A Study On The Use Of Rubrics To Guide Writing And Self-Assessment In The L2 Elementary Classroom

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A STUDY ON THE USE OF RUBRICS TO GUIDE WRITING AND

SELF-ASSESSMENT IN THE L2 ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One of the things that I have always noted in my experience as a teacher working with second language (L2) learners in the United States and abroad is how the modality of writing is an area where L2 students seem to struggle to gain proficiency. When I worked as an English as a second language (ESL) teacher in the United States, every fall and spring, I would review student reports and WIDA scores, the standardized test used to measure adequate progress, to note that the single area that would qualify an otherwise quite proficient L2 student for ESL services was their score in the writing section of the assessment. Quite frequently, much to my chagrin, I would watch as a student would be exited from ESL services based on their average score on the WIDA test while knowing that their proficiency in writing lagged far behind their performance in the other modalities of speaking, listening and reading, and that this deficiency would follow them and affect their academic performance for years to come. I would wonder why it seems to be so difficult to provide support for writing and to foster its growth for many students.

As time went on and I began to work as a mainstream elementary classroom teacher abroad with primarily L2 speakers of English, I noticed that in the curriculum and in my classroom, writing was something that I seemed to spend a lot of time on without witnessing the desired growth. The approach of talking about the role and function of different genres of writing, providing graphic organizers and discussing where the ideas went and how these different chunks of information fit together into a coherent whole was not proving to be sufficient. Through much trial and error, I have found that more

emphasis needs to be placed on the students' goals for the end product, how the reader will receive it, and how it will be evaluated. Through this approach, the student may become more aware of what they need to accomplish to reach the desired output. They may also become more reflective and self-aware of the learning process itself. It is because of this realization that I have decided to focus on the efficacy of using rubrics for self-assessment to guide the student writing process as well as how the students' self-assessment compares to the teacher assessment.

Role of the Researcher

During the course of the study, I was a fourth grade classroom teacher at an international school in Ecuador. The school had recently adopted the International Baccalaureate Primary Years program as its primary curriculum. I was responsible for teaching the content areas of Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies through a curriculum based on the Inquiry Cycle and the students spent half of the day with me receiving instruction in these areas in English. The other half of the day, students received instruction in Spanish in the content areas of Language and Literature, Social Studies and Science. In the international section of the school where I taught, we tended to have the luxury of small class sizes, which presented its own unique set of benefits and challenges. Between the modalities of reading and writing, the majority of students that I taught generally were able to read at a higher level than they were able to write. This discrepancy was apparent throughout my years at that school, which is why I deemed it imperative to investigate various methods of writing instruction to increase my efficacy as a teacher and to improve learner writing outcomes.

Background of the Researcher

At the point when my study took place, I had spent three years as an elementary classroom teacher. Prior to that, I had spent my first two years teaching as an elementary ESL support specialist in a first-ring suburb in a large mid-western city in the US. My third year of teaching, I transitioned to the district's middle school and was a teacher of ESL sheltered instruction in social studies to seventh and eighth grade EL students. After my third year of teaching, I was presented with an opportunity to teach abroad in Ecuador. As living and teaching abroad had been a dream of mine for quite some time, I didn't hesitate for long before taking the leap and leaving my status as a newly tenured teacher behind me in the US. What had struck me most about teaching abroad were the contrasts and similarities between my students there and back home. The most significant difference between these two populations was their socio-economic level. My students in class in Ecuador were primarily Ecuadorian despite attending an international school. My students in the US were often recent immigrants or refugees, some with limited formal schooling. In Ecuador, my students had the benefits and resources of belonging to the upper socio-economic class there. My students in the US came from a disadvantaged socio-economic background and had access to few resources. My Ecuadorian students also had the added benefit of living in their native culture while attending school in English for part of the day. In the US, in addition to having to go to school in a new language, learners also had to work through the process of acculturating to their new environment.

Despite these differences, the students in Ecuador had a lot in common academically with my students in the United States. While not being afflicted by poverty

or limited formal schooling, they struggled with the same issues academically typical of ESL students in the United States. Both my students there and back home tested at several grades below grade-level benchmarks in reading and writing in English, with writing being an area of particular concern. This consistency across countries, class and socio-economic status in the writing domain has led me to believe that a focus on writing is an area of importance for growth in my own practice and that of ESL instruction in general.

Teaching Writing and Rubrics

At my school in Ecuador, one of the ways that we had worked to improve the quality of writing instruction in my school was to track student progress using student generated writing samples and grading these according to a common rubric used by all teachers. The students would respond to narrative writing prompts during three points of the year. The data was used primarily to track student growth over the year by the school administration. Initially, I had not utilized the rubrics to guide my instruction. I assumed that if the quality of my writing instruction was adequate, this would reflect itself in the scores of the students over time. However, as time went on, I began to realize the potential of explicitly teaching students to understand the rubric and to establish it as a way of measuring learning outcomes. This progression in my thinking and practice was actually the inspiration for this study. The motive was to take something that had always felt like a chore and to turn it into something verifiably useful, that would be a pleasure to use in the classroom. I decided not to use my school's rubric because I wanted to be sure the rubric that I was using was well designed and based on current standards and research. Instead I decided to use the *6+1 Trait Writing Rubric* (Education Northwest,

2017). The *6+1 Trait Writing Rubric* was created by an organization named Education Northwest and has been cited in many studies, some of which I will discuss in chapter two. The rubric can be used with any genre of writing and provides a means to assess the quality of writing for the following writing traits: *ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions*. Within the rubric there is an additional feature of the rubric for assessing *presentation*, but I will not be utilizing this part as I would like to focus primarily on self-assessment. From this point forward in this document I will refer to this rubric as the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* which is in line with what the rubric was originally called before adding the *presentation* aspect.

Guiding Questions

For this study, I chose to focus on the value of rubrics in helping students guide their writing and to later self-assess. To this end, I used the following questions to guide my research:

1. Is there an improvement in the quality of students' writing output though the use of rubrics and self-assessment?

2. How do the students' self-assessments compare to the teacher's assessments of their writing?

3. Does the students' ability to self-assess improve over time?

Summary

In this chapter, I have elaborated on the background for my study. The study explored the efficacy of students using teacher-provided rubrics, based on the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*, to guide and inform their writing as they progressed through the writing process. The rationale was presented for looking at how the use of these rubrics for self-

assessment by learners may result in improved writing over time through fostering awareness of the presence of desired writing traits in their own writing. The desired outcome was to provide insight into the relationship of the students' perception of their own work when compared to the teacher assessment and how this may change over time through the use of self-assessment with a rubric.

In the following chapter, I summarize research that supports the use of rubrics in writing instruction as well as the benefits of student self-assessment. I will also address the some of the challenges that writing poses to L2 students when compared to other domains of language. The methodology section will outline my procedure for collecting classroom data for the purposes of answering the research questions put forth.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of my study was to evaluate the efficacy of providing students with rubrics to guide their writing and to self-assess their work. The relationship between the student's self-assessment when compared to the teacher assessment was evaluated, as well as any changes over time. Additionally, improvements in writing were assessed.

In light of my intended purpose, this literature review focuses on three main topics. The first topic explores existing research regarding the unique challenges for L2 writers that are distinct from L1 writers. Then, the efficacy of using rubrics in the classroom for writing instruction is explored. The third section focuses on the benefits of self-assessment in the writing process. Finally, I touch on the gap in current research that I hope to fill by the completion of my study.

Challenges for L2 Writers

There are two modalities that deal with the printed word, reading and writing. It is generally understood that writing is the more complex cognitive process. This is because "reading is more dependent on recognition while writing is more dependent on recall and production" (Panto, 1999, p. 2). Generally, having a solid grasp of writing skills in the L1 is a benefit when acquiring those same skills in an L2 (Cummins, 1991). While learners can build on existing skills in their L1 to write in the L2, effective writing performance in an L2 demands knowledge of academic language, organizational structures, and language forms. (Cummins, 1991).

L2 writers have some unique challenges when writing that L1 writers do not face. In a survey of major published research concerning L2 writing, it was found that L2 writing can demonstrate noteworthy differences from L1 writing in a variety of areas, such as writing strategies, the type of rhetoric used, and linguistic markers (Silva, 1993). One of the major difficulties that L2 writers have is in the planning process. L2 writers were found to have done less planning and struggled to set goals for their writing. This included difficulty in the generating of and organizing of material. Writers took more time on their writing and yet were less fluent and produced fewer ideas. Much of the composing processes seemed to be less efficient as well. L2 writers spent more time revising their work than L1 writers. Furthermore, most spent less time on the re-reading and reflection on the meaning of the text, instead choosing to spend significantly more time on surface level grammar corrections and mechanics such as spelling (Silva, 1993). This leads to writing that on the surface level is correct but lacks a certain depth of meaning and persuasiveness. This is evidenced in the finding that L2 writers are less explicit in stating their position and less likely to offer supporting details, instead being inclined to simply reiterate their original position in an attempt to shore up their argument. Silva suggests that some of this may have cultural roots, as communication in other cultures may be less linear with the avoidance of advocating for their position directly. This tendency can manifest itself as "providing more data but offering fewer claims, warrants, backings or rebuttals" (Silva, 1993, p. 665). Also discussed, is that due to influences of cultural constructions in conversation, some writers may even place their thesis statement at the end of a paper instead of at the beginning.

Related to the strategies that L2 writers appear to use when writing is the type of errors made in writing compositions. In a study on L2 writers' ability to detect errors in their writing compositions, Matsuda & Cox (2011) examined what effects this has on the quality of writing production. L2 writers are engaged in the process of developing an intuitive understanding for the English language; the formation of grammatical sentences will not come to them as easily as it does to native speakers (Matsuda & Cox, 2011). This includes difficulty with correcting errors by ear when reading or having their writing read back to them. The failure to correct grammatical errors is often "due to a deficit in processing rather than a deficit in knowledge" (Lee, 1997, p. 467). So, this inability to correct in ways that an L1 writer can is not due to a lack of knowledge but rather to the fact that L2 writers are not detecting errors.

The following study describes the writing process in a way that parallels my personal experience in acquiring the spoken language. So perhaps, much like in speaking, in writing, the goal should not always be to remove all traces of interference from the L1. With this sentiment in mind, Matsuda & Cox (2011) emphasized that when reading an L2 writer's text, it is important to establish at what point non-standard constructions become incorrect and when is the writing sufficient. Understanding this, it is important to avoid succumbing to the assimilationist view that all such iterations in writing, as in speech, must be eradicated. Furthermore, when working with an L2 writer it is important to be aware of their level of proficiency and having sensitivity to the fact that "language proficiency affects the overall quality of ESL texts" (Matsuda & Cox, 2011, p. 40). I explore in the next section how rubrics may be implemented during the writing process to

help the student organize their writing, and to identify errors and make corrections through means of self-assessment.

Student Self-Assessment During the Writing Process

The use of student self-assessment during the writing process has not received much attention in the research. I have also struggled to find studies of this approach at the primary level. Of the studies covered in this section, which evaluate the usefulness of such a practice in writing instruction, most deal with students at the secondary level or higher and/or consist of students at the university level who are EFL students taking English courses in their home country. Despite this, there are some meaningful conclusions that can be reached by exploring their findings and methodologies.

One encouraging finding found that students who self-assess express that they feel more in control of their learning and more confident in their abilities (Olina & Sullivan, 2004). To find this the researchers looked into the relationship between student self-evaluations and teacher evaluations and their effect on learner performance. There were four participant groups: One group was assessed only through the teacher evaluation; the second group conducted self-assessments; the third group conducted self-assessments but also received the teacher evaluation; and the fourth and final group did not self-assess or receive teacher feedback during the writing process. The groups that rated most highly on the final evaluation were the first and third groups. Group two, who had only self-evaluated but received no other input, reported feeling the most self-efficacy and expressed greater confidence toward future writing tasks. For optimal results, there needs to be a mix of self-assessment and teacher input. Teacher input is especially critical at the beginning of the writing process when students are still

developing skills and their confidence in using self-assessments. However, self-assessment seems to be an indispensable tool that has been shown to help students better understand the criteria by which they will be evaluated.

Based on similar findings or presuppositions, some have gone so far as to create pedagogies around them. Liang (2014) outlines a three-part pedagogy for teaching writing students to self-assess their own written work. The first part of the process is teacher modeling. This step includes: a diagnostic assessment of learner needs; the modeling of how a weak essay should be revised; extensive and explicit feedback from the teacher guided by well-defined criteria; the application of grammar instruction in identified areas of high need; and the strategizing of the error feedback cycle. The second part of the process is guided peer assessment. In this stage it is crucial that students have access to their own copy of the assessment criteria. They will be tasked with evaluating not their own work, but that of their peers. In order to maintain the process of learner-controlled assessment, there still needs to be structured teacher feedback. At the beginning of this process, students should focus on just one aspect of writing assigned by the teacher. The third and final stage is independent self-assessment. At this stage, students have demonstrated their ability to accurately assess the work of others using pre-determined criteria. They should now be ready to assess areas of relative strength and areas in need of improvement in their own writing. Throughout this process, the use of well-established criteria should always be provided. It is also helpful to provide students with exemplars of outstanding writing for comparison and reference. When students first begin self-assessing, they should narrow in on just one writing trait. Once they have mastery and consistency in self-assessment for one area of writing traits, they can

continue on towards a more comprehensive assessment of their writing. In my opinion, this seems to be a process that would be easily differentiated and tailored to different levels; student-friendly rubrics for the elementary level could be tailored and utilized for the specific writing domain being targeted.

The assumption that over time students will gain mastery in assessing themselves is buoyed by a study by Suzuki (2009), in which she tested the compatibility of L2 learners self- and peer-revisions with that of teacher assessment. She tested 24 Japanese university students over a year-long course. She found that at the beginning of the process, there tended to be a larger disparity between the teacher assessment and the self- and peer-assessments at the beginning of the study than the end of the study. This showed that over time and experience with the provided assessment criteria, students improved with experience in judging their own work and that of others. One finding was that students who self-assessed tended to grade themselves more highly than when they received feedback from peer-assessment. Throughout the process, common ESL/EFL type errors persisted. This shows that while it is essential that students are able to assess the writing of themselves and others, it is crucial that the teacher target areas of difficulty in writing and provide some explicit feedback.

In contrast to Suzuki's study that provided the writers with the rubric as a reference criterion, another study did exactly the opposite. Baleghizadeh & Hajzadeh (2014) explored the use of self-assessment but where participants were not provided with the assessment criteria as a reference during the writing process, only afterward when they self-assessed. The participants were at the university level within the context of a standardized English writing test in Iran. This study also concluded that through

continued experience with self-assessment and the opportunity to compare this to the scores given by an expert assessor, students steadily improved, reaching a high degree of accuracy in their self-assessments. Their over-all scores on the writing samples steadily improved as well. From this study there were a few important conclusions. It is possible to train students in self-assessment that produces a highly accurate and consistent score when compared against an expert or teacher evaluation. The rise in scores also shows that self-assessment is quite effective as a tool for developing writing skills. And finally, that self-assessment is inherently learner-centered and can help students become independent learners. The key is to provide learners with the right tools for self-assessment, for example, rubrics, which are explored in the next section.

Rubrics and the Writing Process

When looking at the use of rubrics at the elementary or middle school level, a study by Andrade et al. (2009) explored whether there was a correlation between the short-term and/or long-term use of rubrics and student self-efficacy on writing assignments. Their study included 307 participants who were currently enrolled in grade three through grade seven. During the course of the study, the students first received a model story or essay. They then compiled a list of strengths and weakness of the model writing. This was followed by an introduction to a written rubric which they then used as a tool to self-assess their first drafts of writing. The teacher would give each student feedback and then students would compose their final drafts. Throughout the writing process, students completed a survey regarding their own feelings of self-efficacy about the writing process. The findings of the study were generally inconclusive but found a significant increase in feelings of self-efficacy for female participants. Apart from the

question of self-efficacy**,** the researchers noted that when rubrics were used as a part of writing instruction at the fifth and sixth grade elementary level, their participants had higher quality discussions than those who were not provided a rubric and produced better essays when aware of the criteria by which they would be graded. The researchers found that the simple existence of a rubric does not guarantee improved student success, nor does the act of handing it out and explaining the rubric. This may increase the student awareness and/or knowledge of the criteria on the rubric but may not transfer identified writing traits on the rubric into improved writing. What has the strongest effect was to train the students in using the rubric themselves. First, perhaps by including them in the creation of the rubric. Then, by having them use the rubric to assess sample pieces of writing. By undergoing this training, students may learn to self-assess as they are writing, throughout the writing process. This also has the added benefit of "increasing student motivation, confidence and achievement" (Andrade, 2009, p. 288).

There have been other findings that found that students who were exposed to rubrics and taught how to use them had a statistically significant increase in writing scores. This was the finding in a study by Bradford, Newland, Rule, and Montgomery (2016) that sought to measure the effects of using a rubric as a tool in writing instruction as measured in the effect that it would have on first and second grade opinion essays. Further benefits intrinsic to the use of rubrics included: clarification of the learning target, guiding the delivery of instruction, adding accuracy and fairness, and providing students with a tool for self-assessment and peer feedback. The authors also found that the positive effects of rubrics can be strengthened through the use of mini-lessons that address the specific criteria on the rubric. They suggest that there should also be ample

time for writing. This should be followed up by continued use of the rubric throughout the writing and revision process by frequently revisiting the criteria. There are also many benefits to teachers from using rubrics. They can provide a vision and guide their teaching by outlining explicitly what needs to be taught and setting goals for students on what skill they need to master. The most encouraging finding was that rubrics have the potential to motivate students in the practice of becoming self-directed learners (Bradford, Newland, Rule, & Montgomery, 2016).

Benefits of Writing Rubrics for ELLs

The benefits of writing rubrics for L2 learners seem to be mixed. A research survey by Schirmer and Bailey (2000) explored the added benefit of using writing rubrics with students who are ELLs. They found that many of these students struggle with writing because they are struggling with English. Writing is a complex task made more daunting by the added demands of concurrently learning to become proficient in the use of the English language. Even with proficient speakers, one must be careful not to assume that "they can apply their knowledge of the spoken language to learning the written language" (Schirmer and Bailey, 2000, p. 52). Most of these learners will require explicit instruction regarding the features of quality writing but should also be provided with individualized feedback about their own writing. There is an ongoing debate regarding the merits of a process vs. product approach in writing instruction. The product approach assumes that once learned, students can apply the rules and skills of the English language to their writing, while the process approach "assumes that they can internalize the rules and skills [of writing] through ample time to write and discuss writing" (Schirmer & Bailey, 2000, p. 53). Neither of these approaches adequately meets the needs of ELLs.

What is needed is a balanced approach that offers some explicit, rule-oriented instruction with adequate time to practice and hone these skills.

One strategy Schirmer and Bailey (2000) found to be effective was the use of a writing assessment rubric. Similar to Bradford et al. (2016), they found that rubrics guide a teacher in the process of providing the direct instruction that so many children who are struggling writers need. One challenge of using writing rubrics is that they are static tools that have difficulty meeting the individual needs of diverse students. For this approach to be effective, writing rubrics need to be modified to become more dynamic tools that take into account and accommodate differences for various students in the content of assignments and goals of the curriculum.

One way to do this is through the use of student-generated rubrics. The approach for creating such rubrics was explored by Skillings & Ferrell (2000). To do this, the researchers paired with a second and third grade classroom teacher and her students. The beginning stages of the study consisted of the teacher and students working together to create performance-based rubrics developed from a set of predetermined criteria. Once the rubrics had been created, they were used during instruction and to assess student understanding. They found that the use of rubrics helped to develop and increase the use of metacognitive skills during the student writing process. They also found this process to be particularly successful for students who came from other language backgrounds. This was attributed to the students being more supported in meeting their performance goals because they were provided with a clearer picture of desired end results for a particular writing assignment.

The strength of using rubrics in instruction and assessment is apparent in its success in developing metacognitive skills (Skillings & Ferrell, 2000). Scored rubrics can provide opportunities for additional instruction and can be used in a conference with students to help guide them on the process of understanding why they received the score that they did (Skillings & Ferrell, 2000). The process of utilizing rubrics throughout the writing process, especially during writing instruction, is very effective for second-language learners because of "the repetition and the variety of ways that the concepts are presented" (Skillings & Ferrell, 2000, p. 454). This approach creates a low-anxiety environment through which repeated modeling and the establishment of desired criteria constitutes an effective method for all learners. As noted in all of the research, a clear and understandable rubric is essential. Criteria on the rubric need to be addressed in instruction. For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to use the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* as it adheres to these features. These 6 traits are: *ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency* and *conventions*. The next section addresses the use of rubrics for the purpose of self-assessment and for guiding writing instruction, with a focus on the *6 Traits Writing Rubric* since that is the tool used in this study.

Self-Assessment and the 6-Traits Writing Rubric

The next logical step for incorporating writing rubrics in the L2 classroom is to use them for self-assessment or peer evaluation. In a study exploring the effects of cross-age tutoring, Paquette (2009) implemented the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* for the purpose of facilitating and assessing the benefit of cross-age tutoring. The researcher maintained both a control and treatment group of those who were exposed to the cross-age tutoring and those who were not. Both groups' progress was assessed using the *6-Traits Writing*

Rubric. During the study, students wrote compositions in response to a writing prompt. They then worked with students from another grade who had been trained in how to provide support for each of the six traits of writing. To compare results, the pre- and post-test data were analyzed and then rated by assessors using a 1 to 5-point scale in each of the six traits on the writing rubric. This allowed for comparison between groups in each of the traits and captured the performance of a whole group using the overall cumulative score. One interesting result of the study showed no discernable difference between the second graders who participated in cross-age tutoring and those who did not. However, there was a significant difference in outcome for the fourth graders participating in the study when looking at those who received cross-age tutoring with those who did not. The fourth graders who did not participate in cross-age tutoring only showed on average an improvement of +0.091 on a 1 to 5-point scale while those who did receive cross-age tutoring showed an average improvement of +0.683. These scores were formulated by a combined average of each trait on the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. These results suggest that cross-age tutoring is more advantageous by the fourth grade.

Fry & Griffin (2010) explored the benefits of collaborating with teachers to teach the using the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* in the classroom in their study. These researchers sought to determine first, how students benefited from instruction in the six traits of writing and what instructional qualities or personal characteristics were necessary for the teachers to be successful. Throughout the study, the researchers never presented data related to student achievement in a quantitative way but rather referred to student progress qualitatively in the context of their attitude towards writing and their emotional reactions to feedback from teachers. The researchers found that students benefited the

most when given friendly feedback that was very specific and focused on just one trait of the six traits of writing. More generalized feedback or questions were met with less enthusiasm and hampered the revision process. In general, the researchers narrowed successful teacher instruction to three skills or abilities. First, teachers were more successful when they had mastered the faculty of the language of writing when discussing it. I took this to mean that teachers had to be well versed in the academic vocabulary of the pedagogy of writing and possess an ability to use the nomenclature clearly and consistently. Second, teachers were also more effective when they demonstrated the ability to ask pointed constructive questions that caused the student to reflect on just one aspect of their writing. Third, effective instructors demonstrate the ability to frame feedback constructively in a way that inspires more writing. Most importantly, the most successful teachers have an ability to do all of these three things seamlessly and concurrently.

Setting up a writing program based on the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* is a multi-step process. In an article recounting her experience teaching with the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*, Shapiro (2004), outlines the steps to setting up a successful writing program based on the rubric. The six traits of writing are a catchall for many different aspects of qualities that contribute to successful writing. In introducing each trait to students, it is important to develop common language in order to discuss and critique writing effectively. The first step is to outline each trait and the concepts that they are based on. The second step is expose students to the language of writers with the use of writing exemplars, checklists and rubrics. The third step is to introduce student-friendly rubrics that students can use to assess their writing. The fourth step is to assess using the rubric

both strong and weak writing samples. The fifth step is to offer mini-lessons to support learning and the use of different writing strategies. The sixth and final step is to focus on revising personal compositions trait by trait. One of the most important aspects of the whole process is the creation of a student-friendly rubric that is accessible and will serve as a reference for students to gauge their work.

During this process, it is likely to encounter challenges along the way when implementing the use of a writing rubric. In another article focusing on the challenges posed by using the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*, Spence (2010) recounted her successes and challenges when using the rubric to assess a third-grade English language learner (ELL) who spoke Spanish as her primary language outside of school. The rubric is an analytical rubric that breaks writing down into distinct pieces. This can cause issues when evaluating ELLs. To be successful when using this type of a measure, the author had six recommendations. The first recommendation is to make a thorough review of the rubric and assess its strengths and shortcomings, including what it might reveal or conceal about a student's writing. The second recommendation is to consider the sociocultural context of the writing when making suggestions and giving feedback so that you can create a motivating environment for the student. The third recommendation is to take into consideration the classroom context by acknowledging the day-to-day work of the student. The fourth recommendation is to be open to diverse and non-traditional modes of expression and grammatical constructions. The fifth recommendation is to make sure to use the results of the rubric and other assessment information when conducting writing conferences with the student. The sixth recommendation is to assess ELLs appropriately and fairly. This means to not penalize them for markers of developing English. I agree

with the opinions of the researcher in how they approach using rubrics within the instructional context of providing feedback to and grading students. However, during my study, I feel that it is important to use the rubric as objectively as possible without taking too much into account the background of my participants. This approach is necessary to make sure that my data remains consistent and valid for all participants.

I have found further support for my decision to use the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* as a measure for student progress in writing. In a study advocating for the abandonment of curriculum-based measures for measuring writing (Casey, et. al. 2016), the researchers discussed and sought to verify the validity of other measures to assess writing. They found that when using curriculum-based measures that predominately focused on mechanics, many more complex aspects of writing such as the development of ideas or structure were overlooked or undervalued in the overall assessment. This is why I believe that it is important to adopt a measure such as the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* that offers a comprehensive way to assess the more complex macro-level writing processes discussed in the article rather than focusing more narrowly on measures such as words per minute or vocabulary.

The Gap

In this chapter I have reviewed several different areas related to writing instruction through the use of rubrics and student self-assessment. One of the most obvious gaps in the research is in regards to this approach at the primary grade levels. Beyond this, I was able to find very little research that has explored the L2 writing process for elementary students. While many regard the writing process of the L2 learner to be very similar if not identical to the process in the L1 writer, it is much less

productive and efficient. My study will be useful because it will explore the potential benefits of self-assessment using criteria-based rubrics in the form of the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. As mentioned in my literature review, the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* focuses on these aspects of writing: *ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions*. Another aspect of the gap in the research is the approach of using rubrics to guide the writing process.

While there have been several studies that employ rubrics, there have been very few that have studied their explicit use as an instructional tool paired with self-assessment (Andrade, et al. 2009; Shapiro, 2004). Furthermore, the use of rubrics as an instructional tool has been all but ignored at the elementary school level. In the area of self-assessment in the writing process the research is even thinner. It seems that there exist only a few studies that delve into the efficacy of using self-assessment during the writing process and they often included very small sample sizes and divergent methodologies to implement such a tool (Liang, 2009; Olina & Sullivan, 2004; Suzuki, 2009). As such, it is difficult to draw any strong conclusions about the efficacy of self-assessment in the writing process. However, what has been shown is that it is a potentially powerful tool.

My research topic is important because it lies at the intersection of two different approaches to writing instruction in regards to elementary L2 learners that have been under researched. What research is out there convinces me that the use of rubrics to instruct and guide students during writing and the process of self-assessment are very potent by themselves, but could be even more so when used in together. At the primary

level, this approach was mentioned only once in the article by Shapiro (2004). I firmly believe that this could be a very successful approach.

Research Questions

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of using rubrics to guide instruction and student self-assessment when writing in a fourth grade writing classroom of ESL students. The questions that I will be researching are as follows:

1. Is there an improvement in the quality of students' writing output though the use of rubrics and self-assessment?

2. How do the students' self-assessments compare to the teacher's assessments of their writing?

3. Does the students' ability to self-assess improve over time?

Summary

This chapter has covered several topics related to ESL writing at the primary and secondary levels. First, there was an overview of the challenges that L2 writers face. Many of the challenges seem to be connected to the same hurdles one crosses in the other modalities. Using rubrics can greatly aid students in identifying strengths and weaknesses in their writing as well as self-monitoring their learning. Second, there was a discussion of the efficacy of using rubrics during the writing process. In general, the use of writing rubrics tends to have a positive effect on the quality of student's writing provided that it is used with intention and available to learners as a resource during the writing process. Third, there was an inquiry into the effectiveness of self-assessment during writing and the outcomes of doing so. The findings point to this being something that has to be taught explicitly through direct instruction on how to use these types of tools or aids. One does

not simply hand a student a rubric and expect them to be able to use it effectively.

Finally, I introduced the gap that I had perceived in the research currently and

commented on the unique intersection of these three topics that guided my classroom

research. In the next chapter I will discuss the methodology that I used when

implementing my classroom research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to investigate the efficacy of using rubrics to guide writing instruction and student self-assessment with English language learners (ELLs) at the primary level. There seems to be a gap in the research in regard to the use of rubrics and self-assessment as an instructional tool, particularly at the elementary or primary level. The existing research seems to indicate that the use of rubrics in writing instruction increases students' awareness of the grading criteria. Students also report increased confidence in their ability to set goals and plan through the writing process. Through the use of rubrics in instruction, paired with student self-assessment, I sought to explore whether the students' quality of writing would increase as they became more self-aware and reflective of their role in the writing process. Through conducting this study, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. Is there an improvement in the quality of students' writing output though the use of rubrics and self-assessment?

2. How do the students' self-assessments compare to the teacher's assessments of their writing?

3. Does the students' ability to self-assess improve over time?

This chapter discusses the methodology of my study for the purpose of determining if the use of rubrics and self-assessment resulted in an improvement in the quality of student writing output. First, I describe the design of the classroom-based, action research. I then describe the participants, location of the study and how the data was collected. Finally, I outline the basic procedure of the study and how the data was verified.

Research Paradigm

The study is classroom-based, action research. One of the benefits of action research is that it generates research knowledge while at the same time improving social action (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009). This approach allows me to contribute toward establishing best practices of instruction for writing, and at the same time advocate for how to best meet the needs of ELLs.

Due to the small sample size of 21 participants for the study, it was not feasible to create randomly assigned control and experimental groups. Instead, reliability of the data was achieved through the implementation of repeated writing samples and self-assessments taken over a seven-week period.

Data Collection

Participants. The participants for this study were the students in my fourth grade class. There were 21 students in my class, 11 boys and 10 girls. Nineteen out of my 21 students were native Spanish speakers, one was a native speaker of Chinese, and another was a native speaker of English. The home languages represented by my class in order of prevalence included: Spanish, English, Chinese and Arabic. In terms of LD designation, only one student received mild LD support in learning strategies for ADHD. Although

many of my students were second or third language speakers of English, they were all proficient in English and none were enrolled in ESL services. Most of the class members were writing or reading at or near grade level as recorded on standardized assessments.

Location/Setting. This study took place in a fourth grade classroom with students who were either nine or ten years old, at an international school in an urban setting in Ecuador. The school was based upon the American model of education and all students spent at least half of their day studying content in a classroom where English was the language of instruction. Most of the students were from affluent backgrounds and had parents who were fluent in more than one language. The school provided some ESL services. However, the measure of language proficiency in a particular student was not standardized and the inclusion for receiving ESL services was up to the discretion of the ESL specialist and mostly based on classroom observation. Pull-out service was generally limited to newcomers at the lower primary grade levels. These conditions made it difficult to gauge students' true language proficiency in English other than through informal observation.

Data collection technique 1. The primary data collected was the students' writing scores on a narrative writing samples assessed according to the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* shown in Appendix A. The writing samples took place at three separate points. Once at the beginning of the study, again at the mid-point, and finally at the end of the study. For each of these narrative writing samples, the students were given a writing prompt and 30 minutes to write their composition. For the first sample, they were given a student-friendly version of the *6-traits writing rubric*, shown in Appendix B, to refer to during the writing session but were not given any specific instruction on how to use it.

However, they were made aware that these were the criteria by which their writing would be assessed.

Data collection technique 2. The students were asked to self-assess their compositions a day after writing them by using the same student-friendly *6-traits writing rubric* provided to them during the writing process. This data was compared against the researcher's assessment of the same work. By doing this, I could gauge the effectiveness and accuracy of the student's self-assessment when compared to an expert assessment.

Procedure

The participants composed three separate narrative writing samples during the seven weeks of the study, at the beginning, middle and end. These were self-assessed by the student using the provided rubric as well as being assessed by the researcher. This process was interspersed with direct instruction on the writing traits of *organization* and *sentence fluency*. The reason that just two of the writing traits were selected are related to the time constraints of the study. The study was begun in the middle of the spring semester and was to be finished by the end of the school year. It was deemed more beneficial to cover two of the writing traits in depth rather than to cover all of them in a superficial manner. The purpose of the study was to see the effect of the use of the rubric during instruction as well as a tool for self-assessment. Interestingly, in the results, this gives us another point of comparison between performance on the traits that were taught versus those that were not.

Materials

The researcher used the official version of the *6-Traits Writing Rubric,* while the students used a student-friendly version of the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. This student-

friendly version of the rubric was provided to the students before they began writing and after writing for the purpose of self-assessment. The researcher also assessed the writing samples. The ability to compare these two separate scores for the same writing sample allowed for tracking the quality of the student self-assessment over time as compared to the researcher's assessment. Scores on a narrative writing sample self-assessed by the student and as well as assessed by the researcher were recorded at three different times during the study – at the first, fourth and seventh week. Between gathering and assessing narrative writing samples using the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*, students were provided direct instruction on two of the six writing traits – *organization* and *sentence fluency.* During the weeks where the students created a writing prompt, there were also lessons looking at exemplars of quality writing and class discussions guided by use of the rubric discussing what was good about the writing and what could be improved upon.

Instructional Approach

Throughout the study, students were provided lessons on the writing traits of *organization* and *sentence fluency*. They were also taught and given time to practice how to assess writing using the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. At all times during the study, whether during lessons on writing traits or when writing compositions, students had access to the student-friendly rubric as a reference. While we focused on only two traits for instruction, students self-assessed and were assessed by their teacher on all six traits. Each week that we were not engaged in collecting and scoring writing samples, lessons on the writing traits of *organization* and *sentence fluency* were covered followed by a practice writing activity or prompt. For each week of the study, two class periods were set aside for the tasks of either drafting and then self-assessing their writing samples and working with

exemplars or receiving direct instruction in the writing traits of *organization* and *sentence fluency*. The schedule of the study proceeded as follows:

Week 1. Pre-unit composition of narrative writing sample and self-assess with *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. Further practice using rubric with narrative writing exemplar.

Lesson 1. The students were introduced to the rubric. Time was be taken to read through it with the students. Students then had 30 minutes to produce a narrative writing sample in response to a writing prompt. Students had the rubric available as a reference while writing. The teacher assessed the writing using the original version of the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. This score was not presented to the student and only used as a reference.

Lesson 2. Students re-read their narrative writing samples from the previous day and then self-assessed using the student friendly version of the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. This was followed up by reading a narrative writing exemplar as a whole class and then practice scoring the exemplar with the rubric.

Week 2-3. Direct instruction on the writing traits of *organization* and *sentence fluency*. The format listed below is the same for both weeks.

Lesson 1. Students were provided with a lesson on the trait of *organization.* They then responded to a writing prompt related to this trait. The student-friendly *6-Traits Writing Rubric* was made available to them as a reference while writing but they were also instructed to focus specifically on improving the writing trait of *organization* while composing their practice narrative writing piece.

Lesson 2. Students were provided with a lesson on the trait of *sentence fluency*. They responded to a writing prompt related to this trait. The student-friendly *6-Traits Writing Rubric* was made available to them as a reference while writing but they were

instructed to focus specifically on improving the writing trait of *sentence fluency* while composing their practice narrative writing piece.

Week 4. Mid-unit composition of narrative writing sample and self-assessment with *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. Further practice using rubric with narrative writing exemplar.

Lesson 1. Students had 30 minutes to produce a narrative writing sample in response to a writing prompt. Students had the rubric available as a reference while writing. The teacher assessed the writing using the original version of the *6-traits writing rubric*. This score was not presented to the student and only used as a reference.

Lesson 2. Students re-read their narrative writing samples from the previous day and then self-assessed using the student-friendly *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. This was then followed up by reading a narrative writing exemplar as a whole class and then practice scoring the exemplar with the rubric.

Week 5-6. Direct instruction on the writing traits of *organization* and *sentence fluency*. The format listed below is the same for both weeks.

Lesson 1. Students were provided with a lesson on the trait of *organization.* They then responded to a writing prompt related to this trait. The student-friendly *6-Traits Writing Rubric* was made available to them as a reference while writing but they were also instructed to focus specifically on improving the writing trait of *organization* while composing their practice narrative writing piece.

Lesson 2. Students were provided with a lesson on the trait of *sentence fluency*. They responded to a writing prompt related to this trait. The student-friendly *6-Traits Writing Rubric* was made available to them as a reference while writing but they were

instructed to focus specifically on improving the writing trait of *sentence fluency* while composing their practice narrative writing piece.

Week 7. Post-unit composition of narrative writing sample and self-assessment with *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. Further practice using rubric with narrative writing exemplar.

Lesson 1. Students had 30 minutes to produce a narrative writing sample in response to a writing prompt. Students had the student-friendly version of the rubric available as a reference while writing. The teacher assessed the writing using the original version of the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. This score was not presented to the student and only used as a reference.

Lesson 2. Students re-read their narrative writing samples from the previous day and then self-assessed using the student-friendly *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. This was then followed up by reading a narrative writing exemplar as a whole class and then practice scoring the exemplar with the rubric.

Data Analysis

Through analyzing the researcher's assessment score for the student generated narrative writing samples, I was able to determine the change in quality of writing output. By comparing the students' self-assessment scores to the scores of the researcher rated assessments for the student generated narrative writing sample. I was able to note if there was an increase in the students' ability to accurately self-assess as a result of the treatment process. Finally, by applying both of these methods of data collection during the treatment process I was able to reinforce the validity of the data by finding evidence

of trends as well as whether or not there was a correlation between an increase in the quality of writing output and the ability of students to self-assess their writing.

Verification of Data

There were two main data sources generated by this study. The first was collected as the scores assigned to the narrative writing samples as rated by the researcher. The second was collected as scores assigned to the narrative writing samples as rated by the students' self-assessments. The teacher-assessments were verified by having a colleague trained in the use of the 6-traits rubric grade a set of randomly selected samples.

Ethics

The following safeguards were employed in this study in order to guarantee the preservation of the participants' rights:

1. Written permission was obtained/informed consent.

2. There was a human subjects review.

3. Parents or students had the choice to opt out of the study at any time. All chose to participate, but if they had not, their data would not have used as part of the research findings.

4. The subject's anonymity was preserved through the process of assigning each of them code names with which they labeled their writing samples and self-assessments.

5. Data has been secured digitally in a password protected folder and will be destroyed one year after completion of the study.

Conclusion

In this chapter I described the quantitative methods that I used to collect and analyze data for the purposes of determining the effect that training in the use of rubrics for the purposes of self-assessing writing had on the quality of student writing as assessed by the 6-traits writing rubric. My goal was to outline the appropriateness of each method of data collection as well as to explain my rational for the validity of the data to be collected. This chapter was an outline for the procedure to follow to find answers to my proposed research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study took place in a fourth-grade classroom at an international school in Ecuador in the spring of 2018. The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of using rubrics to guide writing instruction and student self-assessment with ELLs at the primary level. The study took place over a seven-week period. Data was collected in the form of a narrative writing sample during weeks one, four and seven, which were at the beginning, middle and end of the writing unit. Each narrative writing sample was then self-assessed by the student and later by the teacher, both using versions of the *6-Traits Writing Rubric.* The students used a student-friendly version which can be found in appendix A. The teacher used an abridged version of the original which can be found in appendix B. During the writing unit, lessons took place that focused on the writing traits of *organization* and *sentence fluency*. This occurred on the weeks when there was not a diagnostic narrative writing sample taking place. Despite only offering instruction for these two writing traits, students were asked to use the rubric to self-assess for all six writing traits. Through the collection of these data, I sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. Is there an improvement in the quality of students' writing output though the use of rubrics and self-assessment?

2. How do the students' self-assessments compare to the teacher's assessments of their writing?

3. Does the students' ability to self-assess improve over time?

Quality of Students' Writing Output

The first research question sought to measure how the quality of students' writing would be affected through the use of the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* and the process of self-reflection. During the writing unit, the students and the teacher rated their narrative writing samples on all six traits covered on the rubric. These six writing traits include: *ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions*. To evaluate the quality of the students writing, I first present the cumulative average rating given by the teacher for each round of writing data assessed.

Table 4.1 shows the average score received by students for each round of the student composed narrative writing samples as scored by the teacher using the 6 traits writing rubric. Using the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*, writing samples can be scored using whole numbers for each unique writing trait on a 6-point scale. The numbers in the table have been rounded to the hundredths place after the average of the class being calculated. Table 4.1 Diagnostic results showing the average result on the student composed narrative writing samples as scored by the teacher using the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*

	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Writing Conventions
Beginning Week 1	3	2.95	2.81	3.05	2.9	3.05
Middle Week 4	3.79	3.42	3.74	3.47	3.74	3.59
End Week 7	3.8	3.71	3.48	3.48	3.57	3.71

Table 4.2 shows the difference in student scores over the course of the study. By analyzing the data in this way, we can see how the quality of the student writing samples

has changed. The average scores of the narrative writing samples show an increase in the quality of student writing across all 6 traits when calculating the difference in average score between the beginning and end of the study.

Table 4.2 Differences in student scores over the course of the study as scored by the teacher.

Growth	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Writing Conventions
Beginning to Middle	+0.79	+0.47	+0.93	+0.42	+0.84	+0.54
Middle to End	+0.01	+0.29	-0.26	+0.01	-0.17	+0.12
Beginning to End	+0.8	+0.76	+0.67	+0.43	+0.67	+0.66

We can see in the change from the beginning to the end of the study that there was substantial growth in the quality of students writing output over the course of the study. However, the largest gains in the quality of student writing output happened during the period between the beginning to the middle of the study. I speculate that this may indicate a positive impact of the rubric's presence as an aid for students to use as a guide for what constitutes quality writing, causing an initial jump. Also, the growth that has occurred seems to have happened uniformly across all six traits and not just for the traits in which students received direct instruction. This also could suggest that providing students with clear expectations for what constitutes quality writing in the form of a rubric and then providing them with exemplars to illustrate these expectations may have a larger impact than even direct instruction on the quality of writing output in the short

term. Further discussion of what this data might indicate will be discussed in the next chapter.

Comparison of Student and Teacher Ratings

The second research question sought to determine the variance between the score that students gave themselves when compared to the score given by their teacher. Table 4.3 displays the average teacher rating given for each writing trait as well as the average student self-assessment given for each writing trait at the beginning of the study. This data was collected at three different times, at the beginning, middle and end of the study. We are able to see these differences across the class as a whole by measuring the difference between the average score for all teacher-assessed and the student self-assessed narrative writing samples. Positive scores indicate that the teacher rated the students on average higher than they rated themselves. Negative scores indicate that students rated themselves higher than their teacher rated them on average. All calculations have been rounded to the nearest hundredth.

Table 4.3 Pre-unit difference between the average scores on teacher-assessed and student self-assessed narrative writing samples.

Pre-unit Narrative Writing Prompt	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Writing Conventions
Teacher Rated	3	2.95	2.81	3.05	2.9	3.05
Student Self-Assessed	4.09	3.63	3.84	3.68	3.68	3.84
Difference	-1.09	-0.68	-1.03	-0.63	-0.78	-0.79

The negative numbers for the difference between teacher and student ratings show that students, prior to the start of the unit, consistently gave themselves higher scores than did their teacher by quite a large margin. For example, we see the largest differences for

the categories of *ideas* and *voice*. If we look first at *ideas*, the teacher rated the students on average, at a 3, but the students, rated themselves on average at a 4.09. This means that students rated themselves higher than the teacher did by a margin of 1.09. If we now look at *voice*, the teacher rated the students on average, at a 2.81. While the students, rated themselves on average at a 3.84.

Table 4.4 shows the mid-unit difference between the average scores on teacher-assessed and student self-assessed narrative writing samples. At this point in the study, the difference between the two scores indicated have closed dramatically for almost all of the six writing traits, the most notable being for the traits of *organization, word choice* and *writing conventions*, which varied from the teacher rating by less than a tenth of a point.

Table 4.4 Mid-unit difference between the average scores on teacher-assessed and student self-assessed narrative writing samples.

Mid-unit Narrative Writing Prompt	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Writing Conventions
Teacher Rated	3.79	3.42	3.74	3.47	3.74	3.59
Student Self-Assessed	3.32	3.26	3.42	3.53	3.42	3.58
Difference	0.47	0.08	0.16	-0.03	0.16	0.01

Table 4.5 shows the post-unit difference between the average scores on teacher-assessed and student self-assessed narrative writing samples. This data was collected at the end of the study and shows that for each writing trait, students' self-assessments have coincided with the score the teacher had given them. The minor differences between the teacher rated and student self-assessed scores have maintained. Each writing trait has varied from the teacher rating by less than a quarter of a point. While some of the

categories such as *organization* and *word choice* have not maintained as small of

margins, the general consistency across all writing traits is encouraging.

Table 4.5 Post-unit difference between the average scores on teacher-assessed and

student self-assessed narrative writing samples.

Post-unit Narrative Writing Prompt (Avg. Scores)	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Writing Conventions
Teacher Rated	3.8	3.71	3.48	3.48	3.57	3.71
Student Self-Assessed	3.67	3.52	3.29	3.71	3.52	3.76
Difference	0.13	0.19	0.19	-0.23	0.05	-0.05

Change in Ability to Self-assess Over Time

The final research question sought to determine if the students' ability to self-

assess over time would improve when compared to the score given by their teacher at the

three different moments that narrative writing samples were composed by the students

and scored by both teacher and student. These data points are the pre-unit, mid-unit and

post-unit student generated narrative writing samples. By analyzing this data over time,

we are able to gauge if the students' ability to self-assess improved over the course of the

study.

Table 4.6 shows the difference between student self-assessments and teacher-

scored rubrics. As we can see here, over the course of the study the students initially rated

themselves much higher than the teacher rated them. As the study progressed, at the mid-

point students had switched and now rated themselves lower than the teacher had rated

them. By the end of the study, the students had fallen in line with the teacher use of the

rubric and were able to rate themselves within a margin of less than 0.23 of a point on a

6-point scale, in line with the teacher.

Table 4.6 Differences in average scores between teacher-assessed and student self-assessed narrative writing samples.

	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Writing Conventions
Pre-unit	-1.09	-0.68	-1.03	-0.63	-0.78	-0.79
Mid-unit	0.47	0.08	0.16	-0.3	0.16	0.1
Post-unit	0.13	0.19	0.19	-0.23	0.05	-0.05

Conclusion

In summary, the data collected provided clear answers to my research questions. Firstly, the analysis of the teacher rated scores of the student generated data, from the beginning to the end of the study, show that there was an increase in the quality of student writing output on the narrative writing samples. Secondly, the comparison of the scores between the teacher-rated rubric and the student self-assessed rubric show that initially, at the beginning of the study, students rated themselves much higher than the teacher rated them. However, by the end of the study, students were rating themselves lower than the teacher rated them. Lastly, comparing the teacher-rated rubric and the student self-assessment over time shows that there was a large discrepancy between the teacher-rated scores and the student self-assess scores initially. By the end of the study these margins had shrunk considerably indicating that the students had improved in their ability to utilize a rubric to self-assess their own work. Overall, the quality of student narrative writing output increased along with an increased ability to self-assess their own writing. In this chapter, I presented the results of my data collection. In Chapter 5, I will discuss my major findings, their implications, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

In this research project, I attempted to answer the following questions: Is there an improvement in the quality of students' writing output though the use of rubrics and self-assessment? How do the students' self-assessments compare to the teacher's assessments of their writing? Do the students' ability to self-assess improve over time?

The data that was collected provided meaningful insight into the questions that I was attempting to answer. In the following sections, I will discuss the major findings of my study, the limitations of my study as it was conducted, connections of my findings to my review of relevant literature, implications from my work that could affect teachers and administrators, implications for further research, and my final thoughts and conclusions.

Major Findings

The data collected in my study came from a series of student narrative writing samples that were rated by the teacher as well as self-assessed by the student using the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*. This data was collected three times – at the beginning, middle and end of the study. The analysis of this data leads to some clear conclusions. First, there was a clear indication that the quality of student writing samples improved over time. More careful examination of the data leads me to believe the process of self-assessing and learning to use a rubric for this purpose had a greater effect on student writing than did direct instruction on the writing traits. I say this because there was not a noteworthy difference in growth between the writing traits that the students received direct

instruction in and those that they did not. The growth that was shown occurred more or less symmetrically. It is important to note that due to my sample size I am unable to speak to the statistical significance of the difference.

Secondly, I wanted to know how the student self-assessments would compare to the teacher-assessments. At the beginning of the study, the students did seem to overestimate their abilities, rating themselves much higher than the teacher. However, by the end of the study, the students showed great consistency with the teacher-rating; on average, they did not deviate more than 0.23 of a point on a 6-point scale. Finally, further examination of the data shows that the students' ability to self-assess over time increased and was consistent with ratings given to them by their teacher on average. Looking at the data from the middle of the study, this is where the biggest growth in the quality of student writing output happened. By the end of the study, the students did not continue the rate of growth in the quality of their writing output, but they did perform more consistently and rated themselves almost as reliably as the teacher with no outliers when examining individual data points.

Limitations

One of the first limitations of my study was time. Ideally, it would have been beneficial to track the progress over a longer period of time. One of my findings was that the use of rubrics in self-assessment had more of an immediate effect on the quality of student narrative writing output than direct writing instruction. However, if the study had run longer, we might see that this does not hold true in the long term. Another limitation of my study was the size of my sample. I was able to work with two classes that I co-taught with another teacher, however this was not a large enough sample size to produce

statistically significant results. One other complication of my study was scheduling around student absences and school holidays. Both of these issues kept me from being able to adhere to the scheduling of lessons and activities as strictly as I would have liked. When having a student make-up an activity or lesson related to the study that they had missed, I noticed that the quality of the work or the attention to detail was not the same as if they had been present during the day of the lesson. While I don't think that any of these things affected the outcome or general reliability of my study, they are things that I would do a better job of planning for if I were able to run the study again.

Connections to Prior Research

My results made connections, confirmed findings or provided answers to further suggested research from several of the studies covered in my literature review in chapter two. In the study by Bradford, Newland, Rule, and Montgomery (2016), they sought to determine the effect of using a rubric in the course of writing instruction. They found that those who were exposed to rubrics and taught how to use them show significant gains in writing scores. In my study, while lacking statistical significance or a control group, my results also lead to the conclusion that the actual teaching of how to use the rubric is particularly effective. They also suggest that mini-lessons further strengthen the positive effects of rubrics and that rubrics have the potential to motivate students to become self-directed learners, both of which are outcomes found to be true in my study prove. Other benefits include clarifying the learning target for children and providing them with an opportunity for self-assessment.

Andrade (2009) focused on the correlation between the use of writing rubrics on feelings of self-efficacy. While her results were split when analyzing for gender, she did

make some interesting observations that seem to reinforce my general findings. The first was that the simple existence of a rubric does not guarantee success, nor does handing it out and explaining it. Students must be taught how to use the rubric, first with samples and then to self-assess. I also believe this to be true. Had I stopped at simply giving the students the rubric and instructed them to use it to self-assess, I do not feel that I would have had had the same outcome or results. The most significant part was practicing using the rubric to assess narrative writing exemplars and then discussing our reasons as a class. This turned the rubric from a point of reference into a powerful tool for my students.

In a pedagogy of self-assessment put forth by Liang (2014), it was noted that throughout the writing process, the use of well-established criteria should always be provided. I too found that having the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* always accessible to be a powerful aid and resource for students when writing. One major difference in my approach was the absence of structured teacher feedback on student's writing. I instead chose to provide direct instruction on the use of the rubric itself. On the weeks that we collected and assessed the narrative writing samples, during the second lesson, I had student practice scoring exemplars and then we discussed as a class things that the writer had done and things that they could improve on, even going so far at times to discuss how we would score the exemplars on *organization* or *sentence fluency* using the rubric.

Implications

The most significant result of my research was the overwhelming utility of using rubrics when working with students. Primary students can be taught to use more sophisticated rubrics if sufficient time is given in class to the training and application of

them to use as a tool to reflect upon their own writing process and to self-assess their progress. I was encouraged by the ownership that students took towards their own writing process. By showing them precisely what they would be assessed on, it seems that it indirectly let them know the areas in which they could do better. As they got more familiar and comfortable with the rubric, they also began to be more confident in their writing. We also spent time practicing using the rubric to grade exemplars and then discussed those as a class. This not only showed them what good writing looks like, but paired with the rubric, it showed them how to get there. Teaching students to use an assessment tool like a rubric creates a feedback loop that actively guides them in their reflection on their writing. This finding seems to be supported by the research of Olina & Sullivan (2004), that found that self-assessment seems to be an indispensable tool that has been shown to help students better understand the criteria by which they will be judged. In my observations, students became more committed, purposeful and motivated to fully participate in the process of growing as a writer.

Future Research

I found the results of the study regarding student self-assessment using writing rubrics to be very positive and encouraging, both as a teacher and as a researcher. It was amazing to see the rate of growth around writing in my classroom and how eager the students became when writing their narratives during the study. As a researcher, it is always a positive experience to have your study yield such encouraging results. Due to the sample size and the length of the research project, the findings are not definitive. It would be ideal to replicate the study on a larger scale, with more students, over a longer time period. This longer study period may be able to answer the question of the larger

increase in the quality of writing output from the beginning of the study to the middle when comparing the increase in writing quality from the middle to the end. One of my feelings when reading the compositions as a whole is that the writing narratives samples taken at the middle of the study showed some large gains for certain individual students but that the narrative writing samples taken from the end of the study had a feeling of more general, overall consistency of quality. At the middle of the study I was quite excited by the results but by the end of the study, I felt that I had reached the whole class.

My initial position coming out of the study was that the training around the writing rubric had an outsize effect in comparison to direct instruction on specific writing traits. However, I think that this would even out over time and that they are both important factors in a quality approach to writing instruction. To address this, a future study could create two different groups, one receiving training on how to self-assess using a rubric, and the other group only receiving traditional writing instruction, to then see which group grew more as writers over a specified time frame. However, I believe that it would be more interesting to take this approach further and pair the training of how to use a writing rubric to the practice of peer evaluation.

A recurring thought that I have had is that once students become expert in using rubrics for self-assessment, the next logical step would for them to move on to be expert assessors, most notably peer-assessors or peer-reviewers. I feel that this is something that would require a longer time period to establish. My general anecdotal experience with my students was that they tended to rate the exemplars much lower than I would have and had a tendency to rate themselves higher than I would have, at least initially. This tendency was also present in the study by Suzuki (2009), who also found that students

who self-assessed tended to grade themselves more highly than when they received feedback from peer-assessment. However, once this initial tendency has been corrected for, I surmise that the process of peer-reviewing could have an even stronger effect on the quality of student writing output over time than just simply learning to self-assess using a rubric.

In a study examining the effects of cross-age tutoring using the *6-Traits Writing Rubric*, Paquette (2009) found that fourth graders who participated in cross-age tutoring support showed an average increase 7.5 times larger than that of fourth graders who did not. In fact, both groups were assessed by the teacher using the *6-traits writing rubric*. However, the students who did receive the cross-age tutoring then worked with students from another grade who had been trained in how to provide support for each of the six writing traits.

Conclusions and Final Thoughts

I found that I grew tremendously as a teacher during the period of this study. I had always been an impassioned teacher, who counted on my strong relationship with my students and overarching philosophies on best practices as a teacher to guide me in what was best for my students and best for my instruction. One thing that I have been quite impressed with is the effectiveness of utilizing a more data driven, systematic approach in teaching children. While I may be a big thinker who regards himself as someone who focuses on the larger picture and lofty ideals, this whole process has really sold me on the necessity of being more detail oriented, especially when taking into account the learning preferences of students. Most of them were very motivated by improving small details in their writing and were quite satisfied and motivated by incremental gains. I also firmly

believe that for many of my students, providing them this tool in the form of the *6-Traits Writing Rubric* enabled them to self-regulate and self-monitor their learning in a way that was more powerful than simply my spoken or written feedback could. Rather than being personally diminished by this, I feel empowered, empowered in the fact that I have discovered a way to promote self-efficacy and agency in my students. I realize that my efficacy as a teacher goes beyond just direct instruction and that our most important task as teachers is to give students the tools to be lifelong and independent learners.

The work with my class using this rubric created lots of opportunities to speak with my students about goal setting and how to honestly critique one's work in a way that is both honest but kind. By the end of the study the students had taken on a new perspective towards their learning centered around growth. At the beginning of the study, they were preoccupied with how they stood when compared to their peers and what constituted writing at grade level. By the end of the study, most had embraced this idea of setting personal goals for themselves and measuring success not by their score but by how much they had improved.

As I come to the end of what has felt like quite a long process, there are two conversations that I think back on and smile. One was an interaction I had with a boy in my class towards the end of the study during week 7. I had approached him because he had rated himself quite lower in one trait than I had scored him. When I inquired as to why he had scored himself there, he smiled at me widely and said something to the effect of, "But Mr. Matthew, if I give myself a higher grade there, then I won't have room to grow, and I still think that I could do better next time." The other conversation was with my peer reviewer, who was a co-worker at my school and also taught fourth grade. After

the study ended, she shared with me about the effect that being able to observe my class during the study had had on her. She was delightfully taken aback at how personally invested my students seemed in the work that they were doing, marveling at how I had gotten my group of fourth graders to be so engaged and so focused on the task of writing. This was quite an affirming moment for me to find out about the impact I had had on her and how her preconceptions had evolved around the work that students of this age are capable of doing, specifically writing. These are the types of successes and memories that are important for teachers to have when struggling with the day-to-day of working in the classroom. Looking back and seeing the effect that I had on my students and co-workers during this process is its own reward and an apt one.

I have since left my position in Ecuador and moved on to a leadership position in India where I am currently the Coordinator of Student Support Services at the primary level, which encompasses the English as a Second Language, Learning Support and Counseling departments. Fortunately, I do still have some teaching responsibilities working with ELL students, but I find myself in a position in which I am also responsible for guiding and supporting teachers. This includes not only supervising my staff, but working closely with primary school homeroom teachers on how to best support students in the classroom and on strategies to help support students to build towards working independently, to self-regulate and to self-monitor their own progress. I will pass onwards the knowledge that I have gained through this study, encouraging teachers to model with exemplars, set clear expectations for their students, and never to underestimate the types of tools that students are capable of using to self-monitor and guide their learning.

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APPENDIX A

ABRIDGED 6-TRAITS WRITING RUBRIC

6+1 Trait® Writing Rubric for IDEAS

Key question: Does the writer engage the reader with fresh information or perspective on a focused topic?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Does not reflect a main idea or purpose; includes content that is off topic	Has a main idea that begins to emerge, but author's direction is unclear	States or implies a main idea, but is unclear, unfocused, inaccurate, and/or underdeveloped	Conveys a generally clear, focused, and accurate main idea with acceptable development and/or support	Produces a clear, focused, accurate, and complex main idea with convincing development and/or support	Conveys a clear, focused, accurate, and significant main idea and includes unique, substantial insights that are fully developed and supported

6+1 Trait® Writing Rubric for ORGANIZATION

Key question: Does the organizational structure enhance the ideas and make them easier to understand?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Doesn't use identifiable organization; writing lacks a sense of direction or seems random	Contains mostly ineffective organization with only occasional sections or passages that direct the reader	Has uneven organization that affects the reader's ability to follow text	Has basic organization that moves the reader through the text logically with minimal confusion	Reflects smooth and cohesive organization and varied techniques that build smoothly from one idea to the next to create a unified whole	Uses seamless organization that enhances and showcases central ideas; orders or structures information in a compelling way; clarifies relationships among ideas

6+1 Trait® Writing Rubric for VOICE

Key question: Does the writer use tone and style appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience of the piece?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Appears the author is indifferent, uninvolved, or distanced from the topic, purpose, and/or audience	Relies on simplistic phrases such as "I like it" or "It was fun" to convey any personal quality	Has an emerging voice that is not distinct or unique; gives the reader an incomplete impression of the author's relationship to the purpose and topic	Adequately addresses task, purpose, and audience; author appears sincere yet not fully engaged; reader may not be entirely convinced of the author's commitment to the topic	Fully addresses topic, purpose, and audience in a sincere and engaging way that convinces the reader of the author's commitment to the topic	Fully addresses task, purpose, and audience in an individual and engaging way that shows ownership of purpose and topic; is respectful of audience and/or purpose

6+1 Trait® Writing Rubric for WORD CHOICE

Key question: Does the author's choice of words convey precise and compelling meaning and/or create a vivid picture for the reader?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Uses limited vocabulary; attempts to use words to convey meaning are unsuccessful	Has flawed or simplistic vocabulary, resulting in impaired meaning; reader has difficulty understanding the message	Has vocabulary that is understandable yet lacks energy and imagination and may be repetitive; some interpretation may be needed to understand parts of the piece	Uses vocabulary that is functional and achieves purpose; may include some imagery and/or unique word choices; minimal overuse of words; author's meaning is easy to understand and fits audience and text type	Incorporates precise and appropriate vocabulary; uses imagery and/or figurative language if appropriate; features writing suitable to audience, purpose, and text type	Uses precise, powerful, accurate, and engaging vocabulary, including vivid imagery and/or figurative language where appropriate, to enhance meaning in interesting, natural ways appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

6+1 Trait® Writing Rubric for SENTENCE FLUENCY

Key question: Does the author control sentences so the piece flows smoothly when read aloud?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	2 Emerging	3 Developing	4 Capable	5 Experienced	6 Exceptional
	Structures sentences incorrectly so reader has to reread piece several times and still has difficulty reading aloud without pausing or substituting phrases	Varies sentences very little; uses even simple sentence structure incorrectly in places, causing reader to stumble when reading aloud	Has sentences that are sometimes technically correct but not varied, creating sing-song patterns or lulling the reader to sleep; sounds mecha-nical when read aloud	Has varied sentences that are usually technically correct and flow smoothly; tends to be pleasant or businesslike, though may still be mechanical in places; is easy to read aloud	Incorporates some sentences that are rhythmic and flowing, using a variety of correctly structured sentence types; flows well when read aloud	Uses sentences that flow, have rhythm and cadence, and are well built, with strong, varied structures that invite expressive oral reading

6+1 Trait® Writing Rubric for CONVENTIONS

Key question: How much editing is required before the piece can be shared as a final product?

(Note: For the trait of conventions, grade level matters. Expectations should be based on grade level and include only skills that have been taught.)

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	2 Emerging	3 Developing	4 Capable	5 Experienced	6 Exceptional
	Contains errors in conventions that distract the reader, making text unreadable	Has many types of convention errors scattered throughout text	Handles conventions well at times but, at others, makes errors that distract the reader and impair readability; displays a lack of skill with particular convention(s) through repeated mistakes	Applies standard grade-level conventions accurately on most occasions	Shows few errors with only minor editing needed to publish; may stretch, trying more complex tasks in conventions	Uses conventions effortlessly without significant errors; may use conventions to creatively enhance message

APPENDIX B

STUDENT FRIENDLY 6-TRAITS WRITING RUBRIC

MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Student Friendly 6+1 Traits™ Writing Rubric

		1	2	3	4	5	6
	Ideas	• I don't know what I want to say yet. • I don't have a main idea. • I don't have details.	• I have a topic that is too big or one I don't know much about. • I think I have a main idea, but I'm not sure. • I only have a few details.	• I stick to the topic most of the time. It might be better if the topic was smaller. • I think you can figure out my main idea. • I need to include more information in my details.	• I understand the topic but could narrow it a little more. • I can tell what the main idea is all about. • I have some good details to explain the main idea.	• I know a lot about my topic. • It's easy to tell the main idea. • I have great details to explain the main idea.	• I am an expert on my topic. • The main idea is crystal clear. • I have details that are unusual and not everyone already knows.
	Organization	• I have ideas all jumbled up together. • I have no lead or conclusion. • Transitions—what are those?	• I have ideas that go off in many directions. • I have a lead or conclusion, but it needs work. • I have a couple of transitions, but they don't connect ideas clearly.	• I have ideas that are not always in order and are confusing. • I have a lead and conclusion, but they need work. • I have some transitions that connect ideas clearly.	• Most ideas are in the right spot. • I have a lead and conclusion. • I have transitions that connect most ideas.	• Every idea is in just the right place. • I have a lead that introduces the paper and a conclusion that wraps it up. • I have transitions that connect ideas smoothly.	• Super organization makes my ideas clear. • My lead is a "Wow!" My conclusion is a "Wow!" • Everything connects. You never wonder how I got from beginning to end.
	Voice	• I wouldn't read this myself if I didn't have to. • I don't care if anyone reads this writing.	• I think there could be a moment of voice here or there. • My audience? Well, who are they anyhow?	• I have a tiny part of me in this writing. • I don't usually think about the audience. I just write.	• I think it sounds like me in parts of this writing. • I match the audience with the purpose.	• My voice is clear, and I think it sounds like me. • I work hard to make my writing interesting so it will stand out.	• This is me. It's as individual as my fingerprints. • I am writing just for you—my reader.

		1	2	3	4	5	6
	Word Choice	• I use words that do not seem to work. • I use words I don't understand. • I use the same words over and over.	• I use the first words that come to my mind. • My words are sometimes confusing. • My words do not paint a picture in the reader's mind.	• I think a lot of my words are ordinary and everyone uses them. • Some of my verbs are not strong or lively. • I have too many unneeded words, so there is no clear picture in the reader's mind.	• I use words that are clear and make sense. • I have some strong verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. • I still have some unneeded words or phrases to take out, but a picture is beginning to form in the reader's mind.	• I use words that are clear, make sense, and are interesting. • I have strong verbs, sensory words, and precise nouns. • My words do paint a picture in the reader's mind.	• I use powerful words that create a clear message. • I have strong verbs, sensory words, precise nouns, and modifiers. • My words paint a vivid picture in the reader's mind.
	Sentence Fluency	• This is very hard to read aloud. • I use mostly short, choppy sentences or long, rambling sentences. • If I used dialogue, it does not make sense.	• This is a little hard to read aloud. • I use some choppy sentences and run-on sentences. • If I used dialogue, it doesn't sound like the way people talk.	• Choppy sentences slow the reader down. • I use some variety in sentence beginnings and lengths. • If I used dialogue, it sounds like the way people talk some of the time.	• The writing is easy to read aloud. • I use a variety of sentence beginnings and lengths. • If I used dialogue, it sounds like the way people talk most of the time.	• The writing is easy to read aloud with expression. • I use a variety of sentence beginnings and lengths, so the writing flows smoothly. • If I used dialogue, it sounds like the way people talk.	• The writing has an easy flow and rhythm. • I use a variety of sentence beginnings and lengths, so my writing flows smoothly and has bounce. • If I used dialogue, it sounds like the way people talk and makes my writing stronger.
	Conventions	• I have so many errors it is impossible to understand my writing.	• I have so many errors it is difficult to understand my writing. • I need to edit nearly every line.	• I have some errors, so it is difficult to understand my writing. • Basics (e.g., periods, caps, simple spelling) are correct. • I need to do a lot of editing.	• I have a few errors, but they don't make my writing difficult to understand. • I use a variety of conventions correctly (semicolons, ellipses, dashes, italics, etc.) • I need to do some editing.	• I use conventions correctly, so my writing is easy to understand. • I use a variety of conventions to make an impression on the reader. • I have a few errors to fix.	• I use conventions effectively, so my writing is spectacular. • I add style to my paper using a variety of conventions. • I am ready to publish my writing.