

Chapter 15

Fostering Self–Assessment Practices to Grow Readers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examine the role of self-assessment to center elementary learners’ participation and ownership in the learning process. Beginning with a literature review to explore the need for more student-centered assessment practices, the chapter then delves into a description and a classroom vignette to demonstrate the use of three approaches (checklists, rubrics, and open-ended responses) to facilitate self-assessment. The chapter concludes with additional suggestions for application to content area connections and recommendations for digital integration.

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Formative assessment is an effective and necessary approach to monitor progress and adjust instruction based on students’ progress and their individual needs. Yet, formative assessment has been taken for granted (Roskos & Newman, 2012). Based on our experiences, formative assessment often serves the purpose of collecting grades or gathering benchmark data for reporting purposes with little to no analysis for insight into adaptations for instruction. According to the International Reading Association (now the International Literacy Association), “although the term assessment is used, formative assessment is not a process that is associated with grading” (2013). Instead, formative assessment data should be collected and analyzed regularly to ignite reflection and determine next steps to foster learning. Further, when formative assessment practices occur, it is common for only the teachers to be at the center of the practice as they reflect and determine instructional decisions. Yet, student-centered assessment practices should be valued if student-centered learning is valued. According to the International Reading Association, formative assessment should be a collaborative process where both teachers and students actively

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monitor learning (2013). In what ways can students develop greater agency in their own assessment process as learners? When students self-assess their reading development through reflection and goal setting, how does it influence their identity as readers?

This chapter seeks to address these questions by examining the role of self-assessment as a key component in the assessment process. The authors aim to explore how self-assessment with elementary learners can create a more student-centered approach to formative assessment practices within the classroom and beyond. Specifically, the chapter focuses on the role of self-assessment of reading within a balanced literacy framework. While the focus is on reading, the authors argue that the self-assessment strategies and practices could be applied to any component of balanced literacy or content area learning. The chapter begins with an examination of the research in the area of self-assessment, reflection, and goal setting to frame the work in the classroom context. Next, three approaches including the use of checklists, rubrics, and open-ended responses to facilitate self-assessment with elementary learners are described. A classroom vignette provides as an example to demonstrate how one fourth grade teacher integrated each of these approaches to self-assessment in her own classroom. Finally, the chapter concludes with additional suggestions for application to content area connections along with recommendations for digital integration.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Data-driven instruction” is a commonly used mantra in the field of education. Too often, data is narrowly defined as grades and test scores. And test scores from standardized end of year exams, benchmark testing, and reading levels are often used to label children. This is a dangerous practice that does not tell the entire story of the individual learner. Learning is not fixed but rather an ongoing process as individuals deepen their understanding and development.

Although data may be abundant, it is not always useful. Valencia and Buly (2004) examined diagnostic student profiles of fourth graders with failing reading scores and found students had varying reading abilities and levels. Thus, relying solely on results from high stakes assessments is not beneficial and a less reliable indicator of reading abilities. With this approach, educators become data rich and information poor (Stringfield, Wayman & Yakimowski-Srebrnick, 2005) and students become increasingly anxious about testing and learning is often reduced to memorization and regurgitation. Other harmful consequences of relying solely on summative assessments such as test scores include a culture of teaching to the test and the development of inauthentic views of reading as a task rather than reading for meaningful purposes driven by intrinsic motivation. When student performance is measured based solely on standardized tests and other types of summative assessments occurring after instruction, there are limited to no opportunities to revisit, reflect, reteach, and recalibrate instruction and learning. Thus, formative assessment practices should be used regularly. Formative assessment practices should be ongoing, purposeful, and provide useful information to help the learner improve rather than harm (Afflerbach, 2016).

Formative assessment is most effective when it occurs in frequent short cycles and provides teachers with rich information about student progress to inform instruction and support learning. According to Valencia (2011), “the evidence from the assessment must actually be used to modify teaching to meet students’ needs” (p. 388). This approach helps teachers close the gap between the student’s current understanding and skills and the desired instructional goals (Valencia, 2011). “It is essential to engage in dynamic formative feedback cycles including teaching, assessing, and adjusting instruction to meet the

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