

Summary report for teachers:

Self-assessment: What teachers think

Chris Joyce, Lorraine Spiller, and Juliet Twist, 2009

Introduction

This is a summary of a small research project commissioned by the Ministry of Education. In an evaluation of Assess to Learn (AtoL) professional development, Jenny Poskitt and Kerry Taylor commented that teachers seemed to be slower at implementing student self-assessment than other assessment for learning strategies. The MOE wanted to find out more about what the reasons for this might be.

What we did

A series of focus group discussions and one interview were held with 13 teachers from a range of primary, intermediate, and secondary schools in the Wellington area. Discussion questions included:

- What does self-assessment look like to you? What is its purpose? Who benefits?
- What are the issues/barriers to implementing self-assessment in the classroom?
- What could examples of self-assessment look like? How would you use them? Who would use them? What purpose do they have?

The teachers' responses were analysed by grouping them under emergent themes.

A separate case study of two teachers in a full primary school was also carried out. Lessons were developed which were based on open learning intentions and scaffolding designed to help the students explore the learning intention.

What we found

The evidence supports Poskitt and Taylor's observation that incorporating meaningful student self-assessment into classroom practices takes some time to establish. However, an analysis of the teachers' discussions suggests that there are good reasons for this. Three main factors need to be in place for self-assessment to become embedded in both teachers' and students' everyday practice.

- Sustained and planned **professional development** is a necessary component of developing a school-wide culture of self-assessment, as is strong **leadership**. A long term commitment by the school is required.
- **Teachers' beliefs about learning** are fundamental to whether they will provide the space for students to use self-assessment strategies. **Students' beliefs about learning** impact on whether they will meaningfully engage with self-assessment.
- Before self-assessment can be an effective part of students' learning, teachers have to develop a **classroom culture** where students are active rather than passive learners, believe that they can learn, are motivated to want to learn, and are given choices about their learning.

When teachers are learning about assessment for learning, they are focusing on what **they** have to do. They stick to the rules. With sustained development, though, they are more likely to become aware of the contradiction between their beliefs about learning and the existing culture of the classroom. This can be the catalyst for teachers to make deep changes to their practice.

What are the implications?

- Time is an important factor – it takes time to embed self-assessment into everyday practice, it takes time for students to be able to use self-assessment strategies successfully and independently, and time needs to be allowed for students to practice self-assessment.
- Changing teachers' practice is challenging and better achieved by taking small steps rather than trying to do everything at once.
- Students' beliefs about how they learn have to be addressed if they are to engage meaningfully in self-assessment.
- Students of all ages must be taught how to use self-assessment. Both teachers and students need to accept that first efforts will not be perfect, that students will need scaffolding to use the tools effectively, and that students will need different levels of support.
- Different students respond better to different self-assessment strategies. Students should be exposed to a range of strategies and encouraged to independently adopt those that help them learn best.

Poskitt, J. & Taylor, K. (2008) *National education findings of assess to learn (AtoL) report*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved 1 December 2008 from <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/27968/27984>

Research and summary produced as part of the Assessment Resources for Classroom Teachers (ARCT) contract; www.nzcer.org.nz/arb.

Click on the link to the full report: [Self-assessment: What Teachers Think](#).