

Assessment Beliefs of Emergent Literacy Mentors

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Abstract

This study investigated the emergent literacy mentors' assessment beliefs. Using a questionnaire, 50 literacy mentors from private and public schools were surveyed on their assessment beliefs. To provide support to their responses in the questionnaire, an interview was conducted. The findings led to the following conclusions: the literacy mentors are clear about their views on assessment. The study recommends for a research on assessment beliefs to determine perspectives and how these can be presented in the classroom. Overall, this study recommends to help mentors develop a dynamic and synergetic assessment practices.

Introduction

The Philippine Education for All (EFA) is an international commitment of the government to provide quality education to all its citizens, especially the children. EFA is guided by the Dakar Framework that promotes the right of every child, youth, or adult to benefit from education that will meet his/her Basic Learning Needs (BLNs). The BLNs focus on the essential learning tools and the basic learning contents such as literacy and oral expression.

As such, a good quality basic education equips children with literacy skills for further and life-long learning, by extension, literate parents are more likely to send their children to school; literate people are better able to access continuing educational opportunities; and literate societies are better at meeting their pressing development goals. Therefore, literacy programs are indispensable. With that, literacy is a necessary skill that serves as foundation of other life skills (NEC, 2006).

The compelling challenge now is for the assessment of literacy to be truly reflective of the literacy level of the learner. This is the only way to ensure the continued progress of each learner in the literacy ladder.

In the 1990s, there was a paradigm shift in the manner of looking at the learners' performance. Because of a growing discontent on how the learners were academically evaluated, an alternative way of looking at the learners' performance was promoted. As a result, some educators developed, promoted, and used alternative forms of evaluation.

Black and William (1998) espoused the use of alternative models that capture the link between assessment and classroom learning. Such call was first heard in Gipp's (1994) call to 'move from a testing culture to an assessment culture' (p.25).

The shift in the outlook towards evaluation posed implications for research, specifically on the assessment by teachers. Baynard (2011) in his review of literature on assessment beliefs and formative assessment practices found out that there is a dearth of information on this topic. He stressed that research is needed to determine if a relationship exists between collaboration practices, collaboration beliefs and assessment beliefs and values of the teacher.

Nevertheless, there are still studies pertaining to assessment beliefs of mentors and their relationship with other factors, specifically on assessment practices. One study was about the elementary teachers' assessment beliefs and practices which showed that distinct assessment beliefs exist within the elementary classroom: assessment for school accountability, assessment for student certification, assessment for improvement of teaching and learning, and assessment as irrelevant (Calveric, 2010).

Assessment for the improvement of teaching and learning yielded the highest composite mean and was negatively correlated with the irrelevance belief and positively related to school accountability. An analysis of the importance of assessment practices revealed authentic assessments, short answers, teacher-made assessments, and performance assessments as the most valued, while publisher assessments and major exams had the lowest means (Calveric, 2010).

McMillan & Nash (2000) also looked into the relationship between the teachers' beliefs and assessment practices. They found out the importance of individual teacher philosophy on the decision making process, particularly on assessment decision.

However, some teachers still remain tentative on the importance of assessment. Some hold a negative view of formative assessment specifically, or associate their negative view of standardized tests with all types of assessment. This may explain why formative assessment remains to be a gray area in the study of assessment and why the teachers still do not have a unified stance on formative assessment. Most teachers are still uncomfortable sharing learning targets with their students (Forbes, 2007)

Forbes's (2007) findings were further reinforced by the result of the survey conducted by Brown (2004). He administered a 50-item survey to 525 New Zealand primary school teachers on teacher conceptions of the four generalized purposes of assessment teachers. He found that teachers believe that assessment makes schools accountable, but they do not believe that assessment makes students accountable (Brown, 2004).

Maclellan (2001) equally supports the negative view of assessment based on his finding that both students and faculty indicated the most common purpose of assessment was to grade or rank students. Teachers indicated they were concerned about losing instructional time to create and deliver teacher created tests.

Negative views of assessment exist and while some of these negative views are specific to formative assessment it is not clear what aspect of formative assessment is viewed as negative. This, meanwhile, has influenced the view of the entire process to the degree that implementation is affected (Baynard, 2011).

The students themselves have also expressed their beliefs on assessment. Adams, Thomas, and King (2000) have found evidence that students may hold divergent beliefs about classroom assessment. The students also make different uses of assessment results.

Students may perceive grades and grading criteria in a different light than do their instructors. Specifically, instructors may perceive grades as simply a means by which to provide feedback regarding student intellectual development, in terms of their use as gatekeepers regarding their employment goals, or they may regard grades as a reflection of their ability to please their instructors, rather than to learn to think critically (Donald and Denison, 2001).

Furthermore, there is some evidence that individual students may receive different benefits from various assessment practices, depending on their achievement level (Srinivasan, Hauer, Der-Martirosian, Wilkes, & Gesundheit, 2007) and gender (Adams et al., 2000), among other characteristics. The results of these studies further reiterate the importance of this research in strengthening the body of knowledge on assessment.

This study investigated the assessment beliefs of emergent literacy mentors. The intent was to grasp the cognition that the mentors brought with them when they assessed the learners. This specifically

looked in the the beliefs on purposes and uses of assessment, on development and validation, and on its administration.

On the theoretical bases, the literacy assessment principles of authorities on assessment provided the essential foundations of this research.

Wiggins (1993), for one, stressed that the primary focus of assessment is to find out the thoughtful mastery of the students to justify their understanding and craft, not merely to recite orthodox views or employ techniques in a vacuum. The assessment done should be able to tell the degree and amount of the learners' understanding. Such principle implies that it is not enough to assess only one domain, but must also take into account other domains to create a wholistic view of the learner's performance. Moreover, assessment cannot be limited to the application of tools and formats- it is to be well crafted and thought of.

This principle implies that the assessment concerns a long process that take into account the reactions of learners in different assessment and learning tasks. However, it is not enough tha the learners are asked to perform certain activities to measure their intellectual honesty and mastery of concepts.

As such, this principle utterly takes into account the need for a systematic feedback mechanism whereby the mentor provides a quality and prompt feedback to the learners on the outcome of their assessment task. Moreover, this principle brings into focus the need to provide the learners with a model of an assessment task before they are asked to undertake one.

Another assessment principle is validity and reliability (Hogan, 2007). An assessment task is said to be valid when it measures what it is intended to measure and reliable when one yields the same result when applied in another group or context. Validity and reliability are also important in assessment, as they are in testing.

Another principle is that assessment should be progressive, that is, it should start where the students are (Cooper and Kiger, 2001). This principles focuses on the learner's strengths in relation to the stages of literacy development. It supports the notion that the learners perform better when it starts with what the they can do (Swartz & Klein, 1997). It is important, then, that assessment responds to this development. Assessment should be an on-going process based primarily on the results of instructional activities used to promote literacy development (Cooper & Kiger, 2001).

In this principle, the assessment may at times be supported by other formal and informal assessment procedures such as tests. However, the daily instructional activities provide the essential information on the performance of the learners. In the assessment-based literacy classroom, all of the mentors' teaching activities and experiences provide an opportunity to assess and evaluate students in relation to the stages of literacy development.

Another principle of assessment tackles the question, ' what to assess'(Caldwell, 2002). In this principle, the initial step is to ask essential questions to determine what to assess. It is also important to have an in-depth reflection about the collected data, and the assessment decisions should be truthful to the evidences collected.

The next principle on assessment focuses on the collaboration of teachers, tutors, and students (Winograd, 1994) to provide the children with the much needed support for assessment that allows them to build their own confidence or boost their morale in taking the assessment task. This principle works hand in hand with feedback. As feedback becomes clearer with assessment, assessment becomes more significant if used as basis for giving feedback. Through feedback, the learners are able to monitor their learning and actively evaluate their strategies and their current levels of understanding. This only shows that feedback is a powerful tool that could create a significant impact on the learning of the students.

Effective feedback supports self-regulation and active learning (Heritage, 2010). It makes the learning process more transparent. However, this cannot be achieved through the teacher's feedback alone. As mentioned earlier, individual as well as collective feedback would be necessary to effect better learning.

Another principle on assessment recognizes the development needs of the learners. Assessment is used as basis for deciding the academic performance of learners. However, learners are not always assessed on the appropriate level. The learners are at times given materials on grade level to read and respond to, an unfair practice to some learners.

In addition to the assessment principles mentioned above, assessment context and environment should be child-friendly. Probably, one of the biggest challenges for any literacy mentor is to make assessment a child friendly undertaking. Pressley et al. (1998) stressed that there are conditions in the classroom that could affect their responses to literacy activities including assessment. This shows that context and environment are critical to establishing a sound literacy practice.

Finally, assessment should cater to the learning styles and the natural learning development of children. Every mentor is challenged to plan and design assessment based on the manifested behaviors, potentials, and capabilities of the learners. This guarantees ethical practice in assessment. The mentors, as assessment writers, implementers and interpreters, have accountability to those who are immediately affected by it and those who would use the information based on the assessment results (McNamara, 2000).

The data on assessment drawn from this study provided the literacy advocates with research-based information that would help in crafting and eventually implementing better assessment activities to help gauge better literacy programs in their respective locales. Moreover, the literacy mentors were provided with inputs that would heighten their consciousness on how to teach the aforesaid area functionally.

Methodology

Research Design

Applying the descriptive research design to answer the research questions raised earlier, the study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data gathering tools and techniques comprehensive and in-depth enough to explore the details akin to each question raised.

Participants

Fifty emergent literacy mentors who served as participants of the study came from the private and public schools in Metro Manila and other parts of Greater Manila Area.

The kindergarten mentors from the public schools are older by five years than their counterpart in the private schools, with mean ages of 31.76 and 37.04, respectively. There is a wider age difference between the mentors in the private and public schools, at 24 and 51, respectively.

They also have a mean year of 10.75, while most of them have only been teaching Kindergarten for the past five years. The kindergarten teachers from the public schools have been teaching longer, compared to their private schools counterpart (mean years of 10.75 and 7.84, respectively). Most of the mentors from the private and public schools have been teaching for five years.

Sixty eight percent (68%) of the Kindergarten mentors are graduates with a bachelor's degree in elementary education (68%). Such degree gave the mentors the appropriate academic training to teach the kindergarten learners. However, the academic training of the other mentors seemed to be off tangent with the required training for literacy mentors; eight percent (8%) of them are graduates of courses such as BS Biology or BS Home Economics. To make them academically qualified to handle beginning and emergent literacy instruction, they have undergone special trainings or have taken courses on early childhood or child development.

Notably, thirty-six percent (36%) of the kindergarten mentors from the private schools are holders of master's degrees related to their current profession. Some of these are Masters in Early Childhood Education (MA ECE) and Masters in English Language Arts (MAT ELA).

The academic qualifications of the Kindergarten Mentors in the public schools were somewhat different, compared to the mentors in the private schools: first, all of them had the appropriate training for literacy teaching, and second, only 24% of them had masters' degrees. These degrees, however, were not directly related to early childhood education such as M.A. in Educational Administration and M.A. in Special Education.

Instrument

There were two instruments used in this study; the survey questionnaire was used to determine the participants' personal information and their assessment beliefs, and the interview schedule which provided the additional data to validate the information given in the questionnaire. Both instruments were subjected to several rounds of validation.

Statistical Treatment

The descriptive statistics, particularly means and mode, were used to describe the mentors or the participants of this study and their assessment beliefs. For the interpretation of the mean scores, an equal interval at .75 was used which means that the difference between the first range of scores and the second range of scores is .75. As such "strongly disagree" is at 1.0 (the lowest score) to 1.74; "disagree" from 1.75 to 2.47; "agree" from 2.46 to 3.21; and "strongly agree" from 3.22 to 4.0.

Results and Discussion

Beliefs of the emergent literacy mentors on the purpose and use of assessment

The table, as shown below, represents the assessment beliefs and their corresponding discussion. There are seven statements pertaining to beliefs on purpose and use of assessment.

Table 1

Beliefs on the Purposes and Uses of Assessment According to Emergent Literacy Mentors

Assessment Beliefs: Purpose and Use	K	Interpretation
	1. Assessment should support and guide instruction.	3.65
2. A literacy teacher should understand first what assessment is before s/he uses it in class.	3.87	SA
3. Every assessment activity in the classroom should be based on a theory or principle.	3.1	Agree
4. Assessment only pertains to authentic assessment.	2.7	Agree
5. Each assessment tool has its own use and limitations.	3.48	SA
6. Assessment should be standardized.	3.18	Agree
7. Assessment should consider the differences in cultural beliefs and practices of the people.	3.40	Agree

N= 50

The kindergarten mentors show a strong belief in having a clear understanding of assessment before they could apply it in respective classes. They also strongly believe that assessment should support and guide instruction, next is the belief that the assessment tools have their strengths and limitations. The kindergarten mentors also express agreement in the other statements regarding assessment except for the statement that assessment only pertains to authentic assessment.

They believe in a theory or principle-based assessment, uses and limitations of each assessment tool, standardizing assessment, and making assessment sensitive to the culture of the people. Their mean scores only have a very slim difference. Evidently, it proves that the mentors might be sharing the same principles when it comes to assessment.

Overall, there is an agreement among the literacy mentors on the seven statements on the purpose and use of assessment. Although the mentors across levels have expressed agreement on the statement that assessment only pertains to authentic assessment, their individual and aggregate scores are less than or lower when compared to their mean scores in the other statements. This means that they also consider discrete point, paper and pencil, and other forms of analysing students' academic performance to be forms of assessment as well.

In the interview, they further expressed this belief. Notice the following statements:

Traditional method of assessment (PRIV-KINDER- R14-Q2).

I prefer to use the traditional methods because they are more effective in evaluating the reading ability the learners (PUB-KINDER- R36-Q2).

The mentors' statements only prove that they welcome the idea of using all the forms of assessment including the traditional assessment (e.g. discrete methods) in measuring the reading ability of the learners.

This view resembles the practices of literacy experts who seriously monitored students' progress by emphasizing both standardized and criterion-referenced testing (Murphy, 2004), an indication that literacy mentors may be using preferred assessment formats based on their assessment goals. However, some literacy mentors had strongly expressed their disagreement in using summative assessment as a way of evaluating the learners' reading ability. The summative assessments are also referred to as official assessments to represent a third type of classroom assessment called official assessment which are more formal and systematic than either sizing-up or instructional assessment. They also argued that emergent and beginning literacy shouldn't be subjected to formal ways of evaluating the reading ability of the learners (Caldwell, 2002; Airasian, 2007; Genishi, 1992).

From the data, it can also be gleaned that the mentors focus on the uses of the assessment. Although they have agreed that assessment should be principle-based, they do not give primary importance to this belief. Such position may be drawn from their seemingly limited understanding of the principles behind assessment.

This reality manifests that some mentors may not have sufficient grounding on theoretical literature regarding assessment which could be evident in the manner they use and develop their assessment. This realization gains support from the mentors' interview which shows that their beliefs are based on their personal understanding of assessment.

Assessment is used to find out the students' level (PRIV-GR2- R45-Q1)

Assessment is not just used for grading or rating the learners' performance; it is also used to gather valid evidences about a pupil's performance in class over a period of time to have a sufficient data on his/her learning and understanding of the subject matter. (PRIV-KINDER- R2-Q1)

The purposes of assessment are to have empirical bases for judging the learners' development or progress in class, to improve the teaching strategies of the teachers, and to have a sound basis for improving the programs for the teachers and the schools. Assessment is not centered on recording and reporting the progress of the learners in class. (PRIV-KINDER- R9-Q1)

Let the children's learning development be based on their own phase; however, they should be provided with all the necessary assistance (PUB-KINDER- R1-Q1).

The responses indicate that the mentors recognize the importance of a child's development in giving assessment. They seem to be united in expressing that assessment is for the learners.

This belief gains support from the literature that shows that assessment is used to understand the learner's academic progress, strengths and weaknesses. They use assessment to document the individual progress of learners, to consider where each individual began the school year, the quarter, and even each school day, and to appreciate the individual schooling and background of individual students (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996).

In the interview, the mentors also clearly expressed the connection between instruction and assessment. Take the examples below:

The primary purpose of assessment is to provide the teachers, students, and parents with a data-based information on the progress of the students in class. It serves as a feedback to the stakeholders. Assessment can be used as gauge to know the students' prior knowledge which is crucial for teaching new information. (PRIV-KINDER- R10-Q1)

The teachers are committed to assess the students to help them enhance or improve their skills. Assessment is not just a means of grading students. It is an integral part of teaching that measures teaching and learning processes (PRIV-KINDER- R13-Q1).

Because of assessment you will be able to know that there are things you must consider and must put into and emphasis for the welfare and performance of your learners. You have an idea on how will you improve your pupils' ability and skills especially in reading (PUB-GRI-R38-Q1).

The teachers give assessment to their students to find out if these students have learned from them (PRIV-KINDER- R19-Q1)

Assessment means knowing the learning levels of the students. If the teacher knows his/her students' learning level, he/she can provide learning activities that suit the level of the students; hence, learning will become more meaningful. (PRIV-GRI- R25-Q1)

I believe that assessment should be an important tool to assess the learners' performance and transfer of learning, the same with the teacher, it should be a guide to the teacher of what kind of learner he/she has produce (PUB-GRI- R40-Q1).

These points raised by the mentors support Winograd's (1994) stance on the connection between assessment and instruction. He argued that good assessment is actually embedded in the process of instruction. Assessment and instruction can happen in the classroom- moment to moment (Johnston, 1992). Furthermore, Caldwell (2002) expressed the same view. He stressed that assessment and instruction are inseparable; they are two sides of the same coin.

Of the seven beliefs in assessment presented in the table above, two mean scores seem to invite more discussion and investigation. First is the belief that every assessment activity in the classroom should be based on a theory or principle, which gained a mean score of 3.32, and second is the belief that assessment should consider the differences in cultural beliefs and practices of the people, with a mean score sore of 3.30.

Clearly, the fact that the mentors did not give a strong agreement to base assessment on theory or principle could reflect the reality happening everyday in the literacy classroom in the country. Admittedly, the literacy mentors may not see the importance of having theoretical bases to explain or justify their assessment practices. It could be that the mentors merely view assessment as a continuation of their instructional practices; hence, they could not see the merits of having a theoretical grounding for assessment practices.

This argument reminds us of Alderson's observations. One of the major concerns on reading assessment expressed by Alderson (2000) is the fact that no current theory on reading assessment could support its application in the classroom. Eventhough there are a number of reading theories (Morrow, 2007) that could give credence to the reading assessment practices of literacy mentors, these may not provide the necessary theoretical explanation for the use of certain tools and formats to measure the reading ability of learners.

The mean score of 3.30 on the belief that links culture and assessment indicated that the literacy mentors might be slightly convinced in integrating the students' culture in the way they are being assessed. It appears that the literacy mentors have a generalist and global views towards assessment which could dangerously be bordering on "one size fits all".

Be that as it may, it would be a welcome opportunity to investigate such belief further since it could potentially help in understanding the mentors' views towards culture and its reflection in their instruction and assessment practices.

Overall, it could be said that the emergent and beginning literacy mentors seem to be treading on the same path when it comes to the uses and purposes of assessment. Their understanding on the uses and purposes of assessment is apparently similar since the difference between the mean scores was only between .1 to .3.

Beliefs on the Development and Validation of Assessment According to Emergent Literacy Mentors

Table 2 below shows the literacy mentors' beliefs on assessment particularly on development and validation. The six statements on assessment belief are about materials selection, construction of tools, test specification, reliability, and assessment takers' participation in the development of the assessment tools.

Table 2

Beliefs in the Development and Validation of Assessment According to Emergent and Beginning Literacy Mentors

Assessment Beliefs: Development and Validation		
	K	Inter-pretation
1. Proper material selection is important to assessment	3.69	SA
2. Literacy mentors should be trained in constructing assessment tools.	3.63	SA
3. Assessment should be designed according to the needs and activities of the learners in the 'real world.'	3.71	SA
4. Classroom assessment should be designed based on a test specification.	3.32	SA
5. Classroom assessment should be checked for its reliability.	3.59	SA
6. The learners should be involved in the assessment process.	3.71	SA

N=50

Interestingly, the results show that the emergent literacy mentors strongly agree to all of the statements regarding the involvement of the learners in the assessment process, ensuring reliability of assessment tools used in the classroom, designing the assessment tool based on the activities of the learners in the 'real world', selecting materials properly, and providing proper training to the mentor on assessment development.

These strong agreements also show that the mentors have acknowledged the importance of a well-thought out classroom assessment. It further implies that the literacy mentors have become aware or conscious of coming up with a better assessment for the learners.

Such view is akin to Tierney's (1998) principles on assessment that points to the shift of assessment from outside the classroom to inside the classroom. This means that the focus is now on the processes that take place in the classroom. With this shift, the people responsible for assessment have also shifted. This time, the learners themselves who are the beneficiaries and central focus of assessment should now be participants in the entire assessment process. Tierney (1998) pointed out that the importance of having a classroom-specific, reciprocal, and client-centered assessment.

The mentors have also expressed agreement on the use of test specification. Clearly, they saw the need for proper assessment procedures in the classroom, as much as they seem to recognize now the importance of well-crafted assessment tools for classroom purposes. This end, in effect, may give way to certain standards in the development of assessment tools.

As Wixson and Dutro (1998) note, "a standard-based view of reform holds that once broad agreement on what is to be taught and learned has been achieved, everything else in the education system can be redirected toward achieving higher standards." Because of this notion, the assessment of reading would be based on standards set by the government and literacy workers, not necessarily by the classroom teachers themselves.

In the interview, the mentors neither mentioned nor indicated that their students directly participated in deciding for the assessment. However, many of them strongly emphasized that they considered their learners' ability and preferences in deciding which assessment tool or format they would use in class.

Eventhough the mentors also expressed strong agreement to make evident in the classroom the experiences of the learners outside the classroom and to have a connection between the classroom assessment and what the learners do outside the classroom, their communities, and in their homes, in the questionnaire, this is not supported by the mentors' interview. Nevertheless, they still give prime consideration to the cognitive preparations of the learners:

Assessment should be based on the child's learning/ or learning capacity (PRIV-KINDER- R7-Q1)

Let the children's learning development be based on their own phase; however, they should be provided with all the necessary assistance (PUB-KINDER- R1-Q1).

Those children who are exposed to television and other forms of media or those who had undergone Kindergarten have a better leaning ability (PUB-KINDER- R12-Q1).

Undeniably, these mentors still consider home and community cultures of the child in literacy assessment important. Such stance is supported by what the literature says about the application and the evidences of cultural perspectives in the classroom.

Morrow and Gambrell (2004), for their part, promoted cultural sensitivity. They stressed that there is a "need to acknowledge diversity by being sensitive toward culture and language difference." Beaty and Pratt (2007) cited that children become aware of their ethnicity early on by observing differences in color, hair, and facial features, and they also begin to develop attitudes towards these differences. This could mean that the mentors are being cautioned about how they present or represent each culture in their assessment activities. Gunning (2003) emphasized the need to value and build on every student's culture. It was suggested that literacy mentors should be acquainted with the child's culture, especially if it is different from theirs (Strickland, 1998). The mentors are advised to seek the literacy heritage of these cultures. The mentors are tasked to be prepared to accept a variety of learning styles and ways of structuring the classroom (Gunning, 2003). Given these considerations, the literacy mentors are

challenged to find out how these learners from diverse cultures learn best and what their preferred mode of responses are. Such reality certainly challenges the mentors' approach to assessment.

Literacy experts like Malone (2010) had suggested a grading system for reading materials to ensure that the reading materials given to students during instruction and assessment are suited to their grade level. Gunning (2003), on the other hand, had an opposing opinion. He argued that some learners who might be performing below their grade level might not benefit from the use of grade appropriate reading materials. He, then, suggested to have a variety of reading resources to suit the reading levels of the learners. Browne (2001) offers a comprehensive discussion on the intricacies in the use of learning resources. She argues that reading materials especially books are critical since learning to read is generally regarded as the most important aspect of education for emergent and beginning literacy.

The use of books in the literacy classroom is not only aimed at helping the children to read but also to make reading a permanent activity in their lives. Therefore, she suggests that both fiction and non-fiction texts inside and outside school be used. She believes that the texts require careful selection to make the reading experiences worthwhile, and to engage the different styles of reading of the learners (Browne, 2001).

These arguments of the literacy experts in a way validate the stance of the literacy mentors to give due importance to the selection of reading resources. During the interview, the mentors also shared the learners' reactions when they liked or did not like the reading material. When the reading material is appreciated, the learners tended to read faster and interact more during class interaction. Such reaction is in sharp contrast when they read materials which they did not like or were not familiar to them. The mentors reported that the learners seemed to be withdrawn and hesitant to read at all. These situations seem to be a familiar event in a literacy classroom. Experts, then, suggested that every classroom should contain approximately one hundred books and that parts of the selection should be changed every now and then (Sommerfield, Torbe and Ward, 1983). They argued that a different collection of books will stimulate the children's interest in books and will encourage them to discover the wide range of topics, points of view, and knowledge about the authors.

The score on the need for training in constructing assessment tools suggests that the mentors might not have given much priority to the construction of assessment tools. During their interview, they did not also mention anything about the development and validation of their own constructed assessment tools. The reason for this may be seen as a the reality that the assessment activities they applied in their classroom for formative assessment were either lifted from the assessments in the textbooks, constructed for them by a team of other mentors in the school, or had been prepared or constructed in the past. As for the summative assessments, these are usually criterion or norm referenced test made by the entire members of the department or provided by the district, division or central offices of the Department of Education. Given these realities, we surmise that the mentors might not have a felt need to construct their own assessment activities.

The mentors' belief and realities in assessment construction opposed what the literature and literacy experts argued about formative and summative assessment. Tierney's (1998) argument that assessment should emanate from the classroom had a strong implication for the mentors to construct their own assessment activities. This means that the mentors who are supposed to be more knowledgeable about their students' learning abilities and needs are the most qualified persons to prepare the assessment of their own students.

Valencia, et al. (1994) also expressed the need to make assessment an integral part of the teacher's work. Cunningham (1990) also stressed that formal and informal assessment occurred in the context of everyday instruction.

Beliefs of literacy mentors regarding the use of assessment in the classroom.

Table 3 shows the beliefs of the mentors regarding the application of assessment. There are seven statements under this classification.

Table 3

Beliefs in the Implementation of Assessment in the Classroom According to Emergent and Beginning Literacy Mentors

Assessment Beliefs: Implementation of Assessment	K	Inter-pretation
	1. Assessment should be varied.	3.73
2. Assessment is the same as testing.	3.0	Agree
3. Assessment should originate from within the classroom.	2.97	Agree
4. The use of assessment tool is dependent on the skill to be assessed.	3.61	Agree
5. Assessment should be frequently observed in the classroom.	3.32	Agree
6. Large scale assessment involving a number of schools in the district and division can be done.	3.2	Agree
7. Administration of assessment tools is as important as its construction.	3.55	SA

N= 50

Another critical component of assessment is implementation. Implementation of assessment activity pertains to the 'how' of the assessment, its focus lies on how the literacy mentors integrate the components of assessment to make it fair and just for all the assessment takers. This category stresses the implementation of assessment because there might be some practices in the assessment that could serve as threat to the results of the tests (Wright, 2008; Hogan, 2007). This might include, but not limited to the use of the assessment and the physical condition of the testing place. Moreover, the psychological and the physiological conditions of the assessment takers are also considered in implementing the assessment (Wright, 2008; Hogan, 2007). The table above presents the beliefs of the emergent literacy mentors regarding how assessment is used in the classrooms.

The Kindergarten mentors strongly believed that assessment should be varied. These mean score is supported by the mentors' responses during the interview:

Assessment should be varied. The teacher should use several different methods to have a fair judgement of the learners' understanding of the concepts taught. (PRIV-KINDER- R8-Q1)

I use several tools in assessing my pupils' ability to read. I use the running records, which allows the pupils to read. I also ask them correct the error that they have committed. I also utilize the cloze test for reading comprehension. I also use the informal assessment formats like the portfolio assessment (PRIV-KINDER- R8-Q2).

I utilize the paper and pen method and the performance-based like reading aloud (PRIV-KINDER- R9-Q2).

In assessing my students, I give them quizzes. I also use portfolio assessment and journal writing. I also give use observation and give them group activities or other engagement activities. As to the materials I use for the assessment, I use environmental prints, songs, rhymes, and poems for fluency improvement. I also use other materials/things/tools, e.g. graphic organizers, puppet or theatre (PUB-KINDER- R13-Q2).

The mentors' strong agreement to this belief is equally supported by what the theoretical and research literatures say about the need to use a variety of assessment tools and activities.

Steffy (1995) strongly upholds that the assessment system should not be based on a single type of assessment. She advocates for a balance in the use of assessment tools and activities. This means that both authentic and traditional assessment could be used in tracking the reading progress of the learners. With such understanding, the mentors are then challenged to have a sound understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the types of assessment. Meanwhile, Browne (2001) suggests that emergent and beginning literacy mentors' use of informal assessment tools and methods. She also promotes the use of regular reading sessions, observations, reading conferences, checklists, miscue analysis, and reading diaries as means to know the learners' reading ability.

The literacy mentors have also expressed agreement on the statement that assessment is the same as testing. Even though the literature defines assessment and testing differently, the mentors still think they are the same. This stance tells us that the mentors may not have a sufficient grounding on the true nature of assessment, as opposed to testing (Alderson, 2000; McNamara, 2000). In effect, this calls for a more focused evaluation of the mentors' basic knowledge on assessment and testing.

On the equal importance given to the construction of the assessment tool and its administration, the very strong belief expressed by the mentors is reinforced by their statements given during the interview. Over the past years there has been a continuous debate on having large scale assessments. The literacy mentors have expressed agreement that large scale assessment can be done in school districts and divisions.

Implication

Regardless of their background and organizational affiliation (whether they come from public or private schools), they know the nature, uses and purposes of assessment. They also know how to appropriately use an assessment tool.

Many mentors interpret assessment as testing. It appears that there is a misconception on the difference between testing and assessment. Because of this misconception, many apply assessment in their classrooms in the manner they have been using 'testing'. This implies that there is a need to have more studies on theory development for assessment to bring about clarity in the use and differentiation of assessment and testing.

Most literacy mentors see assessment tasks as an add-on component in instruction, regarding assessment as an extension of instruction. Hence, they fail to see the need for having a thorough and meticulous assessment plan. Such reality has an implication for the amount and quality of training that

these mentors may have received during their pre-service training. Apparently, from their responses and practices, many are still not updated on what assessment ought to be and how assessment should be approached.

The training that needs to be given to them would qualify them to undertake activities that require critical interpretation and judgment. Moreover, this might contribute to helping them make better and sound decisions on the learners' performance, as well as help them in plotting the literacy progression of the learners, not to mention, that this may help them make judicious decisions in promoting or retaining the learners.

One of the most notable conclusions drawn is that some mentors attempt to make assessment participative. This means that there is an apparent need to make the stakeholders like the parents participate in the assessment process. The stakeholders can also provide essential data to refine or substantiate the assessment activities and plans of the mentors.

Given the conclusions presented above, this research presents some recommendations to redefine, refine, and strengthen the positive assessment practices of the mentors.

5.3 Recommendations

On literacy assessment, it is necessary that mentors have a clear and expressed views of their assessment beliefs. Hence, it is suggested that a regular action research on assessment beliefs be conducted to help the mentors determine their perspectives on assessment and how it should be presented in the classroom.

It is further recommended that the mentors make a baseline data on the literacy profile of the learner to help them contextualize their assessment. Better still, activities in the classroom should be based on the needs of the class.

A pupil's profile is a significant information for the mentors which may help them in making critical assessment decisions. Through this, a child-friendly assessment environment is promoted.

Third, mentors have to track the performance of the learner in each assessment activity to provide them with a realistic picture of each learner's real academic performance. The results of this study may also provide the research basis for the following assessment endeavors:

1. Providing the teachers with intensive training on assessment tools development and validation. An intensive training for the mentors means that they will be more equipped to handle assessment challenges in the classroom.
2. Conducting a series of studies on the students' acceptance of different assessment tools to provide the mentors with empirical data that will serve as basis for some assessment decisions in the classroom
3. Developing the mentors' assessment data gathering skills to help them identify the information that will support their assessment and instruction

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