Student perceptions regarding the use of rubrics in writing assignments

Lindsay C. O'Neill

Rowan University

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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE USE OF RUBRICS IN WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

by
Lindsay C. O’Neill

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Science in Teaching Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University July 1, 2007

Approved by ________________
Advisor

Date Approved ________________

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The purpose of this study is to explore student perceptions regarding the use of rubrics in writing assignments. This qualitative research study was conducted with 16 students in a first grade classroom. I have conducted 4 mini-lessons on different writing components with the class. As a class we created a scoring rubric that includes important parts of the assignment and a number scale to further weigh the importance. The students were a part of creating the rubric and were given the rubric prior to their writing assignment. During the assignment I observed how the students use their knowledge of the rubric to complete their writing assignment. Upon the completion of the assignment I asked the students questions about the rubric, if they liked it or not, and why. This research supports the idea that students feel better about a writing assignment knowing exactly what they will be graded on prior to the assignment and these implications are discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who believed in me and supported me through writing my thesis. This never would have been possible without the continuous love and support from my father who for the past six years always told me I could do it. My roommate Jill who survived a year during this process and still remained positive. My boyfriend Justin who will never stop believing in me. My extended family and friends who were always encouraging. I love you all. Dr. Hespe, thank you so much for your guidance and support and making this goal attainable for me.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

To this day I will never forget the feeling I felt when I received the grade for my first College Composition I paper. The tears welled into my eyes as I stared at the letter D written rather largely in bold red ink. I thought my paper was great; apparently I was wrong. I looked over my paper and saw only a few corrections and suggestions given by my teacher. I had no idea how she graded my paper or what exactly she was looking for. As the semester grew I found myself in similar situations, not really knowing what the teacher was looking for. I wrote and re-wrote papers, handed them in and just hoped I would get a good grade. This was first semester freshman year and already I felt like I would never make it. Just the thought of taking College Composition II that next semester made me sick.

For the first writing assignment the teacher explained what the topic was and then showed the class a model of a student’s paper who received a good grade on the assignment the previous year. Seeing that gave me a pretty good idea of what the teacher was expecting from our papers. I began to feel better about the assignment. Then the teacher handed out a paper that had a chart on it with numbers, descriptions of what the numbers represented and then broken into content sections. This was a little confusing to me. That was the first time I had ever seen or heard of a rubric.

My first impression of the rubric was that now I would have no excuse for writing a terrible paper. However, I found that while writing my paper I was fully aware of what the teacher expected from me. I could make sure that my paper included all of the qualities that a
good paper should, according to the rubric. To me having a rubric made the writing process less stressful and more meaningful. I thought to myself I hope every assignment from this point forward is accompanied with a rubric.

As it turned out I ended up having to retake my College Composition I class. I made sure to schedule it with the teacher I had for College Composition II. My reason for doing so, I knew he used rubrics.

Purpose Statement

In her rubrics and self assessment project, Andrade (2000 p.3) found that the students who received rubrics had more knowledge of what counts in good writing and of the criteria by which their essays were evaluated. The reason for this study is to find what effects, if any, rubrics have on students when they are given prior to a writing assignment. There is research to support how rubrics are favored by teachers for numerous reasons. Through this study I would like to find out how students feel about rubrics when they are given to them before they start a writing assignment.

A rubric is a tool that is used to show what specific criteria is expected in an assignment. Giving a rubric to students prior to an assignment will inform them of exactly what will be expected of them. A rubric will guide the student during the assignment and will be used as a reference by the teacher to justify the grade the student receives for that assignment. I will be conducting several mini-lessons on different story elements with the class. As a class we will come up with a scoring rubric that includes important parts of the assignment and a number scale to further weigh the importance. The students will be a part of creating the rubric and will be given the rubric prior to their writing assignment. During the assignment I will be observing how the students use their knowledge of the rubric to
complete their writing assignment. Upon the completion of the assignment I will be asking the students questions about the rubric, if they liked it or not, and why.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Through this study I would like to determine student perceptions regarding rubrics given to them prior to writing assignments. I will be conducting several mini-lessons on different story elements with the class. As a class we will come up with a scoring rubric that includes important parts of the assignment and a number scale to further weigh the importance. The students will be a part of creating the rubric and will be given the rubric prior to their writing assignment. During the assignment I will be observing how the students use their knowledge of the rubric to complete their writing assignment. Upon the completion of the assignment I will be asking the students questions about the rubric, if they liked it or not, and why.

Story of the Question

As I sat in the writer’s workshop with my cooperating practicum teacher I tried to blend in as much as possible. It was the first time that I had been to a professional workshop and I didn’t really know what to expect. I did not feel like I belonged. I would later come to find out I wasn’t really too different from the rest.

The only thing I was sure of was that I was going to try and get as much knowledge about writing as I could from this opportunity. About an hour or so into the presentation the presenter, Rosemary Howells, asked the group two questions. First she asked, “How many of you felt prepared as a first year teacher to teach writing?” To my surprise, only about one third of the teachers raised their hands. I on the other hand turned the question around in my head and asked myself, “If I was a first teacher how prepared do I feel to teach writing?” My
answer, not at all. Rosemary surveyed the room and prepared us for her next question. "Ok, Ok. Now seeing the number of hands raised, how many of you felt prepared to assess your students' writing?" The hands began to fall. I could hardly believe the number of hands that were still raised. In my mind all I could think was, "If I don't feel prepared to teach writing, there was no way I was prepared to assess it." By the showing of hands I learned that many of the teachers were in the same boat as I. It was at that moment that I wondered how students' writing was being assessed if there were so many teachers who felt unprepared assessing. Are those students feeling the way I felt during my first College Composition class?

This was when I thought about how much the rubric helped me. If the teachers are making their students aware of what is expected by using a rubric the assessment process would be easy. A rubric can be made as a class so that prior to the assignment the students know exactly what is expected and can use the rubric to evaluate their work themselves. Then when it comes time to assess the writing the rubric can be used to assess each of the writing pieces based on the specific criteria included in the rubric.

After the workshop I became interested in student writing and how it is being assessed. With this interest I want to dig deeper and find what happens when students are given a rubric for writing. I remembered how having a rubric to refer to during my writing process helped tremendously. Through my research I want to find out if it will help younger students as well.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter two of this thesis includes a review of related literature. The context of the study and the research design is included in Chapter three. Also in Chapter three is an
explanation of how the data will be analyzed and interpreted in the study. Chapter four is an overview of the study’s findings and an analysis of the data. The thesis concludes with Chapter five which provides a summary of the findings, the conclusions of the study, the limitations of study and recommendations for future research.
"Rubrics have become a very popular and recognizable trend in education" (Andrade 2000). Rubrics are often used when scoring student writing pieces. When compared to "traditional forms of assessment," Andrade 2000 states that rubrics provide students with more informative feedback about their strengths and areas in need of improvement. Through this study, I would like to discover whether academic performance improves when students are given a rubric prior to a writing assignment. This review of literature focuses on research about rubrics. The first section describes what a rubric is, the origin, current definition, and components of a rubric. The second section discusses the ways that rubrics guide instruction. The third section discusses the validity and reliability of rubrics. Finally, the fourth section addresses how rubrics can be helpful to teachers and students.

What is a Rubric?

The word rubric originated from the Latin word for red, ruber. In medieval times a rubric was a set of instructions or commentary, written in red, attached to a law or liturgical service. This was how a rubric became known as something used to instruct people (Wiggins 1998). The more current definition of a rubric given by Goodrich (1996) states that a rubric is a scoring tool that lists certain criteria for a piece of work. A rubric also articulates different stages of quality for each criterion from excellent to poor. In her article “In Defense of Rubrics,” Spandel (2006) states that “when thoughtfully crafted and used with discretion and understanding, rubrics can be among the most useful instructional tools we have” (p.1).
There are many components that make a rubric. Moskal (2003) suggests that when writing a rubric the teacher should clearly state the purpose of the activity and provide goals and objectives to guide the development of both the performance assessment and the scoring rubric. In his book, *Education Assessment*, Wiggins (1998) suggests that rubrics contain a scale or levels of possible points to be assigned in scoring work. Numbers are most often used to create the scale. Wiggins then goes on to say for each level of performance there are descriptors to ensure reliable and unbiased scoring. Under each descriptor indicators are provided to give an example of what is expected at each level. A rubric is written to inform what and how certain areas are going to be graded on. Wiggins (1998) states that a rubric should reflect the most tangible and appropriate differences of quality between performances.

Using Rubrics to Guide Instruction

“Rubrics teach as well as evaluate” (Saddler & Andrade 2004, p.1). Rubrics can be used to teach specific criteria to students and at the same time evaluate their work. If a rubric clearly communicates the expectations for an assignment and describes high-quality work it can be used to assist students in the planning and goal setting process (Saddler & Andrade 2004). Saddler and Andrade also say that clear and accessible instructional rubrics can give students repeated practice with planning, revising, and editing. Spandel 2006 states that “using a rubric well is an interactive, interpretive process, in which a teacher’s wisdom, insight, experience, and judgment play an important role.” In support, Schirmer & Bailey (2000) found that use of the rubric as a teaching strategy significantly improved several writing traits. All of the writing traits that were improved were found in the rubric they provided. Schirmer and Bailey’s (2000) findings also suggest that teachers can use a writing
rubric to help their students to recognize some qualities of writing and incorporate those qualities into their own compositions.

Spandel (2006) states that “students who learn to think about such issues as clarity and detail, leads and conclusions, voice and audience are in a much better position to revise their writing with purpose and skill (p.20).” Rubrics that address these issues in clear language show students the kinds of things writers do when they revise. It is up to the teacher to make sure all of those concepts are understood. This can be done with the help of a rubric. Schirmer and Bailey (2000) suggest that as students become skilled at including general qualities of writing, the teacher can then create rubrics based on the genre that the students are writing or specific aspects of a writing assignment. The study conducted by Schirmer, Bailey and Fitzgerald (1999) which explored whether a writing assessment rubric could be used as an effective teaching strategy with children who are deaf, supports that statement saying as an instructional strategy, teachers can individualize rubrics by student, class, age level, genre, or assignment to target specific developmental needs of students. “As teaching tools, they (rubrics) provide the teacher with a bridge between instruction and assessment, a bridge that is traversed back and forth. The teacher assesses the child’s writing abilities and creates a rubric that focuses the child’s attention on traits identified in the assessment as needing improvement” (Schirmer, Bailey & Fitzgerald).

Validity and Reliability

In order for a rubric to be successful it should be valid and reliable. In his book Teaching and Assessing Writing, White (1994) states that no measure, however valid it may seem, can be used for assessment if it is not fair. White (1994) defines validity as measuring what you say you are measuring, nothing else, and that you have really thought through the
importance of your measurement in considerable detail. Making sure you are clear on what it is you want to teach should also be valid. Validity forces us to ask what we are really measuring, and it also forces us to ask what we are teaching and why (White 1994). There is difficulty in coming up with a valid assessment when trying to develop writing as a socializing and individualizing discipline (White 1994). It is hard to actually teach students to become a part of a community and be creative through their writing; this is something they must learn on their own. “Rubric design should consider not just the appropriateness and validity of the performance task but the appropriateness and validity of the criteria and descriptors for discrimination in relation to that task” (Wiggins 1998).

According to Wiggins (1998), statisticians tell us that reliability is the upper limit for validity, that no assessment device can be more valid than it is reliable. The rubric allows valid implications about performance to the degree that what is scored is what is essential to performance, not what is easily seen (Wiggins 1998). This also depends on who is using the rubric to score. “Rubrics allow reliable scoring to the degree that evaluative language (excellent, poor) and comparative language (better than, worse than) is transformed into highly descriptive language that helps judges to recognize the salient and distinctive features of each level performance” (Wiggins 1998, p.185). Whittaker, Salend and Duhaney (2001) state that rubrics must be continually evaluated and developed if they are to achieve their intended outcomes and be useful to all the audiences for which they are designed. Therefore, it is important to examine the rubric’s effect on students, teachers, and other relevant parties.

How Rubrics Help

Teachers
Rubrics have become a very popular and recognizable trend in education (Andrade, 2000). They are being used by teachers, students and parents. Andrade (2000) states that rubrics make assessing student work quick and efficient. They also help teachers justify the grades they assign to parents. This statement is supported by Whittaker, Salend and Duhaney who state, “Because rubrics can make grading more objective and consistent, they can assist teachers in explaining their grading of student work to family members. Since family members can use rubrics to assist their children with assignments, sharing rubrics with family members can be a good way to communicate with them and involve them in the learning process (p.2).” Jackson and Larkin (2002) also suggest that rubrics not only provide a framework for teachers and parents, but they also help students to understand the expectations of an assignment beforehand.

Rubrics can also assist teachers in focusing on what it is they are looking for. Wiggins (1998) states that if we are clear about performance and the accomplishing of our goals, we will keep adjusting our criteria and standards as we go. Teachers who use rubrics can always refer back to them in order to see what it is students are having a hard time with. If there is a pattern of weakness shown in a particular area, teachers know that that is something they need to work more on. In her book *Designing and Using Rubrics for Reading and Language Arts K-6*, Groeber (2007) states that pulling out information on an assessment rubric provides teachers with opportunities to encourage students to develop their specific strengths while offering suggestions on how to target areas of weakness with tangible strategies. “Teachers like to use them to assess student work, parents appreciate them when helping their children with homework, and students often request them when given a new assignment” (Andrade, 2000). Though it is important that rubrics are helpful to
teachers and parents it is the students that must benefit from the rubric as well for it to be valuable.

Students

Rubrics are useful in how they help students become more thoughtful judges of the quality of their own and others work (Goodrich, 1996). In her book Groeber (2007) suggests that students become actively involved in their learning when they see a rubric at the beginning of an activity because they are aware of what the teacher expects from them before they take on the assignment. In her study of the effects of instructional rubrics on learning to write, Andrade (2001) found that simply handing out and explaining a rubric was associated with higher scores.

In her study which focused on the effect of instructional rubrics and rubric-referenced self-assessment on the development of seventh and eighth grade students’ writing skills and their understanding of the qualities of good writing, Andrade (2000) found that differences in the study suggested that the students who received rubrics had more knowledge of what counts in good writing and of the criteria by which their essays were evaluated. Andrade (2000) also found in her study that through the use of instructional rubrics students had a better idea of what is considered good writing beyond the recognition of mechanics and neatness.

Andrade and Du (2005) conducted a study to find student perspectives on rubric-referenced assessment. Through this study they were able to administer questionnaires to the students involved in the study to gain feedback. The study revealed that students who had received rubrics tended to identify more of the criteria by which writing is evaluated, suggesting that they were developing an understanding of the qualities of effective writing as
defined by the rubrics they received. The students replied that they liked the fact that rubrics let them know “what’s expected,” and contrasted it with the “guessing game” they felt they had to play when teachers did not provide a rubric or some sort of guidelines for an assignment (Andrade & Du, 2005). Students also noted that rubrics help identify strengths and weaknesses in their own work when used to give feedback, and that knowing “what counts” made grades seem fair (Andrade & Du 2005). In the study they found that some of the students reported using rubrics to plan an approach to an assignment. Since the students had an idea of what was expected of them and what they would be evaluated on they could think of how they wanted to approach the assignment. After receiving several rubric scores students could start to see a pattern of their strengths and weaknesses. They knew what they had to spend more time on and what they didn’t. Andrade and Du (2005) found that the “participants in the study believed there were positive outcomes associated with rubric use, including better and fairer grades, improvements in the quality of their work, and less anxiety about assignments (p.5).” Spandel (2006) states, “A rubric is ultimately a two way commitment, a reader-writer contract that says if you write with thought and with heart, I will understand and I will hear you. I will follow where you lead and reflect on the connections you make. I will allow you to teach me (p.21).”

The research provides a foundation for examining rubrics and evidence of their usefulness to students prior, during, and after the writing process. While the research is helpful, there is still more to be discovered. Through this study I would like to determine student perceptions regarding rubrics given to them prior to writing assignments. Knowing what a rubric is, the components that make up a rubric, how a rubric can guide instruction,
and how rubrics help are all important factors to this study to find what happens when
students are given rubrics prior to a writing assignment.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Description of General Methodology

This study is a qualitative empirical teacher research study. According to the
definition given by Creswell (2003), a qualitative approach most often collects information
through field observations and interviews and searches to find reasons from the stand point of
who is being observed. The research is doing exactly that, it will be conducted through
observations and interviews to determine student perceptions regarding rubrics given to them
prior to writing assignments.

Context

This research study will be conducted in Pineland Township School District (pseudonym
given to protect district identity). Demographic information regarding the district is set forth
below.

Total Enrollment: 6,278
White: 34%
Black: 55%
Hispanic: 8%

Special Education Enrollment: 1,191
Ages 3-5: 117
Ages 6-21 1,074
Total 1,191 (19% of Total Enrollment)
White: 32%
Black: 60%
Hispanic: 6%
Low Income:
Grades: PK-2 673
Grades: 3-5 501
Grades: 6-8 537
Grades: 9-12 375

Student performance data for Pineland Township School District I set forth in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Example of Student Performance by Demographic Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: New Jersey Department of Education Data Collection 2006
The Pineland Elementary School (pseudonym given to protect school identity) is made up of approximately 402 students from grades Pre Kindergarten to second grade. There are approximately 18 subjects who will be participating, all of whom are in my Co-Teach first grade class. I interact with this class on a daily basis assuming the everyday teaching responsibilities. Subjects are both male and female between the ages of six and seven. Three of the students have an Individualized Education Plan and receive services daily outside of the classroom. Three of the students are in the gifted program and participate in the gifted services three times a week. Five students in the class are white, 11 black and one Latino. This class has nine female and nine male students.

Procedure

I will be conducting a writing unit with my class, the students will be asked to complete a writing assignment based on the specific content areas taught. I will conduct four mini-lessons with the class focusing on detail, punctuation, capitalization and staying on topic. Each of the lessons will be about 30 minutes in length and the students will be given examples of each and an opportunity to work on that specific skill independently. After the mini-lessons are taught I will then move into the writing assignment. On the first day of the writing assignment I will introduce the book My Friend John, by Charlotte Zolotow. I will conduct a picture walk and a think aloud prior to reading the story to brainstorm some ideas of what it means to be a friend. After reading the book I will identify one of the characters from the book, John, and lead a discussion where the character is described. Then I will use questioning to elicit specific qualities about the character and what makes him a good friend. I will chart these qualities so the class can see them. On the second day I will review the activity from the previous day. With help from the class, I will model writing a descriptive
paragraph about the character from the book. I will write the paragraph in large print on chart paper. I will model the kinds of thinking that go into decisions about what to write, using correct spelling, punctuation and capitalization, having detail and staying on topic. Then I will read the completed paragraph to the class. Next I will ask the students to think of a friend they would like to write about. I will ask a few students to describe their friend. Then I will have the students describe their friend to a partner. The students will write the name of their friend on a piece of writing paper that will be collected. The third day is when the students are given the writing prompt. They are to write a paragraph about their friend. As a class I will review the rubric with them. I used ice cream scoops to accompany the scoring of the rubric. A “one scoop” paragraph has only one detail, incorrect punctuation and capitalization and is not on topic. I will model a “one scoop” paragraph to the students. A “two scoop” paragraph includes two details, only some correct capitalization and punctuation and not all of the sentences are on topic. I will model a “two scoop” paragraph to the students. Then I will explain that a “three scoop” paragraph has three details, correct punctuation and capitalization and all of the sentences are on topic. I will model the “three scoop” paragraph to the students. I will ask the students what scoop paragraph they want to write. I will also display the rubric and give each student a copy for their use during the writing process. I will tell the students that they can refer to the rubric at any time. The students will have a chance to conference and revise to assure their paragraphs are their best work. Their work will be graded using the rubric. The unit should take anywhere from one to two and a half weeks to successfully complete. I have included the writing prompt and rubric in Appendix A.
Data Sources

Data collection will be collected right after administering the writing assignment and rubric. The data sources that will be collected include observations and interviews. This data will be collected in the classroom. I will be observing the students during the time the unit is being taught. I will be looking for different ways the students use the rubric, if at all. Classroom Observations will be kept in a journal for my own personal records. Observation will be conducted during the three days of the actual writing process. The most salient things I will be looking for is how the students plan their writing, and if the students use the rubric to guide them in any way during the duration of the assignment. The students will be interviewed after the unit is completed and will answer questions pertaining to their opinion of how the rubric affected them during the assignment.

Table 2: Student Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1. Did you like creating a rubric as a class? Why or why not.</th>
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<td>2. Did you use the rubric during your writing assignment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Did knowing what you were going to be graded on before you started your writing help you plan your writing and write better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Would you like to use a rubric again when writing? Would you like to use a rubric for any other subjects?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Is there anything else you would like to say about using the rubric?</td>
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</tbody>
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Data Analysis

The data will be recorded and compiled to identify trends and patterns of student’s use of the rubric during the writing assignment. The most important thing I will be looking for when analyzing the data is if the rubric had an affect on the Students writing. During the
writing process I will be monitoring the students’ use of the rubric. Through the student interviews I will be looking to see if they thought the rubric was helpful, if they used the rubric to plan out their assignment, and if the rubric helped them to produce a better writing piece.

The data collected will be kept confidentially in a secure place for three years after research completion. The names of the district, school, and students have been changed to ensure their identity is kept confidential.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

The study collected data regarding 16 students. The writing unit was given to all 18 students in the class however two students did not have completed parent consent forms. Of the 16 participating students eight were male and eight were female. The students were each given a number to keep their identity secure.

During the three days of the actual writing process I observed the students and kept notes in a journal to mark the ways the students were using the rubric. I was only making notes of how and at what point the students were referring to the rubric during the writing task. Table 3 is an overview of my observations.

Table 3: Classroom Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations Day 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Student asks if journal can be used to do a pre write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All students use journal to pre write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 7 students read over rubric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Several students look at rubric displayed on the front board.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations Day 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Students begin writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 6 students refer to rubric during their writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 9 students conference and revise writing using their rubric.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• 5 students hand in finished work.

Observations Day 3

• 7 students conference and revise.
• 5 of the 7 students use rubric to help revise.
• 11 students hand in finished work

Upon the completion of the writing assignment each student was asked several questions about their use and feelings on the rubric. They had an opportunity to answer the question and give any comments they had about the question. The questions were given to the students orally while I recorded the results. Table 4 is an overview of the questions and the student’s answers.

Table 4: Interview Question Results

**Question 1**

Did you like creating a rubric as a class? Why or why not?

15 students answered yes
1 student answered no

The following comments were given by the students as to why they liked creating the rubric. Following the comments is the student’s number.

• Because it was fun (1,2,4,8,9,10,16)
• Helps us learn more (5)
• Learned new words (6)
• It was important to know (11)
• It taught us what you wanted us to do (12)
• Helped me with adding details (13)
• Helped me make better sentences (14)

The following comments were given by the students as to why they did not like creating the rubric. Following the comments is the student’s number.

• I liked doing the writing but the rubric took too much time (3)

**Question 2**

Did you use the rubric during your writing assignment?

15 students answered yes
1 student answered no

Student #3 was the student who answered no

**Question 3**

Did knowing what you were going to be graded on before you started your writing help you plan your writing and write better?

15 students answered yes
1 student answered no

Student #7 was the student who answered no

**Question 4**

Would you like to use a rubric again when writing? Would you like to use a rubric for any other subjects?

For the first part of the question

13 students answered yes
1 student answered no
2 students answered maybe
Student #3 was the student who answered no
Students #2 and 10 were the students who answered maybe
For the second part of the question
13 students answered yes
3 students answered no
Students #3, 14, and 15 were the students who answered no

**Question 5**
Is there anything else you would like to say about using the rubric?

- It’s a good idea but I don’t want to use it (3)
- We could use it for graphing in math (4)
- Sometimes I want to do better than 3 scoops (7)

The results of the study show that there was only one student who significantly showed disinterest in the rubric. Student three answered no to questions one, two and four, both parts. He commented in question 1 that he liked the rubric, however thought it took too much time. For question three which asked if knowing what you were going to be graded on before you started your writing help you plan your writing and write better, student three answered yes. Also, in question five student three said that the rubric is a good idea but didn’t want to use it. The table below shows the results from questions one, two and three supporting the usefulness of rubrics during the assignment.
Table 5: Questions 1 to 3 results

For each question 15 students answered yes and one student answered no. These results are significant because the questions asked if they liked creating the rubric, using the rubric, and found it helpful knowing what they would be graded on prior to the assignment being graded.
Conclusions

Through this study I set out to discover student perceptions of using a rubric during a writing assignment. The data collected during the course of the study was discussed in Chapter four using observations and interview questions. The data, especially the tables in chapter four, helped to show that the students liked the rubric and used it during their writing assignment. Table 3 notes that there was substantial use of the rubric during the third day observation period. On day one, seven students looked over their copy of the rubric and several other students observed the rubric on the board. Day two, six students referred to the rubric during their writing and nine students used the rubric to revise their work. On day three, five students use the rubric to revise. Table 5 specifically shows the results from questions one through three which strongly support student use of the rubric. Each question 15 students answered yes and one answered no. These results are significant because the questions asked if they liked creating the rubric, using the rubric, and found it helpful knowing what they would be graded on prior to the assignment being graded. It was clear from the observations and surveys that students had a positive perception of rubrics as a way to improve their work.

Connecting with the Literature

Saddler & Andrade (2004) stated that if a rubric clearly communicates the expectations for an assignment and describes high-quality work it can be used to assist
students in the planning and goal setting process. I too found through the observations that the rubric was useful to the students during their prewriting period of the assignment. It gave the students a framework to build from. Many of the students referred to the rubric during their pre-write and their actual writing. In her book, Groeber (2007) suggests that students become actively involved in their learning when they see a rubric at the beginning of an activity because they are aware of what the teacher expects from them before they take on an assignment. This observation is consistent with Question 3 which asked if knowing what you were going to be graded on before you started your writing helped you plan your writing and write better, out of 16 students only one answered no.

Limitations

The study was done at the end of the year which allows for no further use of the rubric in another assignment. This was the first time that any student in the class had been exposed to a rubric, what it is and what it can be used for. This study was made up of data that only looked at using a rubric for one writing assignment. Also, the sample size and grade level were limited to just 18 students in a first grade classroom. I found these to be limitations that could have enriched my study and results.

Recommendations for Future Research

If another teacher researcher wanted to further explore this topic I would suggest starting in the beginning of the year so that you can use the rubric multiple times and in multiple subjects. This will give you a better idea of what works and what doesn’t regarding the rubric components. The rubric is helpful with writing assignments but may not be as helpful with a science project.
Using two different samples of students and giving one group a rubric and not the other group would be a way to find out if the rubric actually helps to improve their scores compared to the group that did not use the rubric.

Schirmer, Bailey and Fitzgerald (1999) state that teachers can individualize rubrics by student, class, age level, grade, genre, or assignment to target specific developmental needs of students. I would also suggest allowing the students to become active participants in the creation of the rubrics. As a teacher you will be able to find out what really matters to them and also add things that they need to know. Together you will create a tool that will be helpful and useful for everyone.

Implications

The implications of this study are directly related to the education field and more specifically to the rubric assessment tool. Through this research I was able to find out student perceptions on using a rubric during a writing assignment. I found that the students used the rubric to help them plan for their writing as well as during their writing and to revise their writing. There are so many different ways to assess a student's work. Using a rubric is a great, subjective way to involve the students and their learning into the grading process. It is also a way to find out what the student needs to work on and through the rubric you can pin point that specific area of need. Spandel (2006) states, "A rubric is ultimately a two way commitment, a reader-writer contract that says if you write with thought and with heart, I will understand and I will hear you. I will follow where you lead and reflect on the connections you make. I will allow you to teach me (p.21)." Teachers can create the rubric to apply to different subject matter and to specific areas within that. They can work along with the students to decide what is going to be graded on and how much it will count for. If
teachers take the time to work with their students to create a rubric I think they would also find its effectiveness and successfulness just as I have found through this study.
REFERENCES


*Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 10(3).


65(3), 383-97.


APPENDIX A

Friends Forever Writing Rubric

1 Scoop

1 detail

Incorrect punctuation

Incorrect capitalization

Sentences not on topic

2 Scoops

2 details

Some punctuation

Some capitalization

Most sentences on topic

3 Scoops

3 details

Correct punctuation

Correct capitalization

All sentences on topic
APPENDIX B

Friends Forever Writing Prompt

Write a paragraph about a friend. Your paragraph must include at least 3 details. The punctuation and capitalization should all be correct and all of the sentences must be on topic. You will be given the rubric to guide you during the assignment as well as for revisions. The rubric will be used to grade your paragraph when completed.