

Getting Students Involved in Formative Self-Assessment

In this helpful article in *Better: Evidence-Based Education*, University of Albany professor Heidi Andrade says the research is clear: when students get feedback on their work in progress, they do better. The problem is that very few students get this kind of feedback from their overworked, spread-too-thin teachers.

“Fortunately,” says Andrade, “research also shows that students themselves can be useful sources of feedback by thinking about the quality of their own work rather than relying on their teacher as the sole source of evaluative judgments.” Studies have documented significant improvements in writing and mathematics when elementary and middle-school students use self-assessment well. Interestingly, grammar and spelling improved very little with self-assessment; the most robust gains came in written organization, ideas and content, voice and tone, and plot development – and mathematical problem-solving.

Drawing a distinction between formative student *self-assessment* and summative student *self-evaluation*, Andrade says the latter is unwise (students might cheat in high-stakes grading situations), but even young students are capable of formatively assessing the quality of their own work and improving it. Here are the conditions that make self-assessment productive:

- Students have been taught the value of looking at their own work.
- Students have access to clear criteria for assessing their work.
- Students have a task or performance to assess and time to revise and improve it.
- Students have direct instruction, help, and practice with self-assessment, including cues as to when self-assessment is appropriate.

Andrade suggests three steps that teachers might follow to get students self-assessing:

- *Articulate expectations.* What students need to do in the task or performance must be clear, as well as the criteria for quality work. However, says Andrade, “Simply handing out a rubric does not guarantee much of anything.” Ideally, students are involved in developing the rubric or quality description.

- *Have students self-assess.* Students make a first attempt at the task or performance – an essay, for example, or a speech, word problem, lab report, fitness plan, or self-portrait – and then apply the rubric criteria to see how they are doing so far. For example, in self-assessing a piece of persuasive writing, students might underline the rubric phrase, Clearly states an opinion in blue and then underline in blue the opinions in their draft. They might then underline Sentences begin in different ways in yellow on the rubric and then circle in yellow the first words of every sentence in their draft and say the circled words aloud with an ear for repetition. If students find they aren’t meeting a particular standard, they make a note to revise that aspect. This highlighting process can be completed in one class period, says Andrade.

- *Have students revise.* Students use the notes and insights from their self-assessment to revise their drafts. “This last step is crucial,” says Andrade. “Students are savvy, and will not

self-assess thoughtfully unless they know that their efforts can lead to opportunities to actually make improvements and possibly increase their grades.”

“Promoting Learning and Achievement Through Self-Assessment” by Heidi Andrade in *Better: Evidence-Based Education*, Spring 2011 (Vol. 3, #3, p. 12-13), <http://betterevidence.org/us-edition/issue-7/>; Andrade can be reached at handrade@uamail.albany.edu