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A research study exploring the affects of award-systems on learner motivation, collaboration and social-cohesion

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ABSTRACT

Here I am again, sitting on the floor, in the school hall, palms sweaty, heart racing, listening intently and waiting expectantly to hear my name being called through the crowd. To my surprise my name was never called. Have you ever received an award at school, or were you like me, always hoping to get one but never walking across the stage trophy in hand? Literature shows that awards have an impact on motivation, collaboration and social cohesion of a learner.

The aim of this research project was to investigate learner perceptions of the award-system used by a private intermediate/senior primary school, in Johannesburg, and explore whether these awards promote or demote learner motivation, collaboration, and social cohesion. My investigation began with describing and analysing the award-system used by the school, followed by an exploration of learners' attitudes towards the award-system, in order to establish the ways in which this award-system promotes or inhibits learner motivation, collaboration, and social cohesion.

Following a post-structuralist research paradigm, I focused on the voices of those who received awards, as well as those who did not or felt marginalized as a result of not receiving any recognition, through critically analysing their responses to a questionnaire. Gazing at the award-system of the school, from the learners' perspective, afforded me the opportunity to gain insight into the effect this particular award- system has on learner motivation, collaboration and social cohesion, in this particular school. I present the research as a story of discovery and a journey. This research becomes *our story* as I, the teacher, am encouraged to look 'deeper' at the award-system of the school. The design I have chosen is qualitative, the reason for this is because I wanted to understand the actual award-system, as well as, individual perceptions of these awards. The questionnaire is considered qualitative in the way that it makes use of open-ended questions to provoke informative, in-depth responses from the learners, it does, however, include closed (yes/no) questions, which are recorded using percentages. The findings were unexpected, as the award-system generally had a positive impact on the motivation, collaboration and social cohesion of the Grade 7 learners in this school.