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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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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables and Graphs	vii
List of Appendices	viii

Chapter One – Overview

Introduction	1
Demographic Information	1
Background	3
Purpose of Study	6
Research Questions	7
Definitions	7
Assessment	8
Formative Assessment / Assessment for Learning / Assessment to Learn (AtoL)	9
Peer and Self- Assessment	10
Motivation	11
Summary and Chapter Outlines	12

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Introduction	15
Learning	15
Motivation	17

Motivation to Learn -----	17
Intrinsic / Extrinsic Motivation -----	25
Formative Assessment -----	27
Learning Intentions and Success Criteria -----	29
Peer and Self- Assessment -----	32
Feedback to Next-Step Learning -----	34
Each Learner Can Improve -----	37
Written Language -----	39
Summary -----	41

Chapter Three – Underpinnings of the Research

Introduction -----	43
Theoretical Framework of the Research -----	43
Trialled Peer and Self- Assessment Strategies -----	47
Data Collection Methods -----	50
Data Analysis Procedures -----	55
Ethical Considerations -----	59
Summary -----	63

Chapter Four – Data Analysis

Introduction -----	64
Data Analysis -----	64
Summary -----	86

Chapter Five – Discussion

Introduction ----- 87

Research Questions & Discussions ----- 87

Summary ----- 112

Chapter Six – Implications of this Research

Introduction ----- 113

Summary of the Research Findings ----- 113

Implications for Practice ----- 115

Limitations of the Research ----- 117

Implications for Further Research ----- 119

Summary ----- 120

Appendices ----- 122

References ----- 139

List of Tables

Table 1.1 - Demographics of participants ----- 2

Table 4.1a – Questionnaire - Attitudinal scale responses – Ability ----- 65

Table 4.1b - Questionnaire - Attitudinal scale responses – Enjoyment ----- 66

Table 4.1c - Questionnaire - Attitudinal scale responses – Influence ----- 68

Table 4.1d - Questionnaire - Attitudinal scale responses – Connections -- 70

Table 4.2 – Questionnaire – Ordering / Ranking ----- 71

Table 4.3 – Questionnaire – Opposing Pairs ----- 74

List of Graphs

Graph 4.1 – Traffic Lights – Enjoyment and Improvement ----- 76

Graph 4.2 – Thumbs – Enjoyment and Improvement ----- 77

Graph 4.3 – Exemplars Next Step – Enjoyment and Improvement ----- 78

Graph 4.4 – How Well – Enjoyment and Improvement ----- 79

Graph 4.5 – How Well Plus – Enjoyment and Improvement ----- 80

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – MUHEC Approval Form ----- 122

Appendix 2 – Information Sheet – Adult ----- 123

Appendix 3 – Information Sheet – Child ----- 125

Appendix 4 – Consent Form – Adult ----- 127

Appendix 5 – Consent Form – Child ----- 128

Appendix 6 – Exemplar Matrices in ‘kid speak’ ----- 129

Appendix 7 – How Well ----- 132

Appendix 8 – How Well Plus ----- 133

Appendix 9 – Questionnaire ----- 134

Appendix 10 – Strategy Evaluation Form ----- 138