Shift to Self-assessment

September 18, 2023

Who decided that grading and assessment should be the exclusive responsibility of teachers? Why do we sideline students when it comes to assessment?

Self-assessment is a powerful strategy that encourages students to become more invested in their learning journeys. It is a process where students evaluate their work, reflecting on what they've learned, how well they've understood complex concepts, how much progress they've made toward mastering key skills, and where they may need to invest time and energy to improve their concept knowledge and skill set (Siegesmund, 2016). Self-assessment shifts the focus from a grade-centric perspective to a learning-centric one. For those of us who want to encourage students to adopt a growth mindset, believing they can always improve and develop with practice and hard work, self-assessment is a critical piece of that puzzle (Wang, Zepeda, Qin, Del Toro & Binning, 2021).

The beauty of self-assessment lies in the empowerment it provides learners. It promotes ownership of learning, motivating students to be more engaged, active participants in their education. When students assess their work, they develop a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, fostering an innate drive to improve, and helping them to develop as expert learners (Tucker & Novak, 2022). They learn to set realistic yet challenging goals for themselves and devise strategies to reach those goals. It creates an environment where mistakes are seen not as failures but as opportunities for growth and exploration. In addition, it cultivates critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills – all of which are essential for lifelong learning and success beyond school. Self-assessment is not simply a tool for academic growth but also for personal development, cultivating students who are self-aware, self-directed learners ready to navigate their learning with confidence and resilience.

Self-assessing Practice and Review

Too often, when teachers assign review and practice in class or for homework, the responsibility for checking the accuracy of that work falls on the teacher. It's the teacher who collects a class's worth of assignments, spends precious time marking papers, and evaluates each student's progress. Why should the responsibility of checking accuracy and thinking about student progress fall solely on the teacher? This traditional approach is not only a drain on a teacher's time but also limits the learning opportunities for students.

Firstly, this process deprives students of the chance to critically engage with their work. As a result, students miss out on the opportunity to recognize their strengths, identify their limitations, and target areas for growth. When students evaluate their own work, they gain invaluable insights into themselves as learners.

Secondly, the time teachers invest in marking many of these assignments could be better spent designing dynamic, differentiated learning experiences that are more student-centered. Since most teachers have anywhere between 30-170 students, the workflow that positions the teacher to assess all student work is unsustainable and makes it impossible to strive for a healthy work-life balance.

Thirdly, this traditional approach overlooks an opportunity to foster peer-to-peer support. Engaging students in self-assessment of review work and practice can be an excellent tool for promoting collaboration. In pairs or groups, students can compare their answers to an answer key or a strong exemplar and work together to check, correct, and discuss their questions. They can use this time to troubleshoot issues, engage in creative problem-solving, and learn from their mistakes together.

It's essential to remember that review and practice should provide a safe space for students to make mistakes. When teachers grade these exercises, it creates anxiety among students still grappling with new concepts or skills. We should treat review and practice not as tests of competence or compliance but as stepping stones towards mastery, encouraging a growth mindset in our students.

Transforming Our Rubrics Into Self-Assessment Tools

Providing a rubric helps students understand *how* they'll be graded on a large-scale assignment and creates clarity about what they are working toward. It serves as a roadmap, helping them understand the criteria on which they'll be evaluated. Rubrics can also serve as powerful self-assessment tools as students work.

In the example below, elementary students working on a narrative are encouraged to look at their rough draft and evaluate where they believe they are in relation to specific criteria.

Narrative Writing Rubric

Element	Beginning 1	Developing 2	Proficient 3	Mastery 4	Self-Assessment
Establishes Situation and Introduces Characters	The situation is unclear. The narrator is not introduced, and the characters lack development and depth.	Attempts to establish a situation. Introduces the narrator and develops at least one character.	Establishes a situation, introduces the narrator, and develops characters.	Establishes a clear situation, introduces the narrator, and develops interesting characters.	
Narrative Techniques	Little to no attempt to use dialogue, description, and pacing. Experiences and events are underdeveloped throughout.	Attempts to use dialogue, description, and pacing; however, experiences and events are underdeveloped.	Uses dialogue, description, and pacing to develop experiences and events.	Effectively uses dialogue, description, and pacing to develop experiences and events.	
Sequence of Events	Unclear sequence of events. The plot is hard to follow throughout.	Attempts to sequence events. The plot is hard to follow in places.	A clear sequence of events that unfold naturally.	Clear, purposeful sequence of events that unfold naturally.	
Conclusion	Abrupt ending. No clear resolution.	Ends with a concluding statement that does not clearly follow from the narrative.	Ends with a clear resolution and concluding statement that follows from the narrative.	Effectively ends with a strong resolution and concluding statement that follows from the narrative.	
Organization & Transitions	Little to no attempt at organization.	Attempts to organize ideas, but transitional language needs to be added.	Organizes ideas in a logical way. Transitional language used.	Strong organization and transitional language are used throughout.	
Mechanics (Spelling & Grammar)	Distracting mechanical errors throughout.	Mechanical errors distract at times.	A couple of errors are present, but they do not distract.	Mechanics reflect careful editing.	

Self-assessment can also serve as a catalyst, inspiring students to reflect on their classroom participation and engagement in learning activities. For example, if teachers are shifting from whole group, teacher-led discussion to small group, student-led discussion, they can use self-assessment to encourage students to think about their strengths, limitations, and areas of growth as participants in a student-led discussion. This reminds students that participating in discussions is their responsibility and that discussion itself is a skill they can improve on over time.

Self-Assessment: Participation in Small Group Discussion			
1 Beginning	2 Developing	3 Proficient	4 Mastery
Limited, to no, participation in discussions. Did not come to discussions prepared and/or did not support statements with evidence that reflected preparation. Few attempts to ask questions or build on ideas shared.	Some participation in the discussion. Limited attempts to support statements with evidence and examples that reflected preparation. Some attempts to ask questions, build on ideas shared, or make connections.	Consistent participation in the discussion. Came to the discussion prepared. Drew on that preparation to support points. Attempted to drive conversations forward by asking questions, building on ideas shared, and making connections. Responded to diverse perspectives, summarized points, and made connections. Made eye contact and spoke loud enough to be heard.	Consistent participation in the discussion and invites quieter voices into the conversation. Came to the discussion prepared. Explicitly draw on that preparation providing evidence and examples to support points made. Propelled conversation forward by posing and responding to questions that relate to the current discussion. Responded thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarized points of agreement and disagreement, and made new connections. Made eye contact, listened actively, and spoke loud enough to be heard.

Explain your self-assessment score below.

_____

_____

What do you specifically want to improve on in future discussions?

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_____

In _The Shift to Student-led_, Dr. Katie Novak and I unpack ten teacher-led, time-consuming, and often frustratingly ineffective workflows and reimagine them to allow students to lead the learning. Workflow shift #8 focuses on moving from teacher-led assessment to student self-assessment. The chapter establishes the challenges presented when teachers are the only ones engaged in assessing student work, dives into research about the value of self-assessment, and presents multiple strategies teachers can use to position students to think critically about and reflect on their own work and what it reveals about them as learners.

Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/c1J9L3bECMM

The Shift to Student-led

To learn more about this shift, check out our new book, _The Shift to Student-led_. If you are interested in a discounted bulk order of 10 or more books, complete this form.
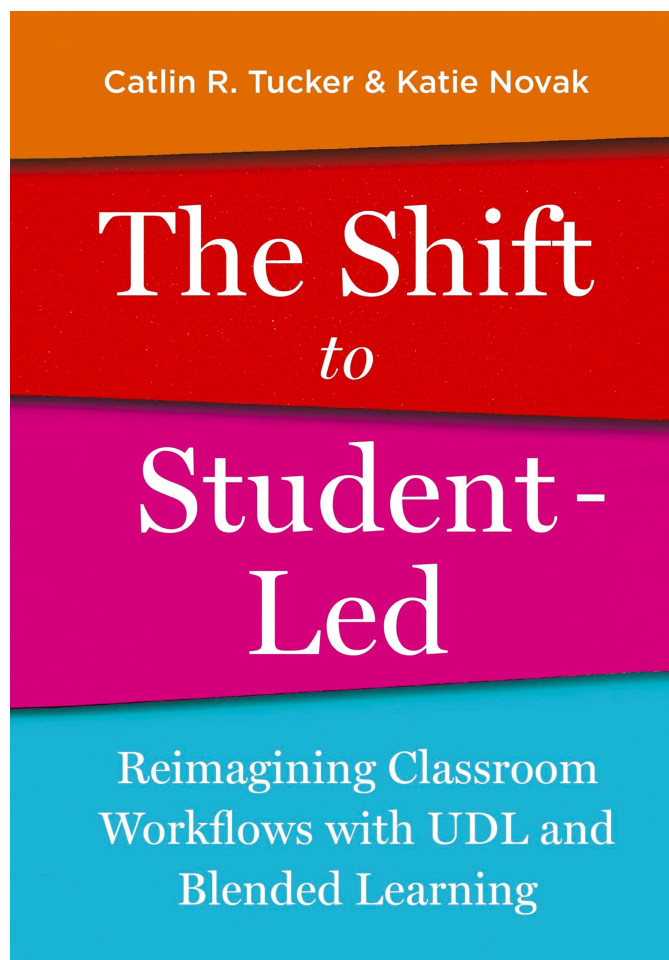
Siegesmund, A. (2016). Increasing student metacognition and learning through classroom-based learning communities and self-assessment. _Journal of microbiology & biology education_, 17(2), 204-214.

Wang, M. T., Zepeda, C. D., Qin, X., Del Toro, J., & Binning, K. R. (2021). More than growth mindset: Individual and interactive links among socioeconomically disadvantaged adolescents' ability mindsets, metacognitive skills, and math engagement. _Child Development,_ 92(5), e957-e976.

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