



Seeing Schools from the Inside Out:

The Role of Students in School Self-Assessment

William J. Smith and Marsha I. Gouett

A great deal of the policy talk on education reform is about students, especially student achievement. Unfortunately, student voice remains conspicuous by its absence in the public debate on education reform. School-centred reform is creating opportunities to remedy this situation; however, to date, these opportunities are more a potential than a reality.

This article reports on a recent attempt to involve students as the key evaluators in a school self-assessment project in Montréal, Québec.

The assessment project was conducted by 32 students in a secondary V French class in a French immersion/math-science alternative school. Their purpose was to evaluate the success or failure of the school's educational project, specifically the implementation of its mission statement. The mission statement was chosen as the focus of the student evaluation as the school's administration and staff have often expressed their concerns about its mandate and a desire to see it revised. From the project leader's perspective, the purpose of the project was to validate and legitimize students' role as serious contributors to the assessment process: "Taking students seriously as evaluators is the key to the student evaluator model, a process in which students, with the help of an experienced evaluation facilitator, design and carry out evaluations of

specific programs in which they are involved."¹

Working in small groups, the students were assigned two main tasks: first, to devise and administer a simple questionnaire, analyse the data obtained from the questionnaire, and present a summary of the results; and second, to prepare a visual and oral presentation ("photo essay") based on photographs taken throughout the school which recorded the students' impression of the success or failure of the school in its implementation of the mission statement.

mission statement after completing the project and enjoyed their assessment work.


It seems obvious from this project that students have a vital role to play as evaluators in an assessment project. Whether or not they produce effective evaluation instruments or error-free data analyses or comments in grammatically sound and correctly spelled French is not the point. The students' response to the project was a positive one, and they were certainly stimulated and engaged by the experience. Accordingly, we can

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The results suggest that generally students felt that the school was successful in implementing its mission statement in only one aspect – the math and science focus of the school. Interestingly, the results also indicated that the majority of students do not intend to pursue a career or studies in math or science. In terms of process, students recognized the difficulties in producing and administering questionnaires but were positive about the value of such instruments and the experience of working together. Overall, it was apparent that the students better understood the school's

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La voix des élèves est entièrement absente du débat public sur la réforme sur l'éducation. Cet article fait le point sur une tentative récente pour que les élèves puissent participer en tant qu'évaluateurs clés à un projet d'auto-évaluation scolaire de la région de Montréal. Travaillant en petits groupes, les élèves ont, à l'aide d'un questionnaire et d'un essai photographique, évalué dans quelle mesure l'école avait réalisé son mandat. Pour lire la version intégrale de cet article (en anglais), consultez le site Web de l'ACE (www.acea.ca).

conclude that the assessment project was a great success, proving the truth in the old adage: "If you want to know what a school is really like, ask the kids." 



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1 P. Campbell, S. Edgar and A. Halsted, "Students as Evaluators: A Model for Program Evaluation," *Phi Delta Kappan* 76 (1994), p. 160.

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Screaming Salad

I watched my mom make salad
The vegetables gave me a fright
The tomatoes screamed when she cut them
The onions cried like fountains
The cucumbers looked as grumpy as clouds
But the lettuce smiled as if it had just been to Ontario Place.
My Mother poured on the dressing
And it looked like snow on the grass.

By Zoe Kavoukian-Scharf, Grade 4
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