

Compulsory School Students' Experiences of Mathematic Teachers' Assessment Practice with a Focus on Communication

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Introduction

Several countries, including Sweden, aim to improve education especially from an assessment perspective (OECD, 2013). The research literature on assessment is relatively comprehensive what is lacking is an in-depth knowledge of the younger students' views on these matters. Research on the area is mainly done in form of quantitative studies and focuses on higher education, specific assessment tools such as feedback and peer-assessment. School students' perceptions and experiences of teachers' assessment practices have been identified as an area in need of further studies by Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) and Peterson (2007), amongst others. Also from a Swedish perspective research reviews identify a lack in this area and both pointing out that further research of students' perspectives, perceptions and experiences is needed (Korp, 2011; Forsberg, 2010).

Aim of the study

The aim with this study is to explore phenomena related to mathematics teachers' assessment practices, from a holistic perspective, with a focus on communication between the teacher and the whole class and how it is perceived by the students. I will especially look for patterns, such as similarities and differences between student and teacher perceptions as well as similarities and differences among students in relation to their academic performance and grades and to gender. The overarching research questions are; how do mathematics teachers communicate their assessment practices and how are they perceived by the students?

Research Design/Methodology

Drawing on the work of Yins (2009) research strategy for case-studies, I will use embedded multiple-case design with an ethnographic approach. Three classrooms (cases) in three different schools will be included. The context is "assessment communication in mathematics" at compulsory school grade eight.

Three schools out of a total of eleven was selected based on different geographical locations of the municipality, high effectiveness in terms of proficiency and comparison of final grades and national tests in year nine.

Teachers were selected randomly from those schools, this in fact included one teacher recommended by one of the eleven principals.

Data collection was carried out in March-June 2013 by a questionnaire with open-ended questions to all students in the three classrooms, observations, artefacts as different documents and textbook and interviews with four students and the teacher in every case.

Analysis on-going

Each case A, B and C will be analysed separately for later cross-case analysis of all three cases, as is common in the analyses of multiple case studies. In the first step, Case B is tentatively categorized out of all data from different sources that contains and affects assessment communication in the classroom.

During the process, particularly interesting data, my reflections, possible links and causes were documented in memos.

Preliminary results

Students claim they do not know what is required to achieve the knowledge requirements for the different grades in mathematics; this is confirmed in the interviews and the questionnaire. Observations in the classroom confirm that the students are poorly informed about the knowledge requirements for the various grades. However, their mathematics teacher believes that they have the knowledge. Another interesting finding is that student's draw strong connection between the content of the chapter in the textbook and the goals of the teaching of mathematics. If the teaching had focused more on the mathematical abilities in the syllabus would this connection been so distinct? The teacher expressed insufficient syllabus knowledge; maybe this is why the teacher uses the mathematics book and allows it to be her only guide?

References

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