants had only limited access to DRA2 materials and very little training in QSI. This lack of training and access to resources most likely had an impact on the way the participants ranked their usage of the assessments. Likewise, the correlation between usage and value was always positive; if a

teacher indicated that she used a particular type of assessment, she ranked it higher in terms of value.

Because performance tasks on demand and written open-ended questions were not significantly different in terms of frequency of usage, it can be assumed that many participants relied on open-ended questions as their most frequent type of performance task on demand. More training may be needed to distinguish between the types of performance tasks on demand so that teachers are better equipped to choose a strategy best-suited to the needs of their students.

The data in this study showed that teachers did not use the data gleaned from Star Reader, standardized tests, or projects as frequently as they did other types of performance-based assessments. Additional training may be needed to help teachers understand that these types of assessments can be valuable tools to drive instruction and meet individual student needs.

Teachers in this study seem to have an understanding of the importance of student input and levels of quality when using rubrics to evaluate performance. A majority of respondents indicated that all or most of their rubrics have these criteria. Participants also have an understanding that students need real-world examples instead of hypothetical situations when learning new material.

One aspect of the data revealed that teachers are not using student samples of work to help children understand criteria for performance. They did indicate that they are engaging students in evaluating their own work, but participants indicated that they are not often using samples of other students' work to demonstrate levels of quality. More training may be needed in this area. Students need targets when learning new material.



They need to see what good work looks like so that they can model their own work against those established criteria (Allen, 2006).

Running records is an integral part of the balanced literacy program. In this study, teachers did not seem to value the information they derived from running records as providing meaningful information about individual student learning. Again, teachers considered open-ended questions and conferring to be most valuable. This result is surprising because of the profundity of information about individual student reading ability that is available when a running record is performed correctly. This result may indicate that they are not conducting running records appropriately or they don't understand the data they derive from it.

Likewise, participants did not indicate that they use DRA2 as often as other assessment strategies. Again, because of the lack of training and access to DRA2 resources and the amount of time required to use DRA2, teachers don't use the assessment strategy as frequently as they do others. Finally, few teachers indicate that they use projects in their classroom. As indicated in the responses to the qualitative questions, teachers are not using them as often as they would like because of the large amount of time need to prepare for and assess performance-based assessments.

### Discussion of the Qualitative Data

The responses to the open-ended questions in the survey revealed important information about teacher perceptions of assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach. What was clear from the responses to these questions was that teachers were divided on whether or not they believed that balanced literacy assessment strategies were beneficial. The responses to this open-ended question showed then that assessment, like teaching, strategies seem to depend upon the individual teacher's style. Teachers chose running records and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) as the most valuable assessment strategies for providing beneficial student information. The literature on each of these strategies indicates that they are indeed extremely beneficial and the fact that a majority of teachers chose them indicates that teachers understand their use. It is also equally important to note that nine participants answered no to survey Question 9, stating that they do not believe the assessment strategies offer adequate information about individual student progress. It can be assumed that either these teacher's responses are caused by their extreme negative feelings towards the balanced literacy program in general, or either they don't fully understand the strategies and how to implement them. There was such a wide range of responses to the open-ended questions that it is difficult to ascertain what may have caused the negative responses, or if perhaps the positive responses were not truthful. It is possible that the positive responses were contrived in anticipation of what district administrators expected and desired for teachers to say. On the other hand, it is obvious that a significant number of participants are extremely unhappy with the assessment strategies and with balanced literacy in general. District

administrators need to confront these negative feelings if they hope for the approach to be successful.

The majority of participants indicated that they have learned more about formative assessment, specifically, performance-based assessment, as a result of implementing the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach. In spite of the negative responses, this point can be seen as a huge victory for the district administrators who chose to mandate the program. Even those who were negative in response to other questions stated that they had learned to involve students in assessment and to use real-world examples instead of hypothetical situations. Participants seemed to understand that on-going formative assessment is more beneficial in terms of providing valuable information about how students are progressing.

Twenty-five of the 39 participants stated that they need more training in formative assessment. Administrators need to understand that this is a significant number in spite of the negative responses to the survey questions. Even though teachers feel overwhelmed with incorporating all of the assessment strategies in the approach, they still want additional training because they want to improve their instruction.

Finally, teachers in this study indicated that they do not use all of the strategies because they have not received adequate training in each of them. Specifically, teachers stated that they need additional training in DRA and running records. District administrators need to understand that teachers cannot be expected to fully implement a program if they have not received training in each of the assessment strategies.

### Discussion of the Themes

An analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data revealed six themes. What follows is a discussion of each of the themes.

#### *Time*

The fact that the word “time” appears more than 100 times in the open-ended responses is important to note. Even those teachers whose responses indicated they have a positive attitude toward the program expressed that they do not have enough time in their daily schedule to include all of the assessment strategies incorporated in the program. This concern might indicate that the balanced literacy program is too complicated or complex for the whole program to be implemented. If teachers are expected to handle a program of this type then the district has to be prepared to offer teachers extra planning time and the resources necessary to implement the program correctly. As the teachers in this study indicated, they are not able to use assessment data to individualize instruction because of significant time constraints.

Additionally, the teachers felt that the time needed to plan for the program and implement the program did not allow them to really “teach” because they were too focused on filling out the paperwork that is required. In the balanced literacy approach, teachers are taught to understand that it is a professional responsibility “to take the time to analyze and interpret the assessments that we give our students so that we can find out how we can individualize and tailor our instruction to meet their needs” (Allen, 2006, p. 130). It is important to note that the participants stated that they don’t have enough time to use properly the various assessment strategies, much less take additional time to analyze the results to individualize instruction. When teachers are overloaded, they resort

to the easiest, more familiar strategies known to them. Time is an important element to be considered for the successful implementation of any curricular initiative.

### *Lack of Support*

Equally noteworthy is the perception that the county had not been supportive of teachers implementing this program in terms resources. Responses indicated that there are far too few resources and no additional planning time with which to prepare lessons to implement the assessment strategies in the approach. Additionally, teachers must be well-trained in any new procedures. Many teachers in this study said they did not want additional training in the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach, but others reported that they were still unsure on how to handle certain assessment strategies and they wanted to have more training.

School principals should understand that teachers need support, encouragement, and positive reinforcement. Teachers in this study demonstrated that if they do not receive this support, they will not be successful in implementing the program. According to Allington (2006) “If you want an intervention to fail, mandate its use with a school full of teachers who hate it, don’t agree with it, and are not skilled (or planning to become skilled) in using it” (p. 34).

### *Grading and Standardized Tests*

The responses to the survey questions suggest that teachers may not be fully using the performance based assessment strategies in balanced literacy because they do not align with district grading policies and because they do not believe they adequately prepare students for standardized tests. In this district, teachers are required to report set numbers of grades in each subject yet they are also expected to implement the

performance-based assessment strategies in balanced literacy. Teachers need training to adequately understand how to report grades that align with district mandates for numeric grades and the performance-based assessment strategies incorporated in the balanced literacy approach. Without clear understanding, teachers become frustrated and feel as if they are working to accomplish two conflicting goals. When implementing a literacy initiative that mandates performance-based assessment strategies, it may be beneficial to consider a standards-based grading system that aligns with the performance-based strategies and that allows for accurate reporting of student progress.

### *Teacher Confidence*

The responses from the survey show that self-esteem of teachers is affected by programs that are forced upon them or which they do not wholeheartedly support. It is important that teachers feel comfortable with material they are supposed to teach to their students and not feel inadequate. Teachers must feel comfortable with the materials or there will be adverse outcomes such as what one teacher reported, “ I do not enjoy teaching as much [since the balanced literacy program was implemented].” These types of attitudes can be the cause of teacher attrition because few people want to stay in a job they no longer enjoy. Repeatedly, teachers spoke of not enjoying their jobs any more. It is clear from the responses that teachers’ self-esteem can be directly affected when they are asked to implement a program they either don’t understand or are uncomfortable using.

### *Instructional Decision-Making*

The teachers in this study expressed a frustration with county administrators because they feel as if they are not valued or trusted to make instructional decisions. In the balanced literacy approach to literary instruction, teachers are viewed as the experts in

the classroom who are best equipped to best meet the needs of individual students (Rasinski & Padak, 1996/2004). Ironically, implementing the assessment strategies in this county's balanced literacy approach has left many teachers feeling as if they have lost the ability to make independent instructional decisions. Administrators should consider how they can empower teachers to make better instructional decisions when implementing performance-based assessment so that teachers don't feel as though they have been stripped of decision-making power.

### *Teacher Buy-In*

When teaching strategies are imposed on instructors there is less likelihood that teachers will buy into the new strategy. Thus, when teachers are not convinced the new strategy will work or when they perceive that those strategies increase the burdens they already face as classroom teachers, there is the possibility that the new strategy will fail, regardless of how good the strategy is. The teachers in this study did not buy into the program and felt that they were losing interest in teaching because the system had taken away their ability to instruct in a way they felt was best for their students.

No program can be effective when teachers do not support that program or feel that the approach has any chance for improving student achievement. Programs that cause teachers large amounts of stress may not be the best choice for a school district looking to improve standardized test scores. If teachers do not buy into a certain program it is highly unlikely that the program will be successful in raising those test scores, and then a lot of resources will have been wasted in training teachers to handle a program they do not like.

Additionally, there is a certain power of the bottom over the top that occurs when teachers decide collectively to rebel against a curricular initiative that they feel is not adaptable to their individual teaching styles (Darling-Hammond, 1997). District leaders need to understand and confront negative attitudes toward curricular initiatives and understand that teacher buy-in is critical to the success of any program.

### Conclusions

The findings in this study revealed significant information in relation to each of the Research Questions. For Question 1, the findings of the study were mixed. Teachers reported that they implemented some parts of the program, but had difficulty finding the time necessary to implement all of the assessment strategies in the program. Additionally, teachers reported that there were parts of the balanced literacy program that were easier to implement and that gave a clear picture of a student's reading problems. For the most part, teachers used the daily assessments rather than the weekly and monthly assessments that may have been more informative of a student's progress. The findings showed that there was a problem implementing assessments for balanced literacy; because of time and resource constraints it can be concluded that the program is not being implemented effectively or optimally. More training may be needed to improve implementation.

For Question 2, the findings suggested that about half of the teachers found the information that they received from doing the assessments was of value and help in planning lessons. However, it was disconcerting to see that the other half of the respondents either had no response to the question or they found little if any help in the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy program. This shows that the program is not being implemented as it was designed and therefore the district may not be able to



achieve the results that it is seeking. There is a problem in trying to force teachers to implement a program they are unsure of or do not understand the rationale behind implementing the program. Hence, teachers must have some say in a new program implementation. If teacher buy-in is not present, other districts may experience similar results. That is, at least half of the teachers are dissatisfied with part, or all, of the program.

For Question 3, it was clear that teachers feel little autonomy in using the balanced literacy program. They reported that the paperwork they have to fill out is time-consuming, and the paper work is mandated so that they have little choice in that aspect. Additionally at least one third of the teachers felt that their teaching style was being hampered by the implementation of the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy program. They felt as though the program was too confining and did not allow them to use any creativity in instruction. Every teacher has his/her own teaching style, but teacher participants in this study felt as if they were unable to use any creativity within the balanced literacy program.

Hence, the findings in this study have suggested that if a school district wants to implement a new educational program it should be sure to have a complete teacher buy-in to the new program. Additionally, a school district needs to be able to provide adequate training for its teachers and then to support the implementation of that program with extra planning time for the teachers during the implementation stage. Districts also need to provide the financial resources the teachers will need in order to fully implement the program.

Since the enactment of the NCLB legislation, districts have been searching for ways to increase the effectiveness of teacher instruction. However, the best possible program can only fail if it is not supported by the teachers who are expected to implement its components. Districts should consider whether teachers in the district see themselves as “passive followers of program directives rather than as proactive professionals who adapt instruction” to the needs of individual students (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999, 15).

As teachers in this present study reported, there are many problems that can occur when districts do not take the time to sell the program to its teachers and to provide ample training, time and economic resources so that the program has a better chance of being accepted by the majority of the teachers in the district. Otherwise, any attempt at introducing a new program will be unsuccessful.

There can be no one best method, material, or program for all students or for all teachers (Allington, 2006). Districts should be wary of prescribing pedagogical practices that teachers don't fully understand or those that teachers don't agree as being beneficial for improving instruction. It is important to analyze teacher motivation when considering a literacy program. Research on teacher perception of the value of the program can help administrators understand how and where to target attention for continued improvement.

#### Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. First it is possible that some teachers may have responded to the questions in a way that they thought was expected of them. Hence, some teachers may have praised the balanced literacy program because they perceived that as being what the district would want to hear. Py and Ginet (2002) reported that people tend to react or behave the way in which they perceive their superiors expect them to react.

Even though responses were completely confidential it is possible that some teachers feared that their identity could have been uncovered in some way, especially since the research was conducted in the district where the researcher is a principal.

A second limitation of the study is that because some district teachers have been vocal in their criticism of the balanced literacy approach, findings from this study may be more negative than those obtained from participants who may be more committed to the program. These teachers may be hoping that if the comments in this study are negative enough the district might rethink the use of the balanced literacy program, allowing teachers to go back to more familiar pedagogy. It is important to note that the responses ranged from widely supportive to extremely negative. Because two of the schools in this study have been successful in terms of standardized test scores, it is not known whether the negative responses came from those teachers because they want to be left alone. Further research is necessary to determine how school performance may affect perceptions of the assessment strategies in balanced literacy.

The findings and conclusions were based on the perspectives of the participants in a single county. The small number ( $N = 39$ ) of participants impedes generalizability to larger samples.

#### Implications for Practice

The findings in this study have several implications for practice. First, teachers should have a voice in whether a new program is mandated in a district. Teacher participation in the planning process is critical to ensure that the majority of teachers support a new program. Because teachers are also “unique individuals who tend to have styles of teaching that fit their personal profiles, it is often a stretch to include

instructional and assessment tools and strategies that are not in their personal comfort zone” (Gregory & Chapman, 2002, p. 34). When this occurs, extra time and support are needed so that teachers understand the inherent benefits and subsequent worth of the curricular initiative.

Second, districts must provide teachers with enough planning time as they begin the implementation of a new program. Otherwise, teachers will not be able to implement a program fully. School districts must therefore include extra planning time into teachers’ schedules. Third, often districts mandate that teachers follow a new program but fail to provide teachers with the economic support necessary to implement the program. Time and resources are essential to the implementation of any curricular initiative.

Fourth, as findings in this study indicated, teachers have their own individual styles of teaching. When teachers feel as though personal style is being restricted by district mandates, there is a possibility that conflict will arise and the effectiveness of instruction may be lessened. Teachers have their own styles and districts that want to implement new programs need to allow teachers to use the parts of that program that fit with their teaching style and discard those parts that would hamper a teacher’s natural teaching style. Teaching is not a one-size-fits-all profession. Teachers need to address the individual learning styles of their students, and districts should have to address the individual teaching styles of their teachers when implementing new programs. Otherwise any new program, no matter how effective it is shown to be on paper, will not translate into the classroom setting with any effectiveness.

### Implications for Future Research

Based on the findings in this study, the following recommendations are made for future research:

First, researchers need to examine balanced literacy more closely. The program consists of many components and as the teachers in this study reported those components are very time-consuming and hence can be burdensome to the teachers. Researchers should look at every component in the balanced literacy program and investigate which component is shown to do what with different students. That information could be used to help teachers use the components they need each year with their class.

Second, considering that at least 50% of the teachers in this study resented the fact that the balanced literacy program had been forced upon them, researchers should investigate what happens to teacher's attitudes about new programs when teachers have had a say in the decision making before a new program is implemented. Such information would be helpful to school districts that are under pressure to raise scores because of the NCLB legislation.

Third, there need to be more studies on the balanced literacy program so that more information could be added about how the program can be made to work, and what the exact level of funding is needed in school districts that want to implement the program. As was reported by the teachers in this study, this school district failed to provide adequate funding for the mandated implementation of the balanced literacy program. Hence teachers were not only stressed by the amount of time that the program involved for them, but they were also stressed by the lack of financial support for the program. Researchers should look at exactly what a school district needs to spend to

implement a comprehensive program like the balanced literacy program so that districts are better prepared to support teachers in the implementation of such a complicated endeavor.

Fourth, researchers need to study the implication of adding extra planning time into each teacher's schedule. The results of this study showed that teachers did have enough time to do the planning required to use the balanced literacy program. Many of the teachers reported that they needed more planning time; they said it was impossible to implement the assessment strategies in the balanced literacy approach correctly if they weren't given sufficient time. Researchers need to look at how teachers' schedules could be altered in order to provide adequate planning time. This is very important future research as studies (Eisner, 1995; Graves, 2001; Sacks, 2000) have noted that teachers who are stressed over the lack of time to fulfill their duties at home and school often quit the teaching profession because of the time requirements. As there is a shortage of teachers throughout the United States, it seems very important to find way to lessen the stressors teachers experience in their profession.

When considering any curricular initiative, educators need to consider how teachers can be engaged in the planning process. In this study, teachers who were not committed to the program expressed extreme feelings of distrust and even anger. It is recommended that further phenomenological research be conducted in the area of teacher motivation and early literacy assessment strategies so that curriculum studies scholars can more fully understand how to gain the support of teachers and ultimately enhance the effectiveness of assessment.

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## APPENDIX A: PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT SURVEY

**The purpose of this study is to measure the frequency of performance-based assessment in elementary classrooms and to examine teacher perceptions about the assessment strategies incorporated in the county's balanced literacy program.**

1. How often do you use the following types of performance-based assessment in your classroom?

Type of assessment	Daily	Weekly	End of Unit	Once or twice a year	Have not used this year
Open-ended questions (oral)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Open-ended questions (written)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Performance tasks on demand	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Portfolio tasks	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Projects	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Conferencing	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Running Records	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Developmental Reading Assessment	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Anecdotal Records	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Star Reader	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

2. How many of your rubrics have levels of quality created with student input?

- A. All      B. Most      C. Some      D. Few      E. None

3. How many of the student performance assessments you assign present problems and challenges that are based on real-world experiences?

- A. All      B. Most      C. Some      D. Few      E. None

4. How many of the student performance assessments you assign come from textbook or workbook-related material presented in hypothetical or simulated situations?

- A. All      B. Most      C. Some      D. Few      E. None

5. For each of the following types of assessments, identify how often you make instructional decisions directly related to information you receive from that assessment.

<b>Type of assessment</b>	<b>Daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>End of Unit</b>	<b>Once or twice a year</b>	<b>Have not used this year</b>
Open-ended questions (oral)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Open-ended questions (written)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Performance tasks on demand	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Portfolio tasks	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Projects	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Conferencing	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Running Records	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Developmental Reading Assessment	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Anecdotal Records	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Standardized tests	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
DRA	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Star Reader	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

6. How often do the following types of feedback and evaluation occur in your classroom?

Type of Evaluation or Feedback	Daily	Weekly	End of Unit	End of grading period	Not done
Students evaluate and reflect on their own work against criteria	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Student evaluate other student's work against criteria	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Teacher evaluates student work and gives feedback	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Evaluation is a cooperative effort between the student and teacher	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

7. Of these choices, which of the following types of performance-based assessments gives you the most valuable information about an individual student's reading ability? Choose only one.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Running Records
- \_\_\_\_\_ Developmental Reading Assessment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Anecdotal Records
- \_\_\_\_\_ Standardized tests
- \_\_\_\_\_ Star Reader
- \_\_\_\_\_ Qualitative Spelling Inventory

8. Please explain why you feel that the type of assessment you chose in the previous question provides the most valuable information about an individual student's reading ability.
9. Overall, do you believe the assessment strategies in balanced literacy provide adequate information about individual student progress? Please explain your answer.
10. How has implementing balanced literacy changed how you make instructional decisions in your classroom?
11. How has implementing balanced literacy changed how you feel about student assessment?
12. Has implementing the assessment strategies in balanced literacy changed how you feel about teaching? Please explain your answer.
13. As a result of implementing balanced literacy, do you feel that you need more training in formative assessment? Explain why or why not.



14. For those assessment strategies that you indicated you do not use, what is/are the reason(s)?

## APPENDIX B: DISTRICT CONSENT FOR RESEARCH

To the Superintendent of the Bibb County Public Schools,

I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting research on balanced literacy and performance-based assessments in elementary classrooms. I am interested in discovering to what extent teachers are using the assessment strategies found in the balanced literacy framework to make instructional decisions.

The participants' names or other identifying information will not be known to the researcher, only the data in cumulative form from all participants. If you agree to allow me to conduct this study, please sign at the bottom of this consent letter. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to you. Your permission for this study is very much valued and appreciated.

### Purpose of the Research

This research study is designed to measure the frequency of performance-based assessments in elementary classrooms in Bibb County. The study will also measure teacher perceptions about balanced literacy, assessment, and individual levels of autonomy. The purpose of this study is to describe the impact of performance-based assessments on instructional decision-making.

### Procedures

Participation in this research will include completion of an electronic survey. Teachers at Springdale, Williams, Carter, and Morgan Elementary who have been trained in balanced literacy will be asked to participate. Responses will be electronic and names will not be associated with responses. The results of the survey will be available to the administration and the teachers at each of the participating schools in early fall.

Research subjects don't have to participate in this research; they may end their participation at any time by not answering the survey. They do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer.

There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study; teachers may decide at any time they don't want to participate further and may withdraw without penalty or retribution.

### *Confidentiality and Data Storage*

All information obtained will be held in strict confidentiality and will only be released with your permission. No identifying information will be collected from participants.

### *Incentives to Participate*

There are no incentives for those participating in this survey.

The district has the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact me or my faculty advisor whose contact information is located at the end of this informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-0843.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Amy Duke

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Title of Project: Performance Based Assessment Research Study

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I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Your signature below indicates that you allow Amy Duke to conduct the mentioned above research in the Bibb County School District. Please return one copy of this consent form and keep one copy for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of District Administrator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Julie B. Cole, Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs, Georgia Southern University, P. O. Box 8005, Statesboro, Georgia 30460-8005; Telephone (912) 681-5465; E-Mail Address [jcole@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:jcole@georgiasouthern.edu)

## APPENDIX C: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL CONSENT FOR RESEARCH

To the Principal of \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary,

I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting research on balanced literacy and performance-based assessments in elementary classrooms. I am interested in discovering to what extent teachers are using the assessment strategies found in the Balanced literacy framework to make instructional decisions.

The participants' names or other identifying information will not be known to the researcher, only the data in cumulative form from all participants. If you agree to allow me to conduct this study, please sign at the bottom of this consent letter. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to you. Your permission for this study is very much valued and appreciated.

### Purpose of the Research

This research study is designed to measure the frequency of performance-based assessments in elementary classrooms in Bibb County. The study will also measure teacher perceptions about balanced literacy, assessment, and individual levels of autonomy. The purpose of this study is to describe the impact of performance-based assessments on instructional decision-making.

### Procedures

Participation in this research will include completion of an electronic survey. Teachers at your school who have been trained in balanced literacy will be asked to complete the survey. Responses will be electronic and names will not be associated with responses. The results of the survey will be available to the administration and the teachers at each of the participating schools in the fall of 2007.

Research subjects don't have to participate in this research; they may end their participation at any time by not answering the survey. They do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer.

There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study; teachers may decide at any time they don't want to participate further and may withdraw without penalty or retribution.

### *Confidentiality and Data Storage*

All information obtained will be held in strict confidentiality and will only be released with your permission. No identifying information will be collected from participants.

### *Incentives to Participate*

There are no incentives for those participating in this survey.

You have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact me or my faculty advisor whose contact

information is located at the end of this informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-0843.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Amy Duke

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Title of Project: Performance Based Assessment Research Study

Principal Investigator: Amy Duke  
108 Darlington Lane  
Kathleen, GA 31047  
478-218-9031 home  
478-779-3750 office  
abduke@alltel.net

Faculty Advisor: Grigory Dmitriyev  
Department of Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading  
Georgia Southern University  
P.O. Box 8144  
Statesboro, GA 30460-8144  
912-681-5545 office  
gregodmi@georgiasouthern.edu

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Your signature below indicates that you allow Amy Duke to conduct the mentioned above research at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School. Please return one copy of this consent form and keep one copy for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of School Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Julie B. Cole, Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs, Georgia Southern University, P. O. Box 8005, Statesboro, Georgia 30460-8005; Telephone (912) 681-5465; E-Mail Address [jcole@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:jcole@georgiasouthern.edu)

## APPENDIX D: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Submitted electronically May 31, 2007 at 4:26 p.m. EST:

Dear teacher,

I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University, and I am conducting research on the performance based assessment strategies incorporated in Bibb County's balanced literacy framework. This is my dissertation research, and the participants are teachers at \_\_\_\_ Elementary, \_\_\_\_ Elementary, \_\_\_\_ Elementary and \_\_\_\_ Elementary. Mrs. Superintendent and your principal have consented for me to contact you and for you to participate in this study. I hope you will choose to help me with my research.

You are being asked to participate because you teach at one of the four schools chosen for this study and because you have been trained in balanced literacy. Participation in this research will include completion of an electronic survey. It is my hope that participating in this survey will give you a chance to share your opinion about the assessment strategies in balanced literacy. The survey is electronic and is hosted by an independent company; it is important for you to understand that the format makes it impossible for me to associate your responses with you or with your school. You will not be asked to enter your name or any other identifying information. If you choose to participate, your consent to participate will be implied by clicking on the survey link below.

If you have questions about my research or would like more information before you participate, please don\*t hesitate to call me at \_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_ . Please take a few moments to click on the link below and complete the survey. The deadline for participation is May 26, 2007. You may complete the survey from your school or home computer. Thank you in advance for your help.

Link to survey: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=723903824822>

Amy Duke, Principal  
Springdale Elementary

## APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES & SPONSORED PROGRAMS  
POST OFFICE BOX 8005  
STATESBORO, GEORGIA 30460-8005  
TELEPHONE: (912) 681-5465

May 10, 2007

Amy M. Duke  
108 Darlington Lane  
Kathleen, GA-31047

Dear Amy M. Duke,

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: H07228, and titled "Performance-Based Assessment Within a Balanced Literary Framework: An Analysis of Teacher Perceptions and Implementation in Elementary Classrooms", it appears that your research involves activities that do not require approval by the Institutional Review Board according to federal guidelines.

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt under the following exemption category(s):

- (I) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if: (I) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (II) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that your research is exempt from IRB approval. You may proceed with the proposed research.*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "N. Scott Pierce".

N. Scott Pierce  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs