

Teachers' Assessment Strategies for Children with Disabilities:

*A Constructivist Study in Regular Primary Schools
in Negros Oriental, Philippines*

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Abstract

This current qualitative study aimed at exploring how the three regular primary school teachers in Negros Oriental, Philippines assess children with disabilities in the regular classrooms. Specifically, it examined the different assessment strategies and how teachers employed them to respond to the needs of children with disabilities. The mentioned aims were asserted to be addressed by utilizing a constructivist methodology, which allowed this qualitative study to understand the experiences of the teachers being studied, and it assumed that the meaning of experiences was constructed by the teachers themselves. These experiences were explored by utilizing two constructivist tools, namely, semi-structured interviews and direct classroom observations.

This study revealed critical findings in relation to teachers' assessment for children with disabilities, according to the teacher-participants themselves. First, the assessment strategies that teachers employed are based on the diagnostic, formative, and summative purposes of assessment. Under these three purposes, teachers specifically employ assessment strategies such as tests, observations, portfolios, and groupings. This finding indicates that in assessing children with disabilities, teachers should employ a variety of assessment strategies. Second, in delivering the mentioned assessment strategies to children with disabilities, the teachers modify the content and delivery based on the needs of the children. The content modification considers the use of the child's native language, and the length and level of difficulty of the assessment. On the other hand, proximity, peer support, use of technology, and time element are the foci of delivery modification. The second finding of the study suggests that in delivering the assessment strategies, there is a variety of means to consider and employ which are responsive to the needs of children with disabilities.

Dedication

*This thesis is wholeheartedly dedicated to my family in the Philippines –
Papa Polo, Mama Belette, Manong Tonton, AJ, and Lynlyn – and to the
Persons with Disabilities sector on the planet who still struggles
to access quality and inclusive education.*

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Table of Content

Abstract	IV
Dedication	V
Acknowledgment	VI
Table of Content	VII
CHAPTER ONE	
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	4
1.3 Research Questions	4
1.4 Significance and Scope of the Study	5
1.5 Outline of the Dissertation.....	5
CHAPTER TWO	
2 Review of Related Literature	7
2.1 Perspectives and Contexts of Assessment	7
2.1.1 Outcomes of Schooling	7
2.1.2 Economic Contexts	8
2.1.3 Equity	8
2.1.4 Accountability	9
2.1.5 Personal Fulfilment and Satisfaction	9
2.2 Assessment and the Zone of Proximal Development	10
2.2.1 Dynamic Assessment	11
2.2.2 Mediated Learning Experiences	13
2.3 Assessment and Differentiated Instruction	14
2.4 Classroom Assessment Strategies	15
2.4.1 Tests	15
2.4.2 Performance Assessment	15
2.4.3 Product Assessment	16
2.4.4 Self-Assessment	16
2.5 Criteria for Selecting Assessment Strategies	16
2.6 Assessment Practices for Children with Disabilities	17
2.6.1 Assessment as an Element in the IEP Process	17
2.6.2 Assessment as a Formative Process	18

2.6.3 Assessment as Demonstration of Real Achievement	19
2.7 Summary and Critical Reflections	19
CHAPTER THREE	
3 Research Design and Methodology	22
3.1 Research Design	22
3.2 Target Population and Sampling	23
3.3 Research Tools	24
3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews	24
3.3.2 Direct Observations	25
3.3.3 Pilot Interviews	26
3.4 Data Analysis	27
3.5 Trustworthiness	28
3.4.1 Credibility	29
3.4.2 Transferability	30
3.4.3 Threats to Credibility and Transferability	31
3.6 Ethical Considerations	32
3.6.1 Research Board	32
3.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity	32
3.6.3 Informed Consent	33
3.6.4 Reciprocity	33
CHAPTER FOUR	
4 Presentation of the Data.....	34
4.1 What Forms of Assessment Strategies Do Primary School Teachers Employ for Children with Disabilities in the Classrooms?	34
4.1.1 Diagnostic Assessment Strategies	35
4.1.2 Formative Assessment Strategies	37
4.1.3 Summative Assessment Strategies	38
4.2 How Do Primary School Teachers Employ Assessment Strategies for Children with Disabilities in the Classrooms?	40
4.2.1 Assessment Content	40
4.2.2 Assessment Delivery	42
CHAPTER FIVE	
5 Discussion of the Findings	45

5.1 Forms of Assessment Strategies	45
5.1.1 Diagnostic Assessment	46
5.1.2 Formative Assessment	48
5.1.3 Summative Assessment	49
5.2 Delivery of Assessment Strategies	50
5.2.1 Assessment Content	51
5.2.2 Assessment Delivery	52
CHAPTER SIX	
6 Summary and Conclusions of the Findings	54
6.1 Summary	54
6.1.1 Forms of Assessment Strategies for Children with Disabilities	54
6.1.2 Delivery of Assessment Strategies for Children with Disabilities	55
6.2 Conclusions	56
REFERENCES	59
APPENDIX	
1 Interview Guide	66
2 Observation Guide	66
3 Information Letter with Consent	68
4 Letter from NSD	70
5 Sample Diagnostic Assessment for Science	72
6 Sample Drawing Journal Entry	74
7 Sample Weekly Quiz	75
8 Sample Periodical Test in English	76
9 Sample Contents of a Portfolio	79
10 Basic Information about Negros Oriental, Philippines	81
11 All about GPRehab	83

CHAPTER ONE

1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of why this study was conducted specifically by examining the statement of the problem, and the significance and scope of the study. Furthermore, this chapter provides an overview of the main research question alongside its sub-questions.

1.1 Background

Both in theory and in practice, assessment is recognized as an important aspect of the teaching-learning process. This is manifested with the fact that in most education policies, there is always a section that emphasizes the assessment process and how it should be implemented in the classroom setting. Consequently, teachers are guided and are compelled to practice the whole idea of assessment in their respective classes.

However, assessment is a complex concept within the teaching-learning process especially if it is contextualized in terms of student's disability and the community's perceptions about its purpose. However, it is to emphasize that the complexity of assessment brings its critical role in the educational process. Primarily, assessment allows educators and other professionals to formulate relevant educational decisions (Taylor, 2003; Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 2004). As Howell and Nolet (2000) assert, "the information obtained from appropriate assessment procedures can be used to enhance the teaching-learning process" (p. 5). It is in this reason that the concept has received a great deal of focus from politicians, the business world, and the community. However, the question remains, "how relevant are these ideas to the needs of children with disabilities especially those in the developing countries like the Philippines where issues of scarcity of resources, rigid curriculum, and negative perception of the community about disability are prevalent"? Because of the intensive advocacy campaign done by certain groups such as the government, civil society, and Persons with Disabilities themselves regarding the concept of inclusive education, more and more children with disabilities are enrolled in regular schools. Definitely, these children bring diversity to the classroom which requires the teachers to be critical and sensitive in ensuring that in the aspect of assessment, children with disabilities are given responsive and appropriate strategies based on their needs.

The Philippines has been critical in providing appropriate and authentic assessment to all learners. Recently, in 2012, the K to 12 Basic Education Program has been passed into law which exemplifies the principles of inclusive education, growth and development, teaching and learning, and assessment (SEAMEO and INNOTECH, 2012). Specifically, in terms of assessment, the K to 12 Basic Education Program recognizes learner-centeredness and considers its learning environment system. Furthermore, the program's assessment process includes the employment of vast array of traditional and authentic assessment tools and techniques for a valid, reliable, and realistic assessment of learning (DepEd, 2012).

However, in spite of the fact that major policies like the K to 12 Basic Education Program are in place, the Philippine education system has been faced with major challenges especially on assessment. As Black and Wiliam (1998) admit, "the everyday practice of assessment in classrooms, elsewhere in the world, is beset with problems and shortcomings" (p. 87).

The challenges of the assessment processes within the Philippine education system are caused by a number of factors. Rodriguez (2008) asserts that rigid curriculum and assessment, classroom shortages, and unfavourable learning environment in general are three of the many causes of students dropping out from school (p. 26). She adds that teachers especially in government schools are left with no other option but to 'teach to the test' especially that written achievement tests determine the quality of performance of the schools and teachers. As one of the primary school teachers shares:

I do not have much time and resources for differentiation. I have more than 40 children in class. I also have to cope with the number of chapters and lessons I have to cover and deliver before the national test comes.

(GPRehab, 2011, p. 45)

Such case causes children with disabilities to struggle in the general education classes. As a result, some parents continue to express their disappointment about how their children are being taught and assessed. A mother of a child with cerebral palsy expresses:

His teacher does not really care about his presence in class. He just goes to school and sits in class. The teacher does not provide other ways for him to answer his exams even if he cannot hold his pencil. He has to force himself to write.

(GPRehab, 2011, p. 16)

The mentioned challenges can be translated into figures. According to GPRehab (2011), for example, in Negros Oriental province, two out of three children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream primary classes drop out after three months from the start of the school year (p. 10). The remaining number has less than 30 per cent chance of progressing to the next level (GPRehab, 2011).

In response to these challenges in educating children with disabilities, the Department of Education (DepEd) has been committed to creating schools that are more inclusive to the needs of these children. Specifically, an intensive training program for teachers on inclusive education strategies have been implemented with the aim of increasing their capacities in effectively accommodating children with disabilities (DepEd, 2012). On the other hand, certain organizations such as The Great Physician Rehabilitation Foundation, Inc. (GPRehab) has been leading the advocacy of the rights of children with disabilities in Negros Oriental, Philippines by establishing inclusive education systems in identified elementary schools in the province. This has been concretized by implementing activities such as parents and teachers' training, school-based awareness activities, and monitoring of the status and progress of children with disabilities.

The aforementioned initiatives have positively influenced schools' practices on inclusive education. Certain public elementary schools from three municipalities in the province of Negros Oriental, for example, have been identified and recognized as 'inclusive schools' because of the teachers' efforts in establishing inclusive education systems which aim at accommodating all children especially those with disabilities (GPRehab, 2011). In addition, the aforementioned efforts have led to significant improvement of teachers' capacities towards teaching children with disabilities especially in the aspect of assessment. GPRehab (2011) asserts that certain teachers specifically in primary schools in Negros Oriental are initiating modifications within their classes. The following is an example of how a teacher does it:

I have a child with cerebral palsy in my grade III class. Because of her spasticity, she has a hard time accomplishing writing activities in class. I have to make some modifications in my classroom instruction. For exams that require intensive writing, I only ask the child to do a verbal evaluation. For example in spelling, instead of making her write the words, she spells them verbally.

(Ma, 2011, p. 6)

Definitely, this emphasizes the teachers' innovation and creativity in assessing children with disabilities in their classrooms. Miles (2005) stresses that it is empowering to see teachers from developing countries innovating for inclusive education so that they can effectively work with children with disabilities. She adds that, indeed, teachers play an important role in making inclusive education a reality.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although it has already been mentioned that the education of children with disabilities in regular schools, especially on the aspect of assessment, remains a major challenge not only in the Philippine context, but also around the world, it is important to add that in the international contexts, there is a massive literature exemplifying the assessment practices of teachers in primary schools for children with disabilities. However, these studies have been conducted in the contexts of developed countries such as the US, UK, and Australia. This immediately excludes developing countries in the picture. Baessa (2008) argues that there is a big need for studies in general to focus on developing countries so that there is an equal balance of perspectives about certain issues in terms of contexts.

An important question that needs to be raised here is, “how do primary school teachers in a developing country like Philippines employ assessment strategies to children with disabilities amidst problems such as poor school facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and rigid curriculum”?

Therefore, it will be a significant endeavour to conduct an empirical study that would highlight teachers’ initiatives on employing assessment strategies for children with disabilities especially in developing contexts. Specifically, this study will hope to heighten the level of awareness on how the education community in Negros Oriental, Philippines perceives inclusion of children with disabilities in general.

1.3 Research Questions

Main research question

How do primary school teachers assess children with disabilities in the regular classrooms?

Sub-questions

1. What assessment strategies do primary school teachers employ for children with disabilities in the regular classrooms?
2. How do primary school teachers deliver the assessment strategies for children with disabilities in the regular classrooms?

1.4 Significance and Scope of the Study

Philippines is a signatory to a number of international policies such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). These policies intensively emphasize the fundamental right of each child with or without disability to access quality and inclusive education. In addition, as mentioned in the background of this study, in 2012, Philippines has started implementing the K to 12 Basic Education Program which highlights two essential principles such as assessment and inclusive education. Consequently, these put the country in a situation that it has to be consistent in putting the mentioned policies into practice. Therefore, this study is relevant and timely to what the Philippines is trying to accomplish within its education system. As its title suggests, this study is anticipated to generate findings on how primary school teachers could effectively assess children with disabilities in the regular classrooms. Although this was a study involving a small sample, it is envisioned that the findings might be of importance in the following ways. First, the study might help the Department of Education in strengthening education policies related to the assessment of children with disabilities enrolled in regular schools. Second, learning from teachers' experiences in using assessment strategies might create an opportunity for other teachers to learn from these experiences and improve their assessment practices in the classroom. Third, this study might benefit children with disabilities because they will be provided with assessment strategies that are responsive and relevant to their needs. Fourth, the Teacher Education Institutions might utilize the findings of this study by including more contents related to assessment of children with disabilities in their pre-service education programs. Finally, one benefit seen in this study is the opportunity for its findings to be used as a basis by other researchers to replicate the study in different classrooms and teachers within the Philippine context.

1.5 Outline of Dissertation

The present study attempted to explore how primary school teachers employ assessment strategies for children with disabilities in the regular classrooms. It was designed to seek answers to the main question: *How do primary school teachers assess children with disabilities in the regular classrooms?* This is presented throughout the dissertation as follows:

The first chapter presents a brief description of the research problem and the justification for carrying this study.

The second chapter provides the review of related literature highlighting a discussion on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks directly linked to the assessment of children with disabilities. These serve as bases for the study's justification and reference point for some of the assessment strategies employed by the participants in this study.

The third chapter gives details of the research design, population and sample of the study. It explains the procedure adopted for the study and describes the research instrument in detail including how the data were analysed. In addition, the concepts of trustworthiness and ethics are discussed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter discusses the analysis of the data collected.

The fifth chapter provides a discussion of the study findings.

And the final chapter presents the summary and conclusions of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

2 Review of Related Literature

This chapter discusses the theoretical and conceptual bases of the study. It starts by presenting the perspectives and contexts of assessment. This part touches the idea on how assessment is defined based on the diverse perspectives of the society about the concept. This is then followed by presenting the theoretical basis of the study which is focused on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development with its critical components: *dynamic assessment* and *mediated learning experiences*. The discussion on the conceptual basis of the study follows emphasizing the concept of *differentiated instruction*. The succeeding parts of this chapter tackle the pieces of literature on different assessment strategies that teachers employ for children with disabilities in the classroom settings, and existing studies highlighting effective assessment practices of teachers. Finally, the last part presents the summary and critical reflections of the pieces of literature mentioned in the chapter.

2.1 Perspectives and Contexts of Assessment

It is emphasized that assessment can be elaborated as a concept by looking into the following perspectives and contexts: (1) outcomes of schooling (Brady & Kennedy, 2003), (2) economy (Tapscott, 2005), (3) equity (Kennedy, 2000), (4) accountability (Linn, 2000) and, (5) personal fulfilment and satisfaction (Smith & Goodwin, 2000). It is believed that these perspectives and contexts significantly shape how the school system and the society in general perceive assessment for children with disabilities (Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Tapscott, 2005; Kennedy, 2000; Linn, 2000; Smith & Goodwin, 2000).

2.1.1 Outcomes of Schooling

It is important to highlight that because of the fact that young people are considered the citizens of the future, the society as a whole takes an interest in the outcomes of schooling (Brady & Kennedy, 2003). This perspective highlights the different and contradicting interests or expectations of the community stakeholders - students, parents, business and industry, governments - about the role of assessment in relation to the outcomes of schooling. This is the reason why in the school setting, teachers may be faced with a challenging task of meeting and reconciling the differing interests and expectations of the community stakeholders. For the business and industry owners, for example, they are not ashamed to take

the interest that young people who leave school can directly contribute to their economic activities. This scenario significantly contributes to one of the economic implications of assessment - *knowledge economy*.

2.1.2 Economic Contexts

In this perspective, Tapscott (2005) focuses on *knowledge economy* as a concept related to assessment. *Knowledge economy*, as he defines it, “is based on the application of human know-how to everything we produce and how we produce it” (p. 7). This means that ‘knowledge economy’ is dependent on intelligent people who have the capacity to solve problems and create new and innovative ideas for a consumer-oriented society (Tapscott, 2005).

Brady and Kennedy (2003) make a direct connection between ‘knowledge economy’ and assessment by stressing:

Assessment is the means by which society is able to monitor the development of its skills and knowledge base. Assessment is able to monitor the society about the progress young people are making in school. It provides some measure of that progress (pp. 23-24).

However, the whole idea of *knowledge economy* has received a number of criticisms primarily because its principle contradicts the ideology of equality and due consideration to the needs of certain marginalized sectors in the society (Smith & Goodwin, 2000). This paves way to *equity* as one perspective of assessment.

2.1.3 Equity

As emphasized by Kennedy (2000), assessment has the potential to influence the social contexts of students in different ways. He adds that it can exacerbate social problems if assessment outcomes are interpreted outside of the social contexts they inevitably influence. Smith and Goodwin (2000) support Kennedy’s idea by concluding, “assessment can alert us to potential social problems and inequities and provide the grounds on which specific action can be taken” (p. 98).

Equity brings the different issues of assessment being a discriminatory aspect to students’ ethnicity, language, and ability or disability (Kennedy, 2000). This is primarily because in a number of instances, for example, students are compelled to take assessments using languages that are not necessarily their own. Expectedly, as Smith and Goodwin (2000) assert, “the students get low scores and are then labelled as slow or low performing” (p. 25).

This brings to the question, “how accountable are the policy makers, government, and the society in general in ensuring that the assessment processes bring positive impacts to schooling, rather than making them an agent to label and discriminate students”?

2.1.4 Accountability

Accountability, as a perspective to assessment, refers to “processes related to student learning, the expenditure of public funds, and aligning educational outcomes with the perceived needs of society and the economy” (Linn, 2000, p. 3). This concept is directly linked with the teachers and the education authorities primarily because they play a central role in accountability processes and they are often held to be accountable for the broad outcomes of schooling. Linn (2000) brings the concept of accountability forward by asserting:

Assessment has a number of advantages as an accountability because it is relatively inexpensive (compared with, for example, increasing teacher salaries in order to attract high-quality graduates to the profession), it can be externally mandated and rapidly implemented, and results can be made highly visible (p. 2).

By being accountable, Genishi (2000) stresses that the education authorities have to critically consider the principle of *student-centeredness*, which advocates for the active participation of the students in the whole assessment processes. He adds that this principle highly contributes to the broad positive outcomes of schooling.

2.1.5 Personal Fulfilment and Satisfaction

Smith and Goodwin (2000), in elaborating this perspective, recognize the concept of student-centred assessment, which involves being in “constant conversation with the children about the sense they are making of their work, what it is they are learning and doing” (p. 103). This means that assessment takes the responsibility of being alert to where children are, how they are responding to lessons and activities, and how they are or are not progressing. Genishi (2000) asserts that “nothing is scientific about this kind of assessment – it is based on developing a relationship with students, knowing who they are and being interested in who they are become” (p. 26). In addition, it is critical to emphasize that the perspective of personal fulfilment and satisfaction brings the progressivist notion that children are able to construct their own knowledge in meaningful ways, and they make meaning of the world around them and they do so in deliberate and purposeful ways (Smith & Goodwin, 2000).

It has been widely discussed in different pieces of literature that the perspectives on *equity*, and *personal fulfilment and satisfaction* are significantly inclined to the assessment of children with disabilities. This relates to one of the principles of assessment laid out by McAlpine (2006) which states, “assessment should be sensitive to gender, culture, linguistic, physical disability, socioeconomic status, and geographical location” (p. 23). However, Smith and Goodwin (2000) argue that in the real world, teachers have to live with the external constraints imposed by education systems while pursuing their own personal views and practices. This is the reason why even at present times, assessment for children with disabilities especially those enrolled in regular classes remains a challenge (Stiggins, 2008; Miller, 2009; Taylor, 2003).

Considering that the perspectives on assessment mentioned come from the education experts in the 21st century, it is but fitting to critically examine the perspectives of early educationists. One of them is Lev Vygotsky who proposed the Sociocultural Theory on Education. This theory is specifically linked to assessment through its Zone of Proximal Development (Chaiklin, 2003; Lidz & Gindis, 2003; Kozulin, 2004).

2.2 Assessment and the Zone of Proximal Development

Theoretically, there have been intensive and vast frameworks that are linked with assessment (Subban, 2006). One of which is the concept of *Zone of Proximal Development* (Vygotsky, 1978), which is considered as a part of a general analysis of Vygotsky’s child development (Chaiklin, 2003). The Zone of Proximal Development, as Vygotsky (1978) defines:

The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 86).

In practice, the role of the Zone of Proximal Development is to point to an important place and moment in the process of child development. This means that the Zone of Proximal Development presupposes an interaction on a task between a more competent person and a less competent person, such that the less competent person becomes independently proficient at what was initially a jointly accomplished task (Chaiklin, 2003).

It is critical to note that the Zone of Proximal Development is considered as one of the most widely recognized and well-known ideas in the studies related to the teaching-learning processes. Specifically, it is linked with the learning of diverse kinds of pupils, including

those with learning difficulties, those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, and gifted students (Smith, 2000).

2.2.1 Dynamic Assessment

On the practical aspect of the Zone of Proximal Development, Vygotsky introduced the concept of *dynamic assessment*, which is an approach to understanding individual differences and their implications for instruction that embeds intervention within the assessment procedure (Lidz & Gindis, 2003). The emphasis of dynamic assessment is on the processes rather than the products of learning. This is further elaborated in its principles or assumptions, according to Kozulin (2001), that (1) cognitive processes are modifiable, and an important task of assessment is to ascertain their degree of modifiability, rather than to remain limited to estimation of the child's manifest level of functioning; (2) interactive assessment that includes a learning phase provides better insight into the child's learning capacities than unaided performance; (3) the primary goal of assessment is to suggest psychoeducational interventions aimed at the enhancement and realization of the child's latent abilities to learn.

It is important to highlight that dynamic assessment was conceptualized in response to the widespread dissatisfaction with traditional means of testing or product-oriented, static testing. It is in this reason that dynamic assessment has several features which contradict with standardized testing's principles. Specifically, dynamic assessment employs the teaching assisting wherein feedback is built-in, either explicitly or implicitly (Lidz & Gindis, 2003). Furthermore, the goal of dynamic testing is to discover whether and how much the examinee will change under the influence of scaffolding activities (Tzuriel, 2004). Finally, it is important to highlight that the essential characteristics of dynamic assessment are that they are "interactive, open ended, and generate information about the responsiveness of the learner to intervention" (Lidz & Elliot, 2005, p.103). This relates with the fact that dynamic assessment was in response to the social need of creating testing instruments that were culturally sensitive and responsive to the factors of socioeconomic and educational differences and deprivation (Lidz & Gindis, 2003).

In terms of the two most common formats of dynamic assessment, Sternberg and Grigorenko (2007, pp. 27-28) describe them as 'sandwich' design and 'cake' design'. Basically, the two designs "assist each child through demonstration, leading questions, and by introducing elements of the task's solution" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 209). In the 'sandwich' design, as Sternberg & Grigorenko (2007) explain:

The instruction is given all at once between the pretest and the posttest. The examinees take a pretest and after completing it, they are given instruction in the skills or principles of problem solution involved in the pretest. After instruction, the examinees are tested again on a posttest (p. 28).

On the other hand, the ‘cake’ design takes a different process as compared to the ‘sandwich’ design:

Examinees are provided instruction item by item. An examinee is given an item to solve. If solved correctly, then the next item is presented. But if the examinee does not solve the item correctly, a graded series of hints follows. The hints are designed to make the solution successively more explicit. The examiner then determines how many and what kinds of hints the examinee needs in order to solve the item correctly. Prompting continues until the examinee is successful, or, if not, the assessor models the problem solution, at which time the next item is presented. (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2007, p. 29)

In practice, several empirical studies prove the positive and significant contributions of dynamic assessment to learning (Long, 2012). This is especially manifested in the field of second language acquisition in the classroom setting where dynamic assessment allows language learners to learn a new language through the employment of the ‘sandwich design’ or the ‘pretest-mediate-posttest’ process (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004; Birjandi, 2009; Hessamy & Ghaderi, 2014). However, dynamic assessment, as mentioned, is practiced in the field of learner’s diversity especially special needs (Cioffi & Carney, 2005). For example, in an empirical study conducted by Kaniel (2010), it was found out that children with specific learning disabilities benefit from the use of dynamic assessment’s ‘sandwich design’ especially in doing reading exercises. This was supported by Cioffi and Carney (2005) when they stress that providing support or assistance to children with disabilities during classroom exercises give them the confidence to accomplish the tasks given.

However, amidst all the merits given to dynamic assessment, it must be noted that certain pieces of literature assert that in most scenarios, the employment of the said assessment can be challenging on the part of teachers especially that it requires substantial amount of time and planning to have it implemented in the classroom setting (Tzuriel, 2004; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2007; Lidz & Gindis, 2003). In addition, it is stressed that dynamic assessment underestimates the essential role that static assessment plays in the learning process (Kern, 2007). Kern (2007) highlights that there seems to be a distinct dichotomy between the two assessment processes and that a number of education experts and practitioners claim that dynamic assessment is more effective compared to static assessment. However, Long (2012) argues, “static and dynamic assessments should be seen as complementary processes both aiming to provide meaningful learning to all learners” (p. 35).

2.2.2 Mediated Learning Experiences

The mentioned points about dynamic assessment especially its two designs gave birth to the idea to *mediated learning experiences* which was developed by Feuerstein and his collaborators (1980, 1997, as cited in Lidz & Gindis, 2003). Mediated learning experiences answers the critical question, “how is assistance provided in the ‘sandwich’ and ‘cake’ designs of dynamic assistance”? Kozulin & Presseisen (2000, p. 69) notes, “the ultimate goal of mediated learning is to make the child sensitive to learning through direct exposure to stimuli and to develop in the child cognitive prerequisites for such direct learning”. This calls for the specific outcomes of involvement that should include development of higher mental functions in the child, self-regulation, representational thinking, and strategic problem solving (Lidz, 2001).

Greenberg (2000) stresses that mediated learning experiences is similar to the idea of coaching which aims to assist someone to be more skilled and independent learner. He adds that mediated learning experiences occur when a more skilled person like a teacher assists the child to grasp something that he or she could not do independently. In the classroom setting, McCombs (2001) argues that the concept should not be haphazardly interpreted by teachers as merely ‘coaching’. He adds that teachers should understand that mediated learning experiences is a complex process and it requires a substantial understanding on how it should be implemented in the classroom. As suggested by King (1994), part of its complexity is its four features that are involved in the teaching-learning process:

1. Reciprocity. This is the establishment of a responsive connection between the child and the mediator. This requires that the child and the mediator share their cultures by integrating their values, ideas, feelings and expectations.
2. Intent. This is the explicit direction or goal that evolves between the mediator and the child. The mediator prepares intent ahead of time and determines how to catch and hold the learner’s attention.
3. Meaning: This is the personal relevance of the learning experience. The mediator ensures that the children share in developing meaning (interest, importance and usefulness) about the activities.
4. Transcendence: This is the expansion of understanding beyond what children are learning in a specific activity. Through transcendence children become active in making their own learning strategies.

Similar to that of dynamic assessment, several pieces of literature extol the merits of mediated learning experiences especially in practice. One of which is the empirical study conducted by Tzuriel (2013) which emphasizes the positive effects of mediated learning experiences to the cognitive development of children with learning difficulties. However, as mentioned, one challenge attached to mediated learning experiences is the teacher's capacity to plan and implement it in the classroom setting because he or she may have the tendency of haphazardly perceiving the concept as merely 'coaching' (McCombs, 2001).

The Zone of Proximal Development alongside dynamic assessment and mediated learning experiences has inspired a number of educationists to create their own perspectives regarding the teaching-learning process in general and how to effectively respond to the diversity of children in the classroom setting. One of them is Carol Tomlinson who introduced the idea of *differentiated instruction*.

2.3 Assessment and Differentiated Instruction

Tomlinson (2001) defines differentiated instruction as a "process of tailoring the instruction to proactively respond and meet individual needs" (p. 29). She adds that in this process, teachers modify the content, process, product, and the learning environment, and they employ ongoing assessment and flexible grouping. These specific strategies are strongly linked with the four classroom elements of differentiated instruction, which Tomlinson (2008) suggests. First, the content which refers to what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information. Second, the process which has something to do with activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content. Third, the products which deals with culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit. And finally, the learning environment which stresses the way the classroom works and feels.

One critical element in differentiated instruction is assessment, which has been inspired by the idea of *dynamic assessment* (Murphy, 1999). Based on Tomlinson's (2001) model of differentiated instruction, assessment is one of the general principles of differentiation. It means that in order to sustain the effectiveness of a differentiated instructional approach, it is critical to conduct ongoing, authentic assessment, and then to adjust strategies and resources according to the assessment results (Tomlinson, 2008). In addition, it highlights that the use of various assessment strategies should match students' strengths, learning style preferences, interests, and readiness. It also stresses that teachers

should gather achievement data through various assessment tools (Tomlinson, 2008). Hall (2002) maintains that assessment takes in the form of testing and homework adjustments, grading considerations, and modifications of assignments and products in the classrooms.

2.4. Classroom Assessment Strategies

A myriad number of strategies have been identified to assess children, and they apply generally in schooling irrespective of key learning areas and students' learning backgrounds (Taylor, 2003; Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Miller, 2009; McAlpine, 2006). Brady and Kennedy (2003) stress that for children with disabilities, these assessment strategies are applicable for as long as teachers modify them based on the needs of these children.

The assessment strategies are categorized into four: (1) test, (2) performance assessment, (3) product assessment and, (4) self-assessment.

2.4.1 Tests

This assessment takes in the forms of standardized and teacher-devised tests (Izard, 2001). The first form is commercially produced tests that are distributed with a manual explaining how the test is to be administered and marked, while the other one is developed by teachers for their own classroom use (Gronlund, 2003). This assessment strategy has to have materials that are not gender or ethnic specific, and sensitive to the diverse learning backgrounds of students (Izard, 2001; Linn & Gronlund, 2003).

2.4.2 Performance Assessment

Forster and Masters (2006) define performance assessment as “the assessment of students as they engage in real learning activities, and it is the on-the-spot evaluation of performance, behaviour, or interaction” (p. 1). When being assessed for performance, students are demonstrating their skills in a way that is integral to the teaching or learning process.

In performance assessment, *observation* is the central component. It is the structured (looking at behaviour in a systematic way) or unstructured (non-judgmental looking) process wherein the teacher observes various student performances and utilizes a variety of strategies to assess those observed performances (Conner, 2001; Phye, 2007).

2.4.3 Product Assessment

Herman (2005) defines product assessment as a “strategy teachers use to assess students in an ongoing way as they engage in the learning process, and it predominantly represents culminations of student achievement” (p. 42). Product assessment has specific forms. They are:

1. Portfolios. It is being defined as ‘a despository of artefacts’ or assortment of documents that may include pencil and paper tests, classroom observation, tapes, artwork, poems or stories, and that requires “a written reflection by the developer on the significance or contributions of those artefacts” (Wolf, 2005, p. 36, as cited in Brady & Kennedy, 2003).
2. Exhibitions. These provide the students the opportunity to display their knowledge through variety of presentation techniques such as scripted discussions, role plays, simulations, and use of audiovisual support (Herman, 2005).
3. Projects. Completed individually or in groups, a project is a substantial piece of work on a designated topic, involving the student in researching and organizing information for presentation. It is claimed as “more flexible than many other assessment situations” (Freeman & Lewis, 2007, p.228) primarily because of student proactivity (choice of topic), extended time for completion, and the possibility of uniqueness (Freeman & Lewis, 2007).

2.4.4 Self-Assessment

This assessment strategy provides the students the opportunity to reflect and identify their strengths and weaknesses in the learning process (D’Urso, 2005). Apart from diaries and journals, self-assessment can be done in a variety of ways such as writing conferences, discussions, reflection logs, weekly self-evaluations, checklists, and teacher-student interviews (Bennett, 2011).

2.5 Criteria for Selecting Assessment Strategies

Certain pieces of literature assert the need to set substantial criteria in selecting assessment strategies especially for students with diverse backgrounds. Masters and Forster (2004) and Herman (2005) first identified the following criteria: (1) curriculum relevance, (2) instructional utility, (3) fairness, (4) reliability or comparability, and (5) practical

convenience. Herman (2005) emphasizes the aspect of *fairness* by stressing the problem of *bias*. He stresses, “many forms of assessment, for example, require extended reading or writing that may discriminate against students from non-English speaking backgrounds” (p. 22).

However, Andrews (2005) and Fuller (2006) argue that diversity of students’ backgrounds has to include disability. Both practitioners assert that disability, in the context of assessment, should not disadvantage him or her. This scenario requires teachers and policy makers to create programs that will provide additional support to students with disabilities during assessment processes.

The assertions made by Andrews (2005) and Fuller (2006) paved way for more researchers to examine the additional and varied support teachers have for students with disabilities enrolled in regular primary classes.

2.6 Assessment Practices for Children with Disabilities

A few number of empirical studies in developed countries explore the practices of primary school teachers in assessing the learning of students with disabilities in regular classes. The following studies have been developed through qualitative methodologies involving interviews, observations, and document analysis.

2.6.1 Assessment as an Element in the IEP Process

Taylor (2009) conducted a study involving a primary school teacher with student with mild intellectual disability enrolled in her class. This study made an important point on how assessment critically contributes in the formulation and implementation of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The process started when the teacher made an informal assessment of the child to develop and evaluate teaching programs. This was done by employing anecdotal records with observational data to document that child’s off-task behaviour. After three days, the teacher was able to determine the major challenge of the child, and that is being off-task most of the time in class. This gave the teacher the opportunity to initiate an intervention program in order to respond to the child’s problem. She, for example, changed the spelling exercises of the child into dictionary work. Furthermore, in order to increase the child’s on-task behaviour each day, the teacher initiated a reinforcement system. Because the child had a little progress, the teacher decided to refer him for formal assessment which involved the

Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children, Kaufman Test for Educational Achievement, Test of Visual Motor Integration, Test of Written Language, and Test of Written Spelling.

The results of the mentioned assessment processes paved way to the formulation of an IEP which specifically and critically includes a modified approach in facilitating the learning assessment of the child. As Taylor (2009) explains in the study:

A special education teacher was assigned to work with the child for one hour each school day in the inclusion setting. During this time, he would receive structured one-to-one tutoring in handwriting (using stencils that would be faded gradually). In addition, his special education teacher would work with his general education teacher to incorporate the recommendations in his inclusive setting. Initially, the child would be requested to complete the tasks with no time limit. After he met the criteria for mastering the skill, however, he would be required to gradually decrease the time he needed to complete the task (p. 240).

2.6.2 Assessment as a Formative Process

Brady and Kennedy (2011) conducted a study involving a science teacher in a large multicultural primary class with some students manifesting signs of behavioural disabilities. The study aimed at examining assessment as a formative process, rather than summative. This was concretely manifested with the teacher's perspectives on what purposes assessment should serve: (1) provide feedback to students on how they are progressing so that they can target areas of need, (2) provide the same feedback to parents and, (3) provide information to teachers to inform teaching.

The teacher utilized a variety of teacher-devised tests which include multiple-choice questions, short response tests, requiring words, sentences, and the labelling of diagrams. He emphasized the value of the mentioned tests for ranking students. However, the teacher argued that the major purpose of testing is diagnostic and it should not promote the notion that "learning ends when a mark has been obtained" (Brady & Kennedy, 2011, p. 113).

The mentioned philosophy of the teacher paved way for him to use varied number of performance or practical assessment strategies specifically designed for the diverse needs of the students. Instead of doing pen-and-paper tests, for example, he assessed them in manipulating scientific equipment to make measurements.

In the study, it was observed that the teacher struggled in providing teacher-devised tests to his students with behavioural disabilities. This situation allowed him to apply the idea that performance assessment may also involve demonstrating a skill in other ways. The teacher cited, for example, that in his marine studies subject, it required a lot of basic recall and recognition. Students may simply bring pictures of dangerous marine creatures to the teacher and tick the appropriate outcome.

2.6.3 Assessment as Demonstration of Real Achievement

McMiller (2010), in his study on assessment of children with disabilities, highlighted the importance of assessment as means of demonstrating the real achievement of students. The primary school teacher involved in his study was passionate about assessment that effectively demonstrates student achievement and thereby promotes student self-esteem. As McMiller (2010) asserts from the perspective of the teacher, “assessment should entail multiple ways for students to demonstrate an understanding. Some students may be able to explain knowledge but not write it. Some may be able to represent it by drawing but not explain it. This is typical to students with learning disabilities” (p. 118).

The teacher, influenced by the mentioned philosophy, used a broad range of assessment of strategies across all key learning areas with emphasis on visual arts. She believed that visual arts should be a legitimate focus of children with learning disabilities. This provides an indication of the teacher’s preferred assessment strategies: ‘to facilitate independent thinking, exploration of a variety of materials and media, development of individual ideas, creative expression, development and refinement of skills and techniques, and a time for reflection’ (McMiller, 2010, p. 120).

The ‘time for reflection’ as an assessment strategy was concretely manifested in class through use of extensive student self-assessment. The teacher often would stop a lesson after 20 minutes to ask students what they have learned and to share ideas and learn from peers, and she typically would end a lesson with asking students to write five things they have liked about the lesson or learned from it. This is part of the teacher’s philosophy that students especially those with disabilities have the capacity to assess their own learning.

2.7 Summary and Critical Reflections

This chapter discusses the pieces of literature relevant to the concept of *assessment* especially for children with disabilities. I started by emphasizing what assessment means by presenting the different perspectives and contexts and how they are connected with one another. I assert that these perspectives and contexts provide a platform to understand how the education system specifically the teachers perceive assessment for children with disabilities, and why such perceptions exist. Personal fulfilment and satisfaction as a perspective, for example, brings a discussion on the importance of the school system’s sensitivity and alertness on how

children are and are not learning and how it should respond to the needs children may have in the classroom setting. These needs may take in different forms such as disability and language.

Being interested and sensitive towards child development, Vygotsky (1978) conceptualized the Zone of Proximal Development. This concept is relevant to assessment of children with disabilities especially that it has been mentioned in several pieces of literature that it tackles special needs and other forms of deprivation as important aspects to consider in discussing about child development. This is supported further by the fact that the Zone of Proximal Development paves way to the conceptualization of dynamic assessment and mediated learning experiences which both strongly support the principle of providing alternative means of assessing children including those with disabilities through the employment of strategies such as the 'sandwich' and 'cake' designs. The 'sandwich' design exemplifies the use of 'pretest-mediate-posttest' process while the 'cake' design is all about providing hints and assistance to a child during an exercise so that he or she can accomplish it.

Several pieces of literature extol the merits of the dynamic assessment and mediated learning experiences especially that a number of empirical studies proved their positive contributions in improving the assessment experiences of children with disabilities in the classroom setting. This merit is brought further when Tomlinson (2001) conceptualized differentiated instruction which is inspired by the Zone of Proximal Development alongside dynamic assessment and mediated learning experiences. Differentiated instruction involves the process of modifying the instruction to respond to the diverse needs of learners. One of its elements is assessment which is characterized as on-going, authentic, and flexible to the needs of all learners.

This idea of assessment within differentiated instruction allowed education experts and practitioners to develop a variety of assessment strategies such as tests, performance assessment, product assessment, and self-assessment. These strategies are applicable for all children. However, it is asserted that teachers should modify them based on the specific needs of children with disabilities.

While it is true that theories are important in understanding assessment in this study, I stress that there is a need to discuss the realistic practices of teachers in terms of assessing children with disabilities. This is an opportunity to support further the theoretical and conceptual claims related to assessment. It is in this connection that in this chapter, I included

some pieces of literature highlighting the teachers' assessment practices for children with disabilities, and based on them, assessment is described as an element in the IEP process, as a formative process, and as a demonstration. These descriptions critically emphasize that assessment has to be responsive to the diverse needs of all learners especially those with disabilities.

CHAPTER THREE

3 Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter, I present the research design, sampling procedure, instruments for data collection, procedure, and data analysis. In addition, the concepts of *trustworthiness* and *ethics* are discussed in this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore how teachers assess children with disabilities in regular primary classrooms in Negros Oriental, Philippines. Generally, qualitative research aims to gain insight and explore the depth, richness, and complexity inherent in the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Punch, 2009; Grix, 2010). Within this qualitative study, I could choose from a number of specific qualitative methodologies such as constructivism, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study to pursue the goal of this study. This is especially because the mentioned methodologies are used to “describe life experiences and give them meaning” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 56). However, considering the limited time in doing the study, I had to critically consider in choosing the methodology that does not strictly require a longer time of data collection. A case study, for example, requires an average of at least three months in collecting the data and being in the field (Yin, 2010). This is a similar requirement given for ethnography and phenomenology (Punch, 2009). This situation allowed me to utilize constructivist methodology because it does not necessarily require a long period of time of data collection (Charmaz, 2006; Vasso, 2006; Lukka, 2013). Johnson (1995) adds that in a constructivist methodology, the data collection process may be done in a relatively short period of time provided that the chosen tools and how the researcher uses them to collect relevant and meaningful data of the given study are given of utmost importance (p. 31).

It must be noted that more than the criterion of time element, a constructivist methodology offered valid and appropriate relevance to conducting this qualitative study. First, a constructivist methodology highlights the understanding of human experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and encourages the researcher to depend upon the views of participants being studied (Creswell, 2007). Second, this methodology “assumes that the meaning of experiences and events are constructed by individuals, and therefore people construct the realities in which they participate” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 58). Third,

constructivism has the aim of “understanding the world of human experience” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 36) which suggests that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). The study will involve the practical and realistic experiences of primary school teachers in relation to assessment strategies and how they employ the process for children with disabilities based on their contexts and experiences in the classroom. This supports what Charmaz (2006) stresses, “constructive methodology aims to elicit and understand how research participants construct their individual and shared meanings around the phenomenon of interest” (p. 73).

Although constructivist methodology has been widely used in business administration, engineering, and medicine, its potential application in other fields of study is broad (Lukka, 2013). This is manifested with the fact that the said methodology is also used in the field of education (Johnson, 1995; Crotty, 1998; Vasso, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Lukka, 2013).

3.2 Target Population and Sampling

This study focused on three regular primary classroom teachers in rural areas in Negros Oriental, Philippines (see Appendix 10) who have children with disabilities included in their classrooms: one teacher teaches in the first grade, the second one is in the second grade, and the third one is in the third grade. The different grade levels and schools that these teachers came from represent diversity of experiences which are essential in this study.

It is critical to emphasize that the study was limited to primary school teachers because they had the responsibility for the total educational programme and the duty of care for their class of students throughout the school day (SEAMEO and INNOTECH, 2012). It is also important to note that most of the training opportunities on inclusive education were given to primary school teachers. Furthermore, more and more children with disabilities are enrolled in primary schools (DepEd, 2012).

The following two major criteria were set in choosing the mentioned study informants:

1. Each teacher should have an identified child with a disability enrolled in her classroom. In this context, a child with a disability refers to a student with physical, intellectual, behavioural, sensory, or learning limitations which affect their daily activities especially in school setting.
2. Each teacher should have the background and has been identified as practitioners for at least three years of inclusive education specifically on how to employ assessment strategies for children with disabilities.

The process of identifying the teachers started by sending a formal communication to The Great Physician Rehabilitation Foundation, Inc. (GPRehab) (see Appendix 11), a non-government organization working with and for children with disabilities in Negros Oriental, Philippines through its Program of Inclusive Education (PIE). GPRehab's PIE has been closely working with primary school teachers in the province since 2004 especially on the aspect of effectively accommodating children with disabilities. The program was able to establish inclusive education systems in certain primary schools in Negros Oriental.

The communication that was sent had the intention of requesting GPRehab to formally recommend three regular primary school teachers who would pass the given set of criteria. The Department of Education divisions of Negros Oriental and Dumaguete City then contributed in the process by verifying the recommendations made by GPRehab. This was done by sending a formal memorandum together with the information letter (see Appendix 3) to the three schools where the three recommended teachers are assigned. This process led to the formal identification of the study informants who were three teachers teaching in primary schools in Negros Oriental, Philippines. The first teacher teaches children in the first grade, the second one is in the second grade, and the third one teaches in the third grade.

The final stretch of the process focused on doing formal introductions to the principals and teachers in their respective schools. It was in this phase when the final confirmations of the teachers to participate in the study were given.

3.3 Research Tools

This qualitative study utilized two constructivist data collection tools, namely, semi-structured interviews and direct observations (Charmaz, 2006). Each of these tools serves different yet equally important roles especially in the collection and triangulation of data (Creswell, 2007).

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary means of collecting data in this study. The type of interview employed was the interview guide or topical approach which was a bit more structured: the interview was scheduled, and the interviewer came prepared with a list of topics or questions (Patton, 2002) (see Appendix 1). In this study, the interviews allowed the researcher to gather an "in-depth and direct perspectives" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 38) from the teachers on how they assessed children with disabilities. The researcher's role was to

facilitate the process and gather relevant information from the teachers based on the interview questions (Cohen, 2007).

As a constructivist tool, semi-structured interviews should achieve a level of in-depth reflection which requires multiple interviews with each participant. As Mears (2009) explains:

The first responses you hear undoubtedly will be the oft-told tale, the frequently shared story of events or happenings without much depth, detail or reflection. A series of two or three, 90-minute interviews spaced about a week or two apart, for example, will provide greater opportunity to build rapport and achieve deeper reflection. Also, when you ask participants a question, related information may rise in their memory later, and multiple sessions give you the chance to access this' (pp. 171-172).

It is in that connection that the interview process in this study was done in two formats. First, the main interview was conducted after doing a series of one to two three-hour direct class observations. Its aim was to intensively discuss the questions exemplified in the interview guide. In addition, this was a structured process in a sense that the date and time of the session were scheduled ahead, and these were audio recorded to ensure clarity and accuracy of data. This usually lasted for more than 30 minutes. Second, the informal interviews were done to raise some specific questions that arose from doing direct class observations. These were usually conducted between five to 10 minutes during the break time between class subjects.

The mentioned two interview formats were done in a week's time for every teacher participant which contradicts the assertion made by Mears (2009). However, Patton (2002) argues that although time (spacing between interview sessions) is critical in the interview process, the most important thing is the depth and relevance of the data taken from the process.

3.3.2 Direct Observations

The second means of data collection was observations. The study used direct observations, specifically naturalistic unobtrusive observations, in order to explore how teachers employed assessments and deliver them to children with disabilities in their classroom in a "direct and natural manner" (Woods & Pratts, 2006, p. 102).

In a constructivist's perspective, direct observations serve two critical functions. First, it provides support and inputs (Lukka, 2013), and second, it triangulates the data (Charmaz, 2006) of the interview process. This means that the process of collecting data in a constructivist methodology in an education setting has to start with preliminary observations in the classroom. This will then be followed by interviews. Finally, it has to end with post-

observations. As mentioned, the two separate observation processes serve different functions. The first one focuses on providing support and inputs, while the second one triangulates the data taken from the interviews.

In the actual data collection in the field, for every teacher participant, one preliminary observation session was done on a Monday morning, and one session on a Tuesday afternoon. Each session lasted for three hours. Two different time frames were involved in the observations – morning and afternoon – primarily because each time frame had different sets of subjects taught. Worksheets were used to critically observe relevant happenings in the classroom in relation to assessment strategies (see Appendix 2). After doing the interviews (which usually took place on a Wednesday), one post-observation session was done on a Thursday morning, and one session on a Friday afternoon.

Table 1. *Data collection schedule*

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	<i>Preliminary observations</i>	--	<i>Interviews</i>	<i>Post-Observations</i>	--
Afternoon	--	<i>Preliminary observations</i>		--	<i>Post-Observations</i>

3.3.3 Pilot Interviews

In order to ensure that the data collection process of the study would not experience gaps and wastage in data collection, and other issues related to validity, ethics, and representation, a pilot study should be conducted before doing the formal data collection process with the participants. Lancaster et al. (2004) refer pilot study as a smaller version of a larger study that is conducted to prepare for that larger study. It involves the process of pre-testing a certain research tool. In the context of this study, pilot interviews were done with three primary school teachers who passed the criteria set as study samples. These teachers were recommended by The Great Physician Rehabilitation Foundation, Inc. (GPRehab) with the approval of the Department of Education Divisions of Dumaguete City and Negros Oriental.

During the pilot interviews, I took note of some important aspects that I improved and integrated in doing the formal interviews with the three main study samples. First, teachers

were comfortable responding to questions by code switching between Cebuano (native language) and English. This led me to also do the same thing especially in raising the interview questions. This made the interview atmosphere more casual which allowed the participants to freely express themselves. Second, one participant in the pilot interviews had the tendency to deviate from the main discussion of the interview by sharing her other experiences not necessarily related to assessment. This took much time in the interview process. This taught me an important lesson to become effective in redirecting the participants immediately if they started deviating from the main discussion. Furthermore, this helped me in saving more time especially that teachers had other school-related tasks to attend to aside from my interviews. Third, since the pilot interviews were done in between the classes of the teachers especially during their breaks, the noise and distractions from the children affected the focus of the participants in the participating the interviews. This led me to ensuring that during the main interviews, the participants were interviewed in a quiet and conducive place after all their classes in the morning or afternoon were done.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews and observations were analysed through the constructivist procedure suggested by Marshall & Rossman (2011) which falls into several phases. First, the data were organized by listing on note cards the data that were gathered, performing the minor editing necessary to make field notes retrievable, and cleaning up what seemed overwhelming and unmanageable. Transcribing verbatimly the data in the semi-structured interviews was also executed. Second, I immersed myself in the data by taking the time out to read, reread, and read them which forced me to become significantly familiar with the material. As Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggests, “researchers should think of data as something to cuddle up with, embrace, and get to know better” (p. 210). Third, I generated categories and themes from the data using the two sub-questions of the study. The first sub-question provided categories regarding the purposes of assessment and it further provided themes on specific assessment strategies that teachers used under each assessment purpose. The second sub-question created categories on content and delivery of assessment strategies, and each category led to the development of specific themes such as proximity, use of technology, and length and content of assessment strategies. Fourth, from the generated categories and themes, I then started coding the data by using both the readings of the data, and the conceptual framework for indications, in order for me to see how the data on

assessment strategies function or nest in their context and what varieties appear and how frequently the different varieties appear. Fifth, the phase of offering interpretations to the coded data took place. In this phase, I brought meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, and categories, developed linkages and a story line related to assessment strategies that made sense and was engaging to read. Part of this phase was concerned with evaluating the data for their usefulness and centrality. Sixth, the searching for alternative understandings took place in this phase where I constantly evaluated the plausibility of my developing understandings on the data regarding assessment strategies. Significantly, this phase emphasized the importance of certain strategies to ensure the quality and credibility of the study. Finally, this phase highlighted the process of writing the over-all report by summarizing and reflecting the complexity of the data. This is reflected in the following chapter where data are presented according to the two research sub-questions: (1) *what assessment strategies do teachers employ for children with disabilities in the regular classrooms?*, and (2) *how do teachers employ assessment strategies for children with disabilities in the regular classrooms?*

It is important to highlight that specifically, the mentioned phases three to five executed the six-strategy constructivist data analysis by Charmaz (2006):

1. Open coding. At this stage, I needed to look for implicit assumptions, to explicate actions and meanings, to compare data with data, and to identify gaps in the data.
2. Focused coding. This stage allowed me to consider the most significant codes which would be used to sift through remaining data.
3. Memo writing. This stage allowed me to write my thoughts about how the data would be coming together in clusters or patterns or themes.
4. Diagramming and memo sorting. This was done by creating basic diagrams of concepts or categories that were linked with one another. In this stage, I highlighted that the memos and summary diagrams would be examined and compared to each other, allowing further grouping of similar processes through a process of sorting that would aid the analysis process.
5. Core categories development. This final stage critically examined and clarified concepts in response to my analytic questioning.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Patton (2002) asserts that validity and reliability are two factors that a researcher has to consider in doing a qualitative study. However, in the context of this constructivist study, it is

important to emphasize the concept of validity more especially that Stenbacka (2001) argues that since reliability issue concerns measurements then it has no relevance in qualitative research. She adds the issue of reliability is an irrelevant matter in the judgement of quality of qualitative research. In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) states, “since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter” (p. 316). Patton (2002) with regards to the researcher's ability and skill in any qualitative research also states that reliability is a consequence of the validity in a study.

In qualitative research, many researchers have developed their own concept of validity and that is trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Mishler, 2000; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). The use of such concept allows many qualitative investigators to use different terminology to distance themselves from the quantitative proponents who are reluctant to accept that there is validity in qualitative studies (Silverman, 2001). It is in this connection that I intentionally use trustworthiness in this study to refer to validity.

Specifically within a qualitative study that utilizes methodologies such as constructivism, according to Guba (1991), trustworthiness has four major criteria to consider, namely, credibility (in preference to internal validity), transferability (in preference to external validity), dependability (in preference to reliability), and confirmability (in preference to objectivity). For the purpose of this study, I describe how credibility and transferability were handled in the whole study process.

3.5.1 Credibility

Credibility, known as internal validity in quantitative research, seeks to ensure that the study measures what is actually intended (Maxwell, 1992). Merriam (2003) adds that in considering credibility, the researcher deals with the question, “how congruent are the findings to reality”?

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest several aspects to consider in evaluating the credibility of a certain piece of research. In the context of this study, I considered four of the several aspects. First, triangulation is the process of utilizing different methods in doing data collection (Punch, 2009). Brewer and Hunter (1999) add by stressing that the use of different methods in concert compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits. In this study, triangulation was carried over by utilizing two major data collection methods, namely, semi-structured interviews and direct observations. Specifically, direct observations served the role of verifying the data or information gathered from semi-

structured interviews. This made my intention of verifying if the participants did ‘walk their talk’ in relation to assessment strategies for children with disabilities. Second, iterative questioning, in the context of doing the interviews, involves the use of probes to elicit detailed data and iterative questioning, in which the researcher returns to matters previously raised by an informant and extracts related data through rephrased questions (Miles & Huberman, 2000). Brewer and Hunter (1999) add that it is through iterative questioning that a researcher is able to detect falsehoods especially if contradiction of statements from the participants emerge. In conducting the interview with each participant, I employed iterative questioning thrice at a certain period of time in the process. Third, one strategy is the *member checking*, a process that devises a way to ask the participants whether the researcher ‘got it right’ (Saumure & Given, 2000, as cited in Shenton, 2004). Concretely, I gave summaries to the three teacher participants before writing up my study and asked them for their reactions, corrections, and further insights. This is a good means of doing a member’s check which within a constructivist methodology, provides an opportunity to further explore the tensions and complexities of the proposed interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, I employed *peer debriefing* which allows the researcher to make arrangements with knowledgeable and available colleagues to get reactions to the coding, the case summaries, the analytic memos written during data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This was practically done by inviting one of my colleagues who has Master’s degree in one of the organizations working with and for Persons with Disabilities in Oslo, Norway.

3.5.2 Transferability

Patton (2002) emphasizes that transferability, or external validity, “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 22). Since the findings of this qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular individuals and environments, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations. However, a contrasting view is offered by Stake and Denscombe (2000, as cited in Shenton, 2004), who suggest that the prospect of transferability should not be immediately rejected especially in research projects that utilize *multiple environments*, which, according to Brew and Hunter (1999), is a process that involves similar projects employing the same methods but conducted in different environments. It must be noted that this study involved three teachers coming from three different regular primary schools in Negros Oriental, Philippines. These schools are located in different locations in the

province, which qualifies this study to have *multiple environments* and therefore, fulfilling partially the transferability requirement of a qualitative study.

3.5.3 Threats to Credibility and Transferability

Punch (2009) mentions that the threats to credibility and transferability can be the researcher, the subjects participating in the study, the situation or social context, and the methods of data collection and analysis. In terms of the researcher, reflexivity, or researcher's bias, is one specific threat especially that before I conducted this study, I was able to work closely with all the three teacher participants for three years through an inclusive education project. This means that I know the participants both on a professional level. Although Silverman (2007) says that this set-up is an advantage on the part of the researcher because rapport and relationship with the participants have already been established, and that they have more confidence as many information as they could, Punch (2009) argues that this may affect the credibility of the whole data collection process. As a response to this, as a researcher, I had to ensure that reflexivity would not significantly affect the credibility of the data in this study by implementing what Field and Morse (1995) suggest:

One step in decreasing bias is to be aware of the possibility of introducing bias at various points of the research process. The researcher should undergo extensive and rigorous training as interviewers and observers before undertaking qualitative studies. He needs to be trained in a manner that encourages an objective view of the phenomena under study. Furthermore, he should examine and declare his underlying values and assumptions in light of the research situation so that they can be considered when reading the research (p. 56).

On the other hand, in relation to the fact that the study participants know me in advance as a researcher, they become a specific threat to credibility. Punch (2009) stresses that this is primarily because the participants have the tendency to make things seem better, or to please the researcher by responding in the way that they believe he expects. To address this threat, I followed what Field and Morse (1995) suggest that I had to make sure that the participants were clear on the nature of research. I concretely did this by conducting an orientation with the participants before the data collection process commenced. The session became an avenue for me and the participants to level off expectations and to discuss the details of what the study was all about.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is critically considered as an important element in this study especially that it involves people in the data collection processes. This perspective reflects what Gregory (2003) strongly stresses:

Every code of ethics designed to guide research involving human subjects gives primacy to the requirement of fully informed voluntary consent. The very clear presumption is that research involving human subjects undertaken without the explicit consent of the researched lacks an adequate moral basis, and it would be better if the research were not undertaken. (p. 35)

Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest that in examining the ethical issues within a qualitative research, four aspects have to be considered, namely, research board, confidentiality and anonymity, informed consent, and reciprocity.

3.6.1 Research Board

Marshall and Rossman (2011) fully recognize the role of review boards in examining the ethical aspect of any research. Specifically, their task is to protect human subjects from unnecessary harm and to ensure that the research will proceed with appropriate protections against risk to humans.

In the Norwegian context, the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) serves as a review board for all research projects done in Norway or sponsored by Norwegian organizations or institutions. Before doing the data collection process, I was required to apply for ethics approval by NSD. After thorough examination, they remark (see Appendix 4):

The project will not entail a processing of personal data by electronic means, or an establishment of a manual personal data filing system containing sensitive data. The project will therefore not be subject to notification according to the Personal Data Act. The Data Protection Official presupposes that all information processed using electronic equipment in the project is anonymous.

3.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

In terms of confidentiality and anonymity, Angrosino (2006, as cited in Punch, 2009) asserts that the research participants must be assured that their anonymity will be protected and that all notes and other materials associated with the project will be kept strictly private. This assertion is manifested in this study especially that in the data analysis and presentation, there are no information that can identify individuals in the data set. Specifically, there are no direct identifiable information of the schools and teachers as participants in the whole process of the project.

3.6.3 Informed Consent

Prior to the start of the research process, it was aimed to get the full informed consent of the principals of recommended schools by GPRehab and the Department of Education, and teachers of recommended schools chosen as study participants. In this context, informed consent is defined as a “principle wherein people being studied must be made aware that research is taking place and that it has certain definable processes and expected outcomes” (Arthur et al., 2008, p. 168, as cited in Grix, 2010). The process started by conducting a short orientation activity with the principals and teachers which aimed at making them aware of the details of the research project. This was an avenue for them to raise their concerns or questions about the project. The teachers, being the participants of the study, were then asked to sign the written agreement containing the details of the study and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

3.6.4 Reciprocity

Reciprocity demonstrates the concept of ‘gratitude’ on the part of the researcher to his or her research participants. Specifically, as Marshall and Rossman (2011) elaborate, reciprocity is “when people adjust their priorities and routines to help the researcher, or even just tolerate the researcher’s presence, they are giving of themselves. The researcher is indebted and should be sensitive to this” (p. 121). Reciprocity is usually expressed at the end of the data collection process, otherwise known as “exit” (Copp, 2008, p. 130), by giving tokens or gifts, offering specific services or support in the future, or providing copies of the research after it is written (Rager, 2005).

In the context of this study, reciprocity to the participants was expressed by providing tokens of appreciation. More importantly, it was agreed that copies of the research project will be provided to GPRehab, Department of Education, and the teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR

4 Presentation of the Data

In this chapter, I present the data collected from doing interviews and observations. To add substance and clarity to the discussion, I include some documents (which can be seen in the Appendix section) highlighting the assessment strategies employed by the study participants. The data are divided into two main parts which are presented under the two sub-research questions: (1) *what forms of assessment strategies do primary school teachers employ for children with disabilities in the classrooms?*, and (2) *how do primary school teachers employ assessment strategies for children with disabilities in the classrooms?*

The following data were collected from three teachers teaching in primary schools in Negros Oriental, Philippines. Teacher A teaches children in the first grade, Teacher B is in the second grade, and Teacher C teaches in the third grade. These teachers are identified to have children with intellectual, learning, and behavioural disabilities enrolled in their classrooms.

4.1 What forms of assessment strategies do primary school teachers employ for children with disabilities in the classrooms?

It is consistent among the three teachers that their assessment strategies for children with disabilities, generally, can be categorized according to their functions. They can be diagnostic, formative, or summative. How teachers perceive or define each of these functions is based on their knowledge exemplified in the assessment guidelines of the Department of Education (DepEd). Teacher B, for example, defines diagnostic assessment as:

A means of determining the strengths and weaknesses of the child in all aspects of learning. This gives the teacher the opportunity to create relevant instructional support for the child within a certain learning period.

Teacher C added that although in most cases, diagnostic assessments are done at the start of the school year or at the start of a certain learning period, it has to be employed by the teacher as often as possible primarily because the child's learning is dynamic and should not only be assessed once.

On the other hand, in terms of formative assessment, the three teachers consistently agree that its function is similar to that of diagnostic assessment especially on the aspect of determining the strengths and weaknesses of the child in terms of learning. Teacher A emphasized that whatever results the teacher gets from doing the formative assessment should

inform the instruction that will be given to the child. As Teacher B puts it, “formative assessment is a critical pre-requisite to making instruction meaningful to the child”.

The summative assessment, for Teacher B, functions as a means to determine the overall learning of the child at a certain period of time. She added:

Summative assessment allows the teacher to identify if the child is able to learn or not at a given period of time. This is usually done at the end of the week or month, or at the end of every chapter of a certain lesson.

It is important to emphasize that from the data collected in the interviews, the three teachers strongly recognized the important functions that the three assessments have in ensuring the learning of children especially those with disabilities. As Teacher C expressed:

As a teacher, I always make sure that I give equal importance to diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. They serve different yet equally important functions in learning.

4.1.1 Diagnostic Assessment Strategies

The three teachers identified three major diagnostic assessment strategies they employ for children with disabilities in their classrooms. Both teachers B and C made use of tests which are usually prescribed by the Department of Education, while teacher A employed observations with anecdotal records. However, the three of them consistently made use of formal endorsements from the previous grade level teachers as supporting documents to determine the strengths and weaknesses of children with disabilities.

For Teachers B and C, the tests are divided into two according to the time of the year they are administered to children. The first one is the pre-test which is given at the beginning of the school year, and the second one is the post-test, otherwise known as periodical test, which is administered towards the end of every grading period. Generally, these tests are characterized as ‘pen and paper’ tests wherein children are given test papers to accomplish within a given period of time. Specifically, the time allotment for a 37-item subject is 60 minutes.

In terms of specific formats, these tests have items in multiple choice, matching type, and short answer. Appendix 5, for example, presents a sample diagnostic test for Science in the third level. The first part requires children to choose the correct answer from the options, while the second part asks them to distinguish whether the given physical characteristic is inherited or not by a child from his or her parents.

Teacher B explained that the varied formats in the diagnostic tests allow teachers to determine the academic levels of the children specifically on the aspects of knowledge, understanding, and process. Test items which ask children to read a short passage and answer the following questions function as a means of checking their understanding or comprehension. On the other hand, items that require children to accomplish a certain task like drawing or discussion are more into checking their processing skills.

It is important emphasize that aside from knowledge, process, and understanding, the diagnostic tests also aim at assessing the macro skills of children. As Teacher C shared:

Within the 37-item test, I have items that focus on the listening skills of the children. I ask them to listen to me as I read a certain passage. After which, they will answer the questions related to it.

Although Teacher A also utilized diagnostic tests in her class, she emphasized that she oftentimes proved the use of observations effective especially that they involve the holistic assessment of children in a certain period of time. She added that in using observations, she specifically utilized anecdotal records and journals to critically document the performance of the child on the aspects of academics and socialization. Teacher A narrated:

What I usually do is that I have one notebook for one child that I'd like to observe. Everytime I get to see relevant behaviour, I write them down. If the behaviour becomes recurring and problematic, I make recommendations on how to address it. However, I would like to highlight that observations are not only used to monitor problems of behaviour, for example. It should also be used as a means to documenting the strengths of a child.

Teacher A asserted that observations should ideally be done often. In her own experience working with a child with a disability, she started using observations during the first week of classes in order to determine the needs of the child. From the outputs of that observations, she critically reviewed the over-all instructional set-up of her classroom to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of the child. At a certain part of the school year, Teacher A noticed that the child was struggling to get good scores from their tests. Critical to know what the reason was, the teacher decided to do observations. From there, she was able to determine that one of the reasons was the fact that the child did have issues with reading long texts in test papers. This prompted her to create a recommendation, and that was to give the child a human assistance when taking the tests.

Of the three teachers, it was consistently noted that one diagnostic assessment they employed for children with disabilities was the formal recommendation documents given by the previous grade teachers. These documents specifically exemplify the performance of one

child with a disability in different aspects of learning such as socialization and academics. They also contain specific recommendations on how to effectively accommodate the child with a disability. For example, if the child has some problems focusing his or her attention in class, the recommendation documents suggest the receiving teacher to provide interesting activities that will help the child maintain his or her attention. Teacher B shared:

The good thing about having recommendation documents is that I can always approach the previous grade level teacher to clarify some important things presented in the documents. I always find time to talk with the teacher so that I will get a clear idea on how I can teach the child best. This encourages cooperation between us, teachers.

In addition, it was strongly stressed in the data collected that the formal recommendation documents create a strong support to the outcomes of doing tests and observations. As Teacher C stressed:

Whatever I get from the doing the diagnostic test, I always go back to the recommendations made by the previous teacher. In this way, I have more bases of making relevant support for a child with a disability.

4.1.2 Formative Assessment Strategies

From the data collected from the three teachers, the formative assessment strategies, which are generally not graded or recorded, can either be done through individual work, pair work, or group work activities. As the name suggests, individual work only involves one child in accomplishing a given task, while pair work is done by two. Group work activities involve between five and eight children working at accomplishing a task given by the teacher.

Teachers A, B, and C consistently employed oral recitation as a specific example of a formative assessment that is focused on individual work. Teacher C explained:

When I do a discussion in class about a certain lesson, I always make sure that the children are attentively listening to me. And one way of ensuring that is through an oral recitation activity. I raise one question to the whole class and then I ask someone to answer it.

On the other hand, journal writing was a specific individual activity employed by Teacher A to allow children to express their learning reflections. Children had their notebooks where they could share their journal entries either through words, drawings, or diagrams. Appendix 6 provides an example of a drawing journal entry of a child with a disability expressing his learning reflection for a particular lesson. In most instances, this activity was done as an assignment which means that children could do them at home and had them submitted the following day.

In terms of pair work, Teacher B stressed that this allows children to work with their seatmates to accomplish a given task. This was seen during an observation wherein a specific example of this is the ‘Think Pair Share’ activity. The teacher raises a certain question to the whole class. The children are then asked to think about an answer to the question, look for a partner, and share their answers to their chosen partners. The activity culminates with a plenary discussion facilitated in by the teacher.

In instances when children were expected to accomplish complex and challenging outputs, the teachers chose to employ group work activities. From the responses of Teachers A, B, and C and from the observations conducted, group work takes in the forms of games and creative activities. Teacher C employed games, for example, in her lesson in English. She asked the children to group themselves into five. After which, she gave them puzzles of a certain animal that produces the given sound. The children had to form the puzzles and have them posted on the board. The first who accomplished the task first won.

The creative activities under the formative assessment strategies involved tasks that allowed children to accomplish them through use of creative activities such as drawing, role playing, and diagramming. Teacher A, for example, had a lesson on ‘Taking Good Care of Sick People’ under the Values Education subject. As a form of evaluating the children’s understanding of the discussed lesson, the teacher asked them do a three-minute role play to the whole class on how to take good care of sick people. Another specific activity was taken from Teacher C where she presented a story to the class. After which, in order to evaluate the comprehension of the children, she grouped and asked them to make a summary of the story through drawing, diagramming, and role playing.

Teacher B justified that the use of games and creative activities as forms of formative assessment served an important purpose especially in teaching a child with a disability. She stressed:

First of all, it is through these activities that the child has the opportunity to work collaboratively with his or her classmates. Through collaboration, the child is able to share the responsibilities of accomplishing a certain task which is a big challenge when he or she does it individually. Also, the use of games makes learning fun for the children.

4.1.3 Summative Assessment Strategies

Definitely, tests were commonly used as a form of summative assessment for children with disabilities. However, each teacher, except Teacher C, utilized one additional strategy. For

example, Teacher A made use of portfolios while Teacher B utilized group work activities to emphasize the capacity of the child to perform a given task.

Tests that Teacher A, B, and C employed for children with disabilities are categorized according to the time they were usually administered. First, the weekly quizzes, as the name suggests, were done before the week ends to cover the lessons discussed from Mondays to Thursdays. Second, the periodical tests, which are longer in format, were administered before a grading period ends, which is usually in August for the first grading period.

Both weekly quizzes and periodical tests used varied formats such as multiple choice, short answer, and matching type. There are also formats that require the children to label diagrams or to draw objects. Appendix 7 presents a sample of a weekly quiz where children are asked to supply a missing letter to form a word that corresponds the picture, while Appendix 8 is a sample periodical test in English with multiple choice and short answer formats.

As mentioned, two teachers employed additional summative assessment strategies to assess the learning of children with disabilities. Teacher A expressed:

I do not think it is fair to assess the learning with the child just through pen and paper tests. What if the child has other ways of expressing what he or she knows, not necessarily through writing? It is in that reason that as a teacher, I am looking at other strategy that is responsive to the needs of the child. And to be specific, I use portfolios.

Portfolios, for Teacher A, allow the child to express his learning outputs through different means – drawing, writing, arts – and have them compiled in a notebook. For a certain period of time, the child was expected to accomplish a specific portfolio task. For example, in Appendix 9, the task of asking the child to making such outputs was within a time frame of two days. After the time deadline, he had to proceed to making another set of outputs within the same task.

On the other hand, Teacher B shared that although group work activities during class discussions are not recorded or graded, she also utilized them to assess the learning of the children in aspect of performance. In her mathematics class, for example, after she discussed polygons, instead of asking the children to do a written test, she asked them to group themselves and respond to the task by creating outputs exemplifying the use of polygons in daily lives. Certain groups chose to make a drawing of a house using different polygons, while others presented a role play. In order to critically evaluate the performances of the children, Teacher B used a checklist containing the rubric of the activity. The checklist allowed her to provide quantitative and qualitative feedbacks to the different groups.

4.2 How do primary school teachers employ assessment strategies for children with disabilities in the classrooms?

Two themes were identified in the context of how teachers employ assessment strategies for children with disabilities, namely, content and delivery. This means that when thinking about the employment of assessment strategies, content has to be examined first. This answers the question, ‘Is the content of the assessment responsive and relevant to the needs of a child with a disability?’ The examination of how the content should be delivered to children with disabilities then follows. It answers the question, ‘Is the process of delivering the assessment to a child with a disability responsive and relevant to his or her needs?’ Simply put, from the data collected, content emphasizes how the three teachers modify the level of difficulty of the assessment, while delivery highlights the process of how the teachers modify the assessment administration for children with disabilities.

Teacher A made a point by stressing:

Because of the limitations a child with a disability may have either intellectually or physically, there is a big need to modify the whole assessment process for him. This is one way of ensuring that everything I do for him is responsive and relevant to his needs as a child with a disability.

4.2.1 Assessment Content

In considering the content of the assessment, the three teachers were consistent at recognizing the importance of identifying the academic capacity of their children with disabilities. This means, for example, that if the assessment is all about adding three-digit numbers, the teacher will have to critically reflect if a child with a disability can manage to answer the items. If not, it is then important for the teacher to simplify the assessment content based on the child’s level of academic capacity.

Teacher C asserted that the *use of the child’s native language* is one way of modifying the assessment content. As seen in the observations, in her daily discussions, she used oral recitations to determine the level of understanding and participation of her children. She would usually raise a question related to the lesson and ask someone to answer it. For her child with a disability, it was quite a challenge especially if English was used as a medium. Teacher C would then simplify the question and used the child’s native language (that is Cebuano) to raise it. This was concretely brought further when Teacher C, in one of her

English lessons, took the time of translating an English text to Cebuano so that the children, especially the child with a disability, would be able to understand what the text was all about.

On the other hand, Teacher A was critical in intensively modifying the *level of difficulty* of the assessment content especially that she had a child manifesting intellectual disability in her class. In her Mathematics class, for example, one of her lessons was about adding three-digit numbers. Expectedly, the child had a difficult time coping with the lesson. As a result, a day before having the Mathematics test, Teacher A decided to create a different and simple test for the child. Instead of adding three-digit numbers, the child only needed to add two-digit numbers.

Teacher B more or less had similar experience with Teacher A especially in modifying the level of difficulty of the assessment content for her child with a disability. As observed in her Science class, she discussed the lesson on 'Parts of the Eye'. For most of the children in class, Teacher B wanted them to provide a one-sentence function of each of the eye's parts as a form of assessment. However, since it would be difficult for the child with a disability to do it, Teacher B decided to modify the assessment for him. A matching type replaced the short answer type of assessment. The child had to match a part of the eye in column B with its function in column A. This implied that the child did not have to think so much of providing functions all by himself. Instead, he had some options to choose from column A.

The *length of the assessment* had to be considered in modifying the content of the assessment as strongly expressed by Teacher C. This means that if possible, a child with a disability should not be overwhelmed with long written tests especially if the attention and focus of the child were a challenge. She shared:

For weekly quizzes, I usually shorten the items for my child with a disability. This is primarily because he easily loses his attention and focus in doing long tests. So instead of taking a 20-item test, I would give him a 7-10-item one.

Teacher B added that the aspect of *length of the assessment* should also be applied in doing group work activities. This implies that group work activities should aim to maintain the interests of the children in accomplishing certain tasks by critically considering the time frame. Teacher B stressed that in most cases, group work activities that last more than 10 minutes do not necessarily maintain children's attention and interest. This definitely requires teachers to be sensitive and particular with the pace of group work activities. Teacher B mentioned that in addressing this, she had to explicitly mention to the class the time element of the activity. In this way, children are guided as to when to accomplish the task while maintaining their attention and interest.

4.2.2 Assessment Delivery

The three teachers provided several points in delivering assessment to children with disabilities in their classrooms. From the points presented, four themes were developed. First, *proximity* deals with how the teachers provided physical assistance to children with disabilities during assessment activities. Second, *peer support* emphasizes how the teachers worked with other children in the class who could significantly give support to their classmates with disabilities. Third, *use of technology* deals with how the teachers utilized available resources in the classroom to assist children with disabilities especially during assessment activities. And fourth, *time element* emphasizes the time adjustments that teachers gave to children with disabilities in accomplishing an assessment activity.

Proximity

Consistent with Teachers A, B, and C, *proximity* was usually done during formative and summative assessment activities. They would approach children with disabilities and sit beside them to monitor their status, first of all, and if they needed help, teachers would provide the needed support for the children. The support would take in the forms of simplifying or translating the given task to Cebuano and providing more cues and hints until they would be able to work on their own.

For Teacher A, *proximity* was specifically applied in her daily class discussions. For example, after discussing in plenary the lesson on ‘Different Parts of a Human Body’, she asked the whole class to do a desk exercise by individually answering certain questions related to the lesson. She recognized that the child with a disability in her class could not do the task on his own. As a result, Teacher A approached the child for a one-on-one session. With the child, she went through the questions slowly and asked the child to give his response verbally or whatever he was comfortable at doing. The child did choose to have his answers both in oral and written forms.

Teachers B and C shared their experiences of using *proximity* especially during periodical tests. Teacher B said:

Since periodical tests are longer and more complex in nature, it is definitely important that I provide support to the child with a disability. In most cases, this support took in the form of working closely with the child during the test. I sit beside him and guide him

item by item. If time does not permit, I usually ask the child to stay after the class and answer the test with my assistance.

Peer Support

Although the three teachers recognized the importance of giving their physical support to children with disabilities during assessment activities, Teacher C asserted that there are instances when the process became tedious especially that they had other important responsibilities to attend to. This led her to employ *peer support* which basically allowed her to identify certain children in class who could work with children with disabilities in accomplishing a task. This was commonly used when Teacher C had a pair work with the use of ‘Think Pair Share’ activity. She usually asked one child to work with a child with a disability. In this way, a task was shared and a competent child could assist the child with a disability during a formative assessment activity.

Peer support was also manifested during group work activities where children had to work with five or more members to accomplish a task. Teacher highlighted that before the group work would start, children were reminded of one rule and that was to work collaboratively and support one another as members.

Use of Technology

While teachers recognized the importance of providing the so-called ‘human assistance’ for children with disabilities through *teacher and peer support*, they did not underestimate the big contributions the *use of technology* gave in employing assessment for the said children. Specifically, Teachers A, B, and C made an intensive use of ‘low technology’ in their classrooms such as photos, boards, and other visual materials.

Teacher A, in one of her lessons in Mathematics, organized a game where selected five children were asked to give the sum of a given addition sentence as fast as they could. The first one to give the correct answer would get one point. And since one of the children has speech impairment and that he could not express his answer verbally, Teacher A provided him a slate board and a piece of chalk where he could write his answer. In this way, the child was able to actively participate in the game.

Teacher C was particular with providing materials that would assist the child with a disability especially during weekly tests. Figure 7 provides the test sample with photos to increase the comprehension of the child on what and how to respond to the test. She shared

that using photos of authentic objects helped significantly compared to just providing a pen or pencil drawing of objects.

For Teacher B, the *use of technology* meant providing a child with a disability with a test paper that has a good face validity. She said:

In making a test for a child with a disability, I always make sure that it does not overwhelm him because it has a lot of texts or the fonts are too small or the spacing is problematic. The test paper itself has to be responsive to the needs of the child.

Time Element

Simply, for Teachers A, B, and C, *time element* means giving time adjustments to children with disabilities in accomplishing assessment activities. Most of the time, adjustments imply extending the time so that they would have enough time to accomplish the tasks. Teacher A expressed:

Adjusting the time is very important for a child with a disability primarily because of the fact that he does have intellectual limitations. I want him to have more time so that he will be able to give his best in answering the test.

During class discussions of Teacher B, if a child with a disability could not accomplish the exercise on that day, she would ask the child to have it as his assignment which should be submitted the following day.

For Teacher C, *time element* was usually applied in doing weekly tests. She shared:

Weekly tests per subject usually last for 15-20 minutes, but for a child with a disability, I usually extend it especially in Mathematics and English where there is a lot of reading and analysing. As much as possible, I do not want to pressure him. I just want him to take his time and do the test with fun.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 Discussion of the Findings

This chapter discusses and summarizes the significant findings and conclusions of the current study. The discussion is structured according to two major concepts based on the research sub-questions, namely, *forms of assessment strategies* and *delivery of assessment strategies*.

5.1 Forms of Assessment Strategies

From the responses given, it is clear that the teachers show a substantial understanding of the concept of *assessment* especially its functions in the classroom for children with disabilities. This is manifested when they explicitly categorize assessment strategies as diagnostic, formative, and summative. I assert that this level of awareness teachers have is a result of how assessment is explicitly emphasized especially in certain education policies in the Philippines. This relates to the perspectives of *equity* and *personal fulfilment and satisfaction*. Recognizing that assessment is not merely a ‘summative’ tool is a manifestation that teachers are sensitive towards the diversity children may bring in the classrooms. This clearly emphasizes that assessment should be utilized as an aspect to promote equity and learning within the education system, and not to ‘judge’ children. In addition, the teachers’ use of formative assessment, for example, exemplifies the idea of *student-centeredness* within the perspective of *personal fulfilment and satisfaction* wherein the teachers take the time out to substantially monitor how the children are performing during instruction. This allows teachers to make necessary adjustments or improvements within the whole instructional process.

From the data collected, the teachers do utilize specific assessment strategies per assessment function in the respective classrooms. These specific assessment strategies come in varied forms to ensure that children with disabilities have more options to express their learning in class. This is strongly linked to the concept of *dynamic assessment* primarily because of the fact that teachers go beyond using ‘pen and paper’ tests which are generally characterized as static testing. The use of groupings, for example, reflects the characteristics of dynamic assessment as being “interactive, open ended, and generate information about the responsiveness of the learner to intervention” (Lidz & Elliot, 2005, p.103). Furthermore, it is important to note that the application of the principles of dynamic assessment is not solely related to the teachers’ use of varied assessment strategies; it is also significantly linked to how they deliver them for children with disabilities.

In addition, teachers' use of varied assessment strategies is reflective on the idea that they are critical and sensitive to the needs of children with disabilities. This relates to the importance of substantially considering one of the criteria for selecting assessment strategies and that is fairness. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this study, fairness addresses the problem of bias especially that many assessments discriminate against children especially those with disabilities.

Generally, from the findings of this study, teachers follow the standard given by the Department of Education especially in using 'pen and paper tests' in diagnostic and summative assessments. However, it is important to highlight that there are certain assessment strategies that teachers employ that are not necessarily mandated by the Department of Education. These include the use of observations with anecdotal records in diagnostic assessment, and groupings in both formative and summative assessments.

5.1.1 Diagnostic Assessment Strategies

For teachers, it is emphasized that diagnostic assessment plays an important role in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of children with disabilities before doing an instruction. In addition, it can also be used during instruction as reflected on how one of the teachers utilized observations with anecdotal records in doing her daily lessons. The whole idea of utilizing diagnostic assessment is reflected with the fact that assessment should be considered an element in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process. This means that whatever data teachers collect from doing diagnostic assessment should be used as springboard to creating an IEP that is relevant to the needs of children with disabilities. However, in the data collected from this study, teachers did not mention IEP. I assume that this is primarily because of the fact that IEP, generally, is a concept that is only familiar among special education teachers, and not necessarily with general education teachers. Furthermore, I stress that IEP is a document that needs time when formulated. For teachers in primary schools, this is a challenge considering that they do have other important responsibilities to fulfil in their daily work in school.

From the findings, within the diagnostic assessment, teachers use varied and specific assessment strategies, namely, tests, observations with anecdotal records, and formal recommendations from the previous grade teachers. The tests are characterized as 'pen and paper' tests where children with disabilities are asked to respond the given tasks through writing. On the other hand, observations are done to gather holistic information about how

children with disabilities are performing specifically in academics and socialization, while the formal recommendations contain critical information as to how children performed in their previous grade and how the current teachers can effectively accommodate them in specific aspects or areas of learning. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, the specific assessment strategies that teachers use are strongly reflected on two of the four categories of classroom assessment strategies: (1) tests, and (2) performance assessment which covers observations and the formal recommendations from previous grade teachers.

The tests used as a diagnostic tool by teachers in this study are administered twice through a pre-test and a post-test. This process is strongly linked to the ‘sandwich’ design of dynamic assessment which emphasizes that before doing an instruction, a child with a disability is given a pre-test to identify his or her strengths. Instruction then follows. The child is finally assessed based on what he or she learns by doing a post-test. This process is concretely seen in the teachers’ responses where they administer a pre-test at the start of the school year and the results of the test are used to enhance the over-all instruction. Post-test then follows in the form of periodical tests.

Again, as asserted by the pieces of literature in Chapter 2 of this study, tests should not solely be used to diagnose children’s strengths and weaknesses primarily because do not holistically reflect the strengths and weaknesses of children with disabilities. It is in that reason that as seen in the findings, there is a need for teachers to explore other strategies of determining the strengths and weaknesses of children before doing an instruction. Therefore, it is important to highlight that in the data presented, the teachers made use of the formal recommendations made by the previous grade level teachers of children with disabilities to support the results of the ‘pen and paper’ diagnostic tests. I assert that one way of getting a good background of the child is through his or her previous grade level teacher who practically worked with him or her for one school year. This takes in the form of a formal document or simply verbal communication – which was practiced by the teachers when they took the time out to approach with the previous teachers and talk about the strengths and weaknesses of children with disabilities, and how to effectively manage them in the classroom settings.

It is also important to emphasize that although in the pieces of literature in this study, observation is recognized as one essential performance assessment strategy, one teacher from the three respondents explicitly highlighted the employment of such strategy to be able to get a holistic judgment of the child’s strengths and weaknesses. As discussed in the data, one

teacher does use observation to assess a child with a disability using anecdotal records. I assert that this process allows the use of observation in a systematic and meaningful way especially that it serves as a springboard to other critical learning processes such as developing Individualized Education Programs (IEP), although this idea, as discussed previously, is not mentioned and seen in conducting interviews and observations with the teachers.

5.1.2 Formative Assessment Strategies

From the findings, within the formative assessment, it is important to highlight that specifically, the following strategies are used by the teachers: (1) individual work, (2) pair work, and (3) group work. These require different mechanics but focus on similar purposes, according to the teachers themselves – to inform instruction. Generally, this practice reflects teachers' awareness and sensitivity towards the diverse needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms.

The individual work represents the self-assessment strategy especially that it utilizes journal writing, for example, to allow children to express their learning reflections. As exemplified in the pieces of literature in this study, journal writing is employed by certain teachers in assessing children with disabilities. This is specifically manifested in the two empirical studies done by Brady and Kennedy (2011) and McMiller (2010) which stress that the fact that assessment should be a formative process and should be a demonstration of real achievement.

As presented in the findings, the use of 'Think Pair Share' as a specific pair work activity in formative assessment brings Zone of Proximal Development and mediated learning experiences into the picture. This is due to the fact that according to the teachers, the main purpose of employing pair work activity is to allow a more competent child to work with a child with a disability to accomplish a certain task. Furthermore, this is to encourage a child with a disability to work with the help or support from someone in class. The Zone of Proximal Development and mediated learning experiences share similar perspective that in order to enhance the learning of the child, he or she must be provided with the so-called 'scaffolding' in the forms of human assistance or support most especially.

The group work activities employed by the teachers in this study are strongly linked to the principles of differentiated instruction on assessment and flexible groupings. Tomlinson (2005) adds that the use of differentiated outputs for certain tasks is an essential aspect of

tailoring the assessment to meet individual needs. As manifested in the findings, differentiated outputs take in the forms of drawing, role playing, diagramming, and other creative activities. These forms should be based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile as reflected in the principles of differentiated instruction.

However, it is important to stress that the employment of group work activities may pose a challenge in the classroom. In most cases, in the Philippines, one teacher has more than 50 children in a small classroom and doing flexible groupings may impose an issue on classroom management and time. I stress that based on the information taken from the teachers' interviews and observations, good planning is essential before using such activities in the classroom to ensure their smooth and meaningful implementation. As a response, indeed, good planning is important in the process and this was concretely manifested with the experiences of the teachers in this study. The teachers do come from government primary schools where they have an average number of 40 children per class. However, they seem to make varied formative assessment strategies as a natural part in their daily class discussions.

5.1.3 Summative Assessment Strategies

From the findings, it is clear that aside from formative assessment strategies, the teachers also make use of varied strategies in doing summative assessment. They are generally divided into tests, performance, and product assessments, as suggested by Brady and Kennedy (2003). The weekly quizzes and periodical tests fall under tests, while group work activities and portfolios belong to performance assessment and product assessment, respectively. However, tests are consistently used as a major summative assessment strategy. This is primarily because of the fact that tests are considered as a form of traditional assessment and are explicitly highlighted in the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum alongside with authentic assessment. In other words, tests are standards that teachers have to use in assessing children. In this study, tests are developed by teachers for their own classroom use, and are endorsed by the education authorities, providing they are integrated into regular classroom routines.

However, as has been consistently mentioned in this study, since tests are generally characterized as 'pen and paper' where children are required to respond to the test questions or tasks through writing, they have the possibility of excluding children with disabilities especially those with reading and writing problems. I assert that tests should not be used as the only summative assessment strategy. Furthermore, there is a big need for teachers to look for other strategies especially for children with disabilities. This is reflected on the

experiences of the two teachers in the study. Both of them did use other summative assessment strategies for children with disabilities, namely, portfolios and group work activities with the use of checklists and rating scales. Certain pieces of literature in this study extol the merits of portfolios because of its claimed features which involves students in some degree of choice of entries such as drawing, essays, diagrams, and art works. On the other hand, the use of group work activities with varied outputs allows the students to express their learning based on their interests or readiness, which is significantly linked with differentiated instruction.

5.2 Delivery of Assessment Strategies

How the teachers in this study employed assessment strategies for children with disabilities exemplifies their sensitivity towards the needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms. Instead of sticking to the traditional means of delivering assessments, they took the time out to innovate for strategies so that the children would be able to give appropriate responses to given tasks. This relates to three empirical studies (Taylor, 2009; Brady & Kennedy, 2011; McMiller, 2010) discussed in Chapter 2 of this study that teachers play a critical role in making the classroom atmosphere responsive and relevant to the needs of children with special educational needs. These efforts are concretized on how teachers differentiate their instructional practices which include the assessment process.

In relation to differentiating instructional practices mentioned, it is clear from the findings that the teachers related their assessment practices to the concept of *differentiated instruction* which strongly suggests that certain aspects of the classroom instructions have to be considered in dealing with diversity, namely, content, process, products, and learning environment. This perspective is manifested by how the teachers meticulously considered assessment content and delivery for children with disabilities in their classrooms.

Theoretically, the Zone of Proximal Development also comes into the picture especially with the involvement of dynamic assessment and the mediated learning experiences. The whole idea of teachers employing and delivering varied forms of assessment strategies aside from 'pen and paper' tests is a principle reflected in dynamic assessment which debunks the whole idea of *static assessment* (Lidz & Gindis, 2003). On the other hand, specifically, how teachers employed *proximity* and *peer support* in their assessment strategies delivery reflects the principle of mediated learning experiences which emphasizes the role of the teacher or any

individual in assisting the child in the learning process until he or she becomes independent (King, 1994).

5.2.1 Assessment Content

In terms of assessment content presented in the findings, the use of child's native language in delivering assessment was identified by the teachers as one of their strategies in the classroom. I stress that this practice, use of the child's native language, in the Philippine context, is believed to enhance learning as exemplified in the K to 12 Basic Education Program. The rationale behind this is based on strong theoretical justifications that the children learn best through their native language. In terms of assessment, providing them to children in native language allows them to fully grasp the task and provide the appropriate responses. This perspective is strongly linked with one of the principles of dynamic assessment which states, "cognitive processes are modifiable, and an important task of assessment is to ascertain their degree of modifiability, rather than to remain limited to estimation of the child's manifest level of functioning" (Kozulin, 2001, p. 23).

Related to the assessment content was the teachers' strategy in adjusting the level of difficulty and length of their assessments for children with disabilities. This was manifested with the fact that if teachers, for example, sensed that children with disabilities were not ready with the level of difficulty of a given assessment, they had to simplify it in order to fit to the academic capacities of the children. This brings to what Tomlinson (2001) emphasizes regarding one aspect of differentiated instruction – content. She stresses that in content, the assessment is modified based on what children already know. This is primarily because of the fact that some children may have partial mastery of the content or display mistaken ideas about the content (Tomlinson, 2001). On the other hand, modifying the length of the assessment, especially shortening it, is also one consideration under the content of differentiated instruction (Hall, 2002).

5.2.2 Assessment Delivery

In the findings, four essential themes are identified in the process of assessment delivery, namely, proximity, peer support, use of technology, and time element. According to the teachers themselves, these themes play an important role in ensuring that children with

disabilities are able to effectively express their learning using varied means of delivering the assessment.

As mentioned, *proximity* and *peer support* as assessment delivery strategies are linked with the Zone of Proximal Development through its mediated learning experiences component. It is clear that the teachers' purpose of employing the two strategies were to provide assistance to children with disabilities so that they would be able to accomplish certain assessment tasks. This matches with what mediated learning experiences are all about – they occur when a more skilled person like a teacher assists the child to grasp something that he or she could not do independently. However, I assert, based on the findings and the pieces of literature of this study, that the employment of mediated learning experiences requires a critical understanding especially on the aspect of ensuring that a child would not become too independent to the teacher. I believe that this is where *fading* comes in, a process involving the gradual removal of assistance given by the skilled person to the child, and this was explicitly seen while doing class observations with the teachers.

On a personal note, in the Philippine context where teachers teach in huge classes, *proximity* can be time consuming and can compromise the teachers' time in doing other equally important tasks in the classrooms. This is the reason, as expressed by the teachers, why the idea of *peer support* was developed with the aim of utilizing the contributions children themselves have in providing support to their classmates.

As seen in the findings of this study, the assistance teachers gave to children with disabilities was also translated through *use of technology*. In this context, technology took in the forms of low-tech materials that were readily available for teachers to use. This emphasizes that in the assessment process, technology, both low-tech and high-tech, plays an important role in ensuring that children receive the support to accomplish certain tasks. I add by emphasizing that although in the Philippine context, high-technology becomes more and more available, there are still instances when schools do not have the luxury of accessing it. This results to teachers utilizing existing resources around them as concretized in the practices of teachers involved in this study.

From the findings, it is important to highlight that one way for teachers in delivering assessment strategies to children with disabilities was through *time element*. This practice reflects the reality that when teachers ask children with disabilities a particular task, expectedly, because of their physical, intellectual, learning, or behavioural limitations, they need more time to accomplish it. *Time element* is a critical element exemplified in the process

of differentiated instruction. Tomlinson (2001) asserts that when teachers deal with the diverse needs of the children in the classroom, the instruction or assessment process has to be differentiated either through flexible groupings or time extension. This strategy allows children to give their appropriate responses to the given tasks

CHAPTER SIX

6 Summary and Conclusions of the Findings

This chapter presents the summary and conclusions of the findings of this study based on the main question: *How do primary school teachers assess children with disabilities in the regular classrooms?*

The study aimed to explore answers to the said main question by answering the following sub-questions:

What forms of assessment strategies do primary school teachers employ for children with disabilities in the regular classrooms?

How do primary school teachers employ assessment strategies for children with disabilities in the regular classrooms?

6.1 Summary

6.1.1 Forms of Assessment Strategies for Children with Disabilities

The findings of this study indicate that teachers utilize a variety of assessment strategies for children with disabilities in the classrooms. This perspective is anchored on the fact that these teachers recognize the need for these children to be provided with assessment strategies that are relevant and responsive to their needs. It is important to emphasize that in this study, teachers categorized their strategies according to the purposes of assessment.

First, diagnostic assessment was perceived as a means to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the child before an instruction. The teachers maximized the use of this assessment by utilizing specific assessment strategies such as pen and paper tests, observations, and formal recommendations from the previous grade level teachers of the children. The pen and paper tests were consistently used by the three teachers primarily because they are mandatory and explicitly mentioned in certain assessment policies of the Department of Education. However, one teacher believed that in order to be able to get a holistic view of what the child's strengths and weaknesses are, the teachers must explore other assessment strategies. This paved way to the use of observations especially at the start of every school year. One teacher emphasized that in doing observations, anecdotal recording process was used. On the other hand, as a form of diagnostic assessment, teachers made use of formal recommendations from the previous grade level teachers of the children. These

recommendations were presented on paper highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the children and specific strategies on how to effectively accommodate them in certain aspects of learning. However, teachers admitted that in most cases, these formal recommendations were done verbally. They invited the previous teachers for a brief meeting and talked about the children.

Second, formative assessment was thought of as an opportunity for teachers to regularly monitor the learning of the children especially during the instruction. Similar to diagnostic assessment, teachers used specific assessment strategies to maximize the purpose of formative assessment. Generally, the strategies were identified as individual work, pair work, and group work activities. For individual work, journal writing was one of its strategies where a child with a disability was asked to write his learning reflections either through words, drawings, or diagrams. On the other hand, Think Pair Share was a common strategy under the pair work wherein a child with a disability was asked to work with a partner to discuss a certain question or task raised by the teacher. Consistently, the teachers made use of group work activities to allow children to accomplish complex and challenging tasks. Part of these are games and creative activities which allowed children to accomplish outputs through drawing, role playing, and diagramming.

Third, according to the teachers, summative assessment functions as a means to determine the overall learning of the child at a certain period of time either at the end of the week or month, or at the end of every chapter of a certain lesson. Tests were commonly used as a form of summative assessment for children with disabilities and they were categorized according to the time they were administered, namely, the weekly quizzes and the periodical tests. Both tests used varied formats such as multiple choice, short answer, and matching type. There were also formats that require the children to label diagrams or to draw objects. Aside from doing tests, two teachers managed to have additional assessment strategies with the belief that having only one strategy does not necessarily reflect the learning of the child. This perspective paved way to these teachers to use portfolios and group work activities.

6.1.2 Delivery of Assessment Strategies for Children with Disabilities

Two themes were identified on how teachers employ assessment strategies for children with disabilities. These themes generally reflect the innovation and creativity of teachers in ensuring that children with disabilities were able to provide appropriate responses to certain assessment tasks.

The assessment content, as one theme, emphasized how teachers modified the content of the given assessment. This was done in three ways. The first one was the *use of child's native language* in simplifying the questions or tasks given. Teachers usually translated English texts to the native language (Cebuano) of the children. The second one was to modify the *level of difficulty* of the assessment content especially for children manifesting learning or intellectual disabilities. And the last one was to consider the *length of the assessment*. This means that for some children with disabilities, a 20-item test could be overwhelming. Therefore, there is a need to shorten the items based on what the children could manage.

The second theme, assessment delivery, offers four specific strategies on how teachers administered assessment activities for children with disabilities. First, *proximity* deals with how the teachers provided physical assistance to children with disabilities during assessment activities. Second, *peer support* emphasizes how the teachers worked with other children in the class who could significantly give support to their classmates with disabilities. Third, *use of technology* deals with how the teachers utilized available resources in the classroom to assist children with disabilities especially during assessment activities. And fourth, *time element* emphasizes the time adjustments that teachers gave to children with disabilities in accomplishing an assessment activity.

6.2 Conclusions

The purpose of conducting this qualitative study was to explore how primary school teachers assess children with disabilities in regular classrooms using constructivist methodology. It was aimed that whatever findings this study has in relation to assessment strategies would significantly contribute in bringing the advocacy of inclusive education forward in Negros Oriental, Philippines. This is primarily because of the fact that although certain efforts or initiatives on inclusive education have been implemented in the province, there seems to be a challenge in documenting them through empirical studies.

The findings of this current study provide an opportunity to formulate significant conclusions regarding the assessment of children with disabilities.

First, there is a strong connection between the theoretical perspectives on assessment mentioned in this study to the practices of teachers. I assume that this is due to the fact that these theoretical perspectives became the bases in formulating education policies related to assessment in the Philippines specifically the K to 12 Basic Education Program. And as policies, they need to be translated into classroom practices. However, it must be noted that

although certain assessment strategies such as tests are a requirement that teachers should practice in the classroom, some of them, as seen in the findings, are products of teachers' initiatives in exploring more options in assessing children with disabilities. This brings to the point that the teachers both use their professional and personal experiences in the classroom which is one critical characteristic of a constructivist study.

Second, the findings of this study provides an important lesson to teachers that in assessing children with disabilities, employment of variety of strategies is a necessity. Sticking to traditions without exploring other authentic strategies does not necessarily respond to the diverse needs of children with disabilities.

Third, I recognize that the qualitative constructivist nature of this study poses a challenge to generalizability of its findings. However, how the teachers provided significant information in this study clearly highlight their substantial level of awareness towards assessment as a concept. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that how the teachers assessed children with disabilities in the regular classrooms indicates innovation, creativity, and willingness which are important in bringing the inclusive education forward. This scenario creates a positive image to the teachers' role in educating children with disabilities especially that in most cases, teachers' incapacity to accommodate these children are consistently highlighted as a failure in inclusive education. In addition, this gives due credibility to the Department of Education that amidst challenges within the education system, the department is critical in ensuring that children with disabilities are accommodated in schools at least in the aspect of assessment.

Fourth, although the teachers in this study showed a number of strengths in assessing children with disabilities, there is one area that has to be improved and that is the use of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in the process of assessment. A number of literature in the field of special and inclusive education extol the merits IEP has in assessing children with disabilities. However, in the findings of this study, IEP was not mentioned and was not considered a part in the assessment practices of teachers. Taylor (2003) stresses that this happens especially when teachers do not have the capacity to execute the plan, and they have a handful of other responsibilities to do in school. Although the mentioned reasons are valid, I argue that IEP should not be taken for granted and that efforts have to be done to use it both in theory and in practice. In addition, I critically stress that teachers should refrain from perceiving that differentiating assessment is only applicable to children with disabilities. It

has to be emphasized that due to the diversity of learners in the regular classrooms, differentiation has to be employed not only to the selected few, but to all learners.

Finally, I recognize that this study has limitations which can be addressed in other studies that will be conducted in relation to assessment of children with disabilities. For one, this study is very general in nature especially in the aspects of disability and subject areas. It is recommended that in the future studies, researchers may focus on one specific type of disability and how assessment strategies are used in response to the identified disability. This is based on the fact that each disability requires unique strategies. For example, the assessment strategies for a child identified with autism may not necessarily be the same or applicable with the strategies for a child with visual impairment. In addition, it is also recommended that specific subject areas will be considered in relation to assessment strategies. This means that researchers could explore a study, for example, that will focus on a child identified with dyslexia and how he or she is assessed in his or her Mathematics subject.

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APPENDIX

1 Interview Guide

Questions:

1. What instances require you, as a primary school teacher, to employ assessment strategies for a child with a disability in your classroom?
 - a. *Are these instances more internal (intrinsic) or external (extrinsic)? Or a combination of both? What are these specific instances?*
 - b. *How do you deal with these instances?*
2. What are the different forms or characteristics of assessment strategies you, as a primary school teacher, employ for a child with a disability?
 - a. *Do you give priorities in differentiating among the different assessment strategies? Or do you give equal importance to all of them? Why?*
 - b. *What forms or characteristics of assessment strategies do you employ for a child with a disability in your classroom?*
 - c. *Can you give specific examples of these specific assessment strategies you employ for a child with a disability in your classroom?*
3. How do you, as a teacher, deliver the assessment strategies for a child with a disability your classroom?
 - a. *What aspects or criteria do you have to consider in delivering the assessment strategies for a child with a disability your classroom?*
 - b. *Do you have to utilize existing assessment materials and modify them? Or do you have to create new ones? Elaborate.*
 - c. *What specific strategies do you employ in delivering the assessment for a child with a disability in your classroom?*

2 Observation Guide

Pre-Observation

Date: _____

<i>Specific Forms or Activities of Assessment</i>	<i>Process of Delivery</i>	<i>Other Points</i>

Post-Observation

Date: _____

<i>Specific Forms or Activities of Assessment</i>	<i>Process of Delivery</i>	<i>Other Points</i>

3 Information Letter with Consent

Request for participation in a research project

Project Title

Teachers' assessment strategies for children with disabilities: A constructivist study in regular primary schools in Negros Oriental, Philippines

Background and Purpose

This is a Master's project under the 2013-2014 Erasmus Mundus in Special and Inclusive Education program and is hosted by the University of Oslo in Oslo, Norway.

This aims to explore how teachers assess children with disabilities in regular primary classrooms in Negros Oriental, Philippines. Studying how regular primary school teachers initiate their own strategies to respond to the diverse needs of their learners is a meaningful opportunity to bring the advocacy of inclusive education in the province of Negros Oriental forward.

This project focuses on regular primary classroom teachers in rural areas in Negros Oriental, Philippines who have children with disabilities included in their classroom. These teachers are identified to employ assessment strategies for children with disabilities in their classes. The study is limited to primary school teachers because they have the responsibility for the total educational programme and the duty of care for their class of students throughout the school day. It is also important to note that most of the training opportunities on inclusive education are given to primary school teachers. Furthermore, more and more children with disabilities are enrolled in primary schools.

The study uses the recommendation of The Great Physician Rehabilitation Foundation, Inc. (GPRehab), a non-government organization working with and for children with disabilities, to identify teachers with children with disabilities in their classes in Negros Oriental, Philippines. Furthermore, these teachers must be identified by the said organization to have the necessary skills in managing differentiated assessment in their classes. The Department of Education (DepEd) also contributes in the process of identifying the samples by verifying what is recommended by GPRehab. To encourage diversity of experiences, the study specifically looks into three primary school teachers - one from first grade, one from second grade, and one from third grade.

What does your participation in this project imply?

Semi-structured interviews are the primary means of collecting data in this project. The type of interview to employ is the interview guide or topical approach which is a bit more structured: the interview is scheduled, and the interviewer comes prepared with a list of topics or questions. In this project, the interviews will allow the researcher to gather an "in-depth and direct perspectives" from the teachers on how they employ differentiated assessment. The researcher's role is to facilitate the process and gather relevant information from the teachers based on the interview questions. These interviews are recorded to ensure clarity and accuracy of data.

The second means of data collection is observations. The study uses direct observations in order to explore how teachers differentiate assessments and deliver them to children with disabilities in their classroom in a “direct and natural manner”. Specifically, observations are done during regular class discussions or lessons with the use of an observation checklist or worksheet.

What will happen to the information about you?

All personal data will be treated confidentially and anonymously, specifically that the names of the teachers or participants will not be recognizable in the publication. Only the project researcher has the access to all the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and direct observations. In addition, it is important to emphasize that no directly and indirectly identifying personal data or information of the participants or teachers such as age, address, gender, and ethnicity will be used in the project. Finally, the data collected will be stored in a private computer and will be protected with a password.

The project is scheduled for completion by the 10th of December 2014. At that point, all the data collected will be destroyed.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, please contact the researcher, **Rolando Jr Villamero**, at his mobile number: **+639152671440** or at his email address: **rolando.villamerojr@gmail.com**.

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

Consent for participation in the study

I have received information about the project and I am willing to participate:

Signature over printed name of the participant

Date

4 Letter from NSD (1st Page)

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Ivar Morken
Institutt for spesialpedagogikk Universitetet i Oslo
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Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org nr: 985 321 884

Vår dato: 14.08.2014

Vår ref: 39266 / 3 / JSL

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 08.07.2014. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

39266

Teachers' differentiated assessment for children with disabilities in regular primary schools in Negros Oriental, Philippines

Behandlingsansvarlig

Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens overste leder

Daglig ansvarlig

Ivar Morken

Student

Rolando Jr Villamero

Etter gjennomgang av opplysninger gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon, finner vi at prosjektet ikke medfører meldeplikt eller konsesjonsplikt etter personopplysningslovens §§ 31 og 33.

Dersom prosjektopplegget endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for vår vurdering, skal prosjektet meldes på nytt. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>.

Vedlagt følger vår begrunnelse for hvorfor prosjektet ikke er meldepliktig.

Vennlig hilsen

Katrine Utaaker Segadal

Juni Skjold Lexau

Kontaktperson: Juni Skjold Lexau tlf: 55 58 36 01

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Kopi: Rolando Jr Villamero rolando.villamerojr@gmail.com

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices

OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no

4 Letter from NSD (2nd Page)

Personvernombudet for forskning



Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 39266

Based on the information we have received about the project, and the e-mail received on August 13th, the Data Protection Official cannot see that the project will entail a processing of personal data by electronic means, or an establishment of a manual personal data filing system containing sensitive data. The project will therefore not be subject to notification according to the Personal Data Act.

The Data Protection Official presupposes that all information processed using electronic equipment in the project is anonymous.

Anonymous information is defined as information that cannot identify individuals in the data set in any of the following ways:

- directly, through uniquely identifiable characteristic (such as name, social security number, email address, etc.)
- indirectly, through a combination of background variables (such as residence/institution, gender, age, etc.)
- through a list of names referring to an encryption formula or code, or
- through recognizable faces on photographs or video recordings.

Furthermore, the Data Protection Official presupposes that names/consent forms are not linked to sensitive personal data.

5 Sample Diagnostic Assessment for Science (1st Page)

Diagnostic Test-Science III

I. Basaha ang mga pahayag. Isulat ang letra sa insaktong tubag.

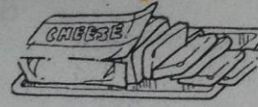
1. Asa niini ang solid?



A



B



C

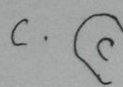
A. 2. Unsa ang gamiton sa pagtan-aw sa mga butang sa palibot?



A.



B.



C.



D.

3. Unsa ang mabuhat para malimpyo atong palibot?

A. Mag labay ug basura bisan asa.

B. Mag sunog ug plastik.

C. Mag bangag ug ilubong ang patay nga hayop

D. Ilabay sa suba ang basura.

4. Asa niini ang annay kinabuhi o mutubo?



A.



B.



C.



D.

5. Unsa ang maka pagimok sa dahon?

A. Magnet B. Kuryente C. Hangin D. Tubig

II. Butangi ug ang mga musunod kon makuha nato sa atong mga ginikanan, kon dili:

___ 1. Gitas-on sa kuko.

___ 2. Porma sa nawong.

___ 3. Intelligence level.

___ 4. Kolor sa panit.

___ 5. Gidaghanon sa amigo ug amiga.

___ 6. Klase sa buhok, kulot ba o tul-id.

___ 7. Gitas-on sa ilong.

___ 8. Gidaghanon sa tango.

III. Tan-awa ug tun-i pag-ayo ang duha ka set-up sa tanom:

5 Sample Diagnostic Assessment for Science (2nd Page)



A



B

Tubaga :

1. Unsa imong ikasulti sa tanom sa setup A?

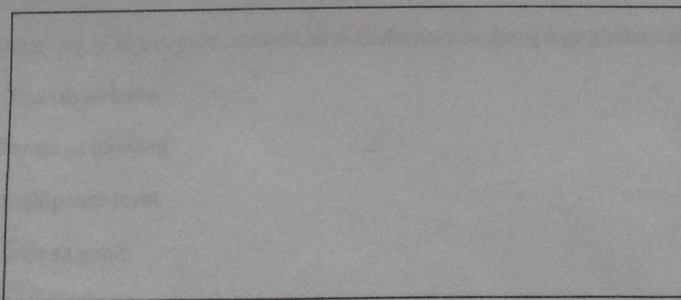
Setup B?

2. Unsa gikinahanglan sa tanom sa setup B?

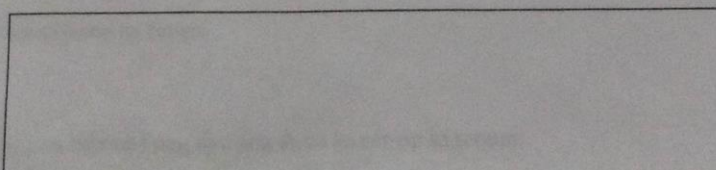
3. Nganong himsog ang tanom sa setup A?

4. Unsa ang mga importanteng gikinahanglan sa usa ka tanom para kini mutubo?

IV. Mag drawing ug usa ka langgam. Isulat ang mga parte sa lawas niini: (5pts)



V. Mag drawing ug usa ka tanom. Isulat ug ilha nga mga parte o bahin niini: (5pts)



6 Sample Drawing Journal Entry



7 Sample Weekly Quiz

Buluhaton 16

Ilha ug hinganli ang mga hulagway sa ubos: Isulat ang nawala nga letra:



1. _ola



3. _ayabas



2. _alde



4. _asket

8 Sample Periodical Test in English (1st Page)

ENGLISH III
First nPeriodical Test

I. Read each item carefully. Write the letter of the correct answer.

- Which is a sentence?
A. Add a bottle
B. Stop and ask
C. My family goes to church every Sunday.
D. Top of the shack
- Which is a real sentence?
A. Fruits are good to eat.
B. Spiders fly in the air.
C. Magicians are rich people.
D. Fairies are real.
- The following are rhyming words. Which is not?
A. Green-lean
B. Cost-lost
C. Healthy-body
D. One box
- Which is in the plural form?
A. Cat
B. Trees
C. Shoe
D. Bag




II. Read each sentence. Write what is asked for:

III.
(effect) 1. The boys run fast, someone chased them
(effect) 2. It rained for a week, as a result big floods occur.
(cause) 3. She is happy today, because it's her birthday.
(cause) 4. The teacher got angry because many pupils are cutting classes.

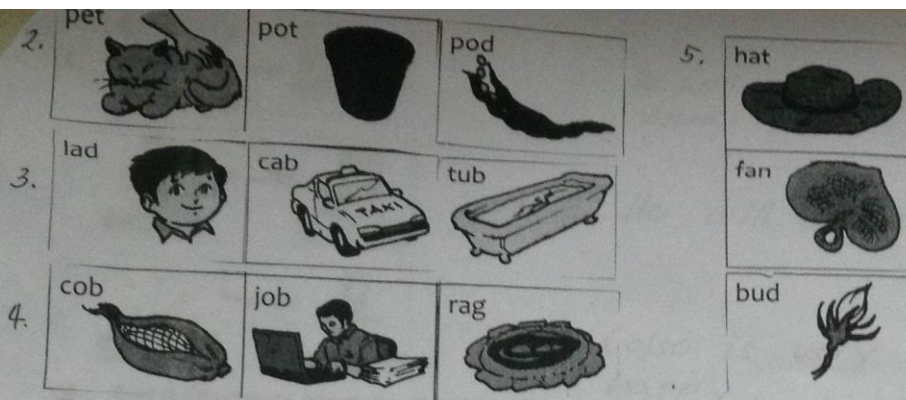
IV. Read each sentence. Tell its kind. Write **DECLARATIVE, INTERROGATIVE, EXCLAMATORY, or IMPERATIVE.**

_____ 1. I love to read fairy tales.
_____ 2. Do your return something that you have borrowed?
_____ 3. Fill in the tub water.
_____ 4. Oh no!, it hurts.

IV
IV. Study the pictures. Write the word that has a different medial vowel sounds.

1. cap  | cup  | tap 

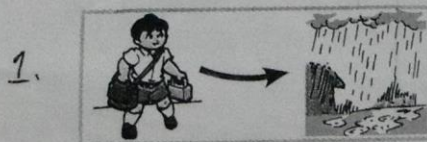
8 Sample Periodical Test in English (2nd Page)



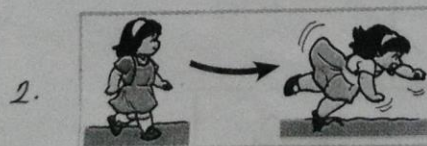
VI. Read the following situations. Make a good inference. Write the letter only.

- Carlo is running in the field under the sun.
 - He will read a book.
 - He will drink a glass of cold water.
 - He will with some friends.
- Father wants to eat adobo.
 - He will buy vegetables.
 - He will buy chicken
 - He will buy flowers.
- It is a Sunday. The family is leaving. They will got to
 - Church
 - Gym
 - School
- Teresa saw a poor child on the street. She had a pack of biscuits.
 - She will eat the biscuits.
 - She will give the biscuits to the child.
 - She will throw the biscuits.
- The teacher entered the classroom. She saw the children talking and walking around. She will
 - Tell them to sit down and be quiet.
 - Be happy
 - Leave the classroom
 - Shout at them

VII. Study the drawing. What is your possible predictions about each. Write the letter only.

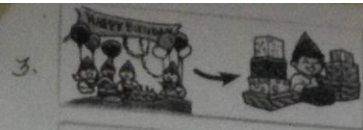


A. She will slipped on the floor.



B. Ben will bring his umbrella.

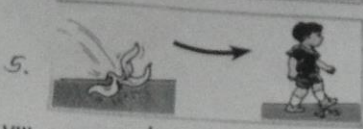
8 Sample Periodical Test in English (3rd Page)



C. He will read the books.



D. He will be hurt



E. Celso is very happy.

VIII. Read the short story. Answer the story map on it.

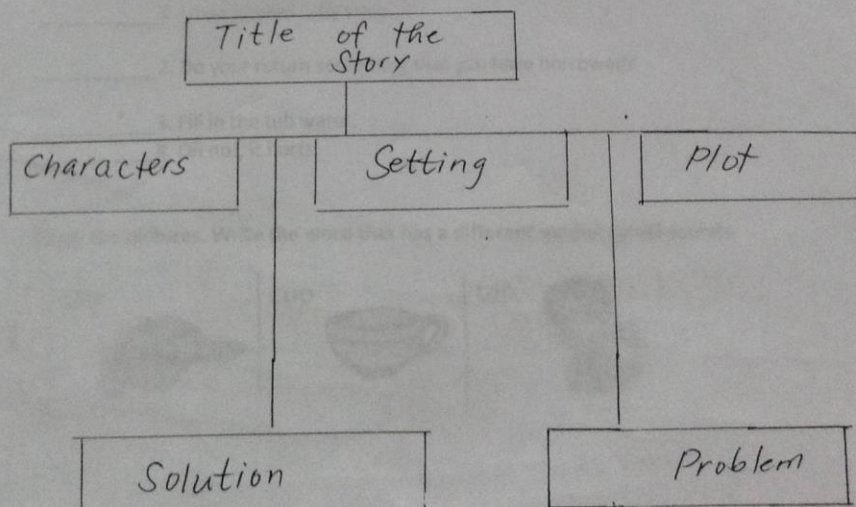
Lost at Sea

The weather was fine. The day was bright and the sea was calm. Father and Ben went fishing. Father prepared his fishing rod, reel and boat. They rowed the boat until they were at the middle of the sea.

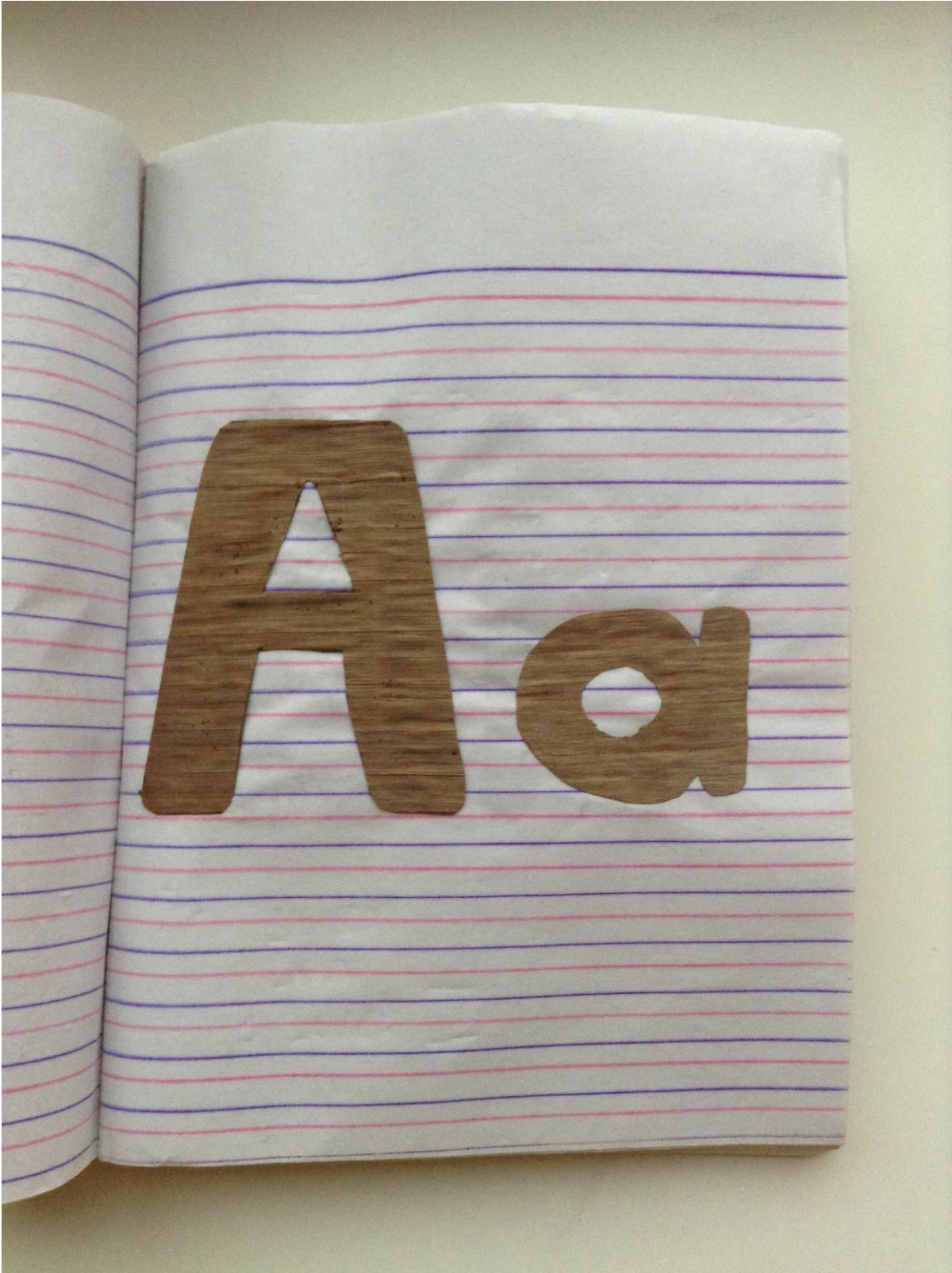
But in the afternoon, rain poured down. The wind was getting stronger. It pushed their boat farther and farther out to sea. It was difficult for them to go back to the shore. The great waves carried their boat to the other side of the island. They could not find their way back. They were lost at sea.

Mother was now worried. She asked the help of their neighbors. The men searched for the lost boat. Later, they found the boat hiding behind a big rock.

"Thank God! You're safe," exclaimed Mother.



9 Sample Contents of a Portfolio (1st Page)



9 Sample Contents of a Portfolio (2nd Page)



10 Basic Information About Negros Oriental, Philippines

Negros Oriental (Cebuano: *Sidlakang Negros*), also called Oriental Negros or “Eastern Negros”, is a province of the Philippines located in the Central Visayas region. It occupies the south-eastern half of the island of Negros, with Negros Occidental comprising the north-western half. It also includes Apo Island — a popular dive site for both local and foreign tourists. Negros Oriental faces Cebu to the east across the Tañon Strait and Siquijor to the south east. The primary spoken language is Cebuano, and the predominant religious denomination is Roman Catholicism. Dumaguete City is the capital, seat of government, and most populous city.

The Land

The province’s terrain consists of rolling hills, a few plateaus, and mountain ranges.

Canlaon Volcano, the highest peak in the island of Negros, dominates the northern end of the province. Another peak is Cuernos de los Negros, whose base Dumaguete lies.

The eastern part of the province has a climate characterized by no pronounced rainfall. The other half of the province has distinct wet and dry seasons.

A Brief History

Negros Island was originally called “Buglas”. The Spaniards changed this to Negros because of the dark-skinned Negritos that live there.

The province was administered from Cebu until 1734, when it was made a military district of its own. In 1890, Negros Island was divided into two politico-military provinces, Occidental and Oriental.

Negros Oriental officially became a province under the American civil government on March 10, 1917.

The People

Negros Oriental is culturally-oriented towards Cebu. Most of the people who inhabit the coastal towns speak Cebuano. Other dialects spoken are Tagalog and Ilonggo.

Commerce and Industry

Like most people in the country, people in Negros Oriental are involved in the agriculture industry. The principal products grown are sugarcane, corn, coconut and rice.

The province has extensive marine resources, making fishing the main source of livelihood in the coastal areas. It also has cattle ranches and fish ponds, as well as a logging industry.

Metallic minerals found in the province include gold, silver, and copper.

Among the popular cottage industries are woodcraft, ceramics, shellcraft and mat-weaving.

The Location



Source:

Province of Negros Oriental (2011). *All About Negros Oriental*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.negor.gov.ph/index.php/about-us>.

11 All About GPRehab

The Great Physician Rehabilitation Foundation, Inc. or **GPRehab** is a non-government organization, registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) on July 13, 2000 as a foundation, whose overall aim is to facilitate the creation of inclusive communities that recognize the value and contribution of all persons with disabilities, especially children and youth.

VISION

The Great Physician Rehabilitation Foundation, Inc. is a non-government organization that recognizes the value of building an inclusive society for differently abled children and youth.

MISSION

We are committed to ensure the optimum development of children and youth with disabilities through inclusive approaches in Health, Early Childhood Care, Education, Protection, Disaster Risk Reduction & Management and other community programs and projects, and the transformation of society towards wider recognition of and greater respect for Persons with Disabilities.

PROGRAMS

I. Capacity Building for Stakeholders Program

Objective:

To build up the capacities of government agencies, NGOs, People's Organizations and other stakeholders to facilitate mainstreaming of disability in government and civil society programs.

Activities:

- Disability Sensitivity Trainings
- Trainings on inclusive strategies in health, early childhood care, education, and protection including:
 - Early Detection and Identification of disabilities
 - Inclusive early childhood care
 - Inclusive Education
- Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction & Management

II. Community Based Rehabilitation Program

Objective: To develop inclusive small communities in the barangay level that will ensure the participation of children and youth with disabilities in community development through the utilization of existing service-provision and support systems within these very communities

Activities:

- Establishment of Community Based Rehabilitation Programs in select areas
- Identification and registration of children and youth with disabilities in the areas
- Disability Awareness in the barangay levels
- Capacity Building of PWD, their families and other members of the community to

encourage cooperation for a more holistic approach to the disability issue in the local community

- Values formation in the community for parents and families of children with disabilities and the whole community as well in order to develop a sense of compassion and concern for children and youth with disabilities

III. Advocacy, Communication and Education Program

- Objective:**
1. To increase awareness about the rights of people and children with disabilities
 2. To engage with government agencies, NGOs and POs in developing and implementing strategies, approaches and methods to ensure mainstreaming of disability in all aspects of community development.

Activities:

- Linkages with local government units, government agencies, as well as NGO's and PWD organizations, national and international, to create and support opportunities in education, employment and livelihood for persons with disabilities.
- Community education on the rights and needs of persons with disabilities
- Awareness raising and advocacy campaigns on disability
- Information dissemination about disability issues
- Capacity building of parents and families
- Collection and integration of data pertaining to disability, inclusive development
- Creation of a province-wide database on children and youth with disabilities

IV. Human Resource Development Program

Objective:

To capacitate the leaders, volunteers, workers and staff of the organization for effective and efficient implementation of the set goals and objectives

Activities:

- Capacity building of Board, staff, volunteers, parents and local PWD through seminars, topic focused trainings and workshops.
- Exposure and exchange visits

V. Inclusive Education Program

Objective: To advocate for inclusion of differently abled children in public education

Activities:

Support for teachers in regular schools in accommodating children with special needs.

Source:

GPREhab (2013). *GPREhab*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.gprehab.gov.ph>