



Making the Implicit Explicit: Designing Approaches to Capture Secondary English/Language Arts Teachers' Classroom Evaluation Knowledge

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Background

Formative assessment (FA) is:

- ♦ A term encompassing teachers' and students' activities to improve student learning at the classroom level, including the use of evaluative skills and strategies
- ♦ Context-specific (e.g., grade, content)
- ♦ Most often studied in science and math in K-12 education
- ♦ Often anecdotally reported in secondary English/ language arts (ELA) instruction; empirical data are needed

Relevance to Evaluation

This study into and about FA:

- ♦ Is tied to teachers' use of evaluative skills and strategies at the classroom level to improve student learning
- ♦ Creates appropriate, relevant, and context-specific instruments
- ♦ Informs understanding of teachers' instructional decision making and classroom implementation
- ♦ Adds to empirical research about evaluation processes in practice

Research Questions

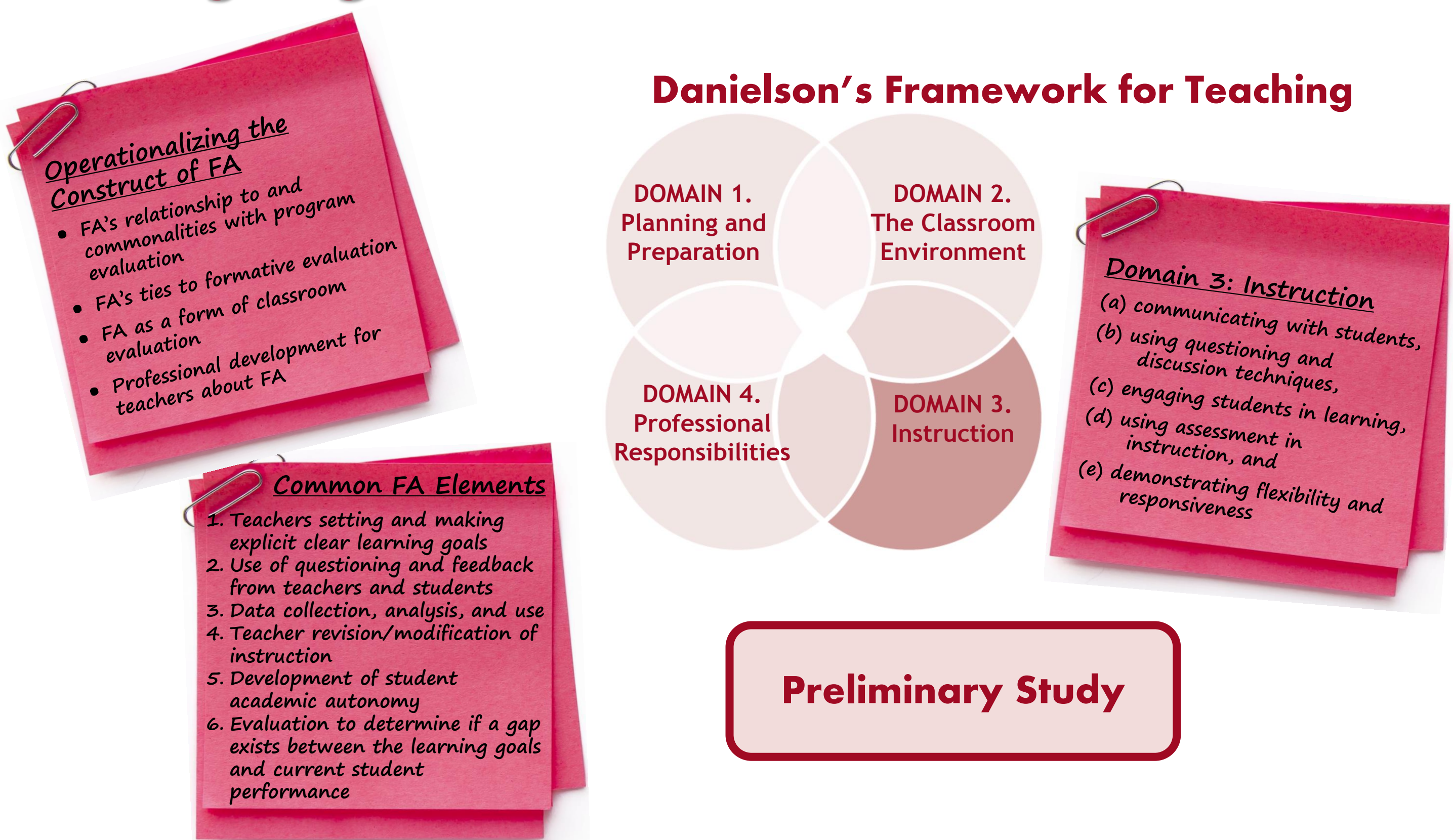
1. What assessment practices do secondary ELA teachers use?
2. How do secondary ELA teachers determine what assessment practices to use and when to use them?
3. What are secondary ELA teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the assessment practices that they use?
4. How do secondary ELA teachers determine the effectiveness of their assessment practices?

Study Participants

Seven teachers across New York State:

- ♦ Six female, one male
- ♦ 10-27 years of teaching experience at the time of the study
- ♦ Trained instructors in a concurrent enrollment program
- ♦ All were teaching the same senior-level course, ENG 135, a semester-long writing-intensive critical reading course, in Spring 2015

Designing the Instruments



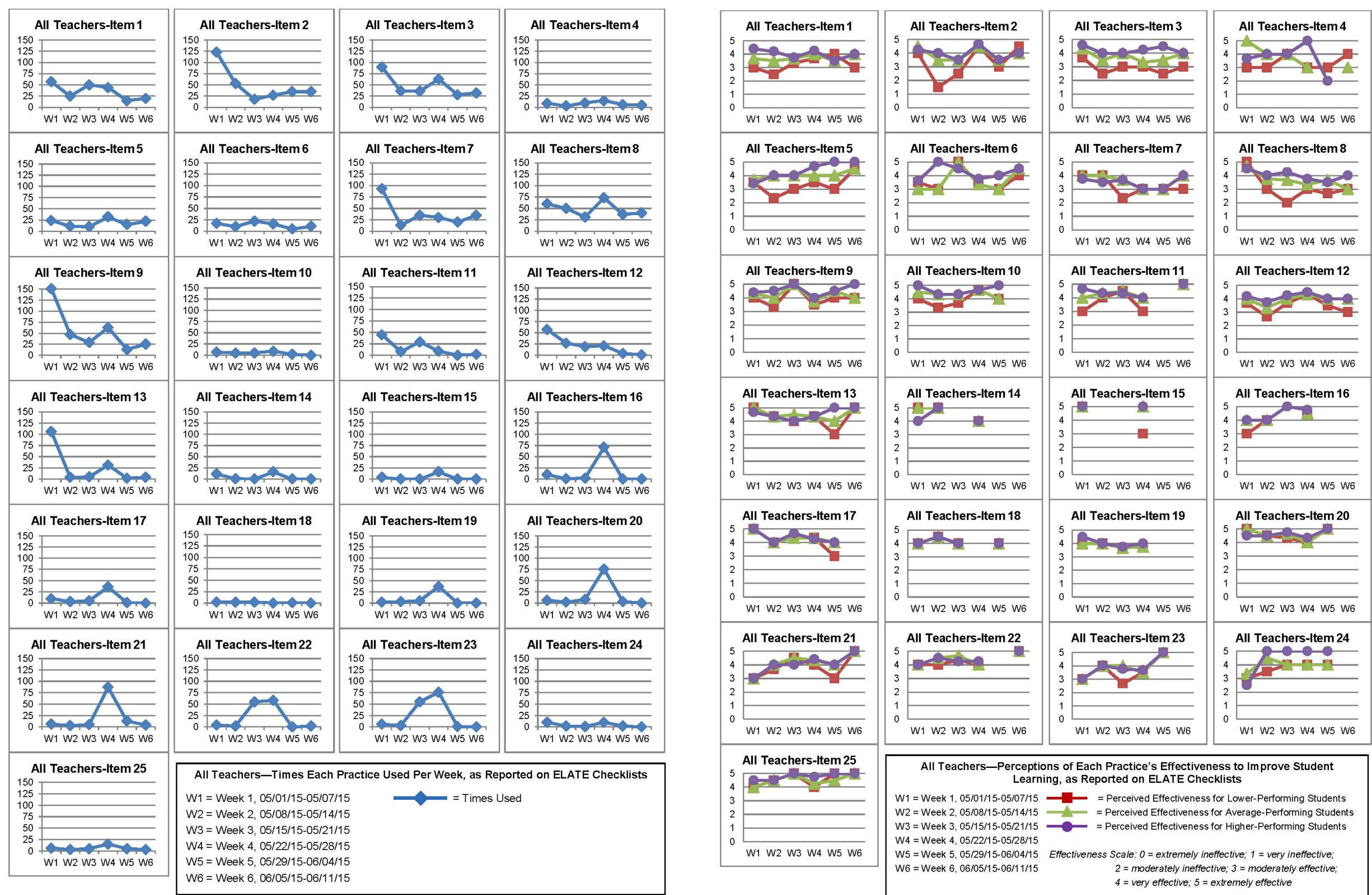
Study Instruments

1. **Teachers' Background Questionnaire**
Administered at the beginning of the study; 7 total
2. **English/Language Arts Teachers' Experiences (ELATE) Checklist**
Once a week for four weeks per teacher; 28 total

Dates Being Reported:		to	
In teaching ENG 135 this week (last Friday through Thursday), I...	How Many Times Did You Use This Practice?	Perception of Effectiveness of This Practice to Improve Student Learning	
		0 = extremely ineffective	3 = moderately effective
		1 = very ineffective	4 = very effective
		2 = moderately ineffective	5 = extremely effective
		Lower-Performing Students	Average-Performing Students
		Higher-Performing Students	
3. **Semi-structured Interview Protocol**
Conducted after analysis of ELATE checklists; 6 total

ELATE CHECKLIST ITEMS	ELATE CHECKLIST ITEMS
Questioning and Discussion	Feedback
1. Asked students questions to determine how well they understood a concept, idea, or strategy.	13. Reviewed and gave feedback (oral or written) on students' think/response papers.
2. Asked questions of individual students by name.	14. Reviewed and gave feedback (oral or written) on students' dialogic journals.
3. Asked questions of the class as a whole.	15. Reviewed and gave feedback (oral or written) on students' portfolios of their writing.
4. Asked questions specifically of students I felt were not paying attention.	16. Reviewed and gave feedback (oral or written) on students' draft versions of a writing assignment.
5. Asked questions of students I thought would be more likely to respond well.	17. Reviewed and gave feedback (oral or written) on students' final versions of a writing assignment.
6. Asked questions of reticent students to help improve their participation.	18. Used a rubric or rubrics for informal feedback to students on their writing.
7. Asked questions requiring brief responses (e.g., a word or phrase).	19. Used a rubric or rubrics for formal feedback to students on their writing.
8. Asked questions requiring more elaborated responses (e.g., a few sentences).	20. Gave students targeted written feedback about their writing, such as comments on certain parts of their assignment.
9. Asked questions intended to stimulate a general discussion.	21. Gave students general or holistic written feedback about their writing, such as comments at the end of an assignment about how they did overall.
10. Used paired or small group (2-4 students) discussion to determine how well students understood a concept, idea, or strategy.	22. Wrote questions when giving feedback to students on their writing to help prompt their thinking and develop their writing skills.
11. Used large group (5 or more students) discussion to determine how well students understood a concept, idea, or strategy.	23. Corrected students' spelling, grammar, and other mechanical errors when giving them feedback on their writing.
12. Used whole-class discussion to determine how well students understood a concept, idea, or strategy.	24. Gave oral feedback to multiple students at once about their writing (e.g., discussing strategies with groups or the entire class).
	25. Conferred with individual students about their writing to give them feedback and to review and discuss their work.

Quantitative Findings



Qualitative Findings

Participants' Selection of Assessment Practices Depends on:

- Purpose of assessment
- Assessment's relationship to instruction
- Teacher knowledge
- Classroom context
- Connections to ELA

Participants' Determination of the Effectiveness of Assessment Practices Depends on:

- Teachers' knowledge of students
- Students' understanding of content
- Student performance levels
- Benefit of the assessment practice to students

Sample Quotes from Interviewed Teachers

Assessment is "a tool [...] to gauge understanding [...] a guide for the teacher to see maybe where there are some areas of weakness or areas of strength."

"I respect the work that they do, and I will evaluate it fairly [...] I'm happy to work with you, and let's see how good we can make this."

"What's relevant, and how—how may I use this to assist students? How may I use this to help me as an instructor?"

Sample Quotes from Interviewed Teachers

"I found that [the assessment practices] I used, I used because they are the most effective" and students are "getting something out of it."

"I kind of get a sense [of what each student's needs are]" [...] "I've had many of them before."

"You listen, you look, you see what they're writing. As you're doing that, you know if they're—if what you're doing is positive or not."

Conclusions

The instruments designed for this study:

- ♦ Captured teachers' in-class use of FA practices, as well as their implicit and explicit knowledge
- ♦ Examined teachers' thinking and decision making behind their FA choices
- ♦ Were successful in collecting data from this particular population
- ♦ Should be adapted for use with other populations of teachers
- ♦ Could be used/adapted in educational program evaluation for multiple purposes (e.g., to examine fidelity of implementation, conduct needs assessment, study classroom practice)