
SELF AND PEER EVALUATION OF WRITING IN THE INTERACTIVE CLASSROOM

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The evaluation of writing in the ESL classroom has traditionally been the teacher's prerogative and has often remained outside the interactive model of student learning. Our goal is to bring evaluation into the classroom in order to increase learners' awareness of criteria for good writing, promote greater improvement of writing by giving learners a diagnostic tool, promote greater learner independence, and develop positive attitudes toward writing.

Although much research has been done on peer and self-evaluation of L1 writing, and although increasing numbers of L1 teachers at all levels are using these strategies, little work has been done in ESL. The students in our project are high intermediate level adults from diverse backgrounds, who are studying general English language skills part-time at a Canadian community college. The grades the students receive during and at the end of the term are often meaningless to them other than in the pass/fail sense. They are not party to how the marks are obtained or on what they are based, and therefore don't know where they have "gone wrong" or how to improve.

Our project had two parts. Part one involved adapting an appropriate evaluation scale, training students in its use, and having them use the scale throughout the term to evaluate their own and their peers' writing. In part two we studied various end-of-term effects of the scale on students. In a pilot investigation we tested the hypothesis that students trained in the use of the scale (the experimental group) would have a concept of good writing more congruent with that of instructors than would a control group. In addition, we compared the criteria most often cited by both groups as they judged the quality of a set of compositions. Finally we examined the responses of both groups to a survey on their attitudes toward writing.

Results are encouraging, although not conclusive. We find a trend in the predicted direction between the experimental group, and

one of the judges; we find the experimental group using a different set of criteria in judging compositions than the control group; and, in addition, we see the experimental group giving more positive responses to all ten statements on a writing attitude survey. Further qualitative and quantitative research will provide a better understanding of the merits of self- and peer evaluation as a diagnostic and instructional tool in the ESL classroom.