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COMPARING STUDENT AND TEACHER SELF-ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

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In constructivist models of education, teachers are positioned as co-learners. This paper raises the question of how we might then apply what we know about student learning to teacher learning through the example of comparing student and teacher self-assessment. A review of academic and professional literature reveals that while the perceived benefits of both student and teacher self-assessment are similar, the current practices are quite different.

One of the many shifts in education in recent years has been the repositioning of teachers as learners. Often this phrase is used to promote the importance of authentic learning through professional development (Bilimaira, 2000; Craig, 2010; Hanna, Salzman, Reynolds, & Fergus, 2010); however, in constructivist models of education, teachers and students are also reconceptualized as co-learners (Holbrook, May, Albers, Dooley, & Flint, 2012) and co-producers of knowledge (Hill & Sewell, 2010). As the concepts of learner and teacher are seen more as interconnected orientations toward knowledge than as defined and discrete roles in the classroom, it allows us to consider how we might also re-envision learning practices for both students and teachers.

This paper will explore one particular aspect of this question by looking at self-assessment. The perceived benefits and current practices of student self-assessment and teacher self-assessment will be discussed and compared. Both academic literature and internet resources that are readily accessible by

teachers in the field will be used to inform the discussion. As this work is in its preliminary stages, the implications will be raised as questions for further thought and research.

Benefits of Student Self-Assessment

The value of having students assess their own learning is linked to the concept of formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning. Early advocates of formative assessment Black and William (1998) declare that "Self-assessment by pupils, far from being a luxury, is in fact an essential component of formative assessment" (p. 143). Canadian assessment for learning researchers Rolheiser and Ross (2000) and Davies (Davies, n.d.) also include self-assessment as a central part of their work.

Studies of student self-assessment demonstrate many ways in which the practice enhances student learning. Rolheiser and Ross (2000) and Ross (2006) cite higher levels of cognitive achievement, motivation and self-efficacy, particularly in writing. Rolheiser and Ross (2000) and Black and William (1998) both claim that self-assessment is especially helpful for low achieving students. A Report by the Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (2007) adds that self-assessment promotes metacognitive skills, increases student responsibility for learning and reduces disruptive classroom behaviour. There is one substantial caveat to these studies, however, and that is the need to teach students how to assess their work and to provide plenty of opportunities to do so: "Simply requiring self-evaluation is unlikely to have an effect on achievement" (Rolheiser & Ross, 2000, p. 33). However, when these conditions are met, students become increasingly able to accurately assess the products of their learning and set goals for future learning (Boud, Lawson, & Thompson, 2013; Davies, n.d.).

Benefits of Teacher Self-Assessment

While student self-assessment is a relatively new practice, the recognition of the value of teacher self-assessment has a longer history. Nearly a century ago, an American education professor published a

book with a lengthy list of questions new teachers ought to ask themselves in order assess "the myriad of little things which vitally affect a teacher's success" (Wemett, 1915, p. 4). By the 1950s and 1960s, teacher self-assessment was seen as essential not only to a teacher's individual success, but also to the recognition of teaching as a profession (Kinney, 1958; Simpson, 1966). Since then, teacher self-assessment has increasingly focused on the effective implementation of teaching methods (Haysom, 1985), personal reflection as a means to self-improvement (Airasian & Gullickson, 1994; Mälkki & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012), and providing evidence of specific outcomes (*A quality teacher in every classroom: Creating a teacher evaluation system that works for California*, 2010).

While the focus of teacher self-assessment has changed over time, its broad aim to promote and support professional development has remained relatively consistent. Arbizu, Olalde, and Del Castillo (1998) contend that "self-evaluation can offer impressive insights into the whole range of teaching evaluation procedures that are aimed at ensuring the improvement of teaching" (p. 351). It makes sense, therefore, to draw parallels between teacher self-assessment and formative assessment; in both cases, the purpose of the assessment is further growth and learning. As the Alberta Teachers' Association website describes it, self-assessment is integral to "ongoing, coherent and coordinated" professional development of teachers as "self-directed learners" ("Professional development," n.d.).

Recommended Student Self-Assessment Practices

The literature on student self-assessment highlights three important factors necessary for effective practice: viewing self-assessment as a skill that improves with time and practice, involving students in the setting of criteria, and including self-assessment as one among many sources of evaluation.

Self-assessment is presented as a complex skill that needs to be both modeled and explicitly taught; like any other skill, it develops over time and with many opportunities for practice. While students focus on assessing their own learning products, teachers can also assess the progress of individuals and

groups of students in their growing ability to generate and use criteria and to construct appropriate goals for ongoing learning (*Capacity Building Series: Student Self-Assessment*, 2007). Davies emphasizes that self-assessment can be introduced to even the youngest students (Davies & Herbst, 2013) but also that it is an "on-going journey" that allows students to improve over time (Davies, n.d.).

One of the factors that improves over time is students' ability to articulate the qualities of good work. Self-assessment is not the same as having students simply mark their own tests or assignments according to a pre-determined key or rubric. Instead, it involves students in the "negotiation" of criteria for assessment: "Neither imposing school goals nor acquiescing to student preferences is likely to be as successful as creating a shared set that students perceive to be meaningful" (Rolheiser & Ross, 2000, p. 34). Student involvement in setting the criteria is considered essential to the learning potential of self-assessment activities (*Capacity Building Series: Student Self-Assessment*, 2007; Davies & Herbst, 2013).

Although self-assessment based on negotiated criteria is a skill that has been shown to improve with time and practice, it is not suggested that it be the only source of classroom assessment. A variety of perspectives and assessment approaches are necessary for authentic learning. Students need feedback from their teachers and their peers in order to have meaningful dialogues about their learning and their self-assessment skills (*Capacity Building Series: Student Self-Assessment*, 2007). The concern that students may over- or under-estimate their learning can be mitigated through the use of ongoing training in self-assessment and through teacher and peer assessments that provide a more comprehensive view of student learning (Ross, 2006).

Recommended Teacher Self-Assessment Practices

It is not difficult to find parallels between the benefits of self-assessment for both students and teachers; however, the recommended practices for both groups reveal significant differences. Using the three

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most common recommendations for student self-assessment practices (skill development, negotiated criteria, and multiple sources of feedback) provides an interesting starting point from which to review current modes of teacher self-assessment.

While teachers are encouraged to explicitly instruct students how to self-assess, there seems to be an assumption in the literature that teachers are already skilled at self-assessment. Airasian and Gullickson (1994) provide a thorough discussion of teacher self-assessment characteristics, but the growth resulting from the "constant cycle of experience, reflection, and improvement" is described solely in terms of changes in teachers' work with students as opposed to teachers' increasing ability to effectively assess their work. Arbizu, Olalde, and Del Castillo (1998) describe teacher self-assessment as a "capacity" that can be developed, but that development is seen as the natural outcome of having more opportunities to reflect on others' opinions of the teacher's practices. Ross, whose work with Rolheiser (Ross & Rolheiser, 2000) encourages the ongoing teaching of self-assessment skills to students, begins his work on teacher self-assessment (Ross & Bruce, 2007) with the assumption that teachers know how to assess their work but need more influence from "peers and change agents" to achieve professional growth (p. 146).

Paradoxically, a case could be made that the current practices for teacher self-assessment undermine this assumption by mandating ready-made tools that do not require nor account for any prior self-assessment skills. Government jurisdictions like Washington State ("Teacher self-assessment form," n.d.) and New York State (Silver Strong and Associates, 2011), book publishers like Pearson ("Teacher self-evaluation form," 2008) and Scholastic ("Self-assessment checklist," n.d.), and the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) have developed charts and questionnaires that are apparently for all teachers, regardless of skill or experience, to use. The ATA does emphasize that "self-assessment must be continuous and seamless with professional growth" (Alberta Teachers' Association, n.d.), but there is no indication of how teachers might improve their self-assessment skills.

The most significant difference between student and teacher self-assessment practices emerges from these ready-made tools. In each case, the criteria for quality work is already set. Although it is considered critical for students to be involved in determining the criteria by which they will assess their work, there are no ready examples that afford K-12 teachers that opportunity. Airasian and Gullickson (1994) describe teacher self-assessment as a process based on "standards or performance expectations set by the teacher" (p. 199), but this is not reflected in the current models. In Ross and Bruce's (2007) case study of effective teacher self-assessment, the case teacher's growth is documented by the example of how he moves from using teacher-made rubrics to those that are collaboratively developed with students. However, it is hard to miss the irony that this study starts with a teacher self-assessment rubric in which all the criteria are pre-established. Both the models of teacher as professional and teacher as learner would indicate that teachers should be involved in the setting of criteria for self-assessment.

The one area in which teacher self-assessment practices begin to align with those for students is in the area of multiple sources of feedback. Ross and Bruce (2007) recommend a model for professional growth which includes self-assessment, peer coaching and formal expert observations; Simpson (1966) and Kremer-Hayon (1993) also cite peer and expert support as helpful to effective self-assessment. Arbizu, Olalde and Del Castillo (1998) advise including student assessments as a catalyst for teacher self-assessment. Nevertheless, some of the literature and many of the tools for teacher self-assessment continue to conceive of it as a solitary, internalized practice (Airasian & Gullickson, 1994; Haysom, 1985).

IMPLICATIONS

While some educational theorists are beginning to challenge the very notion of teacher as co-learner (Biesta, 2014), the scope of this paper is to raise questions about what it might mean in practice to consider teachers as learners. If teachers are considered co-learners, how then shall we enhance this

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capacity? Is it appropriate or helpful to apply the methods and measurements used for student academic development, such as assessment for learning, to teacher professional development? Should traditional ideas about teacher self-assessment give way to align such professional practices with current recommendations for student practices? Is there something inherently different between the two, or are they best seen as occurring along a continuum of self-assessment skills and practices? Can teachers become directly involved in the negotiation of the criteria by which their work is assessed? Is the current situation due more to political and administrative policies than to best learning practices? These questions demonstrate the need for ongoing research into the role of teacher in constructivist paradigms and, specifically, into the purpose and practice of teacher self-assessment.

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