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## **Literature Review**

Previous research exists within Biblical-based educational philosophies, and evidence of current research can be seen in today's private and homeschool communities. The areas of assessment and feedback have been well-researched, including approaches aligned with a Charlotte Mason education (CME); however, the focus has been on applications within traditional school contexts (Kluger & DeNisi). Several studies have been done on CME methods and implementations; however, they do not cover assessments (Smith, 2000), (Whiteside, 2019), (Spencer, 2012). A research gap remains in determining the impacts CME students actually benefit from the type of external assessment and constructive feedback prescribed by Mason.

### **Charlotte Mason Examinations**

The available literature on CME provides sufficient background to understand the nature of exams, assessment, and feedback within the Charlotte Mason framework. Comprehensive exams are administered at the end of each eleven-week trimester. They consist of short essay questions covering all subjects taught, which typically include Bible, history, literature, science, math, citizenship, languages, art, geography, music, handicrafts, etc. (Mason, 1925). Despite this extensive scope, Whiteside stated that:

There was no cramming or studying by the students for the term's

examinations because too much ground had been covered to go back and review everything. The pupils know 2 their work, and find it easy to answer questions set to find out what they know, rather than what they do not know (as cited by Mason, 1925, p. 300).

Under Mason's method, exams allow children to be aware of their learning progress "not with the intention of criticizing or grading, but as a means of encouraging and helping both teacher and taught" (Stephens, n.d., p.1). Little research has been performed on the implementation of Mason's exams and the effects of a student's performance.

### **Charlotte Mason Assessments**

Within Mason's original design, exams were evaluated by trained external advisers. These evaluators provided detailed feedback to both the student and the teacher. Their comments were intended to help and encourage both parties. The feedback for the teacher would be used to better direct the child and address deficiencies. Student feedback reinforced strengths and suggestions for overcoming child-specific challenges.

Mason's method called for evaluators to "provide ideas/notes on a child's work, using a balance of compliment and critique words, keeping it conversational and asking questions, and to speak their language" (Sieben, 2017, p.49). The examiner "avoided all suggestion of competition" and scored the exams not on a number grade but with ratings of "excellent, good, satisfactory, fair/poor" (Stephens, n.d., p. 2). Many factors were weighed when examining a student's work, including the child's interests and development (Stephens n.d.). Exam responses

were assessed not merely as right or wrong; instead, the approach was “qualitative rather than quantitative examining each child with his ability and circumstances against the standard of the average child in the age-group” with specific feedback and help to aid the student (Stephens, n.d., p. 1).

The evaluation process in a Mason paradigm considers how each student processes and learns new concepts and information. Teacher observations serve as inputs to the process and include such factors as personal development, performance, and any difficulties or occurrences that happened within the term and/or during the exam (Stephens n.d.). This approach has become increasingly popular in studies and schools, where it is typically referred to as “assessment for learning” (William, 2011). Assessment for learning has been thoroughly researched within education, but not within a Mason paradigm.

### **Mainstream Feedback**

Components of the CME feedback approach are found in contemporary mainstream education and reflected in the literature. Silver and Lee discussed:

The different types of feedback such as advice, criticism, and praise—and how children are impacted by each type. It stated the importance of a student’s need to feel heard and that “teacher written feedback is fundamental in assisting students to improve in their written performance (Silver & Lee, 2007, p. 43).

### **Student’s Feelings on Feedback**

Rowe examined how feedback impacts not just learning, but other factors of a student's welfare. The themes consisted of "a guide towards success, a learning tool, a means of academic interaction, encouragement, a means of reducing anxiety, a sign of caring, and an indication of respect" (Rowe, 2010, p. 349). "Feedback satisfies the need for personal contact and emotional support" (Rowe, 2010, p. 347). Under the CME paradigm, the idea that a child is a unique person ties into this concept of how feedback can affect the whole person and not just one aspect of life (Mason 1925). Rowe continued, "those who value feedback are more apt to have a deep approach to learning" (Rowe, 2010, p. 345). Rowe helps bridge the gap in the understanding of how feedback can help a child's personhood in a Mason education. Understanding students' perceptions of feedback and why feedback is important will guide us in application within a CME assessment. The impact of well-done feedback on CME students has not yet been addressed in research.

### **Influence on Self-efficacy**

Children "learn in a way that looks like a partnership between the student and teacher, giving them a voice in their learning that makes a child feel respected and validated" (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p. 401). Gamlem & Smith stated that "feedback is regarded as part of the crucial interaction between teacher and student(s) carried out for the purpose of furthering learning" (as cited in Black et al. 2003, 2004; Brookhart 2008; Hattie and Timperley 2007; Hawe, Dixon, and Watson 2008; Smith and Higgins 2006). "Perceptions of self as a learner depend on the quality of feedback students receive" (Brookhart, 2001, p. 156). "Supportive feedback would have a higher chance of eliciting enjoyment and pride, whereas feedback evoking social comparisons and a

judgmental tone has a higher chance of eliciting anxiety” (Van der Kleij & Lipnevich, 2020, p. 348). Sixte, Mana, Avila & Sanchez in their research found that the way children receive information will help them increase their determination for learning (Sixte, et al., 2020). A child’s perception of feedback is critical. “If feedback is not presented in a positive light even well-intentioned feedback can be destructive. The nature and context of feedback matter” (Brookhart, 2008, p. 2). Gamlem and Smith found that “if feedback is not understood, it will be replaced by anger and frustration instead of feedback being fruitful” (Gamlem & Smith, 2013, p. 160). Knowing the importance of being co-learners in the classroom and supporting children with good feedback, we still lack research on the effects of a Mason paradigm.

### **Impact on Performance**

Numerous studies have been done on the benefits of detailed feedback to students on their work. One key finding was that “detailed, descriptive feedback was found to be the most effective when given alone, unaccompanied by grades or praise” (Lipnevich & Smith, 2009, p. 319). Page stated in her study that those who received comments achieved higher scores than those who did not (Page, 1958, p.180). In a more recent study, Bandiera, Larcinese, & Rasul determined that the “average student performs better after receiving feedback on their past academic performance” (Bandiera, Larcinese, & Rasul, 2015, p. 21). De Sixte et. al. claimed that “feedback following the completion of a task is one of the most powerful devices available for improving the way students learn” (as cited in Hattie & Gan, 2011; Shute, 2008). Chase and Houmanfar concluded that “giving elaborate feedback significantly improved learner

performance” (2009). Mason, (1925) described her experience as an administrator representing tens of thousands of children:

They revelled in knowledge, how well they could read and write, their term had been joyous; and that they were good and happy because some little care had been taken to know what they were and what they required which was rewarded by ample results (Mason, 1925, p. 45).

“Although much research has been done on assessments and feedback for a student within a school setting” (Brookhart, 2008), there is a gap in our understanding of how this looks in a Mason education. Brookhart affirmed “the results of meta-analysis conducted across multiple studies: those receiving feedback outperformed their respective control groups” (as cited in Kluger and DeNisi, 1996, p. 4). These studies confirmed that teacher feedback concretely contributes to students’ future achievements. A Charlotte Mason method expert and practitioner, S. Whiteside claimed a history of positive results from giving detailed feedback to CME students, noting that the feedback provided students tangible ways to improve that can be applied to their future performance (personal communication, April 8, 2022).

While considerable research has been accomplished on exam feedback techniques and impacts within traditional classroom environments, the literature has not addressed CME applications. CME-specific inputs are currently limited to theory and anecdotes; further research is required to determine the best practices and effects of feedback within the Charlotte Mason paradigm. This particular study will seek to determine the extent that CME secondary students show an improvement in their trimester exams and express more confidence in their work when evaluated by an outside source.

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