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Self-assessment: What do chemistry teachers think?

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This research study was designed to reveal chemistry teachers' notions of self-assessment, and the ways these are translated into their classroom practices. There were two main areas of exploration: teacher beliefs, and self-assessment strategies. Two methods were used to collect data; focus group interviews and classroom observations. The sample included 10 schools from Kandy and Matale districts in Advanced Level classes. In the first step, two chemistry teachers from each school were selected and in-depth individual interviews were conducted. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcripts were made. The teachers' responses were analyzed by grouping them under emergent themes. This initial analysis revealed patterns of responses from teachers. In the second step, one of the classrooms of two teachers from each school was observed for a two-week period, paying attention to practice of self-assessments in learning chemistry. Then descriptive field notes were made. Data gathered from interviews and classroom observations were triangulated in the analysis. The results of this study show that chemistry teachers did not include a variety of self-assessment strategies as part of their classroom assessment practices. The teachers seemed to be slower at implementing student self-assessment than other assessments for learning strategies. They tended to have a narrow view of what constitutes a self-assessment. The results also show that teachers were not aware of self-assessment techniques and had reasons why they did not use them in their classrooms. The teachers seemed ambivalent about the value or appropriate use of self-assessment strategies. They expressed doubts about students being able to carry out self-assessment, saying that they were unrealistic about their achievements. They also found self-assessment challenging to implement in classrooms due to the difficulties with getting students engaged in it. These teachers expressed a transmissive view of learning where learning is seen as the transmission of knowledge or skills from the teacher to the student. Before self-assessment can be an effective part of students' learning, teachers have to develop a classroom culture where students are active rather than passive learners, believe that they can learn, are motivated to want to learn, and are given choices about their learning. Continuous and planned professional development is a necessary component of developing a classroom environment for self-assessment practice.

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