Students’ Perspectives: The Humanities Research Paper in the Integrated Humanities Programme of a Singapore High School

ABSTRACT

To meet the demands of the new workplace and 21st century economy, there is a shift in focus to alternative modes of assessment that emphasize the teaching of and testing of students' higher order thinking and complex, problem-solving and process skills. Standardized testing is deemed increasingly inadequate. The Humanities Research Paper (HRP), an innovative formative assessment portfolio is hence undertaken at Duchess High School (OHS) in its restructuring and improvement efforts to enhance students' research capacities in learning for life, for progress and for the future.

The key research question this study addresses is: what are students' perspectives of the Humanities Research Paper as alternative assessment in the Integrated Humanities Programme of a Singapore High School? Qualitative research method is used and qualitative data are collected from students of a single Singapore high school as the key frames of reference. Two semi-structured interviews are the primary sources of data studied and reported. The data is analyzed using Miles and Huberman (1994) and the interactive model to encompass the processes of data collection, data reduction, data displays and drawing of conclusions and verification.

The research findings are reported in terms of five assertions. First, students acknowledge the HRP as an alternative assessment to the standardized test but are uncertain about the rationale set by the school. Second, students' commitment to the HRP is dependent on the extent of relevance it has in enhancing or deterring their interest in research. Third, students negotiate to be co-partners with teachers in school assessment reform believing they can both contribute to and benefit from the assessment process. Fourth, students have mixed responses towards the HRP as their expectations exceeded the gains from their being accessed in two key HRP assessment requirements. Fifth, from accounts of strained relationships between mentees and mentors, there are more barriers than benefits to mentoring, suggesting umbrages to the implementation processes.

The study concludes that the negative effects of summative assessment serve as impetus towards embracing more formative approaches to assessment practices and learning. In recognizing that students have directly experienced the HRP, are capable of responsible action, and can usefully contribute to decisions that affect their lives, there should be more regular and active dialogue involving students over changes to school governance, as well as policy and practice that target making constant improvements to benefit the whole school system through assessment innovation.