

FOURTH GRADERS EXPERIENCE A WRITING RUBRIC INSTRUMENT

MASTER'S PROJECT

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Master in Education**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter:					
I.	INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM	.	.	.	1
	Purpose of the Study	.	.	.	1
	Problem Statement	.	.	.	2
	Assumptions	.	.	.	2
	Limitations	.	.	.	3
	Definition of Terms	.	.	.	3
II.	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	.	.	.	4
	Reasons for Peer Assessment	.	.	.	4
	Reasons for a Rubric	.	.	.	6
	Reasons to Avoid Grades	.	.	.	9
III.	PROCEDURE	.	.	.	11
	Subjects	.	.	.	11
	Setting	.	.	.	11
	Data Collection	.	.	.	12
	Data Collecting Instrument	.	.	.	13
	Administration of Data Collecting Instrument	.	.	.	15
IV.	RESULTS	.	.	.	17
	Presentation of the Results	.	.	.	17
	Discussion of the Results	.	.	.	18
V.	SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	.	.	.	19
	Summary	.	.	.	19
	Conclusions	.	.	.	20
	Recommendations	.	.	.	21
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	.	.	.	22

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose for the Study

Our traditional educational system has based evaluation on percentages and letter grades. Students complete assignments that are evaluated by the teacher who measures their performance by a single letter. Papers are returned, discussed and this routine is repeated daily throughout the year. Approximately four times a year teachers average these grades and report to the parents in some form.

Are teachers evaluating students with letter grades because of administrators, parents, or habit? Is assigning a letter grade a meaningful form of evaluation? Do grades aid a student and encourage them to set individual goals for themselves?

The author believes that it is difficult to measure an assignment with a single letter. This system can promote negative competition that can discourage cooperation and lead to low self-esteem. Most importantly grades do not promote understanding and encourage growth.

The author believes that children should be directly involved in the evaluation process. The rubric form of evaluation allows students to assist in creating a system of evaluation and take part in assessing their own work, as well as the work of their peers. This form of assessment promotes cooperation between peers as well as between the students and the teacher. A rubric clearly reveals the individual

strengthened weaknesses of each student. Most importantly the children can discover a specific area that needs improvement and begin to take steps toward a reachable goal.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to analyze the opinions of fourth grade students toward using a student designed writing rubric instrument.

Assumptions

In order to carry out this study the author made the following assumptions. First, the author assumed that the student would fully understand how to use and interpret the rubric evaluation. Second, the author assumed that the questionnaire would measure what it was designed to measure. Third, the author assumed that the responses toward the writing rubric were honest.

Limitations

The author found several limitations effecting this study. One limitation was the fact that there is no control group. A second limitation was the duration of the study was limited to a six week period. This may not be an adequate length of time for students to completely understand how to evaluate and interpret results. A third limitation was the sample size was limited to eighteen students. A forth limitation was the students history of evaluation could effect the attitude they have during this study.

Definition of Terms

A rubric is a written standard for grading, generally expressed numerically and accompanied by specific describers of work at each number (Winbury, 1993).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Reasons for Peer Assessment

Peer assessment helps students learn skills and gain self-knowledge (Culp, 1992). It is important at any age level for students to be able to work as a team. Each member has special talents that can be contributed to a group effort. Children are capable of understanding that they each have strengths and weaknesses. Often times they can relate better by hearing constructive criticism from a peer rather than a teacher. In best situations the peer is describing similar qualities that a teacher has referred to in the past. This only emphasizes areas the students needs to take a closer look at. In order for peer assessment to be successful, each child must understand how the evaluation process is to completed. When completed correctly both the writer and evaluator have learned valuable information. The writer has been made aware of their strengths and weaknesses. At this point they begin revising their writing according to what the evaluator has suggested. The evaluator has benefited from the experience of reading someone else's ideas and has been exposed to another point of view. A peer evaluation can help each member learn more about themselves.

Peer assessment helps students develop a sense of audience; students are exposed to a variety of styles; students are motivated to revise writing; and students develop a sense of community (Gere, 1985). Students that critique each others work spend most of their time focused on the content of writing. They develop a language that allows them to communicate about their writing style and audience. Theorists have found that speech is a vital prelude to writing. Collaborative learning allows students to develop better critical thinking skills and encourages students continued work on a piece of writing. Students responses to each other usually fall into one of three categories: encouragement, opinions on content, and suggestions for improvement. As students begin taking part of the responsibility of assessment, this frees the teacher from serving as the sole authority over the writing process.

Peer assessment helps contribute to cooperative interaction that improves students idea of audience, purpose, and dictation (Lovejoy, 1987). Writing and revising are often viewed as separate stages in the writing process. Many children believe revising is the final stage in the writing process that involves correcting spelling and mechanics. When including peers with the revising stage, students begin to look beyond surface changes and into the content and meaning of writing. As students read each others pieces they are encouraged to be informative, honest, clear, and brief. By doing this, the conversations are purposeful and allow for the writer and reader to discuss improvements. As peers review each other's writing they become aware of their strengths and weaknesses. When a writer realizes a peer is going to assess their writing, they begin to anticipate questions the reader might ask. They

begin to develop an awareness of the audience and therefore their responsibilities as a writer.

Peer assessment helps students feel secure during a conference and allows them to take their writing more seriously as a result (Harris, 1992). Most teachers would agree that evaluating writing can be a difficult process. Conferences are important yet require a great deal of class time. Peers can prepare each other before a conference by reviewing each others work. Classmates can have discussions and share insights about each others work. When a student is realizes their writing will be shared with a peer, they remember past advise and give careful attention to these areas. Working with a peer to make adjustments to writing before a conference with a teacher gives each student an opportunity to improve their work. When a students work together on a piece of writing, they feel more secure with their finished product.

Reasons for a Rubric

The rubric helps individuals focus on the contents of their writing (Gere, 1985). Although a rubric contains many categories, the most important area to focus upon is the content area. The students is made aware of how content needs to be presented and organized. As they begin to organize their ideas and begin writing the rubric is used as a reminder to keep them focused on the content of their work. Without proper guidance students may dwell too long on mechanics and spelling in a rough draft. The rubric reminds children to develop their ideas before spending time on procedures that should take place during proof reading. There is a place on

the rubric for categories that include mechanics and spelling. It simply is not a writer's main focus when first creating a piece of writing.

The rubric helps to score creativity, writing, and organizing (Culp, 1992). Students need to know their own strengths and weaknesses. Although this is traditionally pointed out by teachers, this evaluation can effectively be accomplished by peers using a rubric. The score sheet needs to be clearly explained to the class with the understanding that it is to be completed with honesty. As a student reviews a piece of writing they need to focus on the organization, creativity, and overall writing ability. As writing is being evaluated, it is important peers carefully look at the piece as a whole. Within the writing strong points as well as weak points are noted. As the writer reviews their rubric score in each area, they can easily decide on an area that needs improvements. Adjustments can be immediately incorporated into the current piece of writing. As children begin their next writing assignment they are encouraged to review past rubrics to remember areas they are working to improve.

The rubric helps students determine what is expected by the teacher in the areas of content, structure, language, and mechanics (McCarthy, 1987). Students experience a variety of settings where they are presented with different examples of speaking and writing. For this reason, it is vital that the teacher make clear what constitutes positive ways of writing in their own classroom setting. Requirements and expectations in writing need to be made clear so students understand what is expected in a finished product. Within a class there needs to be a common understanding of how writing is to be evaluated in relation to the classes or teachers standards. When this is accomplished, "students no longer have to waste their time figuring out what the

teacher wants." They already know what is expected and are able to focus on areas that need improvement.

The rubric helps introduce and evaluate a student's piece of work (Schultz, 1986). Introducing the rubric before writing clearly states the characteristics that are expected in a paper to earn a certain score. As the writer is creating a piece they are able to periodically refer to this list to remind themselves of their goals. After the student writes the paper the evaluator chooses numerical values to demonstrate success achieved on each of the characteristics. The numerical values are helpful in assessing specific traits in the paper. When children use a rubric they are forced to isolate certain components in their writing that need special attention. This allows students the opportunity to directly focus on individual goals in later writing.

The rubric helps demonstrate a student's strengths and weaknesses (Routman, 1991). When teachers present students and parents with rubrics they are able to clearly understand criteria used to determine success or failure. Knowing the teacher's expectations provides each student with equal opportunity of success. After writing has been evaluated with a rubric students can immediately judge their writing performance. Usually a teacher will take the time to have a quick conference further explaining results. At this point the student and adult celebrate the strengths and begin to make individual goals to improve weaknesses. Goals need to be realistic and changing throughout the year.

Reasons to Avoid Grades

The first reason to avoid grades is that students are not motivated when teachers use grades (Johnson, 1983). There are a variety of ways to involve students in the assessment process without even involving the issue of grades. The students and teacher need to have a common understanding of the purpose of assessment as well as it's relationship demonstrating the students knowledge to subject matter. In order for the assessment process to be effective records and reports need to be kept by students and teachers. It is necessary to have these written records to provide a base in organizing a students progress. As students and teachers create and review records and reports it is important for everyone involved to realize that there is some personal judgment involved in assessment. This is when communication between students and the teachers is vital. Throughout this process emphasis is placed on progress not letter grades. Therefore top students are motivated to achieve even more, while struggling students achieve smaller reachable goals.

The second reason to avoid grades is that when parents and teachers believe grades determine success, many children turn out to become underachievers (Steinberg, 1993). Parents and teachers are accustomed to using grades and expect them to demonstrate a child's ability. In turn children unconsciously develop an attitude or internal belief about their abilities. Underachievers and overachievers each have views about their intelligence, responses to difficult tasks, and rewards the expect from schoolwork. Children with high intelligence can be so focused on high performance that they can avoid learning new material if it involves the possibility of

error or failure. In turn these children are limiting themselves from expanding their knowledge into unknown areas. Students who are classified as underachievers feel they have been born with less ability that effects how smart they are. In this situation low self-esteem leads to low performance in academic areas.

The third reason to avoid grades is that unfair grading makes students lose interest in gaining further knowledge (Blynt, 1992). When teachers assign arbitrary grades they are categorizing their students and pointing out their shortcomings. Students that earn A's feel their learning can stop. They a have already achieved the highest score. Students who receive C's and D's often feel inadequate and begin to fear and writing assignment. In this way grades do not encourage students to continue writing and learning. Instead teachers need to nurture students' growth and the evaluation system is a part of this process. As students begin to view writing as real, the importance of grades diminishes. When this occurs evaluation simply becomes honest responses from a reader. Teachers need to rate a students growth, productivity, performance, and interest when evaluating a piece of writing.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Subjects

The study was conducted with eighteen fourth grade students in a private country day school. The students consisted of five girls and thirteen boys. Although there were mixed academic abilities, the children were all working around on a fifth grade curriculum.

Setting

School. The private school was an urban, forty-five year old Preschool through twelfth grade facility that included eight hundred and twenty-five students. Two hundred and ninety of the total students were enrolled in the lower school, Preschool through fourth grade.

Community. The private school was located in a fast developing city in central Ohio. The city was located near freeways, an international airport, and was a desirable location for family and business.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collecting Instrument. Before the study can began the author first created a rubric instrument with the class. The first step in this process was to brainstorm with the children what criteria was important in a final draft of writing. Areas that were discussed included punctuation, organization, neatness, creative ideas, and vocabulary. During the second step, the author organized the children's criteria into categories that could easily be evaluated. Third, the author explained to the class how their writing would be evaluated using the standards they created. Each category would be evaluated numerically one through five, with one being the strongest score.

The author demonstrated to the class exactly how to evaluate a piece of writing using the standards they created. After this demonstration children practiced scoring their own writing as well as their peer's writing. After a peer or teacher had evaluated a piece of writing a quick conference took place explaining the score sheet. Although, this was not always necessary because the score sheet automatically showed the students strengths and weaknesses. After the children understood how this form of evaluation works, the rubric became a regular form of evaluation for their writing.

Data Collecting Instrument.

Writing Rubric - Study Guide

1. Neatness	Cursive	1	2	3	4	5
	Readable/spacing	1	2	3	4	5
	Heading	1	2	3	4	5
2. Mechanics	Spelling	1	2	3	4	5
	Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5
	Capitals/Periods	1	2	3	4	5
3. Study Guide	Restating question	1	2	3	4	5
	Questions	Does answer have detail	1	2	3	4
4. Vocabulary	Part of speech	1	2	3	4	5
	Definition/Context	1	2	3	4	5
	Meaningful sentence	1	2	3	4	5

Graded By _____

Data Collecting Instrument.

Writing Rubric

1. Neatness	Cursive	1	2	3	4	5
	Readable/Spacing	1	2	3	4	5
	Heading	1	2	3	4	5
2. Mechanics	Spelling	1	2	3	4	5
	Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5
	Capitals/Periods	1	2	3	4	5
	Indented	1	2	3	4	5
3. Voice	Written in correct person	1	2	3	4	5
4. Quality	Logical order	1	2	3	4	5
	Descriptive	1	2	3	4	5
	Sentences interesting	1	2	3	4	5

Graded By _____

Administration of the Data Collecting Instrument. The students individually completed a questionnaire consisting of fourteen questions pertaining to the rubric form of assessment.

1. The rubric helps me see my strengths.
True ___ False ___
2. The rubric helps me see my weaknesses.
True ___ False ___
3. I try to improve my low scores.
True ___ False ___
4. I am proud of my high scores.
True ___ False ___
5. The rubric helps me concentrate on one area of my writing.
True ___ False ___
6. I have noticed that I put more effort into my writing when I know a rubric is going to be used to evaluate my work.
True ___ False ___
7. When I use rubrics I understand my teacher's expectations.
True ___ False ___
8. I write better reviewing old rubrics before beginning a new piece of writing.
True ___ False ___
9. I write better reviewing old rubrics after finishing my rough draft.
True ___ False ___
10. I write better without reviewing old rubrics at all.
True ___ False ___
11. I like having a friend evaluate my writing using a rubric.
True ___ False ___
12. I would like the rubric to only be used by my teacher.
True ___ False ___

13. I would like to have rubrics instead of grades.

True ____ False ____

14. I would like to have rubrics and grades.

True ____ False ____

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presentation of the Results. The author will show the effectiveness of using a rubric form of assessment to evaluate writing.

Question #	% True	% False
1	100	0
2	100	0
3	94	6
4	100	0
5	89	11
6	94	6
7	100	0
8	61	39
9	56	44
10	6	94
11	83	17
12	17	83
13	33	67
14	72	28

Discussion of the Results.

After reviewing the results presented in the table in connection with specific questions, the author will now discuss the results. Results from questions number one and two demonstrated that 100% of the fourth grade class found the rubric to be helpful in identifying individual strengths and weaknesses. Questions three and four showed over 94% of the students were proud of high scores and wanted to improve low scores. Questions five and six demonstrated 89%-94% of the entire class believed the rubric encouraged them to put more effort into their work while focusing on specific areas needing improvement. In question seven 100% of the children understood their teacher's expectations when using a rubric.

While questions one through seven overwhelmingly demonstrated the rubric had a positive result on for the entire class, questions eight through fourteen have a more varied yet still positive effect on the class. Questions eight through ten showed the majority of the class benefiting from reviewing old rubrics during some part of the writing process. Children simply varied as to when the review took place, before the new writing process or after the rough draft. Questions eleven and twelve demonstrated 83% of the class enjoyed having a friend as well as a teacher use the rubric to evaluate their work. 17% preferred the teacher only use the rubric. In closing 33% of the students wanted rubrics instead of grades, while 72% of the students wanted grades and rubrics.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The author believes through experience and research that children do not always respond positively to the traditional form of evaluation that basis itself on the assigning of grades. Children can work together cooperatively and improve self-esteem while becoming directly involved in their own evaluation process. The self-evaluation and teacher evaluation process is effective when using rubrics. The rubric breaks the evaluation process down into pieces which allows the children to better understand the teacher's expectations and recommendations. The purpose of this study was to create a rubric with a fourth grade class, demonstrate it's use, and directly use it in the classroom for approximately a six week period. At the end of the six week period each child completed a questionnaire asking their opinions of the process. After reviewing the results the author believes the rubric was extremely successful. The students understood their teacher's expectations, accurately read rubric scores, and began to make progress in suggested areas of their writing.

Conclusions

The children were eager to participate throughout the entire rubric process. After working with the rubrics and reviewing the data obtained from the questionnaire it is the opinion of the author that the children benefited from this evaluation process. By using a rubric the children understood the teacher's expectations before even beginning the writing process. The data indicated that students respected their teacher's and peer's opinions and suggestions after their work was evaluated. Students also began to take responsibility for their own learning after realizing their strengths and weaknesses. As the study progressed children were able to use past rubrics to aid them in future writing assignments. Although these rubrics were used at different times in their writing, data indicated that most all of the students referred to past evaluations sometime throughout a new piece of writing. The final questions in the study indicated that only 33% of the students preferred rubrics to grades. The author believes that this score is due to the educational environment of the school setting. The study took place in an academically challenging school where students were accustomed to receiving grades. The majority of the students experienced success and were comfortable with this evaluation process. The questionnaire found that 72% of the students would like to have rubrics and grades. The author believes that this provides evidence to support the value of rubrics as a form of evaluation.

Recommendations

The author believes that the success or failure of rubrics can be attributed to the manner in which the teacher begins the process. It is vital that the children, regardless of age, take part in developing a class rubric. Although the teacher needs to organize their ideas and make necessary additions, the students are capable of aiding a teacher in deciding writing expectations. In helping to create the rubric, students have a better understanding of the teacher's expectations and will value the evaluation system they helped to create.

After the rubric has been developed the teacher needs to take the time to demonstrate its use with the students. They need to practice using the rubric and interpreting results in a constructive manner. It is valuable to have students focus on strengths and weaknesses when reviewing a rubric evaluation. Old evaluations and writing should be saved in a portfolio for future use. These portfolios should be accessible to the students at all times. As the portfolio begins to grow students look back and notice progress being made.

The author believes rubrics can be used with any age student. As children become older the rubric becomes more developed. Even with older children it is important not to try to include too much information in the format of the rubric or it will become overwhelming and lose its value. A rubric is to help writers focus on certain areas of their own writing. The rubric can always be revised throughout the year.

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