6-19-2008

"I don't care how I write, as long as I get a good grade!": using self-evaluations to shift student motivation and improve writing quality

Amanda J. Doyle
Rowan University

"I DON'T CARE HOW I WRITE, AS LONG AS I GET A GOOD GRADE!": USING

SELF-EVALUATIONS TO SHIFT STUDENT MOTIVATION

AND IMPROVE WRITING QUALITY

by
Amanda J. Doyle

An Action Research Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science in Teaching Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
June 19, 2008

Approved by _____
Dr. Beth A. Wassell

Date Approved ___June 19, 2008___
June 19, 2008

ABSTRACT

Amanda J. Doyle
"I DON'T CARE HOW I WRITE, AS LONG AS I GET A GOOD GRADE!":
USING SELF-EVALUATIONS TO SHIFT STUDENT MOTIVATION
AND IMPROVE WRITING QUALITY
2008
Dr. Beth A. Wassell
Master of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this study was to examine what happened when self-evaluations

were used to improve the writing quality, motivation, and self-efficacy of students

in a fourth grade class. Participants included a class sample of 16 students, ages

9-10 years old (8-female, 8-male). Students were given a writing assignment in

which they had an active part in planning and evaluating their own work.

Observations, informal interviews, and surveys were taken before implementation

and compared to data taken after implementation to examine effectiveness of

strategy on motivation and self-efficacy. Writing samples were taken from

assignments completed prior to and after implementation, and were evaluated by

the teacher-research and cooperating teacher, with a writing rubric. Evaluations

from samples taken prior to and after were compared and results were used to

examine effectiveness of strategy on writing quality. Findings suggest that self-

evaluations may help increase student motivation to write and help improve

writing quality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Introduction

"What in the world am I going to do an action research project on?" This is what I thought to myself as I sat in the back corner of the classroom on my very first day as a student teacher. In fact, as I sat there a little while longer, I realized that I really wasn't even sure what an action research project was! I wanted to do something positive with my class. I wanted to improve some area of concern or help create a more encouraging environment… but this class already seemed to have all of that. The students were so polite and kind to each other. The walls were filled with encouraging quotes and colorful pieces of art made by the students. During instruction, hands would fly up as students nearly begged to give answers.

It was during the class writing time when I finally came across something I might be able to do my project on. The students were working on their weekly writing assignment they had been given that Monday. I sat in bewilderment as I watched the students do everything but write. Instead they were making excessive trips to the water fountain and bathroom, re-tying their shoes, sharpening every pencil they could find in their desk, reading their "free-time" books, or sitting at their desk, simply staring into space. After watching this go on for a few days, I asked my cooperating teacher about the students' writing and she responded to me with a sigh. The fact was that for these students (much like the students she has had year-after-year), writing just wasn't their thing. Few students really excelled in writing and even fewer were really motivated to write.

With this, I decided to do my project on a strategy to hopefully improve my students' quality of writing. For my action research project, I implemented a self-

evaluation system for the writing process. Students were assigned a writing assignment in which they had an active part in continually evaluating their work. Throughout the process, I met with students individually to discuss their progress, while I gathered other data from observations, surveys, informal interviews, and writing samples. I recorded data into tables and compared the findings from prior to implementation to findings after implementation.

Story Behind The Research

"I don't care how I write, as long as I get a good grade," (Student A, Personal Communication, March 19, 2008). This was the typical response I was given as I went around to each of my students, asking them how they felt about their own writing. Hearing my students talk about writing made me reflect back to when I was in grade school. In fact, I can remember thinking the same thing. I didn't care how I wrote either, as long as I got a good grade from my teacher! Now, having become a teacher myself, I know that these words are words that no teacher wants to hear.

A younger me never would have imagined that writing would be so important in life. However, as I progressed through college and entered into a graduate school program in teaching, I came to realize just how vital the skill of writing is. It is a skill that is not only stressed in academia, but is also necessary to everyday life. Individuals need to have the ability to effectively communicate and express themselves.

Year after year, teachers struggle with helping their students approach the writing process. We are challenged by not only our students' lack of skills in writing, but also their lack of self-efficacy and motivation to write; both are needed for good writing. As an educator, I feel that it is my responsibility to address these concerns on student

writing. I want my students to strive for quality writing. I want my students to want to write, to be motivated and enjoy (at least a little) writing. Lastly, I do not want my student writing just to get a grade from me. With this action research project, I hope to explore a potential approach to writing that may help me obtain these goals.

Problem

Throughout my experiences as both a student and a student educator, I have observed a strong lack of skills in the area of writing. When attempting the writing process, students continually ignore the planning stages; they rush through an assignment just so they can hand it in and get their grade. Rather than aiming for good quality writing, students focus on getting a passing letter grade. In their study, Perchemilides and Coutant (2004) discuss students' tendencies to judge their writing abilities by the grades they receive, rather than the actually skills involved. This mentality results in not only a lack of effort, but also decreases the overall quality of writing.

In speaking with my cooperating teacher and observing my students' approach to the writing process, it was clear that my own students lacked strong writing skills, as well. I noticed my students struggling to think of topics, being inattentive and off-task, or complaining about how they did not feel like writing. There were several students attempting to write, however, upon closer examination of the work of these students, I discovered poorly developed sentences and fragmented ideas.

My cooperating teacher and I wanted our students to become better writers and hoped to find an effective approach to the writing process to utilize in the future. I wanted my students to strive for quality and understanding, rather than strive for the completion of an assignment just for the grade. Being that students typically write "to get

a grade", I believe that incorporating the use of self-evaluations, a writing approach that takes teacher-grading out of the equation and holds the student accountable for their own progress, and ultimately, their success, may be a potential way to help obtain my goals.

Critical Question

In this study I will be researching the critical question, "How can I use self-evaluation to improve my students' writing skills?" In exploring this question, I also hope to address two factors that are very important to writing skills, self-efficacy and motivation. I will do this by looking at the questions, "How does self-evaluation impact self-efficacy in writing?" and "How does self-evaluation impact motivation in writing?"

Integrated Action Used

In my action research project, I implemented a self-evaluation system for the writing process. To do this, students were given a writing assignment in which they had an active part in continually evaluating their work. Throughout the process, I met with each student individually, to discuss their progress. The results using self-evaluations were compared to the outcome of work produced without self-evaluations. This was done through the use of observations, surveys, and students samples. My goal was to improve the quality of my students' work, as well as increase my students' motivation to write.

Before implementing my strategy, I distributed a writing survey to each student. The survey (see Appendix C) asked students to reflect on their writing skills. It also asked students to rate themselves on several areas related to writing, such as motivation to complete writing assignments and how they felt their writing abilities were. I

conducted this survey as baseline data to be compared with data gathered after my strategy implementation.

One week after distributing the surveys, I began implementing my strategy by giving my students a writing assignment (see Appendix D). In language arts, students spent the previous week discussing short stories, so for the assignment, students were asked to create their own short story. Before students began writing, I gave a detailed and enthusiastic introduction to the assignment. I went over all directions for the assignment and strongly emphasized that *no grades* were going to be distributed by the teacher; students were going to evaluate their own work. Students were also given a pre-writing packet to complete prior to the writing assignment (see Appendix E). The pre-writing packet required students to reflect on writing in general. Students listed what they thought were the key elements of a good short story and created a check list of the ways they were going to keep track of their writing progress. This packet was developed to be used as a data reference in the student-teacher self-evaluative conferences, which were scheduled after all writing assignments were completed.

<center>Context for the Research</center>

School and Community

Lewis Elementary School is a Blue Ribbon School, located in Voorhees, NJ, a suburban community located about twelve miles east of Philadelphia. Voorhees has a population of around 28,000 people. Seventy-three percent of the population of Voorhees is Caucasian, 11% is Asian, and 8% is African-American. The major ancestry groups of the town include Italian, Irish, and German heritages. The median household income is $68,402 (compared to the national median average of $41,994). Forty-six

<center>5</center>

percent of the population (over 25 years of age) hold bachelor's degrees or higher. The town has a very low violent crime rate of 2.2 per 1,000 people (Epodunk, 2008). There are four neighborhood K-5 elementary schools, one 6-8 middle school, and one 9-12 regional high school located in Voorhees. The particular demographics of the sending areas of Lewis Elementary School are of mid-upper socio-economic status. .

Lewis Elementary School has a diverse student population, yet has a higher percentage of Caucasian and Asian-American students. English is the primary language spoken in 93% of the students' homes. Other languages spoken include Korean and Russian (New Jersey School Report Card, 2006). The school has a student population of about 500 and a staff population of 70. The average class size is 20.4 students. There are two kindergartens, five first grade classes, four second grade classes, four third grade classes, five fourth grade classes, and four fifth grade classes. Lewis Elementary School offers many special programs and services including English as a second language instruction, enrichment programs, speech, occupational therapy, Basic Skills Improvement Program, special education services, a Student Teacher Assistance Resource Team (START), SPARKS (an enrichment program for students that excel in particular areas, such as reading), and technology class, along with many others (Voorhees Township School District, 2007). Community involvement is encouraged at Lewis Elementary School, and is shown by community-wide events such as the Lewis Carnival, art shows, and a community volleyball tournament.

Classroom

The class examined in this study was a fourth grade class, consisting of 21 students (10-female, 11-male), ages 9 to 10 years old. There were 3 students receiving

enrichment program services and one student receiving Basic Skills Improvement

Program services in language arts. Twelve students participated in the school band or

orchestra. All students spoke English as the primary language in their home. Fifteen

students were Caucasian. Other ethnicities, as indicated through a student survey,

included African-American (1 student), mixed-African-American/Caucasian (1 student),

and Asian (Chinese – 1 student, Middle Eastern – 3 students). All students in the class

were on- or above-level in math skill instruction. All but one student were on- or above-

level in language arts skill instruction. Despite the majority of students being on- or

above- level in all areas, the overall writing quality of the class was described as poor by

what my cooperating teacher had observed throughout the year.

Participants

     Selection of participants. Upon selection of participants for my study, I

distributed assent and consent forms to all students. Forms for 16 of the 21 students were

returned, all indicating permission for participation in the study. After permission forms

were obtained, I selected three student participants for my focus group. The focus group

included two male students and one female student and represented an even range of the

varying abilities and motivation levels found in the classroom. For this project, I was

primarily concerned with the specific data gathered on these three students. Data

gathered on the 16 other student participants was used to support findings in a general

perspective.

<center>Review of Relevant Literature</center>

     Writing is an obstacle faced by teachers and students alike. While students

struggle with learning, understanding, and conquering the writing process in school,

teachers are challenged by the ways in which to instruct writing and develop the skills of students. In the classroom, there is often a disconnect between what students produce and what teachers expect. This disconnect can be represented by a student's grade on a given assignment. Research suggests the use of self-evaluations as a way to close this gap and improve writing skills (Schunk, 2003). The following will examine such research on the student self-evaluative process.

Improving Student Learning

Students' abilities are typically measured by the grades received. Grades may be indicative of skill in more concrete subjects such as mathematics and spelling. However, in non- linear subjects, such as writing, skills cannot be accurately portrayed by the letter or percentage written on top of the paper. Perchemlides and Coutant (2004) found that a large majority of students define their value as writers by the grades they receive and rely on the grades teachers assign them to assess their own writing abilities. This process does not help to improve students' writing abilities. Students need to understand why they receive a grade. They should assess their own work and reflect on their writing skills. Perchemilides and Coutant (2004) suggested taking grades out of the picture and encouraging students to set their own writing goals. This, according to the authors, will help students strive for great prose and improve the quality of their writing.

Not only should students be encouraged to set their own goals, but they should also be involved in the everyday learning environment of their classroom. Chappuis and Stiggins (2002) looked at the idea of classroom assessment as part of effective teaching and used day-to-day assessment activities to involve students in their own learning. The authors found that actively involving students increased confidence and motivation to

8

learn by emphasizing progress and achievement rather than failure and defeat. Results suggested that when students were involved, they learned how to use evaluation information to manage and regulate their own learning. Thus, students were able to understand how they best learned, knew where they were in relation to their learning goals and were able to take the next actions towards their learning goals (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002).

When considering the reliability of using self-evaluations in the classroom, concerns arise about students distorting their grades or assigning themselves higher grades than the quality of their work suggests. Sadler and Good (2006) examined these concerns by comparing student self-evaluations, peer-evaluations, and teacher-evaluations. The study found very high correlations between student- and teacher-grading. They also found significant gains in understanding in the self-evaluations, when compared to the teacher-evaluations. When students evaluate their own writing, they must provide feedback (both constructive and critical) to themselves. Feedback can be used by students to gain further understanding (Sadler & Good, 2006).

Sadler and Andrade (2004) also looked at the self-evaluative process in student writing. The results of their study found that when students evaluated their own writing, they became self-regulated writers, as they reflected on their strengths and weaknesses. Graham and Harris (2005) defined self-regulation as the thoughts, feelings, and actions that people use to obtain some desired goal (p. 133). Self-regulation is essential to navigate the writing process and become a better writer (Sadler & Andrade, 2004).

Research has shown that the self-evaluative process not only helps to improve student learning, but also helps to increase both self-efficacy and motivation to write (Walker, 2003). In a study, Schunk (2003) found the following:

> At the outset of a given activity, learners have goals and a sense of self-efficacy for learning. Their self-efficacy sustains their motivation and promotes learning. During periods of self-reflection, they evaluate their progress by comparing their performances to their goals. Self-evaluations of progress enhance efficacy and maintain motivation. (pp. 161-62)

When students are empowered to reflect on and measure their own writing abilities, they get a sense of self-belief and motivation to improve (Perchemilides & Coutant, 2004).

Olina and Sullivan (2004) compared the self-confidence and attitudes of students in self-evaluations, self-evaluations plus teacher-evaluations, and teacher-evaluations. The results of the study found that when students evaluate their own work (in addition to or not in addition to teacher-evaluations), students felt more in control of their learning and reported both more positive attitudes and greater performance than did students who did not evaluate their own work (Olina & Sullivan, 2004). These results only further support the use of self-evaluations in the classroom.

The results of the reviewed literature suggest that using self-evaluations in the classroom can be essential in improving student performance, self-efficacy, and motivation in writing. When implemented into the classroom, students can benefit greatly. However, one challenge of using student self-evaluations is the amount of time

necessary to implement such a system. More research on effective ways to actively involve students their own evaluation process is needed.

<center>Research Methods</center>

Overview

To be a good teacher is to never stopping being a student. A good teacher continually looks for ways to improve their teaching. They seek to learn about who they are as a teacher, and use what they learn to more effectively communicate with their students. The field of education is ever-changing, as are the needs of the countless individual students that come with each new school year. It is essential for teachers to not be stagnant in their teaching. With this being said, I used the method of action research for my project. As defined by Phillips and Carr (2006), action research is form of research that is conducted by teachers in their own classrooms, with the goal of continually improving both their own teaching techniques and student learning.

Action research helps teachers explore both their strengths and weaknesses in teaching. With action research, teachers are able to closely examine a particular area, technique, project, or teaching method, reflecting on what happened and why. Teachers are then able to use their results to take further actions to become a more effective teacher and increase student learning. This action research project was aimed at exploring a technique to increase the quality of writing, motivation, and self-efficacy of student writers. As a teacher, I hope to explore a potential way to approach writing in my own future classrooms, while gaining insight on increasing student motivation and self-efficacy related to writing.

<center>11</center>

Data Collected

Data was collected in a fourth grade classroom during Spring, 2008 through observations, interviews, and artifacts. I collected observations to help me examine students' motivation to write. I conducted informal and formal interviews to help me look both students' motivation to write and students' self-efficacy of their writing abilities. I also collected artifacts, including writing samples prior to my strategy implementation to help me examine writing quality.

Observations. My observations included field notes and journal entries. They served as the primary basis for my data and were conducted to gather data on the overall "feeling" or work ethic of my students before and after implementation. I took field notes before and after implementation. Before implementation, I observed students during writing time (in 20 minute increments), for one week. As a passive observer, I situated myself at a table in the left, back corner of the classroom. Students were seated and were working on a week-long letter writing assignment. During the observations, I looked at time on- and off-task. I noted distractive behaviors (such as number of visits to the water fountain, reading a book, and sharpening pencils), comments made by student during writing, and the number of student idle. I kept all general observations in my research binder and organized all student-specific observations onto a student list, where each student was represented by a number.

I followed the same procedure for observations after my strategy implementation; however, I had the role of a participant observer as students came up to me to inquire about their writing process. During this time, I observed the same types of behaviors from the back corner of the classroom, while students worked on the short story writing

assignment I gave them. At the end of writing time, subjective thoughts, ideas, and opinions on my students and the writing process were written into my journal.

Surveys. I gave each student identical surveys before and after strategy implementation (see Appendix C). Students completed the surveys individually during the first 15 minutes of two language arts time periods. The surveys asked students to reflect on their writing skills. Students noted their strengths and weaknesses, as well as rated themselves on several areas related to writing, such as motivation to complete writing assignments and how they felt their writing abilities were.

Interviews. I conducted interviews before and after strategy implementation, both informally and formally (student-teacher conferences). During writing time, I went around to individual students and asked a set of informal questions pertaining to their motivation on the given writing assignment, how they felt their writing was so far, and what their ultimate goal for the given assignment was. Dependent on the responses given, I asked follow-up questions to several students. I wrote notes onto a chart that listed each student (by number) and kept the list in my research notebook.

At the conclusion of the writing assignment, I held three individual formal interviews or self-evaluation conferences with my focus students. I conducted the conferences at a back table in the classroom, during bathroom breaks or free time. At the start of each conference, I asked each student about their feelings on the writing assignment I gave them. After writing down their responses, I showed each student an evaluation form (see Appendix F) that was composed of their responses from the survey (see Appendix E) taken prior to the assignment (on motivation to write and belief in writing quality) and their lists they developed in their pre-writing packet. I asked

students to reflect on their writing experience, evaluate the final copy of their writing assignment, and compare their reactions to previous assignments. I recorded all data onto the evaluation forms.

Artifacts. Artifacts collected included the student writing samples from my 3 focus students. I collected 3 writing samples that were completed earlier in the school year from each of the 3 students, as well as the final copy of the writing assignment produced for this project. I collected the surveys (given before implementation) from all 16 student participants, however, collected surveys (given after implementation) from only my 3 focus students.

Analysis

I analyzed my data by using to Mills (2007) general qualitative analysis. According to Mills, data can be analyzed by coding for themes, meaning to identify patterns and trends that emerge in the data. I organized the data by themes and used tables to display the findings. I furthered examined the tables by looking for commonalities within each theme and calculating averages for particular sets of data.

Observations. I coded observations from both prior to and after implementation by one of two categories: on-task behaviors and off-task behaviors. I then re-examined off-task behaviors, and coded for idle behavior. After coding the observations for behaviors, I recorded all data into two tables. The first table (see Table 1) contained all data gathered prior to implementation, while the second table (see Table 2) contained all data gathered after implementation. I labeled the columns Day 1 to Day 5 and labeled the rows by observed behaviors. The first two rows indicated if students' behaviors were on-task or off-task. Row 3 specifically showed the number of idle students. For each day, I

indicated the number of students performing each behavior, during the 20 minute time period I observed.

I also examined and coded observations for comments made by students, during the observed time periods. I highlighted all comments in my notes that were applicable to my research, and coded them by one of two categories: on-task comments and off-task comments.

Interviews. To analyze the data gathered from the informal interviews, I created a table (see Table 3) that was divided into three categories: motivation to write, motivation for writing, and self-efficacy of writing abilities. I recorded the responses of each of my students into the table, next their corresponding student number. After I entered all data into the table, I looked for common trends among my students' responses for each of the three columns.

To examine the data gathered from the formal interviews or self-evaluation conferences (see Appendix F), I looked at data related to one of my three main categories: writing quality, motivation to write, and motivation for writing. I created a table (see Table 4) to compare data collected on the writing quality and motivation of my focus students prior to my strategy implementation (taken from the writing surveys distributed, see Appendix C) to data collected on the writing quality and motivation of my focus students after my strategy implementation (taken from the formal interviews conducted). I recorded my students' ratings, as well as their responses to their motivation to write on the given writing assignment for this project.

Surveys. I analyzed the surveys by examining each question and picking out those that provided the most data related to motivation (to write and for writing) and self-

efficacy. I used the responses to question numbers 3, 5, 6, and 7, and entered the data into a table (Table 3). The table listed the students by number in the right column. I used the other three columns to indicate students' responses on the surveys. I then used this table to find a common trend for each of the 2 focus areas (motivation and self-efficacy), for the 16 student participants.

Artifacts. I analyzed writing samples both prior to (from all 16 students) and after the implementation my strategy (from the 3 focus students), by examining and rating each sample according to criteria listed on a writing rubric (see Appendix G). The criteria were related to: content and organization, usage, sentence construction, and mechanics. I examined each sample for the assessed criteria according to the rubric ranging from 1 (Inadequate Command) to 5 (Adequate Command). After I evaluated each sample, my cooperating teacher then evaluated each sample with the same rubric. Samples from my three focus students were compared (samples from prior to and after implementation). I used the comparisons between the writing samples to look at changes in writing quality. I also coded the writing samples for evidence of creativity and planning.

Trustworthiness, Validity and Limitations

Validity. To ensure validity of this action research project, I used Guba's Criteria for Validity of Qualitative Research (1981, as cited in Mills, 2007). According to Guba, the trustworthiness or validity of action research can be established if the four following characteristics or criteria are addressed: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to taking into account and dealing with the complexities or variables that present themselves in a study. In my research project, I addressed the characteristic of credibility by practicing triangulation. I gathered data from various sources such as observations, informal and formal interviews of students, and student surveys. I also addressed credibility by collecting artifacts such as writing samples, written both before and after my strategy implementation.

Transferability refers to conducting research that is detailed and specific to a particular context. This characteristic is addressed by gathering detailed and descriptive contextual data that allows for others to repeat the study in a comparative context. Before implementing my strategy, I collected data on the community, school, classroom, and students in my study. I considered details of that may have influenced the outcome of my study, such as students' learning abilities, interests, and school-related strengths, as well as information about the school community.

Dependability refers to conducting research that is stable or constant. This characteristic is met by overlapping methods, or using two or more methods in a way that a weakness of one method is compensated or made up for by the strength of another method. In my study, when I looked at student motivation to write, I overlapped my interviews with both my surveys that I distributed and with the observations I took. I compared my students' responses related to their motivation to write from the interviews and survey to the observations I took of students actually attempting the writing process. By doing this, I was able strengthen my data and account for any discrepancies in the data that might have occurred, had I only used one method.

Lastly, confirmability refers to objectivity of the data being collected. This characteristic is addressed by triangulating data methods and by practicing reflexivity. Reflexivity means to intentionally reveal your own biases or underlying assumptions about a study to help show how and from what direction the data that is being presented is coming from. As stated before, I practiced triangulation in my study by gathering data from various sources such as observations, informal and formal interviews of students, and student surveys. I practiced reflexivity by giving a context or presenting the story behind my research. This story helps others see my own biases or beliefs about what I studied.

Potential for bias. As with all studies, my action research project has several potential biases. One such potential bias is that both my students' motivation and quality of work may have been influenced by the type of writing assignment they were given during the strategy implementation. The strategy implemented included a writing assignment given to my student participants. For this writing assignment, I allowed my students to choose whatever they wanted to write about, thus increasing student interest and motivation from the start.

Another potential bias in this study is the teacher's approach to the implemented strategy (writing assignment). Being an energetic person to begin with, I approached this writing assignment with a lot of enthusiasm towards my students. I wanted my students to get excited about writing and have fun; for me, this type of approach towards teaching is essential! However, my enthusiasm towards the writing assignment may have had a strong influence on my students' motivation to write. Another teacher with a less enthusiastic approach to such an assignment may not have had the same results.

Limitations of study. Several factors limited the extent of research conducted for this study. In this study, I looked at the writing quality, motivation, and self-efficacy of students in a particular fourth grade classroom, located in a mid-upper class community. General data was collected on 16 students; three participants were used as a focus group. Both the specific context of this study (fourth grade, mid-upper class community) and the narrow selection of participants limit more generalizable results. Another limitation of this study was the allotment of time needed to conduct research. Student-teacher evaluation conferences required approximately 4 to 6 minutes per student. The focus group for this study was small (3 students), so the evaluation conferences were able to be fitted into the schedule during bathroom break, with two teachers in the classroom to maintain classroom management. However, in a classroom, teachers would be limited by the actual number of minutes able to be spent with each student, incorporating and finding available time to conduct evaluations for a full student roster, and maintaining classroom management without a co-teacher.

Findings and Interpretations

The following section reviews the findings of my action research project. First, I will discuss the observations taken on the class (16 student participants) prior to and after my strategy implementation. These findings will be compared and will help me examine the effectiveness of my strategy, related to motivation and self-efficacy. I will then look at data taken on the class (16 student participants) from informal interviews and surveys. I will compare these findings to the key findings that emerged in my literature review. It will also serve as a beginning point to compare my data taken after the strategy implementation to, again showing the effectiveness of my strategy related to motivation

and self-efficacy. After discussing the results related to the class in general, I will discuss

findings pertaining to my three focus students, where I will look at the data from the

surveys taken after implementation, and the writing samples taken both before and after

implementation. These findings will help me to not only take a closer look at motivation

and self-efficacy, but will also serve as my primary data for looking at my students'

quality of writing and how it was influenced by my strategy.

Class

 Observations prior to implementation. I used the observations that I took prior to

implementation to look at the students' motivation to write for a typical assignment and

recorded these observations into Table 1. I examined data taken before implementation

so that I could have something to compare data taken after implementation, to look at the

effectiveness of my strategy. Table 1 shows the number of students on- and off-task

during the 20 minute observed time increments for one week. During the course of one

week, the average number of students per day that were on-task was 3.8 students (24%),

while the average number of students per day that were off-task was 12.2 students (76%).

This means that when working on a writing assignment, students may be unmotivated to

do work. It is unclear as to why the students appear to be motivated, however, it is very

important to address this issue.

Table 1. Student Observations Prior to Implementation, 20 minutes/day for one week

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Average
On-task	3	4	6	3	3	24%
Off-task	13	12	10	13	13	76%
Idle	1	3	2	3	4	16%

 Observations after implementation. Table 2 shows the same type of data as Table

1, but contains data from observations taken after implementation. During the course of

one week, the average number of students per day that were on-task was 14.4 students

(90%), while the average number of students per day that were off-task was 1.6 students

(10%). To examine the effectiveness of my strategy, I compared the data in Table 1 to

the data in Table 2. The comparison between the data in Table 1 and the data in Table 2

data shows a significant increase in work performance after I implemented my strategy.

Prior to implementation, only 24% of students were on-task, however, after

implementation, the number of students on-task rose to 90%. This increase in motivation

means that on the assignment that I gave for my strategy implementation, students were

more motivated to write, which suggests that my strategy was effective in increasing

student motivation. To me, it was not as important to know whether students were

affected more by my enthusiasm for this assignment, by the self-evaluation process of

this assignment, or by the writing assignment in general. Because in the end, regardless

of what may have influenced these results, my students were more motivated to write –

one of my hopes for this project.

Table 2. Student Observations After Implementation, 20 minutes/day for one week

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Average
On-task	16	13	13	14	16	90%
Off-task	0	3	3	2	0	10%
Idle	0	2	1	1	0	5%

Informal interviews. I used the informal interviews, conducted prior to

implementation, on all 16 student participants to look at motivation and self-efficacy in

writing. More specifically, I examined data related to motivation to write (what makes a

student write), motivation for writing (what the student is aiming towards by writing, i.e.:

intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation), and self-efficacy of writing abilities and recorded

student participants during the informal interviews into Table 3. I found that one out of

16 respondents (6%) indicated they had motivation to write, 4 out of 16 respondents (25%) indicated they had neutral motivation, and 11 out of 16 respondents (69%) indicated that had no motivation to write. This data clearly suggests a strong lack of motivation to write by students in the classroom. When I looked at the students' responses on what their motivation was for writing, I found that only 3 students out of 16 respondents (19%) indicated that their motivation for writing was to improve their own writing quality, where as the other 13 respondents (81%) indicated their motivation for writing as related to receiving a grade. These results suggest that rather than aiming to produce quality writing, students tend to mostly aim at getting a good grade. In looking at the students' self-efficacy of writing abilities, 6 out of 16 students (38%) indicated that they "did not know" how their writing skills measured up, which means that more than one-third of the class did not know or was not sure about their writing skills.

Table 3. Informal Interviews – Student Responses Before Implementation
*Students 14, 15, and 16 are focus students

Student	Motivation to Write (yes, no, or neutral)	Motivation for Writing (for grade or for self)	Self-efficacy of Writing Abilities (Great, Good, OK, Not Good, Do not know)
1	No	Grade	Do not know
2	Neutral	Grade	Good
3	No	Grade	Good
4	No	Grade	Not Good
5	No	Grade	Do not know
6	No	Grade	Do not know
7	Neutral	Self	Good
8	No	Grade	Do not know
9	No	Grade	OK
10	No	Grade	OK
11	No	Grade	Not Good
12	No	Grade	Do not know
13	No	Grade	Do not know
14	Yes	Self	Good
15	Neutral	Self	OK
16	Neutral	Grade	Good

This set of data that I examined from the informal interviews was very important to me because it represented the general motivation and self-efficacy in writing abilities of my students. It suggests that before my strategy was implemented, students had a low

motivation to write, wrote to get a grade, and typically didn't know how they wrote, which served as a good beginning point to compare my data taken after implementation.

Class surveys. In addition to the data gathered from the informal interviews, I was able to gather more data on motivation and writing quality from the surveys I distributed to the class, prior to implementation. This data was recorded into Table 4. In looking at how my students rated their typical quality of writing on general writing assignments, the average writing quality rating was calculated to 6.23 out 10 (1 as the lowest, 10 as the highest). The average rating for motivation was 3.62 out of a possible 5 (0 being no motivation, 5 being very high motivation). Despite relating to writing quality and motivation, two items of focus for my research questions, these results did not appear to be very conclusive or pertinent to my research.

Table 4. Student Survey Ratings, Before Implementation, out of 16 students

Student	Writing Quality Rating	Motivation Rating
1	4	3
2	9	5
3	7	5
4	3	3
5	3	3
6	7	3
7	8	5
8	5	3
9	7	3
10	7	4
11	5	2
12	8	4
13	8	4
Average Rating	6.23	3.62

Student Focus Group

Focus group surveys. I used the data gathered on my three focus students to more closely examine the effectiveness of my strategy. This data on my focus group was recorded into Table 5 and includes students' ratings on their motivation to write and self-efficacy of writing quality, taken from both before and after strategy implementation. In

looking at how my focus students rated their own writing quality, the average rating before strategy implementation was 7 (out of 10). The average writing quality after strategy implementation was 9 (out of 10). These two ratings show a 2 point increase in average writing quality. This means that student involvement in the writing and evaluation process may increase students' assessment of their writing quality. It also suggests effectiveness of my implemented strategy in increasing self-efficacy of writing quality. In looking at motivation, the average motivation of my focus student before strategy implementation was 2.67, while the average motivation after strategy implementation was 5. This significant increase in student motivation means that my strategy was effective in increasing student motivation to write.

Table 5. Focus Group Survey Ratings, Before and After Implementation

| Student | Before | | After | | |
	Writing Quality (out of 10)	Motivation (out of 5)	Writing Quality (out of 10)	Motivation (out of 5)	Motivation To Write
A	9	4	10	5	Write for quality – self-motivation
B	4	0	8	5	Write to produce best work – self-motivation
C	8	4	9	5	Write for quality, best work, and grade – self- & extrinsic (grade)-motivation
Average	7	2.67	9	5	

Writing samples. Data on the actual quality of writing was gathered on my focus students. Table 6 shows the ratings of my focus students' writing samples. Each student (Student A, B, or C) had three writing samples taken from before implementation and the one writing sample taken from the assignment for this project. Student A received an average of 3.36 for the writing samples prior to implementation, and received a 5 for the writing sample after implementation. Student B received an average of 3.33 for the writing samples prior to implementation, and received a 4 for the writing sample after

implementation. Student C received an average of 3 for the writing samples prior to implementation, and received a 4 for the writing sample after implementation. On average, my focus students' quality of writing rose 22%. This increase in writing quality is significant and means that my strategy was effective in this area.

Table 6.   Focus Group Writing Sample Ratings

	Before Implementation			After Implementation
	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4
Student				
A	3	4	4	5
B	3	3	4	4
C	3	3	3	4

Conclusions and New Understandings

This study addressed three very important topics related to the writing process: writing ability, motivation, and self-efficacy. Similar to the findings from my literature, I found that many students do define their value as a writer by the grades they receive. Not only do grades define their value, but grades also serve as the ultimate goal for writers. The results of this study supported the emergent findings in my literature review, which stated that students strive for getting a good grade and care little about improving or writing for quality.

The strategy that I implemented was a self-evaluation system, in which students were active in the planning and evaluating processes of their writing. The results of my study suggest that incorporating these self-evaluations into the classroom may help increase not only the quality of writing produced by students, but may also help encourage or increase student motivation. These findings are also supportive of what I found in my literature, discussing that students perform and understand better when they assess and reflect on their own work, as they become self-regulated writers.

In addition, the results of this study suggest that with a self-evaluative system, students' writing goals may shift towards improving writing quality for their self, rather than writing for a good grade. These findings, again, support literature on the benefits of deemphasizing grades. When grades are taken out of the picture, students must find a new goal to write for. As I found in my study, this new goal may be writing for one's self and improving one's own quality of writing.

In reflecting back on my research questions of: "How can I use self-evaluation to improve my students' writing skills?": "How does self-evaluation impact self-efficacy in writing?": and "How does self-evaluation impact motivation in writing?", I believe that my action research project helped me answer all three questions. Self-evaluations can be used in the classroom to improve student motivation, self-efficacy, and quality of writing. The student involvement in the self-evaluation process makes students become accountable for their own work. They direct their own goals and are responsible for obtaining those goals. Their motivation is shifted away from performing for the teacher or completing an assignment because they have to, and is pushed towards performing for their selves, which helps them to reach their own goals.

<div align="center">Implications and New Directions</div>

This action research project has been an incredible journey, however, it is not complete. Action research is a continuous cycle of planning, implementing and evaluating, and reflecting. For me, I am left to reflect on what happened in my study and on what I learned. This project has taught me that as a teacher, it is essential to get students more involved in not only planning, but also evaluating their own work. I learned that when students are involved and held responsible for their own work, they

tend to be more motivated and produce higher quality work. I also learned that taking the grade out of the picture or deemphasizing grades may help students shift their goals or motivation to write.

The process of action research itself has also helped me to grow as a teacher. Until now, I always thought that every lesson had to be perfect. I thought that every student had to learn and understand the concepts I was teaching, as I presented my lesson with flawless delivery. I would get upset when everything didn't go just as planned. I would aim for a list of goals and objectives, but when I didn't meet them all, I told myself I was a failure – and that was that. I was wrong! Teaching is a process. There is no ultimate failure for a lesson. Action research has taught that when one of my lessons doesn't go as planned, when not all of my students seem to fully grasp the concept that I am teaching, when my directions or delivery are just a little off key or unclear, or I make a mistake, I need to look at the situation and use it as a learning experience by evaluating the results, reflecting on what happened, and begin planning a modified or new strategy to reach my goals. As a teacher, the actions I take and lessons I develop and implement are all part of the action research cycle.

While my research helped me answer questions on exploring a possible strategy to improve student writing quality, motivation, and self-efficacy, it also posed new research questions that I would like to explore. One such question that I have is how the involvement of students with the self-evaluation process and the de-emphasis of grades can be used in subject areas other than writing. I also would like to explore the research topic addressing if and how self-evaluations affect students of different ability levels within a classroom.

So now, as I sit here as a teacher and think back on this process I began four months ago, I feel confident that I did find "the" topic for me to research; I feel confident that I was able to help both my students and myself as a teacher, in some way, learn and grow; I feel confident that I accomplished my goals and began the process of answering my questions; I feel confident that I now know what action research is and, as a teacher, the action research process will forever continue to navigate my journey.

References

Graham, S., & Harris, K. (2005). *Writing better*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks Publishing
Co.

Harris, K. R., Mason, L. H., Graham, S., & Saddler, B. (2002). Developing self-regulated
writers. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(2), 110-15.

Mills, G. (2007). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. Upper Saddle
River, NJ: Pearson.

Olina, Z., & Sullivan, H. J. (2004). Student self-evaluation, teacher evaluation, and
learner performance. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 52*(3),
5-22.

Perchemlides, N., & Coutant, C. (2004). Growing beyond grades. *Educational
Leadership, 62*(2), 53-56.

Phillips, D. K., & Carr, K. (2006). *Becoming a teacher through action research*. New
York: Routledge.

Sadler, B., & Andrade, H. (2004). The writing rubric. *Educational Leadership*, 62(2),
48-52.

Sadler, P. M., & Good, E. (2006). The impact of self- and peer-grading on student
learning. *Education Assessment, 11*(1), 1-31.

Schunk, D. H. (2003). Self-efficacy for reading and writing: Influence of modeling, goal
setting, and self-evaluation. *Reading and Writing Quarterly: Overcoming
Learning Difficulties, 19*(2), 159-72.

State of New Jersey Department of Education. (2006). Edward T. Hamilton 2005-06
school report card. In *New Jersey School Report Card*. Retrieved February 1,

2008, from

http://education.state.nj.us/rc/rc06/dataselect.php?datasection%5B0%5D=enviro

ment&atasection%5B1%5D=information&datasection%5B2%5D=performance

datasectionB3%5D=staff&datasection%5B4%5D=financial&c=07&d=5400&s=

20&lt=CD&st=CD

Voorhees Township School District. (2007). *About Hamilton School.* Retreived February

1, 2008, from E. T. Hamilton Elementary School Web Site:

http://www.voorhees.k12.nj.us/69511510141109/site/default.asp

Walker, B. J. (2003). The cultivation of student self-efficacy in reading and writing.

Reading and Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties, 19(2), 173-87.

Assent Form

Amanda Doyle
Rowan University
Candidate - MST - Elementary Education

What is research?

I am asking you to be in a research study. Research is a way to test new ideas. Research helps us learn new things.

Participating in research is your choice. You can say Yes or No. Whatever you decide is OK.

Why am I doing this research?

In my research study, I want to learn how to improve the writing skills of students and how to help motivate students to want to write.

I would love for you to be a part of my research so you can help me learn about how to be a better and more effective teacher.

What will happen in the research?

In my research, I will be interviewing students about their writing skills. I may videotape portions of our lessons and take observations to see how students go about writing. I will also use writing samples of students as information for my research to show improvement in writing skills. This research may last up to one month.

What are the good things that can happen from this research?

This research may help you and many other future students improve writing skills and increase motivation to write.

What are the risks that can happen from this research?

While being interviewed, you may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. However, you do not have to any answer any questions you don't want to. Any information given to me may be used in my research study. Your name will not be used on anything. A pseudonym or fake name will be used instead, to protect you.

What else should you know about the research?

Being in the research is your choice. You can say Yes or No. Either way is OK.

If you say Yes and change your mind later that is OK. You can stop being in the research at any time.

Take the time you need to make your choice. Ask me any questions you have. You can ask questions any time.

Signature of Researcher_____
Date_____

Student's Statement

The researcher has told me about the research. I had a chance to ask questions. I know I can ask questions any time. I want to be in the research.

Signature of Student_____
Date_____

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Amanda Doyle
Rowan University
Candidate - MST - Elementary Education

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the Education Department at Rowan University. I will be conducting an action research project as part of my master's program, concerning how to improve the writing process. I am requesting permission for your child to participate in this research. The goal of the study is to examine the use of self-evaluations in motivating and improving the quality of students' writing skills.

During this study, students may be interviewed about their writing skills. Any child who expresses a desire to not be interviewed does not have to participate. To observe the thought process of writing, parts of lessons may be videotaped. I will retain the videotapes at the conclusion of the study. Samples of students' work may also be used as data. To preserve each child's confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used to identify individuals. All data will be reported in terms of group results; individual results will not be reported.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in his/her class. At the conclusion of the study a summary of the group results will be made available to all interested parents. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me by email at ajdoyle@vt.edu. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Amanda Doyle

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child's teacher by Feb. 1.

___ I grant permission for my child _____to fully participate in this study, including videotaping.
___ I grant permission for my child _____to participate in this study, however, I do not wish for my child to be videotaped.
___ I do not grant permission for my child _____to participate in this study.

Parent/Guardian signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

Writing Survey

1.   Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

2.   Do you think you are good at writing? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

3.   How do you measure your writing abilities?

_____

_____

4.   When you write, do you re-read and go-over your work, often?

_____

_____

_____

5.   Do you care more about the grade you get on a writing assignment or the quality of your writing? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

Writing Survey, continued.

6.   When I get assignment a writing assignment, I feel… (circle a number)

0	1	2	3	4	5

not motivated   somewhat motivated   very motivated

7.   Rate how good of a writer you really think you are:

   0 (horrible, don't have skill) to **10** (excellent writer, always pleased with your work)

_____

8.   Would you like to become a better writer? Why or Why not?

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX D

Short Story Assignment

Short Story

You have an EXCITING assignment!!! You are going to create your own short story!
This story can be about anything you would like to write a story about. However, your
story must have the key elements of a short story.

- A short story has **characters**, a **setting**, and a **plot**.
- A short story often focuses on a **single incident or conflict**.
- The plot of a story includes the characters, setting, the **problem, attempts to solve the problem (or story events), a solution**, and an **outcome**.

For this assignment, you are going to be your own teacher. You are going to **set your own writing goals**. When you have completed your short story, you will even get the chance to **evaluate (assess or grade) your own work** with the teacher!

Before you begin writing, please complete the following prewriting organizers on your
short story. **Prewriting helps you plan and organize** your thoughts and ideas into a
solid picture (or story). Prewriting and planning are to **two most important things** to do
when writing!

Plot

Characters

Setting

APPENDIX E

Pre-Writing Evaluation

What Do You Think...

List some elements of a good short story (What do you think a good story should have?).

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

How do you plan to evaluate your writing progress? (How will you make sure you are on the right track to writing a good story?)

To keep track of my writing progress, I am going to:

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

Short Story Assignment, continued

Plot

Problem

Event #1

Event #2

Event #3

Solution

Outcome

Self-Evaluation Form

The Self-Evaluative Writing Process

Thoughts/Opinions?

Rank Motivation ( ) –

Rank writing quality ( ) –

Did knowing you were going to grade/evaluate own work affect your work?

Elements of a good short story:
-
-
-
-
-

To keep track of my writing progress, I am going to:
-
-
-
-
-

Do you feel you accomplished your goals? Why or why not?

What did you end up doing to keep track of your writing?

How do you feel your motivation to write was on this assignment, compared to other assignments?

Do you think this process helps you write? Why or why not?

Did you aim to get a good grade or more to write well? What was your motivation?

APPENDIX G

Writing Sample Rubric

	Inadequate Command	Limited Command	Partial Command	Adequate Command	Strong Command	
Score	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	
Content & Organization	· You do not have an opening and closing.	· You have an opening and/or closing that needs a lot of work (unclear, confusing, boring)	· You have an opening and/or closing that needs work (still too boring)	· You have a opening and/or closing that needs some work (you tried to use a "hook")	· You have an opening and/or closing that is well written (good hook, you wrapped up your story nicely)	
	· You do not stay on topic. You keep going off topic when you write.	· You stay on topic some of the time.	· You stay on topic most of the time.	· You stay on topic.	You stay on topic and all your ideas you wrote belong together.	
	· Your writing is not very organized. It doesn't seem like you planned what you wanted to write.	· You tried to organize your writing, but many of your ideas do not belong together.	· Your writing has some problems in organization. You tried to use some transition words but some of your ideas still do not belong together.	· Your writing is a most organized. Your ideas seem to "flow" together and you used transition words.	· Your writing is very organized. You ideas "flow" together and you used variation words to connect your ideas. Your writing sounds great when read a loud.	
	·You do not have enough details. Many details do not belong together	· You do not have enough details. Your details do not have enough description.	Many of your details are repeated and they do not have enough description.	·Some details are descriptive but others are not. You tried to used vivid language like similes or vivid verbs in some of your writing.	· Your writing has many different details that contain great description. You painted a picture. You used vivid language like similes or vivid verbs throughout your writing.	
Usage	·Many of the words you use to express your ideas do not make sense or aren't used correctly.	·Some of the words you use to express your ideas do not make sense or aren't used correctly.	·While many of the words you use are used well, you have problems using certain words correctly.	·Most of the words you use are used correctly, though there are still a few problems.	·You use words well. There are no/few words used incorrectly.	
Sentence Construction	· You have many sentences fragments and run-ons. Your sentences all start or end the same way.	·You have some sentences fragments and run-ons. Too many sentences start or end the same way.	·You have a few sentences fragments and run-ons. Some of your sentences start or end the same way.	·Most of your sentences are correctly written. A few of your sentences start or end the same way.	·You have many well-written sentences. Your sentences "flow" and are expressive and informative.	
Mechanics	·You make many grammatical errors. Your many errors make it hard to understand your ideas. (Let's use a grammar checklist!)	·You make quite a few grammatical errors. (Let's use a grammar checklist with a buddy!)	·You have some grammatical errors. You seem to make the same grammatical errors. (Review your grammar checklist!)	· You have a few grammatical errors. (Still review your grammar checklist)	·You have almost no grammatical errors. (Review your grammar checklist & make sure your work is perfect.	

Name: _____

Writing sample ___

Score ___

Comments: