

Learning Activity 30 : Proof reading and progressive marking

Learning Behaviours: Proof-Reading, Taking Responsibility for own work, Responding to feedback to improve writing (formative assessment).

Teacher: WHC

DATE: 8.5.06

Class: 10B

Learning Activity Description:

Students worked on a formal analytical essay on the film ‘What’s Eating Gilbert Grape’. They were required to draft the essay and then submit a final copy after they had received feedback from other students. They were then able to access 40 marks but had to respond to my feedback and that of their peers as well as doing some more proof-reading before being able to access a final 10 marks (and possible increase in the original mark out of 40). This meant that students had to see the writing as a process and were required to take responsibility for correcting a lot of their own mistakes (with some guidance). The outcome for almost all students was that they were able to see some quite dramatic improvements in the quality of their work and their marks at the end, as well as learning to be more independent when writing.

Discussion Tool:

Students responded to some questions in their journals which were designed to get them to reflect on the value of proof-reading and how it impacted on their own work. We also discussed the value of the marking scheme and what was in it for them (i.e. improved marks for their essays).

Journal Questions:

1. Did you proof-read your work?
2. Did you find it useful to do this? Why/Why not? What changes did you make to your work?
3. Did you see improvements in your work as a result of proof-reading and responding to what was found?
4. Did you see benefit in having access to extra marks available after you re-drafted?
5. Were you happy with the end result of your drafting and proof-reading? Did your results reflect the changes you made and the work you put in?

Student Comments on Proof-Reading:

“It is important to do it (proof-reading) because you learn heaps from your mistakes”.

“Spelling mistakes, sentence structure... you learn from your mistakes and learn to self-correct”.

“...to check over mistakes and sentence structure. It is very important to do it because you learn from your mistakes and it’s important to recognise them for yourself.”

On Formative Assessment:

“I liked seeing how my mark had improved by the end of the essay drafting.”

“I felt like I got better.”

“I was able to get a better mark by going through and fixing up the things the teacher had commented on. I feel more confident writing essays now.”

Teacher Journal:

I have no doubt that this process was a valuable one for students and it was also a satisfying one for me as a teacher. One student's initial draft mark was a D+ and by the time he had submitted his final, it was a B. He was really happy with this and showed no signs of resenting the extra effort he had to put in to get this mark. The fact that more marks were available after drafting meant that there was real incentive for students to read the comments on their drafts more closely and to actually respond to them by improving in the areas identified by their peers or teacher. Most teachers get frustrated when they spend time offering feedback on work only to have students look at the grade awarded and then discard it. This process takes care of that and encourages active reading of feedback and seeing their drafts as a work in progress rather than something to be rewritten in neater handwriting and submitted without having made any corrections or improvement in quality. If students choose not to redraft after being given a mark out of 40, they are not able to access the extra 10 marks (e.g. 30 out of 40 becomes 30 out of 50).

There are two drawbacks to this task which are the time it takes to actually complete the essay drafting and feedback process (it took us a couple of weeks) and the fact that although students are taking more responsibility for their own work, the teacher still has to read and assess two (or more) drafts of the essay. Despite the time-consuming nature of the exercise, I certainly found it worthwhile in terms of developing independent learning and the need to take care with work and not just hand in the same mistakes in the final draft of a piece of work. The other benefit is the way students feel when they see their mark improving as a result of their efforts. They are more motivated to draft because they can see more marks as a reward for doing so.