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Writing Rubrics as Formative Assessments in an Elementary Classroom

Debra M. Taylor
The College at Brockport, debt@rochester.rr.com

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Writing Rubrics as Formative Assessments in an Elementary Classroom

by

Debra Taylor

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A culminating project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

“One of the things our school needs to improve, according to CSI’s (Christian Schools International) accreditation team is our writing assessments,” stated my principal at one of our staff development meetings.

“That’s for sure,” I thought to myself. Part of the accreditation process involved evaluation and reflection of our practices as teachers. This was one area that we did not feel we were ‘exemplary.’

Assessing my students’ writing was one of my biggest challenges as a teacher. I had a basal reading program that incorporated writing into the lessons with checklist type assessments at the end of each unit for a particular genre for the students to use as a guide to check their writing. I liked them because they had categories like, “Superstar” or “Rising Star;” they were positive words that wouldn’t discourage a beginning writer. The teacher’s book had a holistic rubric for me to use to assess their writing by giving it a score on a scale of 1 – 4. Because I used more of a ‘writing workshop’ format in my classroom, there were elements that I focused on that weren’t always included in the rubric from the teacher’s manual. Other teachers in my school were using analytic rubrics. One teacher was using rubrics that she found on the internet. She would find the rubric for the particular genre her class was writing, and then make sure to include in her lessons what was on the rubric. I also found in my cupboard, a 6+1 Traits writing rubric and teaching kit that other teachers had used in the past. I perused the contents of the kit and thought that the categories being assessed by the rubric were important to writing but I had not been trained on how to use it. I also felt that it didn’t always assess the same things that I was emphasizing in my writing workshops with my students. My young writers
were learning about various genres and much of our writing focused on those elements. My school did not mandate using a particular assessment, so I developed my own checklists for my students that I used as my writing assessments. If a student met all but one of the criteria, he/she would receive an Excellent. If he or she was missing two or three, a satisfactory score would be given. If a student was missing four or more, he or she would receive an S- or an Unsatisfactory, depending upon how much was missing from the piece.

As a graduate student I had been trying to incorporate what I was learning into my teaching and I really liked a ‘writing workshop’ approach to writing. A writing workshop enables students to have choice in what they write. In writing workshop, all students are writing while the teacher conferences with small groups or individual students. A mini-lesson is taught at the beginning of the workshop and focuses on a procedure, writer’s craft or conventions. When the class is studying a particular genre, the students will write on that genre but have freedom to choose what they want to do write about within the genre. In a writing workshop, the students write more like adults do as they have choice, work independently and write for authentic reasons (Tompkins, 2010). I made sure that I taught the genre that the basal program covered but did it in a writing workshop format. My checklists were based on our mini-lesson ‘discoveries.’ The checklist usually incorporated whatever elements I stressed with my students as I did my writing lessons. I was glad that I had the freedom to create my own checklists, but wondered if I should be using rubrics instead of checklists. Checklists have a list of criteria that a student needs to include in their writing but is written in statements. As the student completes each criteria, he checks off a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ box, with the goal of fixing what has not been included. In contrast, rubrics have degrees of work quality from acceptable to unacceptable for the criteria listed.
As a graduate student for childhood literacy, I hadn’t had very much instruction on writing assessments. Only one class I had taken focused on writing, and maybe two lessons touched on writing assessments. Even those lessons focused more on a child’s writing development. We did not learn how to use rubrics to assess writing.

Using rubrics in graduate school was really my first introduction to them, other than what I had seen in my teacher’s manual and cupboard. My professors used rubrics to assess my work for various assignments; I liked the rubrics because they clearly spelled out the criteria that I needed to include in order to create a quality piece of writing. I had graduated from college in 1983 and writing rubrics weren’t being used back then. I was also returning to teaching after being out of the classroom for ten years. I am sure most undergraduates in elementary education have been trained on how to use them but, I had not. If I were teaching in a public school, the district might have mandated what writing assessments to use, but I was in a small private school where I had to take the initiative to find a writing assessment that could accurately assess what my students had learned about the writing genre and how they were incorporating those characteristics into their own pieces.

As I reflected on my learning as a graduate student and how the rubrics my professor used helped me to have a focus for my own writing, I analyzed my own practices in my classroom. My current practice was to give my students the checklist I had created during the revision process. They were instructed to read each category and see if they included that element in their own writing. If they did, they put a check in the ‘yes’ box. If they didn’t then they were to check the ‘no’ box and go back and ‘fix’ their writing by incorporating that element. After they did a self-assessment they were instructed to find a writing buddy who would also assess whether or not they had included all of the elements by checking off the ‘yes’
or ‘no’ boxes for each category. I used the checklists so that the students would have something to focus on when they did their revisions. When I met with students for a writing conference, prior to them publishing the piece, I observed that my student always checked off ‘yes,’ for all of the categories that had to do with various aspects of the genre. The only time ‘no’ was checked was when there were spelling or punctuation errors. I doubted that they were really using the checklist to make revisions on their writing. With the new emphasis by the common core curriculum on revision for third graders, I used the checklists as a way for them to focus on what we had learned during our minilessons in order to improve their writing. After reflecting though, I wondered if how I was doing it was the most effective way. After all, I had learned that revision was more than just “repairing a piece” (Calkins, 1994, p. 39), which is what I was asking them to do. I wondered how I could get my students to be more reflective during the writing process to improve their own writing.

I really wanted to try to use a writing rubric with my students, instead of a checklist, so I started to wonder, what if my students helped me create a rubric that was based upon our mentor texts during writing workshop? If my students helped me create the rubric, it would be kid friendly and written in language that they could understand. It could focus on what we discovered in our mentor texts that made the literature such a good read. Perhaps creating the rubric would also heighten their own awareness of what to include in their writing and what quality writing entailed. The rubric we created together could then be used by me as a summative assessment at the end of our genre study. I also wondered what would happen if they used the rubric they created during the writing process, as opposed to what I was presently doing with the checklist after they had already written their piece. I knew how much I referred to a rubric when I was doing my graduate work as I completed an assignment. Why not give
Significance of the Problem

In today’s assessment-driven education system, students’ reading and writing are being assessed as much, if not more, than any other assessment, across all disciplines. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has resulted in schools in the United States to focus on high stakes reading and writing assessments (Rubin, 2011). The Common Core State Standards Initiative has been adopted by 45 states in the U.S. This initiative, in its writing standards, requires students to meet each year’s grade-specific standards. It requires students to “produce clear and coherent writing.” (Common Core Standards, 2010) Both of these measures have made many schools look more closely at the assessments they are using for their writing programs.

Rubrics have been lauded by many as the tools by which all students can be fairly evaluated (Ramey, VandeVusse & Gosline, 2007; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). And because many standardized tests use a rubric to assess student writing, rubrics dominate the writing curriculum as the assessment of choice in many schools (Mabry, 1999). A rubric is an assessment that lists the expectations for an assignment by listing certain criteria, describing levels of quality from excellent to unacceptable or poor (Andrade, Du & Mycek, 2010). Holistic rubrics give one score for the whole essay and are more concerned about the product rather than the process (Finson, as cited in Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). Analytic rubrics have predefined scale points against which the writing is assessed and are more concerned about the process. Analytic rubrics have come to be accepted and used by many teachers at all levels of teaching, from kindergarten through graduate school (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). The 6 + 1 traits rubric is widely used in classrooms across the U.S. and internationally as a model for assessment in writing and for
standardized assessments because of its effectiveness (Fry & Griffin, 2010). Therefore, many teachers use the 6 + 1 rubric in their own classrooms so that students are familiar with the language and criteria that the rubric uses for evaluating writing (Turley, Gallagher, 2008). Many educators feel more confident when they use a rubric to assess their students’ writing because they have specific criteria that must be met by the student with score points specifically attached to the performance of the student (Fry & Griffin, 2010; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). But others believe that rubrics produce uncreative, ‘standardized writers’ (Wilson, 2006, p. 39; Mabry as cited in Gilmore, 2007) because the students are so focused on meeting a predetermined set of criteria that has been put forth by the teacher or school district that they don’t write in a way that they might otherwise, if not given a rubric. Kohn (2006) feels that rubrics stifle learning because students don’t have to think about they are writing; they only need produce the criteria that the rubric addresses. These views cemented my determination to include my students in the co-creation of the rubric. If the students helped create the rubric then they would be setting the standards and they would be engaged in deep, critical thinking as they would have to negotiate what was important in quality persuasive writing.

**Purpose of the study**

As I did this study I explored the research related to rubric use and their effectiveness as a writing assessment. I hoped to gain insight into the best way to assess my students’ writing in my classroom. As a teacher of second and third graders in a combined classroom, I was using a checklist that I created, based on the elements that I stressed in my writing workshop. As I learned more about rubrics and their effectiveness, I would be more knowledgeable as an educator as to what would work best for my students in my classroom.

This study increased my own understanding of how rubrics can be used as formative
assessment tools. It was critical that the assessment I chose be one from which my students could learn. Because I believe in responsive teaching, I wanted to explore the idea of my students using the rubric during the writing process. As a teacher, I tried to conference with my students on a regular basis. During this conferring time, I tried to give feedback to the students that would help them become better writers. Asking, “what might help this writer” (Calkins, 1994, p. 228) became central during my conferring time. What strategies could I give the student that he could use in all of his writing? But unfortunately, there are many days when I couldn’t meet with all of my students. Needy students, discipline problems that had to be dealt with or interruptions to our writing workshop stole time away. Could a rubric be another tool that they could put in their toolbox of ‘strategies,’ that would help them be more independent as writers and give them feedback on their writing? As I conducted this study, I would be able to observe first-hand how my students interacted with and responded to using a rubric during the writing process. This would give me valuable information that would inform my teaching practices.

As a social constructivist, I believe that learning cannot be separated from a social context and that cognitive functions are a product of social interactions; learning takes place in collaboration (Tompkins, 2010). Having students create the rubric with me would give them opportunity to collaborate together on what criteria should be included in the rubric. As we studied a particular genre(s) of writing together and determined what the author did to make this quality writing, I believed that this would increase their learning of the genre. I hoped that this knowledge would be used to inform their own writing as authors, as well.

I also wanted to share my findings with my colleagues at my school. This would be helpful information as we try to develop effective rubrics for our classrooms. It was important
that as a teacher, I used what I learned to improve my own practices in my classroom as well as be an active participant in improving my school community.

Conducting a study and doing research heightened my abilities to observe my students, collect and analyze data and reflect on the effectiveness of rubrics during the writing process. It informed my teaching, enabling me to use best practices in relation to writing assessments. My research questions were as follows:

1). What happens during the process of teacher and children co-constructing rubrics based on joint examination of mentor texts?
2). What happens when elementary students use a student-generated writing rubric during the writing process?
3). How might student-generated writing rubrics influence students’ writing?

**Study Approach**

This study was qualitative in nature. The participants were seven second graders and twelve third graders that I taught in a combination class. The genre unit of study was on persuasive writing. I used a preassessment which enabled me to see what elements of the genre students were already incorporating into their writing. This preassessment also gave me data to which I could compare their post-study reviews.

Field notes, interviews with my students and observations provided qualitative data using grounded theory design (Creswell, 2003). Interviews, before and after the creation of the rubric, helped me gain insight into the students’ thinking about the process of creating a rubric, and its impact, if any, on their learning. Observations of the students, as they collaborated with me to create the rubric, practiced using the rubric, and then used it independently in their own writing was recorded in a research journal. The rubric the students and I co-created was used to
assess the preassessment and the final writing piece of the students as a means of assessing the students’ writing. As I compared these two pieces of writing, I looked for improvement in students’ writing. Specifically, I ascertained what criteria from the rubric; the students used in their final writing piece.

**Rationale**

There were several goals of this study. One goal was to create a rubric, in collaboration with my students that accurately reflected the learning that students gained through a genre study. This study also examined how third graders used a rubric to self-assess their writing and what influence, if any, using a rubric had on my students. This self-study enabled me to reflect on my questions about rubrics and use research to answer them. As I analyzed the effectiveness of this student-teacher created rubric, it guided future decisions about the kind of assessment I would use with my students. It also gave me insight into the effectiveness of a rubric as a tool for students to use to improve their writing.

I used open-ended questions with my participants about the process of creating the rubric and using it during the writing process. I also asked specific questions that gave me insight into what the students understood about what a rubric is and how to use it in their writing. One-on-one interview was the chosen method to ensure that all of the participants understood the questions and to ensure that all of their thoughts were recorded. Because I was a teacher-researcher, I made sure that my students understood the importance of their role as participants and that their answers would not affect their grade in any way or have any negative consequences.

Besides interviews, I used my own observations as a means of gathering data. This was a challenge because I was a participant observer. I had to ‘step back’ and look on as an
'outsider.' As a teacher doing research in my classroom, this self-study enabled me to learn about myself as a teacher and how I interact with my students as we co-constructed a rubric together. I gained insight into my students as I observed their discussions, questions and conversations around the rubric and its use. As a result, I was able to improve my own practice as an educator.

I collected artifacts like students’ writing samples during my research. These provided valuable evidence in helping me to determine if using a rubric influenced my students’ learning of the particular genre we were studying.

**Summary**

Using writing rubrics had been unchartered territory for me. I had resorted to checklists in the past for assessing my students’ writing. Exploring the possibility of rubrics as a writing assessment with my students broadened my knowledge of assessments in general and guided my decisions about whether or not rubrics are the type of assessment that I want to incorporate into my teaching practices. I was curious to see how third graders would collaborate and design a rubric for persuasive writing and if this process would increase their understanding of what is entailed in writing this type of genre. As I reflected on how my third graders currently ‘revised’ their work, I was interested to learn if third graders could use a rubric effectively to guide their own writing as they create their essays. Third graders tend to “rarely interrupt themselves to reflect on their subject or their text, to plan ahead, or to consider alternate paths,” (Calkins, 2009, p.128). This study gave me insight into the effectiveness of a writing rubric as a summative assessment and as a tool for improving students’ writing as they created their pieces.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Rubrics are tools that can be used as formative and summative assessment in the writing workshop. In order to better understand how I can utilize rubrics in my classroom, I have done an extensive literature review on the subject of rubrics. In this chapter, I will describe the history of rubrics. This will include a definition of rubrics, a comparison between holistic and analytic rubrics, and how rubrics have evolved. Best practices for using rubrics and the debate surrounding their use will also be explained. I will describe how they can be used as formative and summative assessments tools. I will expound on how a teacher can develop her own rubrics in the classroom and how she can use them. I will then explain the importance of student collaboration in creating rubrics. Finally, I will explain the limitations of this study.

Rubrics

The History of Rubrics

Rubrics are tools that educators can use to assess students, from writing to math. It is a document that explains the expectations for an assignment by listing certain criteria. In writing, there are two types of rubrics, holistic and analytic.

Holistic rubrics are used to evaluate a writing assignment based upon the overall quality of the work, without judging the elements separately. Different descriptions are given for various levels of performance, usually from the lowest level of performance to mastery. Focused holistic rubrics may focus on particular aspects, like organization, content, language use and mechanics, but then give one score based on the whole piece (Barone & Taylor, 2006). Holistic rubrics may be more appropriate for assessing creative writing (KAN, 2007).

Analytic rubrics separate and evaluate certain textual components; each component having its own description and scoring scale (Barone & Taylor, 2006). Analytic rubrics will
include performance criteria, performance level and performance definitions across the scale level. Analytic rubrics can focus on various factors like, ideas, purpose, wording or vocabulary, flavor, conventions and handwriting. Analytic rubrics enable teachers and students to focus on each trait separately (Kan, 2007; Barone & Taylor, 2006). The 6 +1 Trait writing rubric is a popular analytic rubric that is used as a way to assess many state administered writing tests and also used by many classroom teachers (Fry & Griffin, 2010). This analytic rubric assesses ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation (which is optional) (Romeo, 2008).

The use of rubrics emerged from a dissatisfaction by teachers and administrators with traditional essay grading strategies (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). Since the 1970’s, holistic grading, which looked at the overall quality of a piece of writing, was believed to be overly subjective and often lacked reliability and validity (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). Rater bias has been documented in many studies (Ross-Fisher, 2005 and Tompkins, 2003, as cited in Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010) and has been related to language command, gender, and even physical attractiveness of students (Read, Francis, & Robson, (2005). This subjectivity pointed to a need for a more reliable means of assessing students’ writing and thus the creation of rubrics.

Many educators believe that using a rubric is better than not using one because not using one is too subjective (Rezaei and Lovorn, 2010) and several studies have shown that assessment is more reliable if a rubric is used (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Silvestri & Oescher, 2006). But even rubrics have their problems; just using a rubric does not guarantee objectivity. Rezaei and Lovorn’s (2010) quantitative study showed that rubrics were not reliable because the raters did not use the rubric to assess the essay; they relied upon their own subjective opinions about what makes an essay a quality one, even though specific criteria for assessing the essays were clearly
defined in the rubric. The raters scored the essays based on the mechanics and grammar of the essay rather than the content. That is why training for scorers is essential, so that bias is kept to a minimum (Dipardo, Storms & Selland, 2011; Fry & Griffin, 2010; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010; Novak, 1996). Also important is the choice of the rubric (Novak, 1996; Watanabe & Hall-Kenyon, 2011). It is important to choose rubrics that are appropriate to the development of the children being assessed (Watanabe & Hall-Kenyon, 2011) and that focus on the particular genre of writing (Andrade, Du, & Mycek, 2010). Today there are websites that teachers can access for creating their own rubrics to meet particular standards they think are important to writing a specific genre. The rubric chosen should support learning; it does not take the place of good modeling by the teacher, feedback and an opportunity for students to ask questions during the writing process (Andrade, 2005).

The selection of anchor papers is also associated with best practices for guaranteeing assessment quality and inter-rater reliability through clearly demonstrating the intent of the rubric to the raters (Popp, Ryan, & Thompson, 2009). Anchor papers are also referred to as benchmark papers, exemplars or range finders. (Popp, et. al., 2009). Anchor papers are sample papers by which all the other papers are assessed when using a rubric. The anchor paper defines the standards of performance for the rubric; it serves as a reference for the various points of the rubric. Usually several anchor papers are chosen that exemplify the various points for the different criteria of the rubric. Grade level should be taken into consideration by the raters when choosing anchor papers because distinct expectations associated with grade level, like conventions, may not be captured in the rubric (Popp, et. al., 2009).

There has been much debate recently over the use of rubrics as assessments tools for standardized testing and for the classroom. As mentioned above, many teachers like using
rubrics because they think that a rubric makes grading writing, which is a challenging task, more objective and easier (Rezaei and Lovorn, 2010). Others feel that rubrics stifle creativity in writers and do not necessarily produce good writers, only writers that know how to meet specific criterion. (Wilson, 2006; Kohn, 2006 & Mabry, 2007). According to Mabry (2006), rubrics control what is taught and valued in the classroom and only produce empty writing. She also asserts that rubrics are reliable only because scorers are focusing on a few features of the writing so that there is a higher chance of agreement. According to Mabry (2006), rubrics undermine validity because they focus so much on specific criteria that a student may achieve quality writing in other ways that the rubric does not assess. Others, like Turley & Gallagher (2008), oppose rubrics that are ‘state-imposed’ (p. 89) because they are created by individuals who are ‘distanced’ (p. 88) from the classroom. They believe that the further away from a classroom an educational tool originates, the less instructionally useful it is. They reason that these types of rubrics only force teachers and students to ‘conform’ to certain, pre-determined criterion that neither teacher nor students helped create.

There is much support to the idea that state imposed writing assignments and generic rubrics cannot capture or accurately assess a student’s writing (Wilson, 2006; Kohn, 2006; Mabry, 2007). The focus of this study will be on rubrics used in the classroom, created by students and teacher together for the purpose of building knowledge about a particular genre, and improving quality of writing.

In conclusion, rubrics are popular assessment tools that are being used across the United States in all curricular areas. As a teacher, it is important to be aware of best practices for using rubrics to ensure as accurate assessment as possible. Choosing a rubric that is developmentally aligned to my students and specific to the genre we are writing are best practices that need to be
followed. Using anchor papers that are at a grade level equivalent to the grade being assessed is another best practice. A rubric is a tool that is to be used by the teacher, and does not replace expert teaching. It is also important to consider the criticisms of rubrics. Being aware of the criticisms will guide my practice as I create my own rubrics in my classroom.

**Rubrics as Summative and Formative Assessments**

Summative assessments evaluate work that has already been completed. End of the unit tests and a composition written at the end of a narrative unit are examples of summative assessments. State-wide testing is another example of summative assessments. They are intended to measure whether or not a student has mastered particular content or learning. Summative assessments determine whether or not students move on to the next grade, and are often used to determine grades. It is a way for students and teachers to make judgments as to whether or not certain goals have been accomplished (Popham, 2009). Rubrics were originally designed to be used as summative assessments for writing only, but research has shown that rubrics are also effective formative assessment tools (Andrade, Du & Wang, 2008; Andrade, et. al., 2010; Ramey, et. al., 2007; Fry & Griffin, 2010).

Formative assessment is a daily, continual and integral part of teaching. It involves collecting information from your students from multiple sources over time that shows evidence of learning and guides/modifies your instruction (Romeo, 2008; Calkins, 2006). It could also be evidence used by students to change the way they are learning something (Popham, 2009). Formative assessments in writing can be conferring with students during the writing process, checking web organizers to see that children have understood parts of a paragraph, checklists for revision, peer conferencing, observing a child’s ability to organize a piece of writing, and rubrics (Calkins, 2006; Paratore & McCormack, 2007) to name a few. Formative assessment is a vital
part of the writing workshop because writing workshop is based upon the premise that students need to be involved in authentic writing that involves choice. Authentic writing is writing with a purpose and audience in mind. As students write and reflect on their writing, they ask questions like, “What questions will the reader ask?” or “What am I going to do next?” (Calkins, 1994, p. 223).

Formative assessment involves two actions (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William, 2003). First students must realize there is a gap between the desired goal and their present state of writing/skill. Second, students must take action to close that gap. Students need a mechanism for feedback that gives them the knowledge to fill the gap (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, 2003). Feedback can improve learning when it gives students information about strengths and weaknesses of their work (Popham, 2007; Andrade, 2000). Rubrics can be a tool that helps fill that gap during formative assessment as students use them to revise their writing during the writing process.

Self-assessment is a process by which students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which their work meets the criteria and then revise it accordingly. Self-assessment is a formative assessment in that it is done during the writing process with the goal of improving one’s writing (Andrade, et. al., 2010). Self-assessment is critical because involvement in the assessment process, enables students to take more responsibility for their learning (Romeo, 2008) and is essential for effective learning (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, 2003 & Popham, 2009). Rubrics can be a teaching tool that can support student learning and develop sophisticated thinking skills in students (Andrade, 2008). According to Andrade (2010), during self-assessment, students’ understanding of the qualities of excellent writing increase when rubrics are explained and given before the writing process, along with a model paper that shows the
criterion of the rubric. Rubrics, when used during the writing process, can promote learning because studies have shown that students learn more about the content being taught when using a rubric (Andrade, 2000). Rubrics also improve a student’s writing as it provides feedback to the students about the strengths and weaknesses of their writing. (Andrade et al., 2008; Ramey, et. al., 2007; Fry & Griffin, 2010) When middle school students used model pieces of writing to critique and evaluate their own writing and developed rubrics from that, the quality of students’ writing improved (Andrade et. al., 2010). Students in a nursing program; said that they benefited from using a writing rubric in that it clarified the expectations for their writing assignment. This study is supported by other research that shows rubrics help students focus their efforts and support their learning (Andrade & Du, 2005, as cited in Andrade, et. al., 2008).

Rubrics can be used as summative and formative assessments. In recent years, rubrics have been used to assess students as a means to improve students’ learning and the quality of their work.

**Developing Rubrics**

Creating a quality rubric is a task that teachers should not take lightly. It is important when creating a rubric to know the writing curriculum, the needs of the students in the classroom and the state standards (Paratore & McCormack, 2007). The rubric a teacher creates needs to be aligned with these three things in order to be valid (Andrade, 2005). A rubric that is well made identifies the criteria for a successful performance and defines the qualities of strong, adequate and weak performance. Popham (2009) stresses the importance of not creating categories that are too general or too detailed.

Spandell (2005) and Piazza (2003) (as cited in Romeo, 2008) recommend using the 6 writing traits: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions as
criteria for creating rubrics. Ideas/content focus on the quality of the writing with the right information and supporting details in just the right spot. Organization takes into account how the writing is organized, for example time order, least to greatest importance, etc. Voice is the ability of the writer to express his individualistic writing style and demonstrate the ability to take ownership of the writing. Voice also shows strong awareness of audience. Word choice has to do with using vivid words that create clear pictures in the readers mind and appropriate vocabulary. Sentence fluency is being able to construct fluent, rhythmic sentence patterns and varied lengths of sentences (Barone & Taylor, 2006). These traits do not all have to be included in a rubric. Other criteria may be added or substituted for these, depending upon the instructional goals of the teacher.

It is important to determine how many levels of descriptors are needed. Spandel recommends both five and six point scales for rubrics. He divides the six points into beginning (1,2), developing (3,4) and strong (5,6) (Spandel as cited in Romeo, 2008). A three-point scale might be described as: below benchmark standards, meets benchmark standards, or exceeds benchmark standards. The scale used might be determined by how the school district evaluates its students; one should choose a scale that is consistent with the grading system of the school.

Andrade, who has done substantial research on using rubrics, suggests the following guidelines for developing rubrics (Andrade, 2000). She includes students in the creation of the rubric because when students help create the rubric they have a better understanding of what is expected to create quality writing (Hirada & Yoshina, 2005; Andrade, 2000). She suggests that a teacher first look at models of the assignment that will be given, for example model essays for a specific writing assignment. The teacher then shows a good example and a bad example. Then, the students and the teacher think about and discuss the qualities that make each model ‘good’ or
‘bad.’ The teacher asks students to talk about problems they might encounter as they complete the assignment. Next, the teacher tracks the students’ ideas under the heading “criteria” or “what counts” (p. 16). If they haven’t listed criteria that the teacher thinks are important, those criteria can be added in and the importance of them can be discussed with the students. The list that is created together may be long; so after class, the teacher will have to decide what can be grouped together or what overlaps. Andrade cautions against creating categories that are too large (2000). The teacher then drafts four levels of quality for each criterion, drawing upon students’ comments of good and poor models. Andrade suggests one use the, “yes; yes, but; no, but; no” technique and gives examples of how to create levels using the above words. She stresses the importance of not worrying if it is perfect but to make sure to include the language the students used during the discussion and the problem areas students typically encounter. Next, the teacher creates a draft rubric that she shows to her students and asks for their comments. The teacher then makes revisions accordingly. Finally, the teacher passes the rubric out to her students and has them use it during the writing process.

As teachers develop rubrics it is important to remember that rubrics should be as varied and as flexible as the assignment given and take into consideration the needs of the students (Gilmore, 2007; Turley & Gallagher, 2008). Teachers don’t want students’ writing to all be the same; it should reflect the nature of the assignment and the writing style of the student. Nor should writing rubrics be the same for all assignments; they should reflect the learning and/or skills to be mastered within that particular assignment. Turley and Gallagher (2008) suggest including a ‘wild card’ criterion on rubrics. This is an additional criterion that students can use to identify one or more of their own goals as writers that may not be included on the rubric the class created together as a community of writers. Rubrics that are flexible and varied will better
meet the needs of the students.

Rubrics should meet curriculum and state standards. They should clearly list criteria that the teacher and students deem important to the writing assignment with descriptions of quality at various levels. They can be developed using the 6 + 1 traits but teachers should be flexible when creating them, always taking into consideration their instructional goals and students’ needs. The best scenario is creating rubrics with your students.

**How to Use Rubrics**

Rubrics are assessment tools that can be used before, during and after instruction. Teachers can use rubrics to plan and guide their teaching. As teachers plan their instruction and decide what skills they want their students to learn or what goals they have for their students, they can create rubrics to reflect those goals. Teachers can then use the rubric to do a summative assessment of the writing. This affords teachers a way to provide individualized, beneficial feedback to students in a manageable time frame (Andrade, 2000). It also can guide future instruction as teachers examine the rubrics. They can see where learning has occurred and where there are trouble spots. Teachers can modify instruction based upon the needs of their students and classes (Paratore & McCormack, 2007). It is important to remember that rubrics are one form of feedback to students and should be used to focus teacher commentary, not replace it entirely. It is important to still confer with students during the writing process, and many teachers include a section for comments on the rubric (Gilmore, 2007; Turley & Gallagher, 2008).

Once the rubric has been created, it is important for the teacher to explain, model and discuss what the students would have to produce to obtain a particular score on the rubric. Andrade (2000) points out that just handing a rubric to a child doesn’t mean he will know how to
use it. Students need to have it explained to them thoroughly and then be given an opportunity to use it on sample papers, with a teacher’s support, before using it on their own work.

Rubrics can be used by students during the writing process and after the writing process as a formative assessment. Students may use it independently during the writing process as a way to evaluate their work and ask themselves, “Am I including the elements that make a quality piece of writing?” During the revision process, Students can be asked to highlight each criterion from the rubric that demonstrates quality writing and then find evidence of that in their paper by highlighting it in the same color. As students do this, they may be amazed to discover that it isn’t there (Andrade, 2000). They can then include in their revisions what they are missing in their writing. Using a rubric in this way as a self-assessment, gives students opportunity to take control of their learning and be more engaged in their learning. Rubrics can also be used for peer assessment during the writing process. One student reads another student’s writing and circles on the rubric how he thinks that student did in meeting the criteria. He attaches the rubric to the writing and then the students discuss together what revisions could be made to improve the writing. After writing, it is recommended that students use the rubric to self-assess their writing and give a rationale for why they gave themselves that score. Students using the rubric during and after the writing process can be helpful to students for goal setting and to teachers, for future instruction.

In conclusion, rubrics can be used by the teacher to plan and inform instruction. They can also be used to assess the final product of a student. Rubrics can be used by students to inform their own writing as a means of improving the quality of their writing and to form future goals in writing. Rubric use must be explicitly taught though by teachers, in order for students to receive the greatest benefit from it.
Checklists vs. Rubrics

Checklists are another means that teachers can use as an assessment tool. The basal series my school uses (Houghton Mifflin, 2001) has checklists for students to use after they have written a piece to help during the revision process and rubrics for teachers to use as a summative assessment. Checklists can incorporate the six trait model developed by Spandel and Culham (Romeo, 2009), but are usually used as a formative assessment to assist students during the revision process. Teachers create a checklist with a series of statements like, “I included periods.” Or “I read over my draft,” and then students check ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to indicate whether or not they have done that. Checklists can also include a place for comments or questions that focus on goal setting.

Checklists differ from rubrics in that checklists list only the criteria for an assignment. Checklists do not describe “desirable” (Andrade, p. 27, 2000) qualities of a writing assignment or “common pitfalls” (Andrade, p. 27, 2000) like rubrics do. There are no descriptions in checklists, which can be very helpful to students and informative as they reflect on their writing (Andrade, 2000). Checklists are valid forms of assessing and goal setting, but don’t offer as much feedback as do rubrics.

The Value of Student Collaboration

There is much value in students collaborating with the teacher in creating a rubric. According to Vygotsky (Au, Carrol & Scheu, 2001), children’s learning is socially constructed. Children learn don’t learn because their teachers tell them what they need to know about a topic. They learn by engaging with new ideas and making them their own. As children create rubrics together in collaboration with other students and their teacher, they become actively involved in trying to understand what makes a certain piece of literature quality literature. They engage in
the learning process, as they negotiate together what to include on the rubric and talk with peers about why that is so important. When students are a part of creating the rubric with the teacher, then the students take ownership of the rubric and the goals being put forth because they have created it (Paratore & McCormack, 2007).

Central to the concept of social constructivism is a child’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky defines this concept as “the difference between the child’s actual level of development and the level of performance that he achieves in collaboration with the adult” (Vygotsky as cited in Au, et. al., 2001, p. 13). Anything below the child’s zone is what the child knows already. Anything above the zone is too difficult and frustrating for the child. New learning within the ZPD is attainable with the teacher’s guidance. The teacher offers much guidance and modeling at first and then as the child becomes more capable and able, offers less assistance over time until the child is able to work independently. The process of co-constructing rubrics with students is a way for teachers to help children learn how to write new genres by gradually releasing responsibility to the students. With help from the teacher, students are able to think about criteria that are important to the particular genre they are studying and what should be included in the rubric. As students and teacher examine various sample papers together of the genre, they talk about varying qualities of the papers and how they would rate them. As students articulate and demonstrate understanding of how to use the rubric on the exemplars, the teacher gives them the rubric to use on their own writing independently. Some students may need more teacher support as they use the rubric, which would be provided by the teacher.

There is research on peer-assessment (Black, Harrison, Lee & Marshall, 2003), that shows the value of peer assessment because kids talk in a language that students would naturally
use. Social constructivism values students interacting with each other in the classroom because learning takes place in the social context of the students’ world. This can be applied to co-constructing rubrics, I believe, as well. When students talk together about categories of quality in a rubric, for example, they may choose words to describe those categories that are socially constructed, like, “very best,” “okay” or “not so well” (Skillings & Ferrell, 2000), as opposed to language that a teacher might include in a rubric, like “proficient”. When students help create the rubric, the rubric will use language that the students can understand because they have created it. This could help to fill in gaps of knowledge between what the teacher is trying to convey through the rubric and what the students understand (Paratore & McCormack, 2007).

One of the criticisms of rubrics is that when students are given a rubric they don’t have to do any thinking because everything is spelled out for them (Kohn, 2006). If students collaborate with the teacher and their peers in constructing the rubric, then much thinking has to happen as students evaluate what is important to creating a quality piece of writing. They become active participants in learning as they have to negotiate different criteria for various qualities of writing. Skillings and Ferrell (2000) studied, over a period of two years, a second and third grade classroom teacher who co-constructed rubrics with her students on a regular basis. They concluded that allowing the students to be a part of the assessment process of co-creating the rubric empowered their own ability to think critically about what makes a writing piece a quality piece of writing because they had to think meta-cognitively; they had to think about their own thinking.

More and more teachers are finding the value of co-constructing rubrics with their students. This new development will only increase learning as students become active participants in their learning by collaborating with teachers and peers.
Limitations of Previous Studies

Very little research has been done on the use of rubrics with elementary children. Andrade (2008) did a quantitative study with third and fourth graders where the students were given a model paper, given the opportunity to develop criteria for an assignment and then used the rubric to self-assess their first drafts. While using the rubrics as a guide, students were encouraged to write reminders to themselves to improve those areas that fell short of meeting the rubric criteria. This quantitative study showed that students who used the rubric improved their writing over the nontreatment group in all of the criteria measured. No qualitative study has been done, to my knowledge, on elementary students. Surveys and interviews from the students are valuable instruments that can add to existing knowledge of how students use a rubric to assess their learning and how using a rubric influences their writing. There has been mixed research that examines college students’ perceptions about the helpfulness of using a rubric in their writing, but not elementary students (Ramey, VandeVusse & Gosline, 2007).

Of all of the studies done on the effectiveness of students co-constructing rubrics for writing assignments, no study to date, has been done on using mentor texts for creating the criteria for a rubric. All of the studies have focused on students using writing samples or models that exhibit good and poor qualities of writing (Andrade, Du & Mycek, 2010; Andrade, Ying & Xiaolei, 2008; Skillings & Ferrell, 2000). My study will focus on using mentor texts as an example of quality writing, not models. Students will have to then determine, based upon their discoveries from the mentor text what poor quality writing would entail.

This study will add to the existing research on the impact that rubrics have on elementary student learning during the writing process. It will also provide valuable information on how students negotiate defining criteria for a rubric using a mentor text, as opposed to model essays.
Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures

As a teacher, it was important for me to use a writing assessment that accurately measured my students’ learning and one that the students helped create. When students are involved in the learning and assessment process, they take more responsibility for their learning (Serafini, 2010). As stated earlier, my school did not mandate a particular writing assessment, so this study gave me an opportunity to explore the use of rubrics as a writing tool during the writing process and as a summative assessment with my students. During this five-week study, I hope to explore the following questions:

1). What happens during the process of teacher and children co-constructing rubrics based on joint examination of mentor texts?

2). What happens when elementary students use a student-generated writing rubric during the writing process?

3). How might student-generated writing rubrics influence students’ writing?

Context

The school where I conducted this study was a suburban school in upstate New York near Lake Ontario. It was a private non-profit school with 130 students; pre-k through 8th grade. The school was located in an upper-middle class community where the median income was $70,792, which is about 28% higher than the median for New York state income. Most of the students were from the surrounding area but 5 percent of the students at the school do received financial assistance (Personal communication, school business manager, March, 2013). The classroom where the study was conducted was a 2nd/3rd grade combination class; there were seven second graders and twelve third graders. Because it was a private religious school where parents have to pay tuition, parents were invested in their children’s education.
For reading and writing, the school used the Houghton Mifflin basal series (Houghton Mifflin, 2001), which included a reading/writing/spelling workbook. I did not use the curriculum material as prescribed in the teacher’s manual. I believed in working in the child’s zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), so I incorporated writing workshop and tried to teach the writing skills children needed through their own writing. I also tried to choose leveled books for guided reading that were of high interest to my students and of the same genre that I was teaching my students during writing workshop, so that we could make connections between our reading and writing. Some of the books came from the basal series; others came from my own collection of books. For writing, I did use the Houghton Mifflin materials for graphic organizers, if I felt they would be helpful. I also tried to cover the writing genres covered in the curriculum.

Writing workshop occurred three times a week in the afternoon for about forty-five minutes. It was a self-contained classroom, so there was flexibility in the schedule to lengthen or shorten our writing time, if needed. I also had a mother of one of my students, who was a certified elementary teacher, volunteer twice a week during writing workshop. The lessons were based on a writing workshop model and A Curricular Plan for the Writing Workshop for grades two and three by Lucy Calkins (2011). Each workshop began with a ten minute mini-lesson that focused on a procedure, genre, or writing strategy. The students were then dismissed to work with a writing partner or by themselves to write, depending upon the focus of the lesson. After the students had written for about thirty minutes they were usually called to the rug for a ‘share’ time. During writing workshop, students were working at different paces and on topics of their choice within the genre (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 2011). The students followed recursive stages within the writing process of prewriting (brainstorming), drafting, revising, editing, and
publishing their work (Au, et. al., 2001). Students were encouraged to work with their peers for brainstorming, editing and revising.

Students were given a checklist during the editing stage that focused on the conventions and a checklist for the revision stage that focused on the elements of the genre that we focused on during our mini-lessons. Checklists were provided in the reading curriculum that the school used (Houghton Mifflin, 2001) These checklists had several statements on them that the students read and then used to evaluate their work, to see if they had incorporated those features in their writing. I used publisher made checklists and also created my own. Checklists were designed to help students with revisions. They were valuable assessment tools that helped students focus on specific criteria they needed to meet for an assignment. Checklists can be helpful for students in that they give specific suggestions for students on how to revise their work (Barone & Taylor, 2006). As mentioned earlier in the vignette, I did not feel that my students used the checklists for revision. They check off ‘yes’ for all of the items, even when it seemed evident to me that they had not done what the statement required, in their writing piece.

Third grade students were required to keep all of their entries in a writing notebook; brainstorming, writing they did independently during Daily five, graphic organizers, first drafts, etc. They also had a writing folder where they kept their checklists for editing and revising their drafts that they decided to publish. Once they were ready to publish their writing, they met with me for a ‘final conference’ and then copied over their first draft.

**Researcher Positionality**

I am a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY in the childhood literacy program. I have had twenty-one years of experience teaching elementary aged children. I taught at a non-profit elementary school in a suburban district in New Jersey for fifteen years, in grades
third and first, respectively. I am presently in my seventh year of teaching at a non-profit school in western New York.

I am a white female, so am racially similar to the majority of my students (out of 19 students, fourteen were Caucasian and 2 students were mixed Latino/white (at least one parent was white), one was Indian/Caucasian, 1 was African American, one was Latino). Nine out of nineteen students were female, so I needed to be sensitive to gender issues that could arise during the study. Because it was a religious school, the students and their families and I shared similar religious beliefs and values. Out of the eleven third graders that I had, three parents were teachers and eight families had at least one parent who was a professional, either in the medical field or the business world. Out of the seven second graders, two parents were teachers and the rest had at least one parent who was a business professional. As a teacher and a professional I shared similar socioeconomic status as the families of my class. We also shared a similar work ethic and attitude about the value and importance education.

There were many values that I had as a teacher of writing. I wanted my students to see that I am a writer and value writing, so I kept my own writing journal that I used with them when appropriate (Calkins, 1994; Au, Carroll, & Sheu, 2001). I also valued the importance of learning through social relationships and language (Genishi & Dyson, 2009) so I gave students opportunities to ‘talk and turn’ to their writing partner, in order to give them opportunity to practice strategies, brainstorm and demonstrate understanding (Au, et. al., 2001, ) through language and peer interaction. When demonstrating a writing strategy to my students during a mini-lesson, I believed that it was important to model for my students what I wanted them to learn (Au, et. al., 2001). They could then practice either by themselves, or with a partner, important strategies that they learned (Calkins, 1994). Students were then given the opportunity
to practice writing independently. I also provided graphic organizers if necessary, to scaffold learners who needed extra support (Au, et. al., 2001).

I also believed that it is vital that students have authentic reasons for writing, besides the pure joy of it. That is why I tried to publish writing we have done in our school newsletter, whenever possible. We also celebrated our writing by having special author celebrations with family and friends. These types of activities helped students see themselves as writers (Au, et. al. 2001; Calkins, 1994).

I believed that it is important for writers to learn the various genres of writing (Calkins, 1994). The New York Common Core writing standards for second and third grade focuses on writing opinion pieces, informative/explanatory texts and narratives (Common Core Standards, 2010). Mentor texts can provide students with quality literature that can be used as examples of various genres in the writing workshop (Calkins, 1994). Mentor texts are texts that the students really enjoy and love. They become the model that students can study and learn from for their own writing (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009). As children are caught up in a good read and enjoy being read to, writing comes alive. The teacher can ask, “What made you love what (a particular author) did here?” or “what made this book so interesting?” A text that the children really enjoyed becomes the ‘mentor text’ in the classroom. The teacher can go back to it many times and use what the author did as an example of what writers in the classroom can do as well (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009; Calkins, 1994). As I used mentor texts on persuasive writing with my students, it helped us discover as a class, what elements should be included in a quality persuasive writing piece. The Common Core Standards (CCSS) emphasize writing opinion pieces that are “logically ordered with reasons supported by facts and ideas” (Fountas and Pinnell, 2010, p. 9). The mentor texts I used, provided an example of this standard to my
students.

As a researcher-teacher, I used formative assessments and summative assessments. Formative assessments are continual, daily, varied ways of collecting evidence of what and how a student is learning. Summative assessments are given at the end of a writing unit and in my class was a writing piece that the child chose from the genre we studied. It is the one that goes through the process of writing: brainstorming, first draft, editing, revising and publishing. There are many types of formative assessments; observations, anecdotal notes, work the student has done in his writing notebook and conferences (Serafini, 2010). Conferring with students or small groups on a regular basis during the writing process also gives the teacher many insights into the progress of the student (Calkins, 1994). These formative assessments helped me understand what the learner could do and what he or she is ready to learn next (Serafini, 2010). They also guided my ‘teaching point’ (Calkins, 1994) during a mini-lesson and guided my lessons for the future. Summative assessments help students and teacher to focus on a goal(s). Summative assessments are important because they are a way for students to be held accountable for their learning. They were also necessary because students receive a report card each trimester and the school community expects a ‘grade’ for the students. When I assessed my students’ final writing piece I always included comments that described what I liked about the student’s writing and what I felt the student could do in the future to improve his or her writing. This summative assessment could be used as an opportunity to reflect on progress that has or has not been made. This reflection could be used as a way of inquiry into what areas the student still needed to learn (Serafini, 2010).

Participants

The whole class participated in the lessons on the particular genre we were studying and
the co-creation of the rubric, which included seven second graders and twelve third graders. I chose six ‘focus’ students from the third graders. These students participated in using the rubric and being assessed with the rubric. At the beginning of the unit I gave a preassessment of persuasive writing. Pre-assessments in writing are something students were familiar with in my classroom. The day before the preassessment, I told the students to think about something that they had a strong opinion about; a movie they really liked, a restaurant they visited or a book they loved. I told them that the next day they would have thirty minutes to write about that topic. They would need to write in such a way as to persuade me to want to go to watch that movie or eat at that restaurant, or read that book. The next day they wrote their persuasive essay. As I looked at the pre-assessments, I divided them into three groups: weak persuasive writing, adequate persuasive writing, and strong writing persuasive writing. My judgments were based on the criteria for persuasive writing as described in the Common Core Standards (2010) for third graders for opinion writing (see Appendix A). Students who met four of the criteria were placed in the strong persuasive writing group. I had six students who met all four of the criteria of the standards. Students who meet only one or none of the criteria were placed in the weak persuasive writing group. Only one student met one criterion. This child was placed in the weak persuasive writing group. The rest of the class, five students, met two or three of the criteria for the CCSS. I looked to see how many reasons these students gave for their opinion. One student had only given one reason and met two of the criteria so I put her in the weak persuasive writing group. The other four formed my adequate persuasive writing group. I divided the piles into two gender piles; boys and girls. I turned all the piles over, manually mixed them up and chose one paper from each group. There was only one girl in the adequate persuasive writing group so I chose her for the study but she changed her mind and didn’t want to participate so I had to
choose another student. So for my adequate focus group, I had two boys instead of a boy and a
girl; Jim and Tom. For the strong persuasive writing group I picked a boy and a girl from the
piles. My focus group consisted of a boy and a girl with strong writing abilities, two boys with
adequate writing abilities and a boy and a girl with struggling writing abilities. These six
students became my ‘focus’ group.

Mike and Rye were from strong writing group:

Mike (all names are pseudonyms) was an eight year old Caucasian boy who was above
target for reading. Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarks put third graders at a level P by the end of
third grade and he was reading at a level R. He was what I considered one of my best boy
writers in the class. He could write descriptively with a strong voice when writing, was able to
write proficiently in many genres, and was a fluent writer. He paid attention to conventions and
was a good speller. He told me he didn’t like writing when he started third grade but loved it by
the end. He was well liked by the other students and was considered a ‘leader’ by the other boys
in the class; he often determined who sat at the lunch table, what games they played at recess,
etc.

Rye was a bubbly, full of energy, eight year old Caucasian girl who was also a gifted
writer and artist. She enjoyed illustrating her work and was known by other students as a ‘great
artist,’ especially her drawings of dogs. She was not afraid to write and to write a lot. Her
writing made sense though and was fun to read; she had an imagination and often times would
think of her own ways of incorporating what I taught. For example, when we were studying
informational writing, I gave several examples on the board of how the students could start their
writing. She asked if she had to start it that way, to which I replied, “no.” She ended up starting
it an entirely different way that was much more interesting and exciting than the examples I had
given. She also incorporated correct spelling, punctuation and capitalization consistently in her writing. She was above level (Level R) in reading and enjoyed reading.

Jim and Tom were from the adequate writing group:

Jim was an eight year old Caucasian boy who had made wonderful progress as a writer. When he first started writing in second grade, it was only about super heroes or characters from video games. His writing pieces were often very long but very predictable and sounded like something off of a video game. He had become more proficient at using complex sentences that were more descriptive. He knew how to engage the reader through his descriptions. At the time of this study, he still preferred to write fictional stories about familiar characters but he was able to produce quality work in other genres. He wrote fluently and was also consistent in his use of correct conventions, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Jim was reading at a Fountas and Pinnell level Q at the time of this study, which is considered above level.

Tom was also an eight year old Caucasian boy who was an average reader and writer. He was reading at a level P at the end of third grade so was right on target. He had great ideas and stories but had trouble expanding on his thinking. He was quiet and sometimes had trouble verbally expressing himself. He also had fine motor issues which made his writing difficult to read at times. Poor spelling also affected his writing, making it difficult to read. It often took several times for him to understand something and he often needed directions repeated. He was my ‘daydreamer.’

Katrina and Peter were from the weak writing group:

Katrina was a bubbly, very sociable eight year old girl of Columbian descent. She was adopted by an American Italian family when she was an infant. English is the only language spoken in the home. She was just a tad behind in reading; she was supposed to be at a level P
instructionally but was at a level O. She enjoyed writing, especially fictional stories. She was able to develop her own personal narratives without any problem but often forgot punctuation at the end of sentences and was weak in spelling skills. She also had trouble staying focused. In second grade she had received reading support (pull-out) three times a week. At the beginning of the year she was on target for reading, so was pulled out for math help two times a week. She struggled in math more than any other subject.

Peter was a nine year old English Language Learner. His birthplace is Petropavlovsk, Kazakhstan. He was removed from the home of his biological parents when he was three years old. He, his older brother, and younger sister were adopted when he was three and a half years old. Peter’s parents speak Ukrainian 85% of the time in the home; Ukrainian is considered his first language. On Saturday he attends Ukrainian School for two hours where he learns to read and write Ukrainian. He is not fluent in reading or speaking either language, although he has gained more fluency this past year in reading and speaking English. His sister, who is in the same class as he, is more proficient than him in the English language. His Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment for June was at a level O, so he was one level behind in reading at the time of this study. He has received extra support from the reading specialist this year in writing. He will often discuss his ideas with her as a pre-writing activity. She has also worked with him on expanding his simple sentences by adding adjectives and adverbs. He takes pride in his neat penmanship but this slows him down as a writer. Correct grammar and spelling are very inconsistent in his writing.

Confidentiality

Before the study began, I obtained informed consent from the parents of the second and
third graders. I also obtained assent from the students, informing them of their rights as participants. To ensure confidentiality of the participants, I created a list of the participants and a pseudonym for each student. These pseudonyms were used throughout the study. When collecting student work, I made a copy of it, crossed out the student’s name so that it could be recognized and wrote the matching pseudonym on it. All copies were kept in a locked file container and were shredded once the study was completed. Video tapes and audio tapes were kept in a locked file cabinet drawer during the study. After the study was completed, video tapes and audio tapes were erased.

**Data Collection and Tools**

This qualitative study intended to explore what happens when students co-construct a writing rubric with their teacher and then use the rubric during the writing process. It also saw what affect, if any, the rubric had on the students’ writing. I gathered data using videotaping, audio taping, observations, interviews, and student writing samples.

**Videotaping**

I video-taped the students during the co-constructing of the writing rubric and while my target group was using the rubric during the writing process. I obtained parental consent and student assent for all of my students so all of the students participated in the co-constructing of the rubric. My parent volunteer video-taped our lessons on co-constructing the rubric. I sat my six focus students together in one group so that I could set up a tripod with the video camera on those students. Videotaping enabled me to review the lesson privately and then catalogue my data for further analysis. It also enabled me to capture the conversations and actions of the students as they used the rubric during the writing process. As a teacher-researcher, I was not able to observe the students during the whole time, as I had thirteen other students to which I
Observations

Observation was another form of data collection that I used in this study. I used a research journal to write down my observations and reflections (Appendix B). I wrote down my observations and reflections while we were reading the mentor texts and while the students worked in small groups and as a class to create a chart on the elements of the persuasive genre. I also wrote down my observations and reflections of our lessons on co-constructing the rubric. While students were using the rubric in small group, I tried to observe how students used the rubric. It was difficult to do though because I was working with other students so was not able to observe as closely as I had anticipated. I recorded my observations in my research journal and dated them. Sometimes I typed up my observations and added them to research journal data. These observations gave me insight into how students co-create a rubric and how they use the rubric during the writing process.

Interviews

Interviews gave me the opportunity to gain insight into my students’ beliefs and perceptions about co-creating a rubric and using it during the writing process. I interviewed each of the six participants chosen for this part of the study. First I interviewed the students after the co-creation of the rubric. This interview took place one day after we finalized the rubric together as a class and had practiced using it on a persuasive writing sample. I met with each student for ten to fifteen minutes. I met with students at convenient times during the day over a period of two days. I interviewed students about the use of the rubric during ‘teacher conference’ time. This time varied for each child, as the children finished their writing at different times.
required that my focus group use the rubric to assess their own work before meeting with a peer who would also assess their work using the rubric. For the purposes of this study, I only focused on the self-assessment aspect of using the rubric. After they met with a peer, then they met with me for a conference. My interview protocol (See Appendix C) began with a statement indicating why I wanted to interview them. It clearly stated that participants could opt out of the interview at any time for any reason. It ended with a closing statement that thanked the student for participating with a request for another interview if clarification on anything was needed. All participants of the focus group were happy to participate and give their opinions and ideas about the rubric. I documented students’ responses by audiotaping the interview and by taking notes on my interview form (Appendix D).

My questions after co-creating the rubric were:

What is it like co-creating a rubric?

Do you think making the rubric helped you to understand what a ‘good’ opinion review includes? If so, how? If not, why?

After using the rubric, my interview questions included:

What was it like using a rubric during the writing of your opinion paper?

Take me through the process, or what you did as you used the rubric.

For both interviews I followed up their questions, in order to prompt students to elaborate their responses.

Research Journal

I recorded my field notes in a research journal. It was also used to record my reflections and questions I had about my research. Just as with a writers’ notebook, the research journal afforded me a place to express my feelings about how my research was going; a place where I
could go to express challenges or questions I had with my study or findings. This communication between myself and the journal helped me to gain insight into what actions or paths I needed to pursue in the study (Borg, 2001). A research journal has many benefits to the researcher including; a record of the research experience that can be referred back to as many times as necessary, a reminder of past ideas or theories that I pursued, and a place to see the thinking behind my decisions I made (Borg, 2001). I kept my research journal locked in a file during my research and then shred it once my data analysis was complete.

**Student Writing Samples**

At the beginning of the study I took a writing sample of all of my students. This writing sample was a preassessment that I gave at the beginning of our instructional unit for persuasive writing. This was a writing piece that the students completed within one writing workshop. It gave me an opportunity to assess what they already knew about the genre. This preassessment, as indicated earlier in this paper, was a persuasive review about something that they felt strongly about; a restaurant, a particular movie or book, etc. Persuasive reviews are a part of the writing curriculum that I use (Calkins, 2011) for opinion writing for second and third graders. The day before the assessment I asked them to think about something that they really felt strongly about, either negatively or positively. I explained that the next day they would have to write about it and try and persuade me why it is so wonderful or why it is so terrible. They had 30 minutes to brainstorm ideas and do some prewriting, whatever they wanted that to be. They had the evening to think about it as well. When they came to writing workshop the next day, they wrote for 30-40 minutes about the topic. Giving a preassessment is a normal part of our writing workshop, so students were familiar with taking a preassessment. These formative assessments are placed in their writing portfolio so that they can see the progress and growth that they have made as
writers at the end of a genre study.

After the students have co-constructed the rubric, and have evaluated sample writing pieces; that I provide, they will be given the rubric to use during the writing process for their own reviews. Because of time, most students only had time to write one review over the course of several writing workshops. Then they did a self-assessment on their writing using the co-constructed rubric, met with a friend who also assessed their writing with the rubric and made revisions, before copying it over for their final review. That writing piece was the sample that I used in the study as my final assessment piece. As I compared the pre-assessments with the final assessments, I hoped to find answers to my question: how do rubrics influence students’ writing?

Survey

I used a survey (see appendix F) to collect information about the students’ opinions and beliefs about using the rubric during the writing process. This survey was written in developmentally appropriate language to ensure that they understood the questions being asked. A third party administered the survey so that my presence would not influence the responses of the participants. She was available in case they had questions or did not understand something. This third party was an aide who works in the classroom five times a week with the students, someone with whom they felt comfortable. The students answered questions in relation to whether or not they used the rubric, how often they used it, whether or not they liked using it, etc. These questions along with my observations gave me; information that I needed to answer the question: how might student-generated writing rubrics influence students’ writing?

I collected different types of data; videotaping, observations, interviews, surveys and student writing samples, in order to ensure accuracy. Surveys by the students about using the
rubric during the writing process ‘checked’ my observations of them using the rubric. I relied not only on my own observations but also the words, actions, beliefs and perceptions of my students. As I used constant comparison to look for common themes in my research, my goal was to provide a study that is trustworthy. Triangulation of these many data sources was one way for me to ensure credibility (Clark, & Creswell, 2010).

**Procedures**

Week 1, Days 1, 2: I gave the students the instruction for the preassessment. I let them brainstorm ideas. I gave them the preassessment.

Week 1, Day 3 and Week 2, Days 1, 2: I read various books from the persuasive genre.

Week 2, Day 3: Together we brainstormed the elements of persuasive writing; kids broke into groups to examine closely one of the texts. Came back together as a group and created an anchor chart listing the elements.

Week 3, Day 1: We found persuasive words from the texts and put them on an anchor chart.

Week 3, Day 2: We found transition words in one of the texts and added them to an anchor chart.

Week three, Day 3: I showed the students a rubric for poetry (a genre we just completed and explained the purpose of the rubric and how it was designed. I explained the criteria for the rubric. I showed the students three poems and helped them assess the poems using the rubric. I gave students an opportunity to ask questions about the rubric. I explained that tomorrow we would be creating our own rubric for our next genre: persuasive writing.

**Co-creating the rubric**

I used a design that draws from the work of Andrade, (2000). The one difference is that for
step one the students examined models of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ writing, representing different performance levels, whereas for my step one, students examined mentor tests as their model for quality persuasive writing.

Step 1: Together the teacher and students examined mentor texts as examples of quality persuasive writing.

Step 2: Collaboratively, students listed criteria for quality persuasive writing based on the mentor text(s).

Step 3: Together, the students described different levels of quality for persuasive writing.

Step 4: I drafted the rubric based upon the students’ work from step 3.

Step 5: I showed the draft to the students and received feedback, including my own reflections of the rubric.

Step 6: Revisions on the draft were incorporated and the rubric was distributed to the students.

Week 4, Day 1, Using the rubric

Step 1: Model essays were given to the students that met the different levels of quality.

Step 2: They practiced using the rubric to assess the persuasive reviews. This was done in small groups. Each small group assessed a review.

Step 3: Together we compared our results and came to a collaborative agreement.

Weeks 4, Days 2 and 3, Week 5: Students used the rubrics to guide their independent practice. As students completed their persuasive reviews and chose one they were pleased with, I interviewed them about co-constructing the rubric.

Week 6: Students used the rubric to assess their writing. I used the rubric to assess their final writing piece that they submitted.
Data Analysis

Videotaping

I viewed the video tapes repeated times and watched for information that would help me answer my questions: What happens during the process of teacher and children co-constructing rubrics based on joint examination of mentor texts? How might student-generated writing rubrics influence students’ writing?

For the lesson on co-constructing a rubric, I manually transcribed conversations between students and students and teacher that pertained to the co-constructing of the rubric. I also added in notes and reflections in my journal as I viewed the videos and transcribed them. Next I began coding my data. Coding data is a process wherein you divide data into text segments. I looked for redundant topics like, the perspective of the students as they created the rubric, how the students and I decided what to include in the rubric, student participation and beliefs about the topics we discussed. I used the coding to look for themes and patterns that occurred among the data. I created at least three codes but not more than six for each tape (Hubbard & Power, 1999). For analyzing the videotapes of my focus students using the rubric, I watched the video several times. I video-taped four writing sessions but unfortunately the lighting was so bright that when I went to view the DVD’s I couldn’t see what was on their desk. I could see the students and hear their conversations but couldn’t make out what was on their desk. Did they have their rubric? Did they have only their notebook? That couldn’t be determined. The audio was working fine but there was no communication between students in the focus group about the rubric during their writing; they all worked quietly, or when they talked it was not about the rubric. So my videos of the students writing did not provide any information about using the rubric.
Audio tapes

I listened to the audio tapes of each interview several times, and transcribed all of the interviews. These transcriptions provided invaluable in analyzing my data, as it filled in missing information from my interview notes.

Observations

My observations were recorded in my research journal via field notes. As I recorded my observations, I made notes in the margins as I did a preliminary analysis of the data. Again, I divided the data into categories that emerged. I wrote down those categories. Those categories were compared to the categories and themes that I saw in my video-tapes, interviews and surveys.

Interview

As I analyzed the student’s interviews, expanded with data from the videotape data, I looked for data that would give me insight into what the student’s perceptions were about co-creating the rubric and if it had any effect on their understanding of how to write a quality persuasive review as they used it for their writing. The interviews provided another means of gathering data as I looked for common themes and patterns.

Survey

After the students completed the surveys, I determined percentages for each answer for each question. I used the percentages to get an overall picture of how the students used the rubric during the writing process. This data was compared with my observations in my field notes and interviews. I looked for similarities and differences in the data.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

It was important that I report my findings in a credible manner. My data analysis was
grounded in the students’ conversations and behaviors and my own observations and reflections as a teacher. The themes that I discovered were based upon data from the above sources. I used many varied forms of data collection: videotaping, audio taping, observation, interview, and survey. Gathering data from a variety of sources increased the credibility of my study through triangulation. Triangulation also involves collecting data from a variety of individuals. I collected data from six focus students of different genders and levels of ability in writing to further the credibility of the findings.

As a researcher, I was aware that I would bring to this study my own biases and interpretations which could affect the reliability of the study. To validate my findings, when I wrote my observations, I used bracketing. Bracketing is one way that researchers can show their own reflections and views which may show possible bias.

**Limitation of the Study**

There were limitations to this study. Most of this study focused on a small number of students, only six. I was the researcher so my interpretations and personal biases could have interfered with the results, although I did my best to be as objective as possible.

**Summary**

Exploring how students and teacher co-create a rubric was an informative and meaningful endeavor that added knowledge to current research and to my own knowledge as a teacher. As I examined how elementary students used a writing rubric during and after the writing process, I was able to understand more clearly if a rubric could be a useful formative assessment for students. Interviews, surveys and observations were my tools to help me gain valuable insight into the effectiveness of a writing rubric for young writers.
Chapter Four: Interpretation of Data

Introduction

This study was completed for several reasons. First, I wanted to create a rubric, in collaboration with my students that accurately reflected the learning that students gained through a genre study. I also wanted to examine how third graders use a rubric to self-assess their writing and what influence, if any, using a rubric had on my students as writers. The study took place in a general education second third grade classroom. Each session took place for about thirty to forty minutes, three or four times a week.

Research Questions

This was a qualitative, inquiry based study, where I collected the data and provided instruction. The research questions I hoped to answer through this study were:

1). What happens during the process of teacher and children co-constructing rubrics based on joint examination of mentor texts?

2). What happens when elementary students use a student-generated writing rubric during the writing process?

3). How might student-generated writing rubrics influence students’ writing?

Data were collected through classroom field notes, anecdotal records, interviews, surveys, a research journal and student writing samples. Observational field notes and videotaping were used to document classroom instruction, small group writing activities and teacher-student discussions. Interviews were taped in order to capture the students’ thinking and opinions about creating a rubric together and using a rubric during writing. A survey was conducted at the end of the study to gather information about the students’ attitudes about the rubric and their use of the rubric. A research journal was used to record my observations and reflections during the study. Student writing samples were collected to see how using a rubric
This chapter will present the data and my analysis of that data that answered my research questions. I will begin by explaining how the students and I used mentor texts to create a list of elements that we thought were important for persuasive writing. I will describe how I incorporated the Common Core Standards (CCSS) into the rubric. Because the students had never been exposed to rubrics before, I will explain what I did to expose them to a rubric. Then I will describe the process of co-constructing the rubric with my students and testing it on exemplars that I had created in order to see if there were any revisions that needed to be done. All of those things helped answer my first question. Finally, I will look at how the students used the rubric and examine the writing samples of the students in order to answer my other two questions.

Findings

Question 1: What happens during the process of teacher and children co-constructing rubrics based on joint examination of mentor texts?

Using the Mentor Texts as the Basis for our Rubric

I wanted to use mentor texts (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009; Calkins, 1994) as the basis for our criteria for our rubric for persuasive reviews because I believe that real literature by real authors should be used in writing workshop in order for students to learn what good writing entails. As they study real authors they can begin to see elements that authors use for various genres. They can also learn how different authors incorporate different elements into their writing, hopefully transferring some of those elements or styles into their own. I spent three days reading books that were persuasive texts: *Earrings* (Viorst, 1990), *My Brother Dan’s Delicious* (Layne, 2003), *I Wanna Iguana* and *I Wanna New Room* (Orloff, 2004). After
reading each book I explained that the character was trying to persuade someone to do allow them to do something, like get their ears pierced, or get something, like an Iguana or a new room. We discussed what they wanted and who they were trying to persuade. We also discussed whether they were successful in getting what they wanted. My research journal reflections state: “The kids loved the illustrations in Orloff and Catrow’s books. Only a handful of girls liked the Earrings book. I was surprised; I thought that more would. Catrow’s illustrations and humor definitely were the favorites of the entire class” (Taylor, 2013). Alex, the main character, tries to persuade his mom and dad he needs a new room; once his little sister was born, he had to move into a room with his little brother, so he writes various letters stating why. One excerpt from my research journal, dated 5/20/13, shows some of the discussion that took place:

Teacher: (Referring to one of the pages; they were not numbered) What reason did Alex give his dad for wanting his old room back?

Student 1: His brother sticks crayons up his nose…

Student 2: And he barks like a walrus…

Student 3: And he snores like a grandpa!

Teacher: Would you want to share a room with a brother who did those things? (Kids talk amongst themselves about that idea.) He gave his father lots of good reasons didn’t he?

One of the children’s favorites of the four books I read was I Wanna Iguana (Orloff, 2004). Alex, the main character is trying to convince his mom that he should get his friend’s baby Iguana, when he moves. He writes his mom giving her many reasons why she should let
him have it and she replies with an answer for each of his reasons. On one of the pages he tells his mom how responsible he will be; in taking care of it. We talked about how he made promises about what he would do if he got one. The main character in *Earrings* (Layne, 2003) did the same thing; she promised her parents how responsible she would be if they let her have earrings. These discussions led students to think about how people sometimes make promises when trying to persuade. When students studied the books on their own, one of the ideas they came up with was: *Make promises to other people* on our elements of persuasive writing chart.

In order to create the criteria for the rubric, I divided the class into four groups. I gave each group one of the books we had read together and asked them to look the book over and list the ways the main character tried to persuade the mom, dad or monster, in the case of *My Brother Dan’s Delicious* (Layne, 2003). Each group made a poster with the ways. They identified things the character did and said to persuade. One group also discovered things like using exclamation points and capital letters to show strong emotion. Together as a class, we made a list of elements of persuasive writing, based on their findings. It included eleven elements: state what your opinion is in the beginning, give lots of positive reasons why, give specific examples to go with your reasons, choose interesting persuasive words. use ! and capital letters when appropriate but be nice about it, show how other people like it or have it, make promises if appropriate, restate your opinion, exaggeration may be appropriate, comparing might get your point across. Some of these ideas were generated by the students, some by me, and some were generated by the students, with my help in putting their ideas into words. I typed up our chart (Appendix G). For the purpose of this study, I wanted to reflect on who had generated the idea; the students, both of us or me. I looked at each of the ideas and coded them with a letter. A ‘K’ indicates that the idea was something that kids in the group came up with, a ‘K/T’
is an idea that the students talked about and then I put it into words. A ‘T’ means that it was all my idea. Excerpts below show how some of our ideas made it on the chart:

Student: Alex gave lots of reasons why he wanted a new room.

Teacher: So we could say that in order to persuade someone you need to have lots of reasons?

Students: shook head ‘yes.’ (I wrote on chart: Give lots of reasons.)

One group noticed that in their book the author used a lot of exclamation points and capital letters to show strong emotion. When they shared what they had found with the whole class, our conversation went like this:

Student 1: There were a lot of excitement marks.

Students 2: There were capital letters when Alex got really mad at his brother.

Teacher: Let’s find that page in the book (looks for page). Exclamation points show that you are excited about something – or really upset or really angry or really want something, right? And capital letters show that you are speaking really loudly like in our book, (as I yelled the words): THIS IS YOUR SIDE OF THE ROOM. THIS IS MY SIDE OF THE ROOM. STAY ON YOUR SIDE. P.S. DON’T TOUCH MY STUFF OR ELSE!

He was yelling wasn’t he? (students laugh, some start mimicking the yelling)

Teacher: If you wanted to persuade someone, do you think you would persuade them if you yelled at them? Would they want to listen to you if you were yelling at them?

Students: (many say no, or shake their heads no)
Student: I don’t think so. I don’t like to be yelled at.

Teacher: (Writes: Use ! and capital letters, but be nice about it.) You should use exclamation points to show that you really mean it, and you might want to use capital letters, but remember when you use capital letters it is like yelling at the person, so you might not want to do that, it depends on the situation.

Sometimes I introduced an idea. For example, none of the groups pointed out that the opinion was stated right in the beginning as soon as the story started. So, I pointed that out to the students.

Teacher: (reads first two sentences from I Wanna Iguana (Orloff, 2004.) Do you notice what the author did here? He told us what the main character wanted right away. Let’s see if the other authors did that. (reads the first two sentences from Earrings (Viorst, 1990) and I Wanna New Room (Orloff, 2004) Did the author tell us what the character wanted right away?

Students: (many at the same time answer) yes.

Teacher: Let’s add this to our chart: “State what your opinion is in the beginning.”

The above excerpts are three examples of how the students and I decided what the various authors from our mentor texts used in their books to persuade. Sometimes the students generated the idea from the mentor text, sometimes I introduced the idea and sometimes the students came up with an idea and then I either added to it or put it in words for the students.

One of the items on the list, “use interesting persuasive words” was an idea that I added. As I looked at My Brother Dan’s Delicious, (Layne, 2003), I noticed a lot of interesting descriptive words: delicious, divine, delectable, delightful, Meaty, mouthwatering, unparalleled
taste sensation. So we talked about how the author used descriptive interesting words. We also
talked about what persuasive words were. In order to make sure that the students understood
what persuasive words were, I went through all four books, chose sentences that had persuasive
words in them, and read only those sentences to the class. The kids tried to identify the
persuasive words. I wrote them on an anchor chart (Appendix H) as they did. This list was
added to throughout the unit, as students thought of more words.

After creating our list from the books, I took the books home, along with the posters,
and typed up their findings from the posters into one document (Appendix I). Then I looked
through the books and typed up what I found in the books (Appendix J). I combined the two
lists into one (Appendix K). As I looked at the list, I tried to identify what each item in our list
signified. Was it an opinion being stated? Was it a reason? Did it have to do with the words
the author used? As I looked at the combined list, the texts we examined emphasized the
importance of stating your opinion and giving lots of reasons for your opinion.

Incorporating Common Core Standards into the Rubric

After creating our list from the mentor texts, I then looked at the Common Core
Standards (CCSS) for persuasive writing. The CCSS required that the writer uses linking words
and phrases to connect opinion and reasons and that the writing has an organizational structure
that lists reasons. It required a concluding statement or section as well.

I looked back through the mentor texts to see if these elements were incorporated into
any of the texts we had read. I had never explicitly taught what transition words are, so wanted
to use the mentor texts if I could, to teach this new concept. My Bother Dan’s Delicious
(Layne, 2003) had a lot of transition words so I decided that I would use that text. I copied
pages from the books that had transition words on them. I passed them out, and after explaining
what transition words were, asked students to work in pairs to try to figure out the transition words. The kids struggled with it at first, but after I showed them how to do it, they were able to identify the words. An excerpt from my research journal dated, 5/23/13 states: “Each group read the page and tried to find transition words. Only one group (2 kids) could do it. Everyone else didn’t know what to do but once the first group wrote theirs on the anchor chart and I read another group’s page and we found transition words together, all the other groups were able to find them in their reading as well” (Taylor, 2013). The students wrote their words on our anchor chart as they shared their words (Appendix L). We added “use transition words” onto our chart that listed elements of persuasive writing (Appendix G).

All of the books we read were narratives, so there was an ending to the story but not a conclusion. I had explicitly taught the elements of a paragraph when we did our informational unit so I decided that I would just add that element to our chart and remind the students about what a conclusion is and why it is important to writing a review. I also decided to add “make sure it is written in an order that makes sense” to our chart (Appendix G). I would do this at our next lesson.

**Summary of Using Mentor Texts**

The anchor chart that we created was based on our first discussions of the mentor texts, the group findings as they examined each book to see what the author did to make the character persuade his parents/monster, our class discussion about the books and the elements from the Common Core Standards. These elements became our chart that we would use to determine what criteria needed to be in our rubric. This first step in using mentor texts to create a rubric involved reading the texts aloud to the students, giving them an opportunity to explore the text for persuasive features in small groups and as a whole group, and creating a chart that combined
their ideas and mine. Using mentor texts gave the students an opportunity to examine closely what real authors do when they write to persuade. Using strong language, exclamation marks, giving lots of reasons with lots of details were key elements they discovered as they looked at the texts.

**Exposing Students to a Rubric**

Up to this point in the study, the students did not really know what a rubric was because I had never used one with them in the classroom, so I had to show them what one was and how it was used. I passed out a poetry rubric (Ferris, n.d.) I found on the internet and explained what a rubric is to kids. I told them that it is something that a teacher can use to determine how well they have done on a writing assignment. I showed them the rubric. We read it together and discussed each category and criteria in each category. I asked kids to identify the difference between each category for the criteria. Through our discussion they were able to see that as you moved across the categories, different elements were left out of the writing or not done as well.

After we went over the rubric together, I passed out four poems. I used a poem that met all of the criteria on the rubric for an outstanding job, and then I altered it, so that I had four exemplars for each of the categories on the rubric: *outstanding, proficient, developing, and beginning*. I explained how they were going to be ‘teachers’ and ‘judge’ the poems by using the rubric; they were very excited to do this. I showed them how they were to read each criterion, one at a time, and then read over the poem and see which category the poem ‘fit.’ When I first handed out the rubric, one student had a question about which category to circle. This question was important, I thought, because it showed that she was thinking about what makes a quality piece of writing and how a child actually writes.
Student: Do we circle the one it should be or the one they did?

Teacher: If we were writing we would want to do everything ‘outstanding,’ so that is the category we would try and write like. But when you are doing peer share or self-edit, you would circle the category that showed how you, or the person who wrote the poem, actually did.

We practiced together with one poem that met the ‘proficient’ category. The first thing they noticed was the misspelled word, ‘through.’ Then, I gave the kids different poems; I had them work with a partner to try and determine what criteria the poems met on the rubric. Right away I got loud and passionate reaction from the students as they started noticing things like misspelled words, sloppy writing, improper verb tense and no punctuation. I circulated around the class to observe how they were doing and if they understood what to do. I came to two students who were working together.

Teacher: I see that you circled the words ‘puk,’ ‘wach’ and ‘flie’ on the poem. Why did you circle those words?

Rye: This kid spelled all those words wrong!

Teacher: Which one would you circle on your rubric for spelling?

Rye: (reads all the categories going across) This one (indicating the ‘Beginning’ qualifier on the spelling and punctuation category).

Teacher: Right, why?

Rye: Cause her paper has more than 3 spelling mistakes.
As I continued circulating around the room, two boys were discussing how horrible the poem was:

Peter: This poem is horrible! …all the words he didn’t spell right.

Student 2: And it’s sloppy! Who wrote this? (Starts circling the misspelled words and writing the correct spelling above)

Peter: Look at how he spelled ‘dun’

Student 2: I counted six words wrong.

Student 1: (Looking at the other student’s paper, he starts to circle misspelled words on his paper.)

Student 2: This is horrible!

Peter: (reading to himself the categories for spelling) This one! The final draft has more than three spelling mistakes (Taylor, 2013).

My journal reflections, dated 5/24/13, states: “The kids wanted to assess the really ‘bad’ poems the most. They enjoyed finding misspelled words and pointed them out to the other kids in their group and to me. One little girl came up to me to make sure that I knew that in one of the poems the word ‘wach’ should have been ‘watching’ (wrong verb tense).” I thought that this was interesting, considering that spelling and conventions are also something that researchers have shown to influence a writer’s grade, even if the content is very good. Here were my second and third graders focusing on spelling and punctuation first before other criteria.

In my reflections, dated 5/24/13, I wrote: “Did the kids focus on the spelling and neatness foremost because they were the most obvious mistakes or the easiest ones to assess?
Researchers have shown that spelling does ‘get in the way’ of assessing content accurately. I made the poorly written essays full of spelling and punctuation errors, I wonder what would have happened if I had included a lot of spelling errors in one of the best content pieces.”

The hardest categories for the students to assess were the ‘beautiful language’ category and the ‘characteristics of poetry’ category. These categories were difficult for them because they contained many concepts, and vocabulary that they were unfamiliar with, so I had to explain what the terms in the rubric meant.

First we talked about the meaning of ‘beautiful language.’ Part of that discussion is recorded below from my research journal, dated 5/24/13.

Teacher: The rubric says “My poem contains many examples of beautiful language.” What do you think that means? (Students raise their hands.)

Student: The poem sounds pretty, maybe, like it uses pretty words?

Teacher: Okay. What else?

Student: Like instead of saying the snowflake fell on the window, beautiful language might be, the snowflake danced on the window?

Teacher: That’s a wonderful example of beautiful language. Turn and talk to a partner and see if you can come up with some beautiful language. You might even think of some of the poems you wrote in our poetry unit. (Students talk and turn.)

Teacher: Let’s have a few partners share some beautiful language they talked about. (I called on some students.)
Student: soft, sweet, sugary cotton candy!

Student: twirling, swirling, turning around. That was in my poem!

Teacher: Those are great examples of beautiful language.

Other language in the rubric that the students were unfamiliar with were onomatopoeia and alliteration. They knew what onomatopoeia was, once I read the word and reminded them about a book we had read that contained a lot of onomatopoeia. They didn’t know what alliteration was, so I had to give the students examples of alliteration. I used the example from Pizza Hut: personal, pan, pizza. We spent a short amount of time just trying to create some alliteration, which I wrote on the board. This is another data point that demonstrates the importance language plays in students’ comprehending the rubric, as will be pointed out later.

Most of the students understood how to use the rubric, but not all of them. I had to work with two girls who hadn’t marked any of their rubric; they were having trouble assessing the poem. They had the poem that had the most mistakes in it. This is an excerpt from my research journal:

Teacher: Read the first category.

Students read to themselves.

Teacher: Do you think the person who wrote this put a lot of time and effort into the poem (rereading the first part of the first category)?

Students: No/ no way!

Teacher: Why not?

Student 1: It’s sloppy… There’s spelling mistakes.
Student 2: It looks like he didn’t care how he was doing.

Teacher: So which category would you circle?

Student 1: This one? (pointing to last category)

Teacher: That’s what I would circle. Now look at the next category: Beautiful language. Does this poem contain examples of beautiful language?

Student 2: I don’t think there’s any beautiful language. It’s like he’s just telling a story.

Student 1: Shaking head, ‘no’

Teacher: Which category would you circle?

After we did this one together, then they seemed to understand and finished completing the rubric together. I explained to the class that the next time we met for writing; they were going to make a rubric for persuasive writing based upon all of our findings from the mentor texts we had read together.

**Preparing to Create the Rubric**

Prior to creating the rubric, I looked at our anchor chart of elements of persuasive writing (Appendix G). I wanted to know ahead of time what categories I was going to require and which ones would be negotiable, so that I could provide direction for what would be included in our rubric. I used other rubrics, like the 6 Traits and the poetry rubric we had just used, for ideas for categories. I started by looking at the elements on the anchor chart and figuring out what could be grouped together. As I looked at what we had come up with, all of them, except one, had to do with content: state what your opinion is in the beginning, give lots of reasons why, give
specific examples to go with your reasons, restate your opinion show how other people like it or have it, make promises if appropriate, exaggeration may be appropriate, comparing might get your point across. The last four had more to do with ways to persuade but would still be considered content, I thought. I knew that this would be too cumbersome a list so I chose the first three as the most important: state your opinion right away, give lots of reasons why, give examples to go with your reasons. The other element on our chart had to do with word choice: choose interesting persuasive words. Transition words were required by the CCSS and we had talked about the importance of using persuasive words and different transition words in our lessons. I also had two anchor charts in the room to help students with this category. So I decided we definitely needed a category for content and one for word choice; these were also categories I had seen on other rubrics. For the, “use ! and capital letters when appropriate but be nice about it,” I classified under punctuation. Because the CCSS required an organized structure for persuasive writing, I decided we needed to have that included on our rubric as well so I decided on a “How I Organize my Writing.” Based upon other rubrics I had seen and the class’ response to the poetry they had assessed that had spelling and punctuation mistakes, I decided to also include a category that had to do with spelling and punctuation and perhaps neatness.

The negotiable aspects that I decided to let the students decide would be the words we would use to qualify the different levels of quality, whether or not they wanted to include the writing process as a part of the rubric and whether or not they wanted spelling and punctuation to be separate from neatness, or included with it. The students would also help me decide the statements for each category to describe the quality of work.

Part of my decision to have the categories decided before actually creating the rubrics with the students, was due in part, to time. I needed to complete the study before the end of the
school year and we hadn’t even started writing yet. The other factor in this decision was due to the fact that I never thought about the students being capable of looking at the criteria and coming up with their own categories. In hindsight, I wished I had given them a chance to try and group the elements into their own categories first. It might have given them a clearer understanding of what the categories entailed and it would have given me the opportunity to see what they were capable of doing.

Co-Constructing the Rubric

Creating qualifiers for the categories

Our first lesson on co-constructing the rubric involved creating the levels of quality for our writing, and determining what our other categories would be. First we decided what our levels of quality would be called. I decided that it would be easier to label the first and last categories first and then label the two in the middle. I gathered three or four suggestions from the class and then the class voted on the suggestions. We decided on: extraordinary, fine work, good job, and totally needs improvement. We also decided what our other categories would be. For our content category, I had to explain to the students what the word content means. Below is an excerpt of my explanation of what ‘content’ means from our lesson dated 5/28/13.: 

Teacher: Content is what you put in your writing, your actual writing. If you were writing poetry, your content is your poem. For persuasive writing, your content is trying to persuade someone. Do you understand what content is? (some kids shake their head yes, others don’t respond) For example, if I had a box (I picked up a small container that was on a student’s desk) I could put coins in there. The coins would be the content. I could also put erasers in here. The erasers would be the content. So, the content is what you put in your writing.
According to our anchor chart of elements from the mentor texts, content needed to include stating an opinion, giving reasons to support the opinion and details for each reason. It also had to show not tell. This was something we had been trying to incorporate into all of our writing so the students were very familiar with this concept. After explaining what content meant through various explanations and visuals, I asked the students if they wanted to call this category “content” or “what you put in your writing.” The class voted on calling it “content.” I wanted to make sure at this point that the language we chose would be language that was familiar to the students. As I learned later in the study through my interviews, this was going to be very important for the students’ use of the rubric.

We also talked about spelling, punctuation, neatness and the writing process. I let the kids discuss which ones were important and should be included. Different students gave very good reasons. Allowing the students to share their thoughts gave me insights into their thinking about writing and the writing process. One student thought that the writing process was important because “if you only did a first draft then your final copy would have spelling that was wrong and carets in it.” Others said that spelling and punctuation were important. Regarding punctuation one student said, “You wouldn’t know where to stop and it wouldn’t make sense.” (Appendix K) Another student said neatness was important because “when it’s all messy you can’t read it. When I read something that I did yesterday and it’s all messy… I won’t be able to read it.” (Appendix K) After discussing and voting, the kids wanted to include neatness as one category, punctuation and spelling another. They also voted not to include the writing process as a part of the rubric. I explained that they would still use the writing process but it wouldn’t be a part of their final grade.
Negotiating degrees of quality

The next step in co-constructing the rubric was deciding what statements would qualify the quality of the work. This was the most time consuming. During these lessons (5/28/13, 5/30/13), I presented the category and as we agreed upon criteria, I wrote it in on a blank rubric on the overhead projector. The process for creating the statements for our categories went like this. I would name the category and then used our chart we had created; to list the criteria that should go in that category. I circled them on the chart as we progressed through the categories. Our first category that we did together was “content.” I wrote, “Stating your opinion right away.” Then I wrote ‘give reasons.’ I asked the class how many reasons they thought one should give in order to have an extraordinary review. Different children offered different numbers. I would either agree or steer them in another direction by giving them something to consider. For example, all of the students wanted to give a lot of reasons under content and lots of details. I commended them for their learning; they knew they needed to give a lot of reasons and details in order for it to be persuasive. But I also told them that because of time constraints, that I would accept three as extraordinary. I wanted them to write several persuasive reviews and knew that they would not have the time to, if they listed five, six or seven reasons. As the teacher, I knew the work that would be involved in giving three reasons that supported their opinion, along with details to support their reasons. They didn’t realize the work that was ahead of them, so I had to limit the reasons on the rubric. Below is an example of this conversation, from my transcripts of our lesson on 5/30/13:

Teacher: (we were discussing how many reasons they should include for their reviews)

For every reason, you have to write one paragraph to explain why. (kids responded with mixed reactions, some complained)
Teacher: You can’t say that Yolickity is the best place to eat unless you give reasons why. You have to give reasons and details…I heard the number six coming out for reasons. Six paragraphs is a long persuasive review. What were some of your numbers?

Student: I thought how much a person needs to be persuaded.

Teacher: If he (referring to Alex from our mentor text) had just given one or two reasons when he was trying to persuade in the book, then his mom might not have been persuaded.

Katrina: Six

Tom: Five

Student: Three or four

Student: Three or four

Teacher: If you say five reasons, you have to give five paragraphs. You have to give details to go with it. As your teacher, I am going to tell you if you have to give five or six reasons you might not have time to write more than one review. So I am going to say three reasons. I love your high expectations. I love that you see from the text we read together that you need to give lots of reasons. I love your thinking that way.

As we moved along each category I would offer a suggestion and then they would offer feedback to me about whether or not they agreed. It was hard to qualify the categories. I tried to use the “yes/ yes, but/ no, but/no” formula (Andrade, 2000) as a guide, but I wasn’t always sure what to include or not to include. I had difficulty especially with the two middle categories, Fine work and Good Job. My research journal, dated 5/30/13, states: “We tried to create the criteria for the rest of the qualifiers (for How I Organize my Work), I was stumped and didn’t know how
to still make it meet the ‘fine work’ and ‘good job’ categories by omitting those (certain criteria). We skipped this category and moved on to the other categories. I will do some research for this category for ideas.” I ended up just creating the criteria for this category on my own, because we ran out of time. Choosing what to include and what to leave out of the rubric, felt like a very random process at times. Creating a rubric was new for me and the students, so many times I felt like we were grabbing numbers out of the air. The students wanted to just decrease the numbers as they moved to each category; three reasons for extraordinary, two reasons for fine work, one reason for good job and no reasons for totally needs improvement. My job was to try and get the kids to think about what their decisions would look like in the writing. I asked questions like, “would it be a good job if they only gave one reason?”

Other criteria were easier to create. Spelling, punctuation, neatness and Words I Use; seemed to be the easiest to manage. For the spelling and punctuation, we agreed that even for extraordinary, it was okay to have one mistake. The students’ expectations were higher; they thought it should be perfect. I had to remind them that everybody makes mistakes, so it was okay to have one mistake for punctuation and one for spelling. Once we decided what we were going to include in our statement for Extraordinary, it was easy to create the rest of the qualifiers. My notes from my journal from 5/30 state “We just increased the number of spelling and punctuation errors by one or two for the rest of the categories.” I also thought that the “words I use” category was easier to manage as well. In my reflection journal dated 5/30/13, I wrote: “We worked through the “words I choose” category pretty easily I thought.” We used the anchor chart as our reference. We knew we needed to include persuasive words and transition words. What we deliberated on was how we would quantify our word choice. Should we say ‘a lot of persuasive words?’ or should we give a number? One child suggested that in order for it to
be extraordinary, one should use at least ten persuasive words. I didn’t agree because I thought that was too many and didn’t want a child feel forced to use persuasive words that might not fit into the writing naturally, so we created the rubric using the words, a lot, some, a few, no. Data excerpts from transcriptions of the lesson on 5/30/13 show this discussion:

Student 1: I use really attractive words

Teacher: I like that… (student’s name) said, “I use really good words… is there something better than good words, how about persuasive words?”

Student 1: I said attractive words.

Teacher: I use really persuasive words? (Acknowledging student who said attractive words again, realizing I heard her wrong) Attractive words make the reader want to read more, I like that.

Student 2: I use five persuasive words.

Teacher: Should we use a number? Should we have how many persuasive words?

Student 2: How about 10?

Teacher: If we had 10 persuasive words I could see someone going: Please, please, please, please go to Lugia’s! Using a word over and over again just to get in the ten words. (We laughed together.) I don’t want you to make something up just to meet the requirement.

**Using the draft rubric on exemplars**

Once we had our draft rubric, I went home and typed it up. That night I typed up four different exemplars about a local ice cream place I frequented, Lugias. As I read over the rubric
and typed up the exemplar, I realized that even though I didn’t want to put a number on how many persuasive words or transition words we required in our rubric, it was very difficult to assess my exemplar with ambiguous words like a lot, or a few. I decided that we actually did need a number to differentiate the different qualities. In my research journal, dated 6/4/13, I wrote: “Extraordinary category: a lot? What is a lot? 4? 6? 10? Maybe we do need a number to qualify the statement.” I changed the rubric that night; a lot became more than four, a few became three. The other categories stayed the same; two and one respectively.

Prior to using the rubric on the exemplars I told the kids what I had thought about the night before. I told them about the change I had made for the word choice category. During our lesson, I distributed the rubric to the students, along with an exemplar. First, we assessed a review together. After reading it, we read each category for content. I asked them questions, using the rubric as my guide. Did it state an opinion in the beginning? Did it give reasons? How many? As we read the review, the students found the reasons and marked them with an R1, R2, R3 on their copy. As a child read, I had two students keep track of transitions words and persuasive words that were in the review on the white board.

I also showed the students a statement that I included in the rubric under *The words I use:*

I choose words that show I strongly believe in what I am writing about. My words keep the reader interested. After creating the exemplars, I realized that voice is an important part of persuasive writing and that a student could actually use persuasive words in his writing but not write in such a way as to show strong feeling about the topic. I also wanted to include something about keeping the reader interested because one of the students brought this up in our lesson when we were discussing this category. She said that our words should be attractive (Lesson from 5/30), meaning the reader should be attracted to what we write. It should keep them
interested. I made sure that these two elements were in the rubric. We went through each category and checked to see if the criteria had been met.

Below is an excerpt from my journal, dated 6/4/13, that shows how we did this when we got to organization.

Teacher: Does it have a title?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: Does it have an introduction that states an opinion?

Students: Yes (shake heads).

Teacher: Can someone read that please?

Student: “Do you love ice cream? Well, I love ice cream and I know a great place for you to go to get some really great ice cream. It is Lugia’s. If you haven’t been there, then you need to go!”

Teacher: Does it have reasons with details to support the reason? (Most students agree that it does, some aren’t sure. I call on student)

Student: “First of all, it has many flavors of hard ice cream. There are tons of flavors! It has chocolate Panda Paws, Death by chocolate and Peanut Butter S'mores...”

Teacher: Excellent, the reason is that it has many flavors of hard ice cream. The details are the flavors: Chocolate Panda Paws, Death by chocolate....
I wasn’t sure if all of the students understood this concept of giving a reason with details to support it so I gave them extra practice doing this at a time other than writing workshop.

Using our draft rubric on exemplars was very important for many reasons. First, it made me realize that our qualifiers for the second category, *Fine work*, needed to be changed. During the creation of the rubric, we decided that two reasons for persuasive writing would qualify as fine work. As I reflected on that, I felt that we should have kept it at three, like the first category, only changed the number of details given. This would reflect the yes/but formula espoused by Andrade (2000). Using the draft rubric also made us all aware that using a rubric to assess writing doesn’t mean that the writing is going to perfectly match every category. One aspect of the criteria might be met in one category but another aspect might be met in another category. This threw some of the kids off as they were assessing but helped them to see how they might end up circling different qualifying statements in different categories. Creating and using the draft rubric also made us realize that for “Words I use when I write” it was easier to assess a number. It was hard to be objective about what ‘a lot’ or ‘some’ meant, so we changed the rubric and gave a number to how many persuasive words and transition words we would require.

**Student and Teacher’s Beliefs about Making the Rubric**

Different students had different opinions about creating the rubric. Jim, one of the focus students, said that creating the rubric was like, “discovering something new for me.” He also identified it as something that assesses writing and was able to describe how he could use it to help him when he writes. This is our conversation, dated 6/5/13:

Teacher: What was it like making the rubric?

Jim: Kind of like discovering something new for me.
Teacher: Alright.

Jim: Just, ummmm

Teacher: So you didn’t really know what a rubric was before?

Jim: A rubric is how good somebody does on their paper or something.

Teacher: As we were making it was there anything you didn’t understand?

Jim: Not really.

Teacher: You like everything we did? So in your mind how do the categories work?

Jim: It gets worse as you go down.

Teacher: So how are you going to use this in your persuasive writing?

Jim: I can look at each one and see if I can use three reasons and more and some details with the reasons.

Mike, another focal student was excited about using the rubric because he was going to be able to assess other kids with it. His understanding of the rubric was that teachers used it to assess writing and that he could use it to help him with his own writing. This is my interview with Mike, dated 6/4/13:

Mike: I was thinking when we finish this, we are going to test it on stuff and I can’t wait to test it on stuff to see if it’s good.

Teacher: And when we did test it on the poetry and the persuasive writing was it fun?

Mike: U huh.
Teacher: What did you like about it?

Mike: I like you got to grade the peoples, like a teacher, oh you got this wrong, you got to fix it.

Teacher: So you know what a rubric is for then? What is a rubric for?

Mike: Correcting any type of writing to see if it’s got what it needs… to be a good story.

Teacher: Okay then, so when you are doing, using this at your seat, how can you use it while you’re writing?

Mike: Like if you have it at your desk. You could read all of these (pointing to rubric) and then do what it tells you to do.

Teacher: Which one are you aiming for?

Mike: This one (pointing to extraordinary).

Rye thought it was fun to make. My tape ran out when I was interviewing and I didn’t realize it so I only have my interview observation notes. The data from my notes indicate that she understood that a rubric was to assess someone’s writing as to how good it was and that she would use it when she went to write her persuasive review. Also, Rye said that some kids tried to get her to vote a certain way when we voted, but that she voted for what she thought was best.

My interview notes with her, dated 6/5/13, which noted the main ideas that we talked about were: “it was fun; you got to vote on what you wanted; some kids tried to get you to vote the way they wanted; but she voted for what she thought was best; she wondered about the last category; punctuation, neatness and spelling – was that for the final draft or first draft?; talked
about making sure other kids knew that was only for the published copy; knew what a rubric was for, “tells how good your writing’ is” said she would use it to help her write hers.”

When I asked Tom what it he was thinking when we made the rubric he referred to our lesson about the personal pan pizza, and using persuasive words that all start with the same letter. He also talked about how he thought it was important to read it really fast; he compared it to a commercial. He talked about the importance of not repeating the same persuasive word over and over. All of these thoughts related back to lessons we had, not the rubric. These comments made me think that he really had a good handle on what persuasive writing included; persuasive words and really convincing someone, even by the way you read it and say it. He didn’t really understand parts of the rubric itself and confused terms like alliteration and persuasive words, which I will explain later. This is one excerpt from my interview with him, dated 6/6, showed his thinking about what persuasive writing includes. This was at the very beginning of the interview:

Tom: I was kinda thinking you wouldn’t want to stop a lot because you don’t want the person you’re trying to persuade, you want to just keep saying your words, almost like they won’t try to (stop you)…when you persuade on commercials they talk really fast.

Teacher: So you think when you go to read it, it would be important to read it at a fast speed? Is that what you’re saying?

Tom: Yeah, so there’s no room for the person to comment so like, in my tarantula thing, I wrote, “it’s fun to scare your mom.” So they wouldn’t say, “I’m not so sure (about that) and (you) just keep talking.
Tom also felt that neatness should be separate from spelling and punctuation, something that we discussed as a group. He expressed his idea that they were two different things so shouldn’t be assessed in the same category. From the same interview above, he explained his reasoning:

Teacher: Was there anything here (pointing to the How I Organize my Writing category) that you didn’t understand?

Tom: Well, there’s one thing about this… my spelling, punctuation and neatness. It (the writing) might have a lot of punctuation but not be neat, or it might be neat but not have a lot of punctuation. If these were separate… it seems like these are two different things in the same category, so you’d have to do them both.

Peter and Katrina, my two struggling writers, had different feelings about creating the rubric. Peter thought that some parts of doing it were hard. He understood that a rubric was to assess how you did on your writing. He also indicated from his answers what one needed to include in persuasive writing. Excerpts from my interview with him, dated 6/5/13, show this:

Teacher: What was it like for you co-creating the rubric?

Peter: The words, what would be the excellent part, fine work, good job… it was hard think about them.

Teacher: Were you happy with what we finally decided?

Peter: Yeah

Teacher: When we were doing it together, did you understand what a rubric is?
Peter: A rubric is how good you did on your writing or what you’re using your rubric on.

In another part of the same interview I asked Peter a question about if he thought making it helped him. His answers indicate that he understood that persuasive writing included transitions words, persuasive words, paragraphs, reasons and neatness. This is our interview:

Teacher: Did making the rubric help you understand what persuasive writing should include?

Peter: Yea.

Teacher: What did you learn are some important things you need to include?

Peter: You need transition words and persuasive words so to make it pretty good. Make more paragraphs…

Teacher: What are some other things?

Peter: more reasons…

Teacher: Anything else?

Peter: Oh, I should write neater.

Katrina was relieved that we were making it together. She thought she was going to have to fill in ‘all those boxes’ by herself. She also didn’t like the way we described the second category for quality.

Teacher: What was it like making the rubric with the class?

Katrina: Well at first I thought we would be making it all ourselves, but instead I didn’t know that you were going to set this all up on the computer. I thought we were going to have to make
all these boxes and do it ourselves and try and remember but if I tried to do that I wouldn’t remember.

Teacher: Did it make you feel better to know that we were going to do it together and that you weren’t going to have to do it yourself?

Katrina: yea.

Teacher: How did you feel about the categories that we made up?

Katrina: I think fine work could be a little more kinda exciting, like extraordinary (is).

Teacher: You didn’t think fine work sounded very exciting?

Katrina: no.

As I will show later in this study, Katrina struggled the most out of all my writers understanding the parts of the rubric. I spent most of the interview making sure she understood it, once I realized she did not comprehend many important concepts. At the end of our interview I asked Katrina a question about whether or not she thought the rubric would help her. Her answer indicated she understood that a rubric is used to assess someone’s writing and that it has information on it to help you when you write. I have italicized her words that show this understanding. Here are excerpts from the same interview as above:

Teacher: Do you think making a writing rubric helped you understand what good persuasive writing is?

Katrina: Yes,

Teacher: you do?
Katrina: because now I know how I do my neatness… like I know that you have a rubric so that it can help you… like, help you see if they did really good with neatness, the words I use, content.

Teacher: I am going to give you a rubric today. This will be your rubric to use today. How do you think this is going to help you when you write today?

Katrina: When I write today it’s going to help me because I can know I can read it over for conclusions and the words I use and getting neatness down and writing all of my words and punctuation.

This data seemed to indicate that all of the focus students had a clear understanding of what persuasive writing includes as described in the rubric, except for Katrina, who had a more basic understanding. Five of the focus students demonstrated an understanding of what a rubric was and that it was used to assess one’s writing. Five students also seemed to understand that a rubric can also help them with their own writing.

I thought that a lot of time, effort, thinking, learning and energy went into creating the rubric. As I look back at my field notes, co-constructing the rubric together only took two 30 minute lessons. It was all the preparation for making the rubric, preparing the students in understanding what a rubric is by giving them poetry to read and assess, creating various exemplars, and testing out the draft rubric that was time consuming. All of those measures were necessary though for the students to really understand what important elements need to be included in a persuasive review, what a rubric is and how to use it to assess writing.

Summary

Co-constructing a rubric with students from mentor texts involved many steps. First it
involved reading mentor texts that used persuasive writing for enjoyment. Then it involved engaging students in a close study of the text for elements that made the text persuasive. My students and I created a chart together listing the elements of persuasive writing for future reference. I had to decide what criteria were missing from our chart in order to meet Common Core Standards and create a way to use mentor text to teach that criteria or to explain it to the students. I also had to decide which categories would be negotiable and which ones wouldn’t be. It involved explaining vocabulary like *persuasive words* and *transition words*. Anchor charts had to be created to support student’s learning of new words. Because my students had never been exposed to a rubric before, I had to show them examples of one and give them an opportunity to use it on sample writing, so that they could see how it was used. Actually creating a rubric was a process of the students and me discussing why certain elements were important in our writing, negotiating numbers and phrases, and coming to an agreement by what resonated as reasonable, or voting on it. After creating the rubric, I had to create exemplars of persuasive writing that we could assess, using our draft rubric, so that students understood how it worked and to see if there was something we needed to change. After revisions were made on our draft rubric, I created the rubric that students would use on their writing.

My interviews and surveys from the students about how they used the rubric, helped me find answers to my next question.

**Question 2: What happens when elementary students use a student-generated writing rubric during the writing process?**

Students who were in my focus group were placed together at a table while they wrote their persuasive reviews. I was working with other students during this time, so was relying on my video recording to give me data I would need to see if they actually used the rubric at their
desk. I video-recorded four writing sessions but unfortunately the lighting was so bright that
when I went to view the DVD’s I couldn’t see what was on their desk. The audio was working
fine but there was no communication between students in the focus group about the rubric
during their writing; they all worked quietly, or when they talked it was not about the rubric.
Therefore, my data for answering this question will come from the survey that the students filled
out, the interview that I conducted with each focus student, and my notes from my research
journal. Triangulation from these sources will validate my findings. The interview about co-
constructing the rubric was done over a period of several days during reading and writing
workshop. These were taped and transcribed. The interview about how the students used the
rubric were done one on one during teacher conferencing, except for one interview in which I
interviewed two boys together. The students brought with them their first draft and the rubric
they used during the writing process. These interviews were also taped and transcribed.

**Students Mark the Rubric During the Writing Process or For Self Edit**

From the survey, four of the focus students said they used the rubric during the writing
process (Appendix O) either always or usually. Of those four, they also said on their survey that
they used it for all of the categories, either usually, or always. Only one of the four, circled
sometimes for the *Words I Use When I Write* category. One theme that kept resurfacing in both
of my interviews with the students who chose to use the rubric was the way they used it. After
checking to see if they had included all of the elements in their writing, they would either circle
the criteria on their rubric or check if off.

First, these students acknowledged using the rubric during their writing (interview
transcripts, dated 5/28/13).

Mike: Well, I looked at it a couple of times to see if there was anything else missing or was
there something I had too much of…

Jim: I tried to use the Extraordinary box and I tried to use it on every single one.

Rye: It was in my folder and I would pull it out and look at it.

When I looked at these students’ rubrics, I noticed that they had circles on their rubrics.

I questioned the students about this.

Tom: I used it like I wrote a reason and I wrote three details. I tried to use the Extraordinary box and I tried to use I on every single one.

Jim: I kind of used it as a checklist. If I state my opinion right away, if I give three reasons…

Teacher: Tom when you used it, how did you use it?

Tom: Well, I kind of did the same thing as Jim. I kind of used it as a checklist. If I state my opinion right away…

As I commented on what Tom and Jim did on their rubrics, I said, “You circled each part of the category…” Jim interrupted, “…as you go along.” I continued our conversation. “So you did it (circled the parts of the categories) as you saw that you were doing that in your writing?” Mike replied, “Cause when you circle it all, you don’t want to have to go through erasing it, then circling the whole thing.” By circling each section at a time, as he went along, he was able to keep track of whether or not he was including all of the elements on the rubric.

Tom said he didn’t use it during the writing but he did use it to self check his work. Instead of circling his, he put check marks next to qualifying statements. Our conversations from the interview on 6/15/13 showed how he used it.

Teacher: What do these little checkss on your rubric mean?

Tom: If I did more than this one. (pointing to the fine work category).

Teacher: As you looked for them in your writing you checked them off as you found them, is
that what you did?

Tom:  When I found the reason, (referring to the content category), I put number 1 on my draft. Number 2…

Teacher:  So you looked at the rubric and then looked in your writing to see if a reason was there, you wrote a number 1 in your first draft to show that you had 1 reason and then checked it off? Is that what you did?”

Tom:  shook his head yes.

All of these writers used the rubric in a systematic way to keep track of whether or not they had included all of the criteria for extraordinary writing by either circling the items on their rubric or checking them off as they wrote their paper. They understood what a rubric was. They knew that it was a tool that they could use to help them meet criteria that would make their writing extraordinary, a goal they wanted to achieve as writers.

**Readers Who Struggle, Struggle with the Rubric**

Another observation after interviewing the students was that my readers and writers who struggle also struggled with using the rubric, either because they could not read some of the words or because they did not know what all of the words in the rubric meant. Katrina, one of my writers who struggled, and Tom who also struggled, did not understand many parts of the rubric and needed more explanation from me.

Katrina was my first student who I interviewed about creating the rubric together. Our conversation hadn’t gotten very far when I realized that there were many thing she did not understand about the rubric. She did not understand that the rubric could be used in a definitive way to guide your writing, especially in the beginning of our conversation. This excerpt from my interview, dated 6/5/13, shows her uncertainty. I have italicized the word that emphasize her
ambiguity.

Teacher: What do you understand it to mean on your contents if you did an extraordinary job on content?

Katrina: I added lots of detail… about like three. And give some opinions… I’m guessing in the middle…”

Teacher: (I referred her back to the rubric.) How many reasons would you have to have to have a really extraordinary persuasive writing:

Katrina: I am guessing about a lot.

My research journal entry dated 6/6/13 states: “I started with Katrina who is one of my weak writers and realized pretty quickly that she didn’t really understand what the rubric was all about. When I asked her questions about what she would do to write an extraordinary review she would say, “I guess about…” There wasn’t surety there at all”

She also struggled because she could not read the words in the rubric or she did not know what they meant. In my interview with her, dated 6/6/13, the excerpts from our conversation demonstrate her lack of understanding about what some of the words meant.

Teacher: What is your understanding of Content?

Katrina: silence for at least ten seconds.

This silence indicated that she did not know what it was. I had to remind her about my definition of it when we made the rubric together.

Teacher: So what are transition words?

Katrina: Transhision words are like, uhmm… I forgot what they were.

When referring to the organization category of the rubric, I asked her what indenting is.

Teacher: Do you remember what indenting is?
Katrina: I know what it is. When you indent it means like… I know what it is but I forgot how to explain it more.

Teacher: Okay, can you show me something that’s indented? Something in this book that is indented?

Katrina: ummm, ummm (silence)

…she was unclear about some of the vocabulary on the rubric like transition words and persuasive words.

Again, my reflections from my research journal, dated June 6 state: “she was also unclear about some of the vocabulary on the rubric like, transition words and persuasive words.”

In my interview with Tom, when we were talking about whether or not he had included four persuasive words in his writing, I asked him to give me an example of a persuasive word.

Teacher: Can you give me an example of a persuasive word?

Tom: Personal Pan Pizza

Teacher: That’s an alliteration, not really a persuasive word…

Tom: Ummm, so in one of those books we read… ummm… so what are persuasive words again?

My readers and writers who struggled also had trouble reading some of the words on the rubric, which hindered their comprehension of the rubric. In my interview with Katrina and Tom, there was at least one occasion where they were not able to read words on the rubric.

As Katrina and I were looking at the rubric and reading the various parts of How I Organize my Writing, Katrina got stuck on a word.

Teacher: Introduction. Then what are you going to have?

Katrina: ex…. (silence)
Teacher: examples, then what are you going to have?

Peter also was not able to a word on the rubric. We were looking at the rubric and I wanted to know if he understood what he would need to do if he wanted to do really well on his writing. He looked at the content category and started to read from it.

Peter: You have to have three details and at least three reasons (looking at the rubric).

Teacher: What else?

Peter: Op… (silence)

Teacher: opinion, Okay… state your opinion.

There could be several reasons why these three students struggled with reading some of the words and understanding certain concepts in the rubric. First of all, Peter and Katrina were also struggling readers. Because they struggled in reading, they were not able to read all of the words on the rubric, that my stronger readers were able to. Peter and Katrina struggled more with concepts like what a persuasive or a transition word is, and what an ‘example’ is. Part of this may have been due to their own inattentiveness during lessons. Peter is known to ‘daydream’ during lessons and become easily confused about things; he often needs directions repeated. Katrina can also be easily distracted during lessons, especially if there is an opportunity for her to socialize. Because they often needed reteaching; it is possible that they needed it for the rubric too. We looked for transition words and persuasive words together in small groups. We put our findings on an anchor chart. We even practiced finding persuasive words and transitions words in our exemplar. After all of those exposures to the words, they still were unclear as to what they meant and in need of more teaching, so they may needed more instruction.

Katrina had difficulty with understanding the concept of ‘content.’ Katrina may have
needed more than one explanation about what content was; she often needed reteaching in math and in ELA. It may be possible too that she would have understood content more clearly if I had given the students an opportunity to create the category from the chart we made, as opposed to me creating the category. The students came up with the elements for persuasive writing from the mentor texts, but I didn’t let them create the categories; I did. Perhaps the hard work of looking at the elements and then grouping them to make a category would have given Katrina the opportunity to internalize the concept more completely.

**Students are confused when there is Inconsistent Language**

Throughout all of my lessons during our persuasive writing unit, whenever I referred to the points that the kids would have to make to support their opinion, I always referred to them as ‘details.’ I referred to them as details when we studied our mentor texts and I referred to them in the rubric itself for the content area category. I also referred to them as details when I gave students practice with writing details in class to support a topic sentence; in order to reinforce our learning about what is included in a paragraph. This activity lasted over a period of three days and coincided with our persuasive genre study. I always asked for three details to go with the topic sentence.

When we were creating our rubric together, we ran out of time and we were having difficulty with the “How I organize my Writing” category, so I decided that I would create the criteria for this one on my own in order to save some time. When I created the category, I wrote, “reason with examples.” In my interviews with students in my focus group and with other students in the classroom, this word created confusion in their mind. The conversations we had will demonstrate this.

In talking with Katrina, when looking at the *How I Organize My Writing*, I asked her
what else she needed to have an extraordinary persuasive writing, she was confused by what she thought and by what she saw in the rubric. This excerpt from my interview, dated 6/6/13.

Katrina: umm, detail

Teacher: Oh, okay. Where’s it talk about detail?

Katrina looked for the word detail, but couldn’t find it in the rubric.

Teacher: Here, where it says reasons with details. Those examples are your details.

My interview with Tom also shows that he was confused about the word example in the rubric. We were looking at the How I Organize My Writing category.

Teacher: Is theer anything there that you don’t understand.

Tom: Examples, I don’t get what it means by ‘example.’

Teacher: Examples are the same thing we have been talking about this week with details.

Tom: Oh

Teacher: Details are why the chicks are cute or why the chick are fun. So the examples are the detail sentences.

Tom: It’s not just going like, they’re cute. They’re cute by… yeah… by their so yellow and fluffy and stuff… right, so yeah.

Teacher: So the examples are the details.

Both of these students were confused by the word I used in the rubric, ‘example.’ It wasn’t used in the rest of the rubric; the word ‘detail’ was used. It wasn’t used in my lessons with the students either. When we read the mentor texts, we looked for details that supported the reason. When I gave them practice writing reasons for a practice activity, I asked them to give details that supported the reason. When I used inconsistent language on the rubric, it resulted in confusion on the part of some of my students.
Students May Need Anchor Charts

After Mike finished his first draft, I met with him for teacher conference and used that time to interview him about using the rubric. When we got to the Words I Use When I Write category we checked to see if he had five persuasive words. He had circled “I use at least three persuasive words.” under the qualifier, Fine Work. He had already identified two persuasive words in his writing. My research journal notes dated June 11, states: “He had never and should. He definitely had four. He didn’t know for sure if he did though. He thought he did.”

Our conversation continued as follows, from the interview dated, 6/12/13.

Teacher: So were you not sure what persuasive words were, Mike?

Mike: I knew what they were…(he looked at the anchor chart that listed persuasive words on it)

Teacher: But because they weren’t on the anchor chart, you didn’t think you had them?

Mike: Like never isn’t on there.

Teacher: Go add that to our anchor chart.

In my reflections in my research journal, dated 6/12/13, I had written: “I thought it was very interesting today when I interviewed/conferenced with Mike. When we were using the rubric to see how many transition words he had in his writing, he wasn’t sure if he had four because one that he had, ‘never,’ wasn’t on the anchor chart. Mike is a strong writer and is using that anchor chart to help him with his writing and understanding the rubric. I wonder how the other kids are using it.”

Two other of my focus group students used the anchor chart during my interviews with them as well. When I interviewed Katrina on 5/28/13, I asked her if she could give me an example of a persuasive word. She looked at the anchor chart on the board and then replied, “need.” Tom referred to the anchor chart as well during his interview dated 6/12/13. I asked
him what persuasive words were.

Tom: Persuasive words are like.. to get people to.. like, have, should.

Teacher: (noticing that he looked at the anchor chart) Did you look at the anchor chart to help you?

Tom: (shakes his head ‘yes’)

Teacher: So the anchor chart helped you?

Tom: Shakes his head, ‘yes.’

One of my writers whom I considered a strong writer, one of my adequate writers and one of my writers who struggled all referred to the anchor chart in my conversations with them. Mike; relied so much on the anchor chart as a reference point that he didn’t think he had four persuasive words because the word he wanted to use wasn’t on the chart. Katrina and Tom both needed to use the chart to help them remember what a persuasive word was. It seems from this data that an anchor chart provides an important point of reference to students for new concepts and ideas that they are trying to internalize and apply to their writing. If they were using this chart in their writing, it probably means other students, of various writing abilities were too.

Students Can Use the Rubric to Self-assess their Writing

There was evidence of students using the rubric to self-assess their writing in many instances. I document these instances below. The first instance is a conversation that I had with Mike. I happened to have the tape recorder running and caught the conversation on tape, not realizing until later when I was re-listening to the tapes, that what he was doing was using the rubric to self-monitor his writing. He came to me because he was working on his writing and was deliberately checking to see if he had all the requirements of the rubric. On one part, he wasn’t sure if he was showing, not just telling, in his writing. He had his writing and his rubric.
This is our conversation, from transcripts dated 6/10/13.

Mike: (referring to the rubric) “three details, yea…”

Teacher: At least three details (he and I are reading over a paragraph to see if there are three details)

Micah: what would showing be? (referring to the rubric under content where it says, “show not just tell.”)

T: showing means instead of just, well… (reading from his paper) “if it has rained recently and the ground is wet we must spend recess either inside or on the blacktop where there is nothing to do.” That is definitely showing and not just telling.

(Looking at his next paragraph about the bus ride to school) You talked about it taking a long time to get there… You might wanna… you could show more about talking about how boring it is or long….

Mike: We have to pick up ten kids…

Teacher: So you could put in here, “we have to pick up ten kids” that would be showing, not just telling. Put it here on this line.

Of the four students who said they used the rubric during their writing on their surveys (see Appendix M), all except one referred to it usually or often for all categories; Peter used it for one category “sometimes.” All of them acknowledged using it in my interviews, (dated 6/5,6/6) that I had with them as well.

Peter, one of my struggling writers, indicated in the survey that he used the rubric and
had circles on his rubric to show the parts of the rubric that he thought he met in his own writing. My assessment of his writing, using the rubric, matched his self-assessment except in two areas. He thought he had chosen words that “show I strongly believe in what I am writing about” (Appendix O) and had tried to “show not tell” (Appendix O). I didn’t think he had met that criteria. He had used persuasive words but didn’t elaborate enough in the details to “show not tell” or write with a strong persuasive voice. He is a poor speller and had circled on his rubric, “There are 3 or 4 spelling errors,” (Appendix O) which was an accurate self-assessment. Peter was also using the graphic organizer that I had provided, but had worked very independently through the whole writing process. He usually visited me several times in one writing workshop session for support and help with where to go next in his writing. He never came to me once during this unit. I checked in on him a few times to see how he was progressing with his graphic organizer and he seemed to be on track. His graphic organizer shows his reasons, with details. The example above gives at least one observation of one of these students actively checking his piece, during the writing of his review, to make sure it included all of the items on the rubric. The example of Peter shows evidence of him self-assessing his writing as well.

These excerpts are taken from interviews dated 6/12/13, with the students after they had written their first draft. The rubrics that they brought to the table had been marked, indicating that they had used it as well.

Teacher: Mike, what about you? How did you use it?

Mike: Well, I looked at it a couple of times to see if there was anything missing or was there something I had too much of. Well, you can’t have too much of something.

Teacher: … So, Mike, you referred to it a couple of times, does that mean you kind of had in your head what you needed to do. Explain that.
Mike: I knew I was suppose to do more that four persuasive words, more than different transitions words, three reasons... so I wrote it and then I looked to see if I had all that stuff.”

When interviewing Rye I asked her if she understood how to use the rubric. She said that she did. Then she proceeded to tell me how she used it to self-assess her writing.

Teacher: You said you sometimes looked at it.

Rye: It helped because you can always pull it out of your desk and say, oh yeah, I forgot I need to be neat with my final draft, to use all my punctuation and stuff and to use transition and persuasive words. So you can just pull it out of your desk and look at that.

Both Rye and Mike indicated on their surveys how often they used their rubric during their writing. Both students circled either usually or always for all of the categories on the rubric.

As indicated earlier in the study, Mike and Jim both had circled statements on the rubric to indicate that they had done that in their writing. As they circled each statement this was also a way of self-assessing their work, to make sure they weren’t leaving anything out. Jim had also indicated on his survey that he used it usually or always.

This data demonstrated how students used a rubric as a self-assessment tool during their writing. They used the rubric during their writing to make sure that they included in their writing everything that defined ‘extraordinary’ work. They used the rubric to check for not only things like how many persuasive or transition words they had, but for elements like whether or not the writer ‘shows, not just tells’ when he writes. If students use a rubric to self assess their work, that makes me believe that the teacher needs to make sure that the rubric is a quality measurement tool.
Summary

There are many things that happen when students use a rubric. Some of those things are positive and some are negative. Positive things include using the rubric as a way to keep track of their own writing as a means of self-assessment. They will circle or check off the parts of the rubric that match what they have done on their paper. If they have not met the requirements that they desire, they will go back to revise their work to make sure it meets the criteria. They will use the rubric as a measure for quality of what they are writing; as they reflect on their writing they try and make sure that their writing meets the criteria of the rubric.

On the other hand, when readers who struggle use the rubric, they may not be able to read words on the rubric or understand what words mean on the rubric. This is partly due to the fact that readers who struggle don’t have proficient decoding skills that enable them to read the words. It could also be due to the possibility that the students were not focused during the lessons that emphasized the new vocabulary words like persuasive or transition words.

Regarding the confusion my writers who struggle had in understanding the concept of ‘content,’ it is possible that this new learning was not in the child’s zone of proximal development and therefore, the student needed more scaffolding to understand the concepts presented. Their inability to understand the ‘content’ concept may have also been due to the possibility that I created the ‘content’ category as opposed to letting the students come up with the category. If students had looked at the elements of persuasive writing on the chart and had coined their own term for those elements, they probably would have understood the concept better.

Other findings from the data showed the importance of a teacher using an anchor chart to support her writers when introducing new concepts or vocabulary. Finally, if there is
inconsistent language between what the teacher uses in lessons and what she uses on the rubric, students can become confused, which affects their comprehension of the rubric.

**Question 3: How might student-generated writing rubrics influence students’ writing?**

In order to answer this question, I will use the interviews that I did with the students before they used the rubric and after. I will also use data from the survey and the student writing samples.

**Rubrics Can Help Students Remember Important Elements of Writing**

Sixty-six percent of the students surveyed felt that they thought the rubric helped them become a better writer (Appendix M). Part of that might be because the students felt that the rubric helped them remember what was important in their writing. Interviews I performed after they used the rubric demonstrated this idea. I have italicized words the students used to emphasize their thinking in this way. When interviewing Jim, (interview dated 6/12/13) he said: “You would look at this (referring to the rubric) and this would *remind you* that you needed to have an opinion, you needed to have three reasons and you needed to have at least three details.”

When I asked Rye if she would like to use a rubric in the future, this was her reply: “Probably because they’re more helpful than not using one, not using one you’re *going to forget* about how neat it is (needs to be).”

When I asked Tom if he would use a rubric in the future this is what he said: “It can tell you what you should do. It tells you what it is so *you don’t have to remember everything that is said, you can read it over again so you don’t forget things.*”

All of these students used the rubric as a way to help them remember what to include in their persuasive writing. It almost seemed to be a relief for some of them; like it was one less
thing they had to remember as writers. I especially sensed this in Tom when he shared (see excerpt above) about how it helped him remember. Tom was always forgetting things: his homework, his pencils, where he put his notebooks. I could see how a rubric would be something he would appreciate as a writer. As I reflected on this data, it made me realize that there are many new things students learn during a genre study. Perhaps a student generated rubric was one effective way to help some students have a visual reminder for what to include in their writing.

Katrina was the only one who indicated on her survey and in her interview, dated 6/13/13, that she never used the rubric during her writing. She did use the rubric after she finished her first draft as a self-assessment tool; I have a copy of her rubric and she has certain categories circled on her rubric. Unfortunately she was one of my last ones to finish her final draft and we were short on time, so I couldn’t sit down with her and go over her thinking with her about why she had circled certain criteria. When I interviewed her to see if she had used the rubric, her answers were very short and abrupt:

Teacher: Did you use the rubric when you wrote your persuasive review?

Katrina: No, I never used it

Teacher: Why not?

Katrina: I didn’t help me.

Teacher: Why didn’t it help you?

Katrina: It was confusing.

Teacher: Would you want to use it again in the future?

Katrina: No, I would never want to use it again in the future.

In hindsight I wished I had explored with her what was confusing, but I didn’t. It is
possible that she was so negative because she ‘was done’ with school. It was the last day of ‘work’ before the final fun school activities would begin. I am wondering if her negative attitude toward using the rubric had anything to do with her difficulty understanding the rubric and its concepts. If she had trouble reading some of the more difficult words on the rubric like opinion, persuasive and transition, as I indicated earlier in this study, it would have been very frustrating for her. She has had trouble in math with too much text and numbers on a page. I am wondering if this data shows that a rubric may not be helpful for all students, especially students with attention problems. There might be ‘too much’ on the page for them to make sense of and sort out. It is also possible that if she had more support and scaffolding from me using the rubric, her attitude might have been more favorable toward using it. My other student who struggled in writing and reading, Peter, loved using the rubric and answered in his survey that he used it sometimes for certain categories, always or usually for others.

**Student-Generated Rubrics Help Students Understand Important Elements of Genre**

When I interviewed students about what it was like co-constructing the rubric, most of them gave answers that indicated how it was something new for them, or it was hard deciding on parts of it, or they preferred a different label for a category. I found it difficult to get more information from them about making it, so I decided to focus on their understanding of the rubric and how it would drive their own writing. I had started my interviews with Katrina, who seemed to be very confused about various parts of the rubric so I wanted to make sure my other students understood. As I spoke with Katrina about the rubric, she began to grasp more clearly what persuasive writing should include. The rubric was our point of reference for talking about the genre, and as we talked about it, she gained understanding. As indicated earlier in this paper, Katrina didn’t realize that there were definite elements she could count on, based on our
rubric that would make her writing extraordinary. By the end of our conversation, she was feeling more confident in her knowledge. Here is an excerpt from the last part of my interview:

Teacher: Do you think making a writing rubric helped you understand what a good persuasive writing is?
Katrina: Yes.
Teacher: You do?
Katrina: Because I know how I do my neatness…. Like I know that you have a rubric so that it can help you like, help you see if they did really good with… the words I use, content.
Teacher: I am going to give you a rubric today. This will be your rubric to use today. How do you think this is going to help you when you write today?
Katrina: When I write today, it’s going to help me because I can know I can read it over for conclusions and the words I use and getting neatness down and… punctuation.
Teacher: So when you go to write today how you are thinking you’re going to start it?
Katrina: I am going to start with, I think…

As noted earlier in this study, Katrina’s survey answers indicated that she never used the rubric and that it never helped her. Her final interview statements supported her survey answers. She probably didn’t use the rubric, but the above data seems to contradict her statement that it didn’t help her. Maybe using the rubric didn’t help her, but our discussions about the criteria in the rubric definitely seemed to increase her comprehension of the concepts in the rubric. Her post assessment results, which I discuss later, also seem to indicate that her understanding of the persuasive genre increased.

Peter, my English Language Learner (ELL) showed a good understanding of what persuasive writing should include in my interview (dated 6/5/13) with him after we co-
constructed the rubric. This was our conversation.

Teacher: If you wanted to do really well (on your persuasive writing), tell me what you would have to do.

Peter: You have to have, to have three details and at least three reasons (looking at rubric).

Teacher: What else?

Peter: You need transition words and persuasive words so to make it pretty good. Make more paragraphs.

Teacher: How would you tell me about soccer if you were trying to persuade me?

Peter: If you like to catch balls, kick and pass the ball, you should play this game of soccer. If you like to run you should play this game of soccer. On the surveys that the students filled out, in the comment section, Peter wrote his comment on his survey it said: “I love rubrics. They help me.”

The above excerpts are the most obvious indications of students gaining an understanding of persuasive writing through co-constructing a rubric together. Tom also showed an increase in understanding as we discussed the elements on the rubric together. He was unclear about many concepts as indicated earlier in this study; things like what a transition word was, he had confused alliteration with persuasive words. By the end of our conversation he seemed to have a better understanding of these concepts, as he was able to use the rubric to assess another student’s writing. When he came to the table with his rubric, he also had a rubric he had used for another student’s during peer-edit/share. These excerpts, dated 6/12/13, show the confidence he exhibited with using the rubric:

Tom: I read the story (referring to the Zoe’s persuasive review) and then underlined the misspelled words and I see[d] what she did with the rubric… so she used at least four persuasive
words… I went and counted them.

Teacher: What are persuasive words?

Tom: (referring to anchor chart) Persuasive words are like to get people to… *like, have, should* (said the words in italics with emphasis). (Then I asked him some questions about using the anchor chart.)

Tom: She stated her opinion right away and gives three reasons for persuasive writing and gives three details. And she showed not tell.

Teacher: Can you find an example in yours of showing?

Tom: When you watch it, it’s fun to watch it crawl around in its cage.

Tom demonstrated an understanding of what persuasive words are, something he had confused earlier with alliteration. Even though he had to refer to the anchor chart, he knew where to look in case he needed support. He also knew Zoe needed to state her opinion right away and ‘show’ not just tell when giving examples. He had trouble understanding the word ‘example’ in the rubric earlier and was now clear in knowing what it meant when I used it in my question.

The data seem to indicate that students’ understanding of the elements of a genre can increase with using a student-generated rubric. Students had to study mentor texts closely in order to determine the elements of the genre. They also had to think about what criteria make a quality piece of writing; things other than elements of the genre, things like correct spelling, correct punctuation and neatness. Through discussion, creating the rubric criteria, talking about the rubric with me one-on-one, and/or using the rubric as they wrote and/or assessed their writing or another student’s writing, they were able to have multiple exposures to elements of the persuasive genre and elements of quality writing. All of these things helped to increase the
knowledge and understanding of the genre.

**Co-constructed Rubrics Can Improve Students’ Writing**

Mike, on his comments section of the survey wrote, “It really helped me become a better writer.” (Appendix O). All of the focus students, except Katrina, indicated on their survey (Appendix O) that they felt using the rubric helped them become a better writer. One student circled ‘usually,’ the other four circled, ‘always.’ The data below also show that their writing did improve overall.

First, I compared the student’s pre-assessments to their post-assessments using the rubric we created together. I looked at each category to determine how many criteria needed to be met in order for the student’s writing to be extraordinary. For the *Content* category, there were four criteria: “I state an opinion right away.” “I give at least three reasons to support my opinion.” “I give at least three details for each reason.” “I show not tell.” Table 1 shows the results of this comparison.

*Table 1 Pre-assessment and Post-assessment Comparison of Content*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>The Words I Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the category, *The Words I Use*, there were four criteria: “I use more than four persuasive words.” “I use four or more different transition words throughout.” “I choose words that show I strongly believe in what I am writing about.” “My words keep my reader interested.” The chart
below shows how my focus students did on this category. I compared their pre-assessments and their post-assessments. All of the students improved in this category. Peter, Tom and Jim made significant improvements in this category; they hadn’t met any of the criteria on their pre-assessments. Table 2 shows how students in the focus group improved in this category.

For the category, *How I Organize My Writing*, there were six criteria. This category stated, “My review includes: 1) title 2) an introduction that states my opinion 3) reasons 4) with examples 5) conclusion 6) I have indented my paragraphs. The criteria had to be in the order listed in order to be organized and make sense. Table 3 shows the comparison of how students did in organizing their paper for their pre-assessments and post-assessments.

*Table 2  Pre-assessment and Post-assessment Comparison of Transition and Persuasive Words Used*

*Table 3  Pre-assessment and Post-assessment Comparison of How Students Organized Their Writing*
Katrina, Peter and Tom made significant improvements in this category. Katrina had only stated an opinion with one reason on her pre-assessment. Peter had a title on his pre-assessment but only stated an opinion with one reason. Tom stated his opinion but only had one reason; he did include details to support it but did not include more than one reason. It is important to note here that I did give students an opportunity to use a graphic organizer if they wanted to (see Appendix N). Peter and Tom both chose to use a graphic organizer for their post assessment; this also probably contributed to their ability to organize their writing.

I did not include the category for punctuation, spelling and neatness for my data analysis because the students were given no opportunity to use the writing process to improve their spelling, punctuation and neatness on their pre-assessments. For their final copies, they were able, through peer and teacher conferences, to improve their spelling and punctuation. I did not think comparing the pre-assessments and post-assessments for this would be a valid comparison.

Next, I compared their pre-assessments and post-assessments, using the Common Core Writing Standards for persuasive writing. All of the students met more of the CCSS on their post assessments than they did on their pre-assessments. All of them were able to state an opinion about something in an organized way on their preassessment. I accepted a very loose interpretation of ‘an organized way.’ For example, Katrina only wrote four sentences with one reason but it was organized. Peter only wrote one sentence stating one reason; with one detail to support his opinion. Peter did not give ’reasons,’ (plural) as the standard states but he did give one reason, so I made the decision that he met standard A. Table 4 shows the results of comparing the pre-assessments and the post-assessment using the Common Core Standards (CCSS).
Table 4 *Focus Students’ Preassessment and Post assessment Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Students in Focus Group (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Peter</th>
<th>Katrina</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Jim</th>
<th>Rye</th>
<th>Mike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standards Met on Pre-assessment</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A,B with only one reason</td>
<td>A,B with at least three reasons</td>
<td>A,B with at least three reasons</td>
<td>A,B,C,D</td>
<td>A,B,C,D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grade three common core writing standards:**

C.C.W. S. 1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

A. Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.

B. Provide reasons that support the opinion.

C. Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.

D. Provide a concluding statement or section.

It may not appear, from the chart above, that my strong writers, Mike and Rye, improved because they met all of the standards of the common core prior to our unit, but they did. When I went back and compared their preassessment to their post assessments, their writing included more reasons with details to support those reasons. It was more organized. They also increased their number of transitions words and persuasive words, which can definitely affect the fluidity and ‘persuasiveness’ of a writing piece. Tables 5 and 6 below show the data.
Table 5  
Comparison of Persuasive Words in Students’ Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pre-assessment</th>
<th>Post-assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This compares number of persuasive words used in each student’s writing samples, comparing the pre-assessment to the post-assessment.

Table 6  
Comparison of Transition Words in Students’ Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pre-assessment</th>
<th>Post-assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This compares number of transition words used in each student’s writing samples, comparing the pre-assessment to the post-assessment.

This data, in conjunction with the other data, demonstrates clearly how a student-generated rubric can improve a student’s writing. In the content area, all of the focus students improved. All of the students also improved in word choice and usage. All of the students improved in the area of organization. Finally, all of the students improved on the number of persuasive and transition words used. The increase in number of transition and persuasive words could have also been attributed to the fact that their post-assessments were longer, so the number of words used, would automatically have an effect on the number of transition and persuasive words they incorporated into their writing.

Summary

This qualitative study answered my question; what happens when students co-construct a rubric with the teacher? When students were involved in co-constructing a rubric they had to closely examine mentor texts in order to discover the elements of the particular genre. They also discussed and debated with each other different criteria that they felt would qualify varying
degrees of quality. They got to place themselves in the role as ‘teacher,’ as they evaluated
exemplars and compared them to a rubric. They also had the opportunity to discuss with each
other, other important aspects of quality writing such as correct spelling, punctuation and
neatness. As a teacher, I made certain decisions about creating the rubric that affected what
input my students would give concerning the rubric. I knew that the rubric needed to be aligned
with the Common Core Standards so I had to try figure out a way the mentor texts could teach
any elements the CCSS required; if not then I explained what criteria needed to be incorporated.
My decision to create the categories, without the input of the students may have had an impact
on students’ comprehension of certain words and concepts on the rubric. Anchor charts had to be
created to support student’s learning of new words.

This study also answered my question: what happens when elementary students use a
student-generated rubric on their writing? I was very curious to know when I started this study
if third graders would be able to use the rubric to self-assess their own work. This study
answered that question with a resounding, ‘yes.’ They did this by circling statements in the
rubric, as they did those things in their writing. They used it as a tool to remember what needed
to be included in their persuasive writing. It also made me keenly aware that students who
struggle in school and as readers, in particular, may have a difficult time using the rubric. There
may be words and concepts that they do not understand that need further explanation and
discussion. The data study also showed the importance using an anchor chart to support writers
when introducing new concepts or vocabulary.

My third question, how does a student-generated writing rubric influence students’
writing, was also answered. All of the focus students’ writing improved. Reading and enjoying
mentor texts together, examining the text for persuasive features, discussing and deciding the
criteria for the rubric and looking at exemplars of varying degrees of quality all contributed to the understanding of the students as they used the rubric on their own writing. Even Katrina, the student who said in her comments on the survey, “I never, never, never would want to use it!!!” improved her writing.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to find an answer to three research questions regarding co-constructed writing rubrics. My research questions were:

1). What happens during the process of teacher and children co-constructing rubrics based on joint examination of mentor texts?
2). What happens when elementary students use a student-generated writing rubric during the writing process?
3). How might student-generated writing rubrics influence students’ writing?

In this chapter I will discuss conclusions I have made based upon my findings from the study. I will discuss how the findings, as outlined in chapter four, benefitted the students who participated in the study and future students of mine. I will also discuss the ways in which I have benefitted from the findings of my research. Recommendations for future research will also be given along with final thoughts on my research.

Conclusions

The value of collaboration

There were many benefits of collaborating with my students in creating the rubric based on mentor texts. One benefit of co-constructing the rubric with my students, as opposed to giving my students a rubric that I had made, or one that was pre-made was the opportunity it afforded my students and I to discuss and make meaning around the mentor texts. Using mentor texts as the basis for our rubric, as opposed to exemplars, gave students an opportunity to engage in rich literature by authentic authors. As Dorfman and Cappelli (2009) explain, students need to hear and appreciate the story first and that is what we did. They truly enjoyed
listening to the texts. They were able to make connections to the characters who wanted things that they might want, like earrings, a pet, or a new room. They were exposed to the many different elements used in persuasive writing; like stating your opinion many times, using punctuation to accent your point, promising something to someone in order to get what you want, using comparison to persuade, and giving many reasons with lots of detail. The mentor texts provided a rich context for persuasive writing (Dofman & Cappelli, 2007).

Co-constructing the rubric also gave the students and me an opportunity to discuss and make meaning about the elements that are important to persuasive writing. According to Vygotsky (Au, Carrol & Scheu, 2001), children’s learning is socially constructed. Children don’t learn because their teachers tell them what they need to know about a topic. They learn by engaging with new ideas and making them their own. As students and I closely studied the texts in small groups and talked with each other about what the author did to try to persuade, we had to use our own thinking to determine what was important. Deciding together what we thought were important elements of the genre, rather than me just telling them, increased their understanding of the genre.

One of the criticisms of rubrics is that when students are given a rubric they don’t have to do any thinking because everything is spelled out for them (Kohn, 2006). Creating together a student-teacher generated rubric gave students an opportunity to become active participants in evaluating what is important in creating a quality piece of writing. We negotiated together through discussion, consensus and voting what should go in the rubric; much thinking had to happen as the students and I did this. The students became active participants in learning as we negotiated different criteria for various qualities of writing. They engaged in the learning process, as we negotiated together what to include on the rubric and talk with peers about why it
was so important. Getting the students engaged as learners empowered students to take ownership of the rubric and the goals being put forth because they created it. This confirms what Skillings and Ferrell (2000) concluded from their study of second and third graders; allowing the students to be a part of the assessment process of co-creating the rubric empowered their own ability to think critically about what makes a writing piece a quality piece of writing because they had to think meta-cognitively. They had to think about their own thinking.

Using the draft rubric together on exemplars gave the students and me further opportunity to think about whether or not the criteria we set forth were reasonable and appropriate. We were able to see if the rubric actually reflected the learning and/or qualities that we thought were important for persuasive writing (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). When the rubric didn’t meet our expectations, revisions could be made so that it more accurately matched the elements or qualities we thought were important. This process of revision was important because the rubric became a tool to serve our purposes not a tool that the students had to serve. Many teachers use pre-made rubrics but because the students and teacher made no contribution to the rubric, they are using a predetermined set of criteria that is supposed to improve writing, when in reality it only ‘improves’ writing to the extent that the expectations of the rubric set forth. Our rubric evaluated what we, a community of learners, deemed important (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). Mabry criticizes rubrics because they “serve as arbiters of quality and agents of control” (cited in Kohn, 2006, p. 13), but when students create the rubric and make revisions to match their expectation of quality, the rubric becomes a tool that the students control.

**Co-constructed rubrics can be used as tools for self-assessment**

This study’s findings clearly showed how students used the rubric to self-assess their own writing. This was a very exciting discovery for me as a teacher because I understand the
importance of self-assessment. Using a rubric as a tool for self-assessment gave students an opportunity to take control of their learning and be more engaged in their learning as they reread their writing to make sure it met all the criteria of the rubric. They were able to reflect on the quality of their work, evaluate what was missing from their writing, and decide what needed to be added or changed and make the necessary revisions (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William, 2003). This ability to self-monitor and self-assess empowers students as learners because they don’t need to rely on the teacher or someone else to tell them what they need to do to improve their writing; it gives them confidence as writers and learners (Andrade, et. al., 2008).

I do think that because they had created it with me, they had a sense of ownership. When I had given them checklists in the past, the checklist was something that I had created. There was no thinking on their part that went into it. They had no sense of ownership over it; why should they embrace it? The students who chose to use the rubric were able to use it as a tool to self-assess their writing and monitor their own learning; this mechanism for feedback improved learning as evidenced from the interviews which showed an increased understanding of the genre and their improved writing samples (Popham, 2007; Andrade, 2000).

**Co-constructed rubrics can positively influence students’ writing of a genre**

This study showed how a co-constructed rubric can positively influence a student’s writing. Rubrics, when used *during* the writing process, can promote learning because studies have shown that students learn more about the content being taught when using a rubric (Andrade, 2000). As students thought about criteria for quality persuasive writing after assessing mentor texts, as we negotiated together as a class what should be included in the rubric and as the students used the rubric to assess exemplars, they had multiple exposures to think
about what criteria goes into persuasive writing. These multiple exposures helped deepen their understanding of the persuasive genre and quality writing. The rubric became a tool that embodied all of this thinking. As they went to write their own persuasive reviews they were able to draw upon all of the discussions and lessons that led up to co-constructing the rubric as well as refer to the rubric. The rubric became a tool that helped them remember what they had learned and decided upon. This guided their writing. The end result was the students’ writing improved, and reflected the qualities and elements that we deemed important.

**Implications for Student Learning**

**Students benefitted from engaging in the assessment process**

The students who participated in the study benefitted from being able to actively participate in the assessment process. They did this by being able to discuss and decide for themselves the elements of persuasive writing. They contributed to deciding the qualities of each category on the rubric and by assessing exemplars. They were able to see that their ideas are important and worthy of consideration. They were able to create a tool that enabled them to assess their own writing. Research has shown that when learners are a part of the assessment process, they are more engaged, confident and motivated. Their achievement is also maximized (Andrade & Cizek, 2010). I am not asserting that every focal student was more engaged, confident and motivated but I did see evidence of those qualities in some form. For example, Peter, one of my students who struggled with writing, came to me less frequently than he usually did during writing workshop for assistance; this indicated to me more confidence in his ability to complete the assignment. When I asked Mike which category he was aiming for he said, “Extraordinary” (interview from 6/6/13); his comment indicated that he was motivated to
produce quality writing. He was also motivated and engaged when he came to me; wanting to make sure that he was ‘showing and not just telling’ in his review. Tom expressed in his interview that he liked the rubric because it helped him remember what criteria were important for his writing; alluding to more confidence in being able to complete the assignment. These are examples of how students who engaged in creating the rubric benefitted from being a part of the assessment process.

**Students who struggled in writing benefitted from co-constructing a rubric**

My writers who struggled benefitted from using a rubric during their writing. Rubrics, when used during the writing process, can promote learning because studies have shown that students learn more about the content being taught when using a rubric (Andrade, 2000). The improvements between their pre-assessment scores and post-assessments scores were significant. Even the one student, who said that she didn’t use the rubric, improved her writing significantly as shown by her preassessment and post assessment samples. This was because she was engaged in many activities that reinforced the elements of persuasive writing. Peter, who was one of my weakest writers, and usually needed a lot of support, was able to create a persuasive review with very little support from me. Even though his post-assessment review didn’t have as strong of a voice as I would have liked for the genre, it improved greatly in all areas, compared to his pre-assessment. Once he received support from me in reading and understanding the rubric, he was able to use it to guide his writing as he tried to meet the criteria on the rubric in his own writing.

**Future students will benefit from using a co-constructed rubric**

Future students will benefit from this study because when I use a rubric in the future, it will be a co-constructed one, not a pre-made one. The reason state-imposed rubrics are criticized
by researchers like Turley & Gallagher (2008), is because they are created by individuals who are “distanced” (p. 88) from the classroom and they believe that the further away from a classroom an educational tool originates, the less instructionally useful it is. That is why a co-constructed rubric will be more useful for my students; we created it in the classroom, where learning takes place. Students will have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of what I have learned from this study regarding rubrics; namely to scaffold readers and writers who struggle, allow students to try and create the language used when possible and use descriptors that state what the student can do.

**Students will benefit from using co-constructed rubrics as opposed to checklists**

I have decided that rubrics can be more beneficial to students, as opposed to the kind of checklists I was administering prior to this study. Checklists like I was using in writing workshop, did not include desirable and undesirable qualities of a writing assignment like rubrics. A co-constructed rubric offers students an opportunity to think more deeply about the genre we are studying and what elements are important to writing, unlike a pre-made checklist (or rubric), where there is little thinking on the part of the students. This will benefit students’ ability to self-assess their writing on a deeper level. One of the complaints voiced by Kohn, (2006) who is opposed to rubrics, is that rubrics compromise student learning because the student relies so much on the rubric they don’t have to think. When students are engaged in the learning, the learning is more effective because they internalize the concepts more readily (Anderson & Speck, 1998). My students learned more about the genre content of persuasive writing because they not only were exposed to it through mentor texts, like they have always been in previous genre studies, but they were then asked to critically think about how to take the elements of the mentor texts and put them into something that was concrete, something they
could see and refer to as they wrote. Using co-constructed rubrics, rather than a teacher made checklist benefitted the students who participated in this study and will benefit future students.

**Implications for Teachers Using A Co-constructed Rubric**

*What is included on the rubric shapes what students’ value in their writing*

As the teacher and students co-construct a rubric together, what they decide to include on the rubric shapes what the students value. Rubrics have been criticized as producing empty writing because the rubric controls what is taught and valued by the teacher, Mabry (2006). Co-constructing a rubric with students reverses this because the rubric represents what the students’ value as well as what the teacher values. When we were creating the rubric together the students valued: giving lots of reasons with lots of details, using strong language, and using exclamation marks. These were key elements they discovered as they looked at the texts. They thought that the more of these elements one included, the more persuasive it would be, so originally we used words like *a lot, some* and *few* as qualifiers for the different degrees of quality. Because these were difficult to assess; we ended up replacing the word with a number; for example, *four for a lot*. We decided on a number together, partially to make assessment more objective but also for practical reasons; they probably would not have enough time to write a six or seven paragraph review in the time allotted for writing workshop. This became a focus as students were assessing their writing; they were looking for a certain number of transition words or details or reasons. Unfortunately, this took the focus away from our value of trying to write persuasively by using a lot of reasons and details that would convince the reader, to numbers. In the future, I would try and help the students create statements that didn’t use numbers to convey the importance of the criteria. For example, “It sounds like I care about my argument. I tell how I think and feel about
it” (Andrade, 2013, p. 17), rather than “I used four persuasive words.” (co-constructed rubric, appendix O). The students also valued having a neat final draft free of spelling, punctuation errors, so this became a category on the rubric. Unfortunately, we resorted to numbers here as well. In the future, I will try to use statements with qualifying words like “I have enough errors in my writing to distract the reader.” (Andrade, 2013, p. 17) What goes into the rubric determines what students value. This is very important to consider when co-constructing a rubric together because the students’ perceptions of what is important will affect what they include in their writing. My students did create some very persuasive writing, even with our first, but imperfect rubric. My students worked hard at making sure they had an ‘extraordinary’ piece of writing by meeting the criteria under that category. As teachers, it is our job to guide the process so that what is ‘extraordinary’ on the rubric is truly ‘extraordinary’ quality writing.

Students need scaffolding when co-constructing a rubric

It is very important that teachers provide students with support during the co-constructing of the rubric and while the students use the rubric. Vygotsky (as cited in Au, et. al., 2001), speaks about the important of working in a child’s zone of proximal development, the zone where a child is able to construct new learning with the help of an expert teacher. Co-constructing a rubric with my students was a way for me to help children learn how to write new genres by gradually releasing responsibility to the students. First, the students thought about criteria that were important to the persuasive genre they were studying and what should be included in the rubric. As we examined various sample papers together of the genre, we talked about varying qualities of the papers and how we would rate them. As students articulated and demonstrated understanding of how to use the rubric on the exemplars, I gave them the rubric to use on their own writing independently. Some students may need more teacher support as they used the
rubric, which I provided.

During the co-constructing of the rubric it became clear that not all of the students understood what transition words were. We needed to explore together what those were and make an anchor chart; the anchor chart was a reference point for students as they wrote and tried to incorporate transition words into their writing. It was also clear that when the students were given an exemplar to assess, they did not all know how to use the rubric. I had to give them guided practice and independent practice to help them in their learning. As Andrade (2005) pointed out, the rubric does not take the place of good modeling by the teacher, feedback or an opportunity for students to ask questions during the writing process. Some students still needed other supports like graphic organizers; using the rubric did not mean that I stopped using other important teaching tools that could aid students who needed it. Readers and writers who struggle may also need small group or one-on-one support in being able to read the rubric and understand all of the words and what they mean. Just giving out the rubric does not ensure that the students will understand it or know how to use it; this was something that Andrade stressed as well when she worked with students (Andrade, 2005). Explicit teaching, anchor charts, graphic organizers and one-on-one conferences may be necessary to ensure that all students understand the rubric, how to use it; and feel confident using it.

Engaging students in creating categories can make a difference in their understanding

One of my desires when I began this study was to find a rubric that contained ‘kid friendly’ language. I found out that co-constructing a rubric does not ensure that it will be kid-friendly, especially if I choose the terminology instead of letting them. For example, when choosing the categories for our rubric, I used language that I had borrowed from other rubrics I
had seen, and I grouped the criteria into a category that I decided. This became a problem when I used the word, ‘content’ for one of the categories. First, it was a term that students were unfamiliar with. Even after explaining to the students what it meant, students were confused, especially my writers who struggled. If I had let them look at the criteria, group like elements and then come up with their own name for the category, it would have been in ‘kid friendly’ language. It would have been easier for them to understand. Another place this became evident was when I created the organizational part of the rubric, without any input from the students, and ended up using a word, ‘example.’ This term confused several students in my focus group because throughout the study I had referred to ‘examples’ as ‘details’.

For a co-constructed rubric to be ‘kid friendly’ and truly reflect the students’ learning, it is important for the teacher to allow students to experiment and try to create their own categories based on the elements they discover in the mentor texts. Encouraging students to use language that they can understand because they have created it, can help to fill in gaps of knowledge between what the teacher is trying to convey through the rubric and what the students understand (Paratore & McCormack, 2007), therefore lessening confusion.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

**Limited number of participants**

This study only focused on six students who used the rubric on the persuasive genre. I recommend that in the future this study is repeated with a larger number of participants. Repeating this study with a larger group of students could affect the results.
Study was limited to Persuasive Genre

This study focused on using mentor texts and co-constructing a rubric on persuasive writing. Future studies could be conducted on different genres in order to determine if co-constructed rubrics using other genres influence students’ writing in the same way.

Effect of Self-Assessment on Gender

In this study, all of the males were responsive to self-assessment and motivated to use the rubric as a tool for self-assessment. The two girls in the focus group were not; Katrina said that she didn’t use it nor ever wanted to use it in the future. Rye said she used it but didn’t use it in the same way as the boys. The boys either circled or checked off each criterion on their rubric as they used it; Rye just made circles around all of the criteria in each category and from my interviews, wasn’t as enthusiastic in her use of the rubric as the boys. This seems to confirm what other researchers have found; boys and girls respond differently to feedback as far as motivation and performance are concerned (Dweck & Bush, 1976; Andrade, 2003). Other studies (Goodrich, 1996, as cited in Andrade; Andrade, 2003) have indicated that girls respond to self-generated assessment more positively than boys. Boys tend to be either neutral or possibly negative (Andrade, 2003). Future researchers could explore this topic further to determine what influence co-constructing a rubric and using a co-constructed rubric has on gender difference, if any.

Final Thoughts

As I reflect back to my initial thoughts when I started this study, I realize that a rubric can be an effective summative assessment when it is a co-constructed rubric. When students and teacher together use mentor texts to discover the elements of the genre, students are able to
think about the qualities of that genre and create a rubric that accurately reflects that thinking. I still have questions concerning about how to weigh the various parts of the rubric as far as grades go, and am considering how I could use the co-constructed rubric to assess my own teaching, but am on my way to understanding co-constructed rubrics as one means of assessment for writing. I also wondered when I first started this study whether or not third graders could really self-assess their own work. When I had provided checklists for students to use during the revision stage, I got returned to me a checklist, with the row of ‘yes’ all checked off by the student; with no indication that the student did indeed really check his work to see if his writing included that quality or element. This study has given me proof that third graders are capable of assessing their own work. They are able to “interrupt themselves to reflect on their writing and to consider alternative paths” (Calkins, 2009, p. 128). Finally, co-constructing the rubric together also gave me an opportunity to see how my students thought about various aspects of writing. It gave me a new appreciation for my students as writers and thinkers. They realized how important it was to include correct punctuation and correct spelling so that it made sense. They had high expectations as learners; they wanted to give lots of reasons, lots of details, lots of persuasive words and transition words. Once the rubric was created they also wanted to do ‘extraordinary.’ They wanted to produce quality writing and I had the opportunity to help them do that through this study.
References


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assessment process. *Reading Teacher, 53*(6), 452.


Appendix A

Grade Three Common Core Writing Standards:

C.C.W. S. 1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

a. Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.

b. Provide reasons that support the opinion.

c. Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.

d. Provide a concluding statement or section.
## Appendix B

**Observation Protocol for Research Journal**

Observation Date and Time:__________ Length of Observation: _____________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Closing:**
I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to participate in this study. As indicated in your consent letter, your identity will be kept confidential.
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Participant: (pseudonym) ____________________________
Date of Interview and Time: ____________________________

Purpose Statement: **Start audio recording-Identify participant by pseudonym, the date, and time**
The reason I want to interview you is because I want to find out what you thought about making a rubric for opinion writing. I am going to ask you some questions and I want you to answer them the best that you can. Please be honest; don’t be afraid to share your thoughts. There is no right or wrong answers and you will not be graded for how you answer. Your answers are helping me learn about co-creating rubrics. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question I ask, please know that you have the choice not to respond. You may stop doing the interview at any time. Our interview will last about 15 minutes. I will be recording our conversation, if you have given assent.

Questions to be used after co-creating the rubric:

What was it like co-creating a rubric?

Do you think making the rubric helped you to understand what a ‘good’ opinion review includes? If so, how? If not, why?

Questions to be used after using the rubric:

What was it like using a rubric during the writing of your opinion paper?

Take me through the process, or what you did as you used the rubric.

Closing:
I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your thoughts with me. Your participation and insights will help me understand whether or not a rubric was helpful to you as a writer. As noted in your consent letter, I will keep your identity confidential.

In the event that I need clarification after transcribing this interview, may I request a follow-up discussion?
Appendix D

Interview Form For Co-Constructing Rubric

Participant:  (pseudonym) _____________________________
Date of Interview and Time: _____________________________

Purpose Statement: **Start audio recording-Identify participant by pseudonym, the date, and time**
The reason I want to interview you is because I want to find out what you thought about making a rubric for opinion writing. I am going to ask you some questions and I want you to answer them the best that you can. Please be honest; don’t be afraid to share your thoughts. There is no right or wrong answers and you will not be graded for how you answer. Your answers are helping me learn about co-creating rubrics. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question I ask, please know that you have the choice not to respond. You may stop doing the interview at any time. Our interview will last about 15 minutes. I will be recording our conversation, if you have given assent.

Questions to be used after co-creating the rubric:

What was it like co-creating a rubric?

Do you think making the rubric helped you to understand what a ‘good’ opinion review includes? If so, how? If not, why?

Closing:
I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your thoughts with me. Your participation and insights will help me understand whether or not a rubric was helpful to you as a writer. As noted in your consent letter, I will keep your identity confidential.
In the event that I need clarification after transcribing this interview, may I request a follow-up discussion?
Appendix E

Survey Protocol

Participant: (pseudonym) ________________ Date of Survey: ________________
Time: ________________

Purpose Statement: Pass out survey to participants.
The reason I want you to participate in this survey is because I want to learn about how you used the rubric we created. I am going to read you some sentences about using the rubric. You will choose: never, sometimes, usually or always. Please pick the one that best describes how you felt or how you used the rubric. Circle your answer. Please be honest; don’t be afraid to share your thoughts. There is no right or wrong answers and you will not be graded for how you answer. Your answers are helping me learn about how third graders use rubrics. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question I ask, please know that you have the choice not to respond. You may stop doing the survey any time. If you don’t understand a question, please ask me to explain.

1. I used the rubric during the writing process.
   Never               sometimes   usually  always

2. I understood how to use the rubric while I was writing.
   Never               sometimes   usually  always

3. I understood what each category in the rubric meant.
   Never               sometimes   usually  always

4. Look at each criterion below that we created when we made the rubric together. After each one, choose the answer that best tells how often you used that part of the rubric;
   (Here each criterion will be listed from the rubric that we created, for example, content, or a hook that catches the reader’s attention)
   Never               sometimes   usually  always

5. I thought that using the rubric helped me be a better writer.
   Never               sometimes   usually  always

6. I would like to use a rubric in the future.
   Never               sometimes   usually  always

Closing:
I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your thoughts with me. Your participation and insights will help me understand whether or not a rubric was helpful to you as a writer. As noted, I will keep your identity confidential.

In the event that I need clarification after transcribing this survey, may I request a follow-up discussion?
Appendix F

Survey For Students

Participant: (pseudonym) ________________ Date of Survey: ________________
Time: __________________

1. I used the rubric during the writing process.
   never               sometimes   usually   always

2. I understood how to use the rubric while I was writing.
   never               sometimes   usually   always

3. I understood what each category in the rubric meant.
   never               sometimes   usually   always

4. Look at each criterion below that we created when we made the rubric together. After each one, choose the answer that best tells how often you used that part of the rubric:

   Content:
   never               sometimes   usually   always

   The Words I Use:
   never               sometimes   usually   always

   How I Organize my Writing:
   never               sometimes   usually   always

   Spelling, Punctuation, Neatness:
   ever               sometimes   usually   always

5. I thought that using the rubric helped me be a better writer.
   never               sometimes   usually   always

6. I would like to use a rubric in the future.
   never               sometimes   usually   always

If there is anything you would like to write about using the rubric you may do so on the lines below.
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix G

Chart of Elements of Persuasive Writing Chart

- State what your opinion is in the beginning.  T
- Give lots of reasons why.  K
- Give specific details to go with your reasons.  K
- Choose interesting persuasive words.  T
- Use I and capital letters when appropriate but be nice about it.  K/T
- Show how other people like it or have it.  K
- Make promises to persuade.  K
- Restate your opinion.  T
- Exaggeration may be appropriate.  K/T
- Comparing might get your point across.  K/T

These three were added later, based on Common Core Standards:

- Use Transition words.  T
- Make sure it is written in an order that makes sense.  T
- Have a conclusion.  T

K indicates that the kids thought of the idea.  T indicates that the teacher added the idea.  K/T indicates that the students initiated the idea and the teacher put it into words based on student conversation.
Appendix H

Persuasive Words Anchor Charts

- Want
- Need
- Have
- Should
- Please
- Promise / guarantee
- Think / believe
- In my opinion
- know
- Really
- Best
- Never

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Appendix I

Class Findings of Persuasive Elements

Students’ Responses to Persuasive Genre Books:

(Italics in parenthesis are my words which I believe express what the students were trying to get across.)

I Wanna Iguana:

- Alex is trying to make it sound like an Iguana is cuter than a hamster.
- Iguanas can make a good friend.
- Alex could teach it tricks.
- Alex said that he would clean the Iguana’s cage and feed it (and water it).

I Wanna New Room:

- He (Alex) wrote letters to his parents.
- Alex told his parents how annoying his brother was.
- He told his parents how he needed his own space.
- He said that his brother keeps him up at night.
- He used capital letters and exclamation points (to show that he felt strongly about something)

Earrings by:

- She (the main character) said that she would be proud of them.
- She said that wearing earrings would help her posture.
- She said that they would make her look and feel good.
- She said that every girl has them.
- She said that she was responsible because she clears the plates and she takes showers without being told to, implying that she is mature enough to have them.
- She is the only girl in her class that doesn’t have them.

My Brother Dan’s Delicious:

- He tried to show that:
  - his brother is more delicious than he is
  - It would be easier to eat Dan than him
  - His brother would make more of an easy meal because he would be easy to catch.
Appendix J

Teacher’s Findings of Persuasive Elements

The teacher’s observations about the mentor texts:

I Wanna Iguana:

- Right away Alex tells what he thinks: “I know you don’t think I should have Mikey Gulligan’s baby iguana when he moves, but here’s why I should.”
- He says it will get eaten by Stinky’s dog Lurch, if Stinky takes it instead of him.
- He says that they are quiet pets.
- He signs his letters in such a way as to make his mother think about him in a positive way, “smart and sensitive kid,” “your adorable son” “Love and a zillion and one kisses” “Your son who has learned his lesson” He chooses his words carefully to try and persuade.
- He says that he will try and clean is room if he gets one and he will even pay for the lettuce.
- Several times he states, “if I had an iguana...” throughout the book.

I Wanna New Room:

- Right away Alex states his opinion: “I know you think I should share a room with Ethan now that we have Baby Annie, but here’s why I shouldn’t.”
- He doesn’t just say “He’s annoying.” He tells specific things he does that are annoying, like: “Sticks crayons up his nose” “barks like a walrus” “snores like Grandpa Ralph”
- He promises to keep his room clean if he gets his room back.
- He tells how even Stinky’s dog Lurch has his own room (comparing).
- He asks several times throughout the book for his old room back.

Earrings:

- Right in the beginning the main character states her opinion very strongly: “I want them. I need them. I love them. I’ve got to have them. My mom and dad won’t let me have them. Earrings. Beautiful earrings for pierced ears.” (pages 1,2)
- She states how other people have them.
- She tells that she doesn’t want to have to wait for them.
- She tells that she is the only girl in the world without them (exaggeration).
- She takes her parents reasons for not getting them and argues their points.
- She states how she doesn’t want anything else except earrings, not even new clothes.
She tells them all of the things she will do if they will let her get them (clean up her room for one whole year, read a book once a week for a whole year, walk the dog every day for a whole year).

She repeats what she wants throughout the book.

My Brother Dan’s Delicious:

In the beginning when he talks about the third step in dealing with monsters and he says it is to distract them, he states his distraction clearly: “Are there any monsters about? If there are, I just want you to know, my brother Dan’s delicious!”

He said that his brother is bigger than he, so would be a bigger meal.

His brother eats healthier than him, so he would be better to eat.

He repeats throughout the book his opinion that Dan is delicious.

His word choices are very persuasive and interesting:

Flavor factory
Uniquely appetizing taste
Delicious, divine, delectable, delightful,
Meaty, mouth watering
Unparalleled taste sensation

He uses similes to compare:
He’s like a Thanksgiving turkey already stuffed for the platter!
Dan is nothing less than a thirteen-year-old mouthwatering flavor factory!
Appendix K

Student and Teachers Findings in Persuasive Texts

I Wanna Iguana:

- Alex is trying to make it sound like an Iguana is cuter than a hamster.
- Iguanas can make a good friend.
- Alex could teach it tricks.
- Alex said that he would clean the Iguana’s cage and feed it (*and water it*).

  ➢ Right away Alex tells what he thinks: “I know you don’t think I should have Mikey Gulligan’s baby iguana when he moves, but here’s why I should.”
  ➢ He says it will get eaten by Stinky’s dog Lurch, if Stinky takes it instead of him.
  ➢ He says that they are quiet pets.
  ➢ He signs his letters in such a way as to make his mother think about him in a positive way, “smart and sensitive kid,” “your adorable son” “Love and a zillion and one kisses” “Your son who has learned his lesson”

  ➢ He says that he will try and clean his room if he gets one and he will even pay for the lettuce.
  ➢ Several times he states, “if I had an iguana...” throughout the book (restates his opinion).

I Wanna New Room:

- He (*Alex*) wrote letters to his parents.
- *Alex* told his parents how annoying his brother was.
- He told his parents how he needed his own space.
- He said that his brother keeps him up at night.
- He used capital letters and exclamation points (*to show that he felt strongly about something*)

  ➢ Right away Alex states his opinion: “I know you think I should share a room with Ethan now that we have Baby Annie, but here’s why I shouldn’t.”
  ➢ He doesn’t just say “He’s annoying.” He tells specific things he does that are annoying, like: “Sticks crayons up his nose” “barks like a walrus” “snores like Grandpa Ralph”
  ➢ He promises to keep his room clean if he gets his room back.
  ➢ He tells how even Stinky’s dog Lurch has his own room (comparing).
  ➢ He asks several times throughout the book for his old room back (restates his opinion).
Earrings by:

- She (the main character) said that she would be proud of them.
- She said that wearing earrings would help her posture.
- She said that they would make her look and feel good.
- She said that every girl has them.
- She said that she was responsible because she clears the plates and she takes showers without being told to, implying that she is mature enough to have them.
- She is the only girl in her class that doesn’t have them.

Right in the beginning the main character states her opinion very strongly:

“I want them. I need them. I love them. I’ve got to have them. My mom and dad won’t let me have them. Earrings. Beautiful earrings for pierced ears.” (pages 1,2)

- She states how other people have them.
- She tells that she doesn’t want to have to wait for them.
- She tells that she is the only girl in the world without them (exaggeration).
- She takes her parents reasons for not getting them and argues their points.
- She states how she doesn’t want anything else except earrings, not even new clothes.
- She tells them all of the things she will do if they will let her get them (clean up her room for one whole year, read a book once a week for a whole year, walk the dog every day for a whole year).
- She repeats what she wants throughout the book: beautiful, glorious earrings (restates her opinion).

My Brother Dan’s Delicious:

- He tried to show that:
  - his brother is more delicious than he is (comparing and contrasting)
  - It would be easier to eat Dan than him
  - His brother would make more of an easy meal because he would be easy to catch.

In the beginning when he talks about the third step in dealing with monsters and he says it is to distract them, he states his distraction clearly: “Are there any monsters about? If there are, I just want you to know, my brother Dan’s delicious!”

- He said that his brother is bigger than he, so would be a bigger meal.
- His brother eats healthier than him, so he would be better to eat.

He repeats throughout the book his opinion that Dan is delicious (he restates his opinion)

- . His word choices are very persuasive and interesting:

Flavor factory
Uniquely appetizing taste
Delicious, divine, delectable, delightful,
Meaty, mouth watering
Unparalleled taste sensation
  ➢ He uses similes to compare:
He’s like a Thanksgiving turkey already stuffed for the platter!
Dan is nothing less than a thirteen-year-old mouthwatering flavor factory!
Appendix L

Transition Words Anchor Chart

- first
- second
- third
- But!
- in other words...
- as well as...
- well...
- next...
- perhaps...
- for example...
- soon...
- finally

Transition Words (linking words)
- most
- importantly
- so
- another
- reason
- also also
- if
- besides
- then

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## Appendix M
### Survey Results in Percentages

1. I used the rubric during the writing process.
   - **never**: 33%
   - **sometimes**: 0%
   - **usually**: 66.6%
   - **always**: 0%

2. I understood how to use the rubric while I was writing.
   - **never**: 17%
   - **sometimes**: 0%
   - **usually**: 33%
   - **always**: 50%

3. I understood what each category in the rubric meant.
   - **never**: 16.6%
   - **sometimes**: 16.6%
   - **usually**: 50%
   - **always**: 16.6%

4. Look at each criterion below that we created when we made the rubric together. After each one, choose the answer that best tells how often you used that part of the rubric:
   
   **Content**:
   - **never**: 33%
   - **sometimes**: 17%
   - **usually**: 33%
   - **always**: 17%

   **The Words I Use**:
   - **never**: 33%
   - **sometimes**: 0%
   - **usually**: 17%
   - **always**: 66%

   **How I Organize my Writing**:
   - **never**: 17%
   - **sometimes**: 0%
   - **usually**: 17%
   - **always**: 66%

   **Spelling, Punctuation, Neatness**:
   - **ever**: 17%
   - **sometimes**: 0%
   - **usually**: 0%
   - **always**: 83%

5. I thought that using the rubric helped me be a better writer.
   - **never**: 17%
   - **sometimes**: 0%
   - **usually**: 17%
   - **always**: 66%

6. I would like to use a rubric in the future.
   - **never**: 17%
   - **sometimes**: 17%
   - **usually**: 0%
   - **always**: 66%

If there is anything you would like to write about using the rubric you may do so on the lines below.

**Two comments were recorded on the survey sheets:**
1) I love rubrics. They help me.
2) I think that spelling and neatness should be separate.
3) It really helped me become a better writer.

For the purposes of this study, one student was equal to 16.6%. Sometimes I rounded it off to 17%. Sometimes I kept it at 16.6%, for the sole purpose of making sure all of the numbers equaled 100% for each question. I did the same thing with 66.6%. I usually rounded it off to 66%, in order to ensure 100%.
Appendix N

Graphic Organizer

Persuasive Writing Graphic Organizer

Name _____________________________________________

Introduction

My Opinion:

________________________________________________________________________

Reason 1:

________________________________________________________________________

Detail 1:

________________________________________________________________________

Detail 2:

________________________________________________________________________

Detail 3:

________________________________________________________________________

Reason 2:

________________________________________________________________________
Detail 1: 
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Detail 2: 
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Detail 3: 
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Reason 3: 
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Detail 1: 
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Detail 2: 
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Detail 3: 
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Conclusion: Restate your opinion with each reason
___________________________________________________
Appendix O

Co-constructed Rubric for Persuasive Writing

Name ______________________________
Rubric for persuasive writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>Extraordinary</th>
<th>Fine Work</th>
<th>Good Job</th>
<th>Totally Needs Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>I state the opinion right away. I give at least 3 reasons to support my opinion. I give at least 3 details for each reason. I show not just tell.</td>
<td>I state the opinion right away. I give two reasons to support my opinion. I give at least 3 details for each reason. I try and show but don’t always.</td>
<td>I state the opinion. I give two reasons to support my opinion. I don’t give three details for each reason. I try and show but don’t always.</td>
<td>I don’t state my opinion clearly or don’t state it at all. I have one reason for my opinion. I have only one or two details for each reason. I just tell, not show.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Words I Use</td>
<td>I use more than 4 persuasive words. I use 4 or more different transition words throughout. I choose words that show I strongly believe in what I am writing about. My words keep the reader interested.</td>
<td>I use at least 3 persuasive words. I use at least 3 different transition words throughout. I choose words that show I strongly believe in what I am writing about.</td>
<td>I use 2 persuasive words and only 2 different transition words. I choose words that show I believe in what I am writing about.</td>
<td>I use 1 or less persuasive words and only 1 or less transition words. I really don’t convince the reader at all with my words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How I Organize My Writing</td>
<td>Extraordinary</td>
<td>Fine Work</td>
<td>Good Job</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My review includes:</td>
<td>My review includes all of the following but they may be out of order</td>
<td>My review is missing one of the following:</td>
<td>My review is missing two or more of the following:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* title</td>
<td>• A title</td>
<td>• A title</td>
<td>• A title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* An introduction that states my opinion</td>
<td>• An introduction that states my opinion</td>
<td>• An introduction that states my opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Reasons with examples</td>
<td>• Reasons with examples</td>
<td>• Reasons with examples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* conclusion</td>
<td>• Conclusion</td>
<td>• Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have indented my paragraphs</td>
<td>I have forgotten to indent 1 paragraph</td>
<td>I have forgotten to indent 2 paragraphs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Spelling</td>
<td>My review is neatly written and has 1 or less erase marks. It only has 1 (or no) spelling mistakes and 1 or less punctuation mistake.</td>
<td>My review is neatly written but I didn’t form all my letters correctly. There are 2 spelling errors and/or 2 erase marks. Several sentences do not have punctuation.</td>
<td>You can read my review but one of the keys to legibility could be better. There are 3 or 4 spelling errors, 4 erase marks and/or 3 or 4 missed punctuation or improper punctuation.</td>
<td>My review is not easy to read because the writing is not neat and there are 5 or more erase marks, 5 or more spelling mistakes and 5 or more punctuation mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neatness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation . ! ? ,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>