Peer and Self-Assessment in Written Language:
Strategies for Motivation and Achievement

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of the formative assessment structures, specifically peer and self-assessment strategies, on student achievement and motivation within a written language context. Although the literature reports on the effectiveness of these strategies, its practical application, its impact on the teaching/learning process, and its affects on the learners was a consideration for this 'chalk face' practitioner.

The 26 participants, a diverse group of learners, were volunteers from a Year 5/6 composite class at a decile one school in New Zealand. They completed a questionnaire at both the start and finish of this project that queried perceptions about literacy and motivation, trialled a variety of peer and self-assessment strategies in practical classroom writing situations, and were involved in various unstructured interviews, discussions, and observations. Using action research, a practical research methodology undertaken as part of the classroom programme, allowed the integration of theory and practice so the routines of the classroom programmes remained relatively unchanged while changes to the teaching/learning process were tested.

The pre-dominantly qualitative data was collected, correlated, and analysed from an interpretative approach so recurring themes, key ideas, and unexpected or unusual findings were identified. The major finds were:

- Participants' achievement levels and motivation to learn increased when using formative assessment / assessment for learning / assessment to learn structures and principles.
• Peer interactions and support, and co-constructing a shared understanding of what is required and how it can be achieved, enhances learning by developing assessment skills, higher levels of engagement in work, and direction for present and next-step learning.

• Different peer and self-assessment strategies are more appropriate than others depending on the literacy skills of the learner.

This project has implications for teaching practice but due to its highly contextualised nature and action research methodology, results cannot be generalised. However, teachers can adapt and employ factors they feel are suitable for their own situations especially as improving student achievement is a goal of teaching and, in this research, improving student achievement was attained by using peer and self-assessment strategies.
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